

# Black Flag

## Anarchist Review



## Anarchism and the General Strike

## Louise Michel: raising the Black Flag



## Anarchism in Brazil (1903-2013)

**And much more...**

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## Editorial

We start with Anarchism and the General Strike, prompted by the general strike being discussed at the 1873 Congress of the Federalist International Workers' Association. As well as discussing the position of various anarchists on the general strike in both theory and practice – both being important as events influenced the development of ideas within both anarchism and syndicalism. After this overview, we include a selection of original texts on the general strike by many well-known anarchist thinkers and activists (many of which are translated into English for the first time). We hope they will both enrich our understanding of anarchist history as well as anarchist practice and theory now and in the future.

We then move onto the London Congress of 1881, seeking to correct all too common generalisations and distortions. As Kropotkin himself rightly said during the Lyon Trial in 1883, "I ask the court not to confuse my speeches with resolutions concerning the diffusion of chemical knowledge." We seek to present those – and other speeches – and indicate how looking solely at the resolutions – as most non-anarchists do – gives a distinctly false impression of both the Congress itself and anarchist ideas and strategy. Rather than simply being a gathering of anarchists spouting dynamite bluster, the Congress represented a wide range of anti-parliamentarian socialist opinion including those, like Kropotkin and others, who advocated working within the labour movement. Sadly, these voices were ignored and this in turn raises questions over the relationship between those considered as "leaders" and those who share a label.

The Lyon show-trial is covered next, when over 60 anarchists (including Kropotkin) were arrested on spurious charges who then used it to propagate their ideas. We reprint Nicolas Walter's account of the trial plus contemporary reports.

The year 1883 also saw Louise Michel raise the Black Flag during an unemployed demonstration in Paris, so starting the process by which it eventually became the iconic anarchist symbol. Like the Red Flag it replaced, it was a recognised symbol of working-class resistance in France – the workers in Lyon had raised both during their insurrection of 1831. Constance Bantman discusses its context and we reprint a contemporary report of the trial published in the individualist anarchist journal *Liberty* as well as Michel's defence statement.

This year also marks the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Albert Camus and we take the opportunity to recount his links with the anarchist movement by reprinting an article by Nick Heath as well as publishing a new translation of his famous 1953 speech to French trade unionists – "Bread and Liberty" – which summarises his libertarian ideas.

Then Wayne Price discusses lessons for libertarians from previous wars. We end with an overview of the anarchist movement in Brazil between 1903 and 2013, a subject not well-known in the English-speaking world.

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](mailto:blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk)

# Anarchism and the General Strike

Iain McKay

It did not take the appearance of anarchists to invent the idea of a general strike. It was the product – like so much of anarchism itself – of the workers themselves. So, in Britain, the popularising of the idea of the general strike is usually attributed to William Benbow (1784–1841) who was involved with the National Union of the Working Classes and proposed a “Grand National Holiday” – a month away from work – in 1832. It was later adopted by the Chartist Congress of 1839 while in 1842 a general strike erupted across Britain.<sup>1</sup>

So do not think we are trying to suggest that anarchists invented the general strike. Here, we are simply trying to summarise the birth and development of anarchist perspectives on the general strike and to debunk certain myths or correct certain misunderstandings. We will not present a comprehensive history of general strikes but rather limit ourselves to discussing anarchists and their view of the general strike as a tactic for social change. We will, of course, mention specific strike waves as these informed anarchist advocacy of the tactic as well as confirming the correctness of holding this position.

First, however, we need to clarify what we mean by “general strike” as it varies considerably in both practice and in theory.

In terms of practice, a “general strike” covers a range of possibilities. It can vary in extent, from a town, to a region, to a nation and, potentially, to

being international in scope. It can be of a single trade or industry to many and even all. It can be planned (called for a specific day by a union or party, such as the British General Strike of 1926) or spontaneous (such as the Great Strike of 1877 in America) or a combination of both (such as the American Eight-Hour movement of 1886). It can be for reforms (for the Eight-Hour Day or universal suffrage), for solidarity (for releasing prisoners or supporting other workers), for defence against reaction (such as against the Kapp Putsch of 1920) or for social revolution.

**we will discuss how the idea of the general strike arose within anarchism and how it changed over the years by drawing lessons from actual general strikes which did take place as well as from debates between anarchists and within the wider labour movement**

Likewise, if the general strike can take many forms, so can the theory associated with it: how it is envisioned can vary from advocate to advocate, from group to group. This means that some (like Industrial Unionists and some revolutionary syndicalists) can see it as simply a case of “folding arms” from an agreed day until the capitalist class agree to the demand to hand over its property. For others (revolutionary anarchists and most syndicalists) it is seen as growing out of partial strikes to become the

starting point for a general expropriation and insurrection. Perspectives can also vary overtime, with certain groupings initially supporting one version of the general strike but overtime coming to advocate another (the French revolutionary syndicalist CGT being an example of this). This means that certain critiques of “the general strike”

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<sup>1</sup> Mick Jenkins, *The General Strike of 1842* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980).

can simply be irrelevant (i.e., they are not addressing the perspective of its advocates) or, at best, out of date (i.e., they address a position formerly held but now rejected for a different one).

As will become clear, anarchists have usually concentrated on discussing what is needed to turn a strike wave into a general strike and then into a social revolution (having quickly abandoned the notion of starting the social revolution by simply calling a general strike). Likewise, anarchists do not see the general strike as an act by which we *demand* the means of production but rather a process by which we *take* them.

With that in mind, we will discuss how the idea of the general strike arose within anarchism and how it changed over the years by drawing lessons from actual general strikes which did take place as well as from debates between anarchists and within the wider labour movement.

### **Precursors of Revolutionary Anarchism**

First, we must start before revolutionary anarchism developed within the International Workers' Association (subsequently referred to as the "First International").

The first anarchist – or, more correctly, someone later considered an anarchist by others – to raise the idea of a general strike – a general ceasing of work – as a tactic was, somewhat surprising, arch-individualist Marx Stirner who noted its potential in 1844:

The laborers have the most enormous power in their hands, and, if they once became thoroughly conscious of it and used it, nothing would withstand them; they would only have to stop labour, regard the product of labour as theirs, and enjoy it. This is the sense of the labour disturbances which show themselves here and there.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the means of production are also "the product of labour" and so his passing comments imply a vision of a general strike as also an act of expropriation by the workers, the seizing of the means of production as well as previously produced goods held in stores and shops. How the producers then managed the seized property was not discussed – presumably Stirner thought that, as unique individuals, they would be the best judges of what they wanted although his comments on the

negative impact of the division of labour suggests a wider perspective than that usually attributed to him.

Yet it must be stressed Stirner's work did not have any impact on anarchism – Proudhon never mentioned him while Bakunin mentioned him once, in passing – before his discovery by individualist anarchists in the 1890s. His influence, such as it was, was limited to Marx and Engels. However, the embrace of Stirner by anarcho-syndicalists in Glasgow in the 1940s and 1950s – who took his notion of a "Union of Egoists" literally as "One Big Union" – showed that his ideas were not appreciated by individualist anarchists alone.

The first self-professed anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was opposed to strikes over economic issues (although the reasons for that opposition are often distorted by Marxists and usually used in an attempt to discredit anarchism *as such*, in spite of Proudhon alone holding that position). Yet during the 1848 Revolution he advocated what was effectively the general strike to secure political change:

One only needs very little knowledge of the people and of governmental machinery to understand what an irresistible force such a system of opposition would have had, if solemnly announced and energetically maintained... If the people, they said, refused to pay its taxes once, it would never pay them again and government would become impossible! If the citizens are taught to split themselves up, if the history of the Roman people on the Sacred Mount is repeated by way of a parliamentary conflict, very soon the departments and provinces will separate from one another: centralisation will be attacked on all sides, we will fall into federalism: there will be no more Authority!<sup>2</sup>

The reference to Ancient Rome is significant as it was marked by increasing inequality and internal political struggle between the aristocratic patricians and the common people ("plebs"). Many of the latter were imprisoned or enslaved when they could not repay their debts. In 494 B.C. the plebs simply walked out of the city to the Sacred Mount leaving the patricians rulers of an empty city. The

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<sup>1</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (Rebel Press, London, 1993), 116.

<sup>2</sup> "Confessions of a Revolutionary", *Property is Theft!* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011) 469.

patricians had no choice but to negotiate and so the tribunes of the plebs were founded to protect the people against oppression.

Proudhon's argument was part of a wider discussion in his *Confessions of a Revolutionary* on civil resistance to the oppressive conservative Assembly and Government produced by the first elections of the Second Republic. Despite his opposition to strikes on the economic terrain, he rightly saw the power of a general strike to tame oppressive governments and impose popular reforms that would push society towards anarchy.

### **The Federalist-wing of the First International**

It is within the International Workers' Association that the general strike truly becomes part of anarchism and it is interwoven with the development of revolutionary anarchism itself within that organisation.

The General Strike was first raised in the International by Belgium delegates at its 1868 Congress when they proposed a resolution which "urge[d] the workers to cease work should war break out in their respective countries" as part of "tak[ing] the most vigorous action to prevent a war between the peoples, which today could not be considered anything else than a civil war, seeing that, since it would be waged between the producers, it would only be a struggle between brothers and citizens".<sup>1</sup> The following year saw its paper, *L'Internationale*, raise the general strike as a means of social transformation:

When strikes spread, they gradually connect, they are very close to turning into a general strike; and with the ideas of emancipation that now prevail in the proletariat, a general strike can only lead to a great cataclysm which would renew society. We are not yet there, no doubt, but everything leads us there...

<sup>1</sup> "Resolution on War," *Black Flag Anarchist Review*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer 2022), 20.

<sup>2</sup> "Nouvelles de l'extérieur", *l'Internationale*, 27 March 1869.

<sup>3</sup> "Organisation et grève Générale", *L'Égalité*, 2 April 1869 – see Michael Bakunin, "Organisation and General Strike", *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Summer 2022).

But don't the strikes follow each other so rapidly that the fear is that the cataclysm will arrive before the proletariat is sufficiently organised? We think not, first because strikes already indicate a certain collective strength, a certain agreement amongst the workers; next, each strike becomes the point of departure for new groups. The necessities of the struggle impel workers to support each other across borders and across trades; the more active the struggle becomes, therefore, the more this federation of proletarians has to expand and strengthen.<sup>2</sup>

This was immediately republished by Bakunin in the Swiss Internationalist paper *L'Égalité* a few days later, showing his support for its position on the general strike.<sup>3</sup> The idea quickly spread and by June 1870 *La Solidarité*, a Swiss "Bakuninist paper

edited by James Guillaume, support the general strike as a revolutionary tactic as a successful strike in Neuchatel: "We are not far perhaps from the moment when partial strikes will be transformed into a general strike which will put the workers in possession of the instruments of labour."<sup>4</sup>

The article appears to envision the general strike starting on a specific day with a specific demand:

Instead of ruining ourselves by partial strikes, let us organise a general strike.

Let a single cry resound throughout Europe: cessation of work for social reorganisation! And that in factories, mines, factories, workshops, construction sites, quietly, without making much noise, we abandon work. Society, on pain of death, must then submit to the collective will of the workers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 336.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Charles Thomann, *Le mouvement anarchiste dans les montagnes neuchâteloises et le jura bernois* (La Chaux-de-Fonds: Thesis, 1947), 183.

The Belgium federation held a regional Congress in April, 1873, which saw the delegates discuss “the question of the general strike, considered as the means of effecting the expropriation of the capitalist class.”<sup>1</sup> However, a tendency was expressed to contrast the general strike to the partial strike which was generally not shared elsewhere. In August, another congress of the Belgium Federation was held “immediately prior to the general Congress of the Anti-authoritarian International” and it which “pronounced in favour of the general strike.”<sup>2</sup> In terms of practice, the general strike was utilised, with various degrees of success, during the Cantonal Revolts which swept Spain from July 1873 onwards during the First (Federal) Republic. In some towns – like Alcoy – the general strike turned into a revolution while in others – like Barcelona – it remained a refusal to work.<sup>3</sup>

As may be expected, the Belgians “raised the question of the general strike at the Congress of the Anti-authoritarian International at Geneva in September 1873. They urged the importance of the general strike as a tactic which could mobilise the workers for revolution: ‘a means of bringing a movement onto the street and leading the workers to the barricades’”.<sup>4</sup> There was a wide range of perspectives raised at the debate. As noted, some Internationalists – particularly in Belgium – had argued for the general strike as an alternative to partial strikes rather than an extension of them, viewing it as starting on a specified day and time with an explicitly revolutionary aim. James Guillaume expressed a different perspective:

Is it essential that every movement breaking out amongst the workers should be simultaneous? Should the ideal of the general strike, given the meaning which is attached to these words, be that it has to break out everywhere at an appointed day and hour? Can the day and hour of the revolution be fixed in this way? No! We do not even need to bring up this question and suppose things could be like this. Such a

supposition could lead to fatal mistakes. The revolution has to be contagious. It would be deplorable if one country did not start a revolution because it was waiting for help from others.<sup>5</sup>

With some notable exceptions, the general strike was supported by most delegates. Paul Brousse (then an anarchist and leading advocate of “propaganda by the deed”<sup>6</sup>) and a Spanish delegate opposed the notion based on their experiences in Barcelona (although another Spanish delegate supported it due to the experience in Alcoy), as did the delegate of the British Federation, John Hales, who rejected the notion as he believed it required such a high level of pre-organisation that it was impractical. The Congress decided to issue a somewhat bland resolution after the discussion, which was held in private so as not to alert the powers-that-be of possible revolutionary strategies.

Thus the idea of the general strike grew out of struggles waged by the International across Europe. Indeed, the move towards a general strike was a logical outcome of the necessity of workers’ solidarity with, for example, the Jura Federation arguing in January 1874 during a protracted strike that a wider struggle against capital was needed: “Yes, it has to be recognised: the only method of ensuring the success of the workers’ demands is to generalise the struggle, to oppose the world league of labour to the universal league of capital.”<sup>7</sup>

The general strike was again mentioned at the annual congress of the Jura Federation in 1874 in a report delivered by leading militant Adhémar Schwitzguébel:

“the idea of a general strike by the workers, which would put an end to the miseries they suffer, is beginning to be seriously discussed by workers’ associations better organised than ours. It would certainly be a revolutionary act capable of producing a liquidation of the present social order and a reorganisation conforming to the socialist aspirations of the workers. We think that

<sup>1</sup> James Guillaume, *L’Internationale, documents et souvenirs* (Paris: Stock, 1909) III: 81.

<sup>2</sup> Cahm, 222-3

<sup>3</sup> There appears to be no comprehensive account in English of this movement and many accounts of it utilise Engels’ diatribe “The Bakuninists at work” as if it were an objective work of history rather than a polemic aiming to mock and discredit the opponents of Marxism within the International labour movement utilising articles written by Marxists in Spain who had the same goal in mind. Suffice to say, the

“Bakuninists” in Spain did not view the events of 1873 as Engels did and saw no need to reject their politics based on them.

<sup>4</sup> Cahm, 223

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Cahm, 224.

<sup>6</sup> In the original sense of the term (i.e., trying to spark collective revolts by various means) rather than acts of individual terrorism, as it became synonymous with years later.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Cahm, 338.

this idea should not be brushed aside as utopian, but on the contrary seriously studied by us too”<sup>1</sup>

So by 1873, the general strike had been raised, discussed and applied within the Federalist-wing of the International across Europe. As would be expected, it reflected the experiences of those who discussed it, changed in the light of developments and debates but the idea of a general strike as a means of social revolution was now part of revolutionary anarchism. As Kropotkin later summarised:

The working men at the Congresses of the International... discussed the fundamental question of a revolutionary reconstruction of society, and launched the idea which has since proved so fruitful – the idea of a General Strike. As to the political form which a society reorganised by a social revolution might take, the Latin Federations of the International... pronounced themselves in favour of an organisation based on the federation of free Communes and agricultural territories... The two main principles of modern Syndicalism – “direct action,” as they say now, and the elaboration of new forms of social life based on the federation of the Labour Unions – these two principles were at the outset the leading principles of the International Working Men’s Association.<sup>2</sup>

It was with this perspective that anarchists worked within the labour movements of their respective countries as well as analysing and learning from struggles both near and far.

<sup>1</sup> quoted by Cahm, 225.

<sup>2</sup> “Syndicalism and Anarchism”, *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), 405.

## From 1877 to 1886

### – Developments on two Continents

The spontaneous strike wave and popular revolt of July-September 1877 in America was recognised by anarchists in Europe as an example of the potential of the general strike. Starting in response to a wage-cut, the strike spread along the railway lines and in many places turned into a general insurrection, with pitched battles with the armed forces of the State.<sup>3</sup>

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Kropotkin penned two articles on the events, the first argued that the movement “did not proclaim any of those principles which have become so familiar in Europe through international propaganda: the abolition of wage labour, the establishment of collective property, the abolition of the State. The uprising had no flag, laid no principle, planted no marker.” What was needed was “to have anarchist sections of the International... in the places which had seen the momentarily triumphant of the popular insurrection” so that “the people master of capital, of factories, of workshops, would have

organised work for their own benefit; as master of the palaces, of bourgeois houses, they would have installed the families of workers in them; they would have created, in a word, a ‘Commune’ as we understand it”.<sup>4</sup> The second bemoaned that the socialists in America were focused on elections while the trade unions were limited to wage issues, arguing for a socialist labour movement which both organised in the workplace and raised socialist ideas and goals.<sup>5</sup>

Elisée Reclus also commented upon this revolt and like Kropotkin argued for the need to turn a movement based on the refusal to work into one aiming for workers’ control:

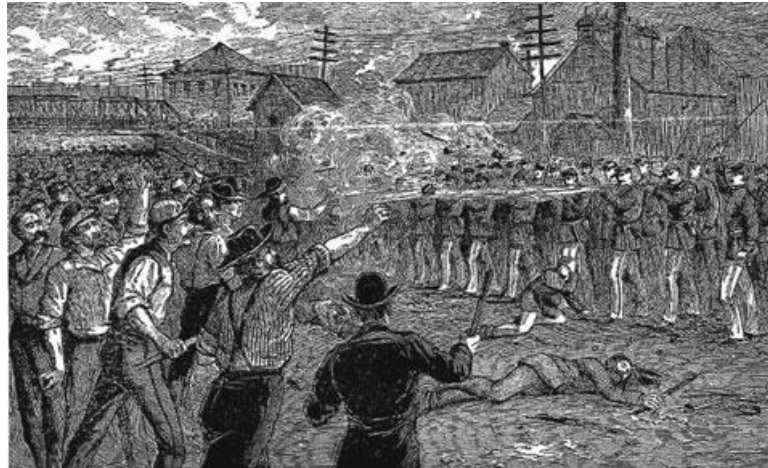
Masters of the railroads as they were in some states for more than a week, the

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Boston: South End Press, 1972), 1-24.

<sup>4</sup> “Affaires d’Amérique”, *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne*, 5 August 1877.

<sup>5</sup> “Bulletin international”, *L’Avant-garde*, 11 August 1877.

strikers... would have had time to expropriate the companies by virtue of their collective authority and to manage, for the benefit of all, the lines of railways of which they had temporarily become owners. It was then that the real revolution would have started... First of all, the sympathy of the people supported the strikers... but as soon as commodity prices increased, as soon as general circulation was partially interrupted to the detriment of the ordinary advantages of civilisation, they ceased... The big question is still that of bread: the hunger of the producers caused the strike; that of consumers put an end to it.<sup>1</sup>



The final Congress of the International took place at Verviers (Belgium) in September 1877 but the end of the International did not stop anarchists applying the ideas generated within it in their respective

countries. In France, for example, the Lyons workers' Congress in early 1878 saw them raise a four-point programme: "the complete separation from all bourgeois politics; the organization of trades unions for revolutionary ends; the creation of propaganda and study groups; and the federation of these trades unions and study groups in order to exploit areas of popular agitation and direct them to revolutionary ends."<sup>3</sup> While the resolutions—Kropotkin, amongst others, helped to prepare them<sup>4</sup>—were not passed (parliamentarianism held sway), the anarchist who raised them (Ballivet) ended his speech with a proto-syndicalist perspective which is worth quoting:

I shall try to say, in a few words, what tactics we would like to see adopted by our fellow workers:

Stay as far as possible outside any expression of bourgeois society;

On the terrain of trade associations, definitively pursue the formation of unions; these unions, however, should not only propose the defence of wages, but the abolition of wage labour, by the collective appropriation of all means of production;

As can be seen, the general strike was now intrinsically linked with expropriation. This was reflected in resolutions passed in August 1877 at a conference of delegates from the French sections in Chaux-de-Fonds:

5<sup>th</sup> resolution – The French Federation resolves that it will take advantage of all popular movements to develop as far as possible its collectivist and anarchist programme, but it calls upon the groups that make it up not to compromise their forces for the benefit of a victory for a bourgeois party.

6<sup>th</sup> resolution – In the event that strikes break out in places where the French sections have influence, the sections of the French Federation should take advantage of the circumstance to give the strike a revolutionary socialist character, by urging the strikers to end their position as wage-workers by taking possession of the instruments of work by force.<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to see how an assembly of striking workers and their strike committee can be turned

<sup>1</sup> Elisée Reclus, "La Grève d'Amérique", *Le travailleur: revue socialiste révolutionnaire*, September 1877, 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> James Guillaume, *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs* (Paris: Stock, 1910) IV, 248-9.

<sup>3</sup> David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism* (London School of Economics: London, 1971), 112.

<sup>4</sup> Cahm, 245



Create everywhere mixed circles of social studies for the propaganda of our principles;

To federate from the bottom up these unions and these circles to extend as far as possible their internal and external means of action to try to immerse us in what is the product of popular activity, attempting to give to its efforts a broad and human goal.

In a word, to produce, in the very heart of today's society, the organisation of the free society of the future; so that on the day when social development brings about the death of bourgeois society, the new society will be ready to replace it.<sup>1</sup>

The following year saw Kropotkin argue that anarchists sought “to bring about on a vast scale the transformation of the property system by the expropriation pure and simple of the present holders of the large landed estates, of the instruments of labour, and of capital of every kind, and by the seizure of all such capital by the cultivators, the workers’ organisations, and the agricultural and municipal communes. The task of expropriation must be carried out by the workers themselves in the towns and the countryside.”<sup>2</sup> He pointed to the Spanish Anarchists as an example to follow, “to build this force that will crush capital on the day of revolution: the revolutionary trades union. Trades sections, federations of all the workers in the same trade, federations of all the trades of the locality, of the region” would “seize the soil, the instruments of labour, all social wealth” while “overthrow[ing] the State, proclaim[ing] the free Commune.”<sup>3</sup> He linked the need to build a fighting union movement with the social revolution:

The goal of the revolution being the expropriation of the holders of society’s wealth, it is against these holders that we must organise. We must make every effort to create a vast workers’ organisation that pursues this goal. The organisation of resistance to and war on capital must be the principal objective of the workers’ organisation... the strike being an excellent

means of organisation and one of the most powerful weapons in this struggle.<sup>4</sup>

This perspective was taken up, expanded upon and taken to its logical conclusion in December 1882 when Kropotkin commented upon the Great Strike of 1877 in his discussion of Expropriation as a key feature of any successful social revolution. This article was included in his first anarchist book *Words of a Rebel* in 1885 and is worth quoting:

Well, when these days come – and it is for you to hasten their coming – when a whole region, when great towns with their suburbs have got rid of their rulers, our work is marked out, it is necessary that all machinery be returned to the community, that social assets held by individuals be returned to its true master, everyone, so that each can have their full share of consumption, that production of all that is necessary and useful can continue, and that social life, far from being interrupted, can resume with the greatest energy. Without the gardens and fields that give us produce essential for life, without the granaries, the warehouses, the shops that contain the accumulated products of work, without the factories and workshops that supply the fabrics, the metalwork, the thousand objects of industry and craft, as well as the means of defence, without the railways and other means of communication that allow us to exchange our products with the free communes of the surrounding area and to combine our efforts for resistance and for attack, we are condemned in advance to perish, we will suffocate like a fish out of water which can no longer breathe although bathed entirely in the vast ocean of air.

Let us recall the great strike of railway engineers that took place a few years ago in America. The great mass of public recognised that their cause was just; everyone was tired with the insolence of the companies, and they were glad to see them diminished at the mercy of their crews. But when they, masters of the tracks and locomotives, neglected to use them, when

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<sup>1</sup> Ballivet, “La représentation du Proletariat au Parlement”, *La Vie Ouvrière*, 5 May 1910, 533. James Guillaume later linked this speech to “The Ideas of the International” in the article “A propos du discours de Ballivet” published in the leading syndicalist journal *La Vie ouvrière* (5 July 1910).

<sup>2</sup> “The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of Its Practical Realisation”, *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 221.

<sup>3</sup> “The Workers’ Movement in Spain”, *Words of a Rebel* (Oakland: PM Press, 2022), 239.

<sup>4</sup> “Workers’ Organisation”, *Words of a Rebel*, 250.

all the flow of trade was interrupted, when food and goods of all kinds had doubled in price, public opinion changed sides.

“Rather the companies that rob us and who break our arms and legs than those idiot strikers who leave us to starve to death!” Do not forget it! All the interests of the crowd must be safeguarded and its needs, along with its instincts for justice, must be fully satisfied.<sup>1</sup>

This showed both the power of a general strike and the need to turn it as soon as possible into a general expropriation in order to *restart* production and distribution under workers’ control – not to mention to allow the coordination for the defence of the revolution and other essential functions.

The 1886 Eight Hour Day strikes in America also showed the power and potential of a general strike.

Initially called by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions in 1884, the organisation proclaimed that on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1886 the working day would be eight-hours, enforced not

by feeble laws but by the workers themselves. By 1886, the idea had caught on with, for example, the rank-and-file of the Knights of Labor joining the movement in opposition to its leadership.<sup>2</sup> While initially dismissing the movement as doomed to failure (thanks, in part, to residual views from when they were followers of Marx and Lassalle), the anarchist International Working People’s Association (IWPA) joined the agitation and the strikes which erupted on May 1<sup>st</sup>. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, the police attacked a peaceful rally near the Haymarket, a bomb exploded and the State had the perfect excuse to crush the anarchists: as Emma Goldman later put it, “five men had to pay with



their lives because they advocated Syndicalist methods as the most effective, in the struggle of labor against capital.”<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, Kropotkin’s article on “Expropriation” was translated for *The Alarm* (the English-language newspaper of the IWPA) and appeared in a few weeks before the strikes for the eight-hour day.<sup>4</sup> Given that many members of the IWPA had either seen or participated in the 1877 strike wave, its arguments clearly resonated with them.

### The London Dock Strike of 1889 and after

By the early 1880s, leading anarchists had realised the potential of the general strike as a means of starting a revolution but also the dangers inherent in it if it did not become a general expropriation. Without this, the general strike would fail simply

because the working class would suffer due to the lack of necessary supplies. However, the rest of the 1880s saw far too many anarchists become infatuated by dynamite bluster and abstract revolutionary

rhetoric rather than the practical work within the labour movement which marked the late 1860s to the late 1870s.

However, the period was not without progress for anarchists “played an important part in the Tailors Union, securing a declaration in favour of the general strike at a meeting of members in 1885” while a “more successful anarchist attempt to radicalise trade unions developed when a leading trade union militant, Joseph Tortelier, joined the anarchist movement in 1884 and eventually succeeded in persuading the Builders’ *chambres*

<sup>1</sup> “Expropriation”, *Words of a Rebel*, 199-200.

<sup>2</sup> Brecher, 37-9.

<sup>3</sup> “Syndicalism: The Modern Menace to Capitalism”, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 87. Initially published in “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice” in two parts in *Mother*

*Earth* (January and February 1913), before being revised as a pamphlet the same year, 1913. It should also be noted that Goldman regularly lectured on syndicalism, direct action and the general strike.

<sup>4</sup> “Expropriation”, *The Alarm*, 20 March 1886.

*syndicales* of Paris to declare for the general strike at a large meeting in November 1887.”<sup>1</sup>

These tendencies were reinforced by the practical example of the 1889 London Dock Strike which inspired the likes of Kropotkin and Malatesta to write more on the need for anarchist involvement in the labour movement.<sup>2</sup> As the former summarised many years later:

The strike was a wonderful lesson in many respects. It demonstrated to us the practical possibility of a General Strike.

Once the life of the Port of London had been paralysed, the strike spread wider and wider, bringing all sorts of industries to a standstill, and threatening to paralyse the whole life of the five millions of Londoners.

Another lesson of this strike was – in showing the powers of the working men for organising the supply and distribution of food for a large population of strikers. The demonstration was quite conclusive.”<sup>3</sup>

Kropotkin wrote two articles for French anarchists on the strike.<sup>4</sup> The first argued that the Great Dock Strike was “the picture of a people organising itself during the Revolution” and had “demonstrated in a way that brought a shiver down the back of the bourgeois to what extent a great city is at the mercy of two or three hundred thousand workers.” It was “the general strike” which “has proven the strength of the workers” even if it did not need “all workers [to] cease work on the same day” and showed the necessity of anarchists to “work amongst the workers... to prepare for the social, economic, Revolution.”<sup>5</sup> The strike had shown millions of workers “the *uselessness* of the employers, whose harmfulness they have known about for a long time” and had confirmed anarchist theory – on the ability of workers to organise themselves, federalism and the possibility of agreeable work, “the work of the society that has achieved Expropriation, followed by Anarchist-Communism.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly with Malatesta, who used

the strike as evidence to support his labour-orientated anarchist-communism.<sup>7</sup>

The following year – 1890 – saw an anonymous article entitled “General Strike” in *Le Révolté* end with the words: “We want free agreement of labour, without masters, without laws, but simply grouped by affinities. Since the general strike is the cornerstone of our liberation, cry out long live the general strike.”<sup>8</sup> Louise Michel was also regularly lecturing on the general strike and issued a pamphlet which proclaimed that “Power is dead... capital is a fiction, since without work it cannot exist, and it is not suffering for the Republic that is necessary; but creating the Social Republic... for all, a free humanity upon a free world.”<sup>9</sup> This would be achieved by an expropriatory general strike:

Taking possession is more accurate than expropriation, since expropriation implies an exclusion of one or the other, which cannot exist, the whole world belongs to everyone, each will then take what he needs... Individual property persists in living despite its anti-social results, the crimes it causes on every side... A single general strike could finish it off, it is coming with no other leaders than the instinct of life -- revolt or die [there is] no other alternative... No one can believe that the transformations of societies stops with us and that this most illusory of republics is the end of progress. It is communist anarchy which is on the horizon on every side<sup>10</sup>

The stirrings of the general strike were being felt across the globe, in Germany, Brazil, the United States in Britain and Belgium (in the latter two countries, “it is by a hundred thousand that the strikers are rising up, soon it will be more”<sup>11</sup>).

Anarchists took a keen interest in the 1<sup>st</sup> of May movement which arose after the Second International passed a resolution making it International Workers’ Day. Like other anarchists,

<sup>1</sup> Cahm, 259.

<sup>2</sup> For more details, see Iain McKay, “The London Dock Strike of 1889”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 63 (Winter 2015).

<sup>3</sup> “1886–1907: Glimpses into the Labour Movement in this Country”, *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 395.

<sup>4</sup> In 1897, these articles were included in a pamphlet with a four page preface and an article by John Burns, one of the strike leaders, entitled *La Grande Grève des Docks (The Great Dock Strike)*.

<sup>5</sup> “Ce que c’est qu’une grève”, *La Révolte*, 7 September 1889.

<sup>6</sup> “La grève de Londres”, *La Révolte*, 27 September 1889.

<sup>7</sup> “A proposito di uno sciopero”, *L’Associazione*, 6 October 1889.

<sup>8</sup> “Grève Généralé”, *Le Révolté*, 8 March 1890.

<sup>9</sup> Louise Michel, *Prise de possession* (Paris: Saint-Denis, 1890), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Michel, 12-14.

<sup>11</sup> Michel, 14.

Kropotkin rejected the idea of the day being a simply one for marches and urged that it be marked as a general strike – for winning the 8 Hour Day and, potentially, as a means of creating a revolutionary situation.<sup>1</sup> So while anarchists in 1890 and 1891 saw as an opportunity for the workers to show their strength across the world on the same day, German Social Democracy like the trade union bureaucrats in Britain pushed celebrating International Workers’ Day to the first Sunday after May 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>2</sup> The prestige of the German Marxists within the Second International proved decisive in which vision dominated how the 1<sup>st</sup> of May was marked, as Kropotkin lamented:

As in the International, the idea of the general strike emerged and its implementation seemed imminent, as the various trades banded together, federated and took to the streets on May 1<sup>st</sup>. These were stirrings that had to be halted at all costs.

The Marxists took charge of that.<sup>3</sup>

“What should have been the tangible sign of the solidarity pact between the oppressed of every country,” Malatesta bemoaned a few years later, “what should have been a review of the proletarian forces, what should have helped prepare the people for today’s great revolutionary means – the general strike – has turned into the *feast* of labour – and a feast day little observed!”<sup>4</sup>

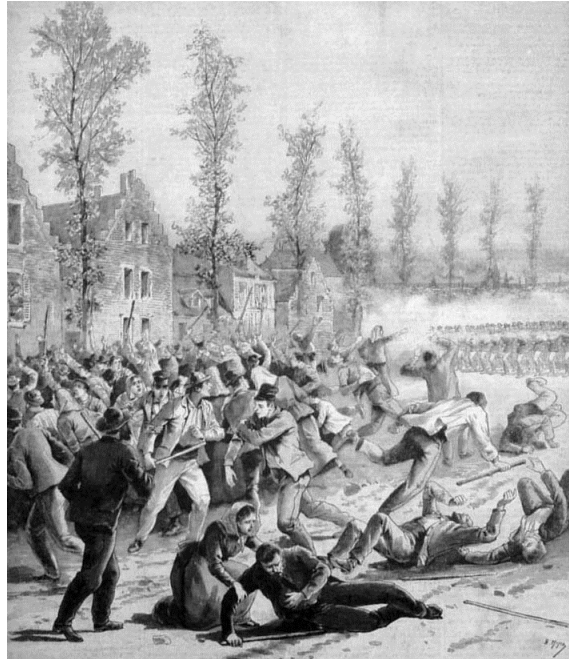
<sup>1</sup> “Allez-Vous En !”, *La Révolte*, 4 October 1890.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Peter Kropotkin, “1<sup>st</sup> May 1891” in *Direct Struggle Against Capital* (this three-part article originally appeared in *La Révolte* on 18 and 25 October and 1 November 1890).

<sup>3</sup> “The Death of the New International”, *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 338.

This disappointment did not stop anarchists working within the unions. With the movement towards renewed and strengthened anarchist participation in the labour movement underway, Malatesta raised some concerns:

The general strike is preached and this is all to the good; but, as I see it, imagining or announcing that the general strike is the revolution is plain wrong. It would only be a splendid opportunity for making the Revolution, but nothing more. It might be transformed into revolution, but only if the revolutionaries wielded enough influence, enough strength and enough enterprise to drag the workers down the road to expropriation and armed attack, before the effects of hunger, the impact of massacre or concessions from the bosses come along to erode the strikers’ morale... No longer should the strike be the warfare of folded arms.<sup>5</sup>



**Troops of the paramilitary Garde Civique fire on strikers near Mons on 17 April 1893**

The Belgium General Strike of 1893 saw Malatesta in the country.<sup>6</sup> He shared his views of the events with Kropotkin who

penned an article for *La Révolte* noting its importance in terms of how it presaged the early days of what could become a social revolution and the inability of Belgium anarchists to push it further than its limited initial goal to secure universal suffrage. This article was considered important enough for its arguments on anarchist activity to be summarised in *Freedom* which concluded:

The lost opportunity in Belgium last April should be a useful lesson to all Anarchists. There is little doubt that if our comrades had devoted as much energy to an active propaganda in the labour movement as to talking bombs and dynamite, the result, when the opportunity for action came,

<sup>4</sup> “The 1<sup>st</sup> of May”, *Complete Works of Malatesta* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2016) III: 63.

<sup>5</sup> “Matters Revolutionary”, *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), 106-7.

<sup>6</sup> Davide Turcato, *Making Sense of Anarchism: Errico Malatesta’s Experiments with Revolution, 1889–1900* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015), 104-8.

would have been very different. What might have been the beginning of a social revolution in Belgium has ended in a miserable fiasco.... When every trade union, every co-operative society, every club, every voluntary association of workers has amongst its members several convinced Anarchists... then a true Social Revolution will be an immediate practical possibility. Then there will be men in every district ready to seize the opportunity offered by a great strike... But let us take warning by Belgium and avoid the fatal mistake of standing aloof from the daily practical interests of the mass of our fellow workmen. A true Social Revolution can never be brought about by a few enthusiasts. It is a change wrought throughout the inmost depths of the people; a change of heart and mind and spirit in enormous masses of men.<sup>1</sup>

Again, the importance of organised anarchists within popular movements – like a general strike – is seen as key, the means of transforming a protest or revolt into a social revolution. A strike, no matter how large, in-and-of-itself would not become a revolution automatically. The role of anarchists – the militant minority – was crucial. Malatesta, likewise, explained other lessons to be learned from these events and their aftermath:

Let us now ask the parliamentary socialists: if the people, denied so-called political rights, were able, by virtue of the strength of their organisation, to impose their wishes upon the government, why do you say that nothing can be achieved unless deputies are appointed? And why, having managed to win universal suffrage with admirable vigour, have they not managed to win anything worthwhile since then? Might it be because, whenever the people vote, they grow accustomed to looking to Parliament for everything and cease doing things for themselves?

Then again, all the effort put into securing the vote – for the right to appoint the people

to whom they look for certain reforms – might that not have been effort better invested in going after the desired reforms directly?<sup>2</sup>

Unsurprisingly, when Anarchists sought to secure their right as socialists to participate in the Second International at the London Congress of 1896,<sup>3</sup> Kropotkin also urged that they “must also show solidarity with the idea of the general strike, in contrast to the politicians who are using every means at their disposal to suppress it until the next Congress.”<sup>4</sup> After the anarchists were expelled from the Congress, they held a counter-meeting at which “Louise Michel advocated the general strike. Partial strikes fail and partial revolts fail and lead to hecatombs of victims of the best of the workers. A general strike would mean a general revolt which could not be put down by massacres. Their duty was to organise the miserable and down-trodden for this last great effort for freedom.”<sup>5</sup> A resolution saw the definition of “political action” widen beyond the electioneering insisted upon by the Marxists:

all Anarchist-Socialists agree that the emancipation of the labouring masses by organised struggle against Capital by means of a general strike is absolutely impossible without systematic struggle against the monopolised State... organise all who are already fighting against Capital for a general *Political Strike* against the State, monopolised by the capitalist class<sup>6</sup>

Anarchists helped ensure the general strike made its way into the French trade union movement, becoming part of revolutionary syndicalism and from there spread internationally – helped by anarchists across the globe who had been raising it since the late 1860s. It even started to permeate into the Marxist movement, with Social Democratic parties developing within them advocates of the idea who would not be put off by appeals to the authority of Marx and Engels.

### 1905 and after

By the dawn of the new century, the general strike was international and spreading – both in terms of

<sup>1</sup> “A Word in Season”, *Freedom*, June 1893.

<sup>2</sup> “How to Get... What You Want”, *Complete Works of Malatesta* III:71.

<sup>3</sup> For more details, see Davide Turcato’s “Socialists and Workers: The 1896 London Congress”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 1 Number 3 (Autumn 2021) and *Making Sense of Anarchism*, 136-141.

<sup>4</sup> “The Workers’ Congress of 1896”, *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 348.

<sup>5</sup> *Proceedings of the International Worker’s Congress, London, July-August, 1896* (Glasgow: The Labour Leader, 1896), 65.

<sup>6</sup> *Proceedings*, 65-6.

advocates and practice. In 1902, the German anarchist-syndicalist Arnold Roller published his pamphlet *Der Generalstreik und die Soziale Revolution (The General Strike and the Social Revolution)* in London which summarised its nature and history. This was translated in 1905 as *The Social General Strike* and Max Baginski and others circulated it at the founding conference of the Industrial Workers of the World in June of that year, where the veteran anarchist Lucy Parsons spoke about it to the assembled delegates:

I wish to say that my conception of the future method of taking possession of this Earth is that of the general strike; that is my conception of it. The trouble with all the strikes in the past has been this: the workingmen... strike and go out and starve. Their children starve. Their wives get discouraged... My conception of the strike of the future is not to strike and go out and starve, but to strike and remain in and take possession of the necessary property of production. If anyone is to starve – I do not say it is necessary – let it be the capitalist class.<sup>1</sup>

With the Russian Revolution of 1905, its power and potential became obvious. Kropotkin rightly noted the emergence of both the soviets and the use of the general strike:

Another prominent feature of the Russian revolution is the ascendancy which labour has taken in it. It is not social democrats, or revolutionary socialists, or anarchists, who take the lead in the present revolution. It is labour – the workingmen. Already during the first general strike, the St. Petersburg workingmen had nominated 132 delegates, who constituted a “Council [Soviet] of the Union of Workingmen,” and these

delegates had nominated an executive of eight members... Similar organizations most probably have sprung up at Moscow and elsewhere, and at this moment the workingmen of St. Petersburg are systematically arming themselves in order to resist the absolutist “black gangs”...

Many years ago the general strike was advocated by the Latin workingmen as a weapon which would be irresistible in the hands of labour for imposing its will. The Russian revolution has demonstrated that they were right. Moreover, there is not the slightest doubt that if the general strike has been capable of forcing the centuries-old

institution of autocracy to capitulate, it will be capable also of imposing the will of the labourers upon capital, and that the workingmen, with the common sense of which they have given such striking proof, will find also the means of solving the labour problem, so as to make industry the means not of personal enrichment but of satisfying the needs of the community.<sup>2</sup>

In the anarchist press, he noted that the Soviet “very much reminds us of the Central Committee which preceded the Paris

Commune of 1871, and it is certain that workers across the country should organise on this model. In any case, these councils represent the revolutionary strength of the working class.” When the workers and peasants “understand the strength conferred by direct action added to the general strike” and get “their hands on all that is necessary to live and produce”, then they can lay “the initial foundations of the communist commune.”<sup>3</sup> Kropotkin stressed how it validated anarchist advocacy of the general strike:

A general strike was declared. “Nonsense! A general strike is impossible!” the fools said, even then. But the workingmen set

**“A general strike was declared. ‘Nonsense! A general strike is impossible!’ the fools said, even then. But the workingmen set earnestly to stop all work in the great city, and fully succeeded. In a few days the strike became general.”**

<sup>1</sup> “Speeches at the I.W.W.’s founding Convention”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* vol. 2 no. 1 (Spring 2022), 126.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kropotkin, “The Revolution in Russia”, *The Nineteenth Century and After* (December 1905), 880-1.

<sup>3</sup> “L’Action directe et la Grève générale en Russie”, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 December 1905.

earnestly to stop all work in the great city, and fully succeeded. In a few days the strike became general. What the workingmen must have suffered during these two or three weeks, when all work was suspended and provisions became extremely scarce, one can easily imagine; but they held out... Once the heart of Russia, Moscow, had struck, all the other towns followed. St. Petersburg soon joined the strike, and the workingmen displayed the most admirable organizing capacities... A whole country had struck against its government, all but the troops... In a few days the strike had spread over all the main cities of the empire, including Poland and Finland... All life in the towns had come to a standstill. And what exasperated the rulers most was that the workers offered no opportunity for shooting at them and re-establishing "order" by massacres. A new weapon, more terrible than street warfare, had thus been tested and proved to work admirably.<sup>1</sup>

This was reflected in the conclusions of a Russian Anarchist congress held in 1906:

The social-democrats consider the workers' unions as an *aid* in their political fight; the anarchists, on the other hand, consider them as *natural organs for the direct struggle with capital and for the organisation of the future order* — organs that are *inherently necessary* to achieve the workers' own goals...

We could all appreciate the importance of the general strike for Russia last October, when even the unbelievers had to admit its revolutionary potential... we can boldly declare that the general strike, proclaimed by our Western European comrades as a means of producing a revolution, has proved to be a powerful weapon in the struggle... however, we have to remember that the general strike is not an instrument that can be used by the will of central committees and that can simply be decreed

by an order of the majority of workers' delegates... a strike can only be successful when it is willed by a large majority of the workers...

We want to add that although a general strike is a good method of struggle, it does not free the people that use it from the necessity of an armed struggle against the dominating order... we also want to point to the necessity of not losing sight of the necessary preparatory work amongst the peasants and the workers to the end of *using immediately the first fruits of the victories that were gained through the general strike*, and... starting the expropriation of lands and means of production and consumption immediately... wherever this seems possible.<sup>2</sup>

This resolution summarised the lessons gained from the International onwards — unions as means of combating and replacing capitalism, the key role of the general strike as starting a social revolution and the recognition that it needed to be extended to both expropriation and insurrection. Similar viewpoints were expressed in the resolutions passed on syndicalism and the general strike at the International Anarchist Congress held the following year.<sup>3</sup> Malatesta made the point explicitly in his speech at it:

As far as I am concerned, I accept the principle [of the general strike] and promote it as much as I can, and have done so for several years. The general strike has always struck me as an excellent means to set off the social revolution. However, let us take care to avoid falling under the dangerous illusion that the general strike can make the revolution superfluous.

We are expected to believe that by suddenly halting production the workers will starve the bourgeoisie into submission within a few days.<sup>4</sup> Personally speaking, I can think of nothing more absurd. The first to starve to death during a general strike will not be the bourgeoisie who have all the accumulated produce at their disposal, but

<sup>1</sup> "The Revolution in Russia", 874-5.

<sup>2</sup> "The Russian Revolution and Anarchism", *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 476-7.

<sup>3</sup> *The International Anarchist Congress: Held at the Plancius Hall, Amsterdam, on August 26th-31st, 1907* (London: Freedom Press, 1907), 21-2

<sup>4</sup> Malatesta had in mind statements like the general strike "probably be[ing] the first time that the ruling classes will understand and feel what it means to be hungry" and "[I]et us stop working for them and they will starve in spite of their money." (Arnold Roller, *The Social General Strike* [Chicago: Debating Club No. 1, 1905], 8, 17).

the workers, who only have their labour to live on.

The general strike as it is described to us is a pure utopia. Either the workers, starving after three days of striking, will go back to work with his tail between his legs... or he will decide to take the products into his own hands by force.... let us prepare for this inevitable insurrection instead of limiting ourselves to exalting the general strike as if it were a panacea for all evils...

Rather than inviting the workers to stop working, what we should be doing is asking them to go on working, but for their own benefit. Unless that happens, the general strike will soon become a general famine, even if we were strong enough to commandeer all the produce in the warehouses straight away.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of the general strike as a means of creating a revolutionary situation was shared by the likes of Emma Goldman, so often slandered by Marxists and others as some kind of “lifestyle” anarchist. Thus, we see her and her comrades urge the creation of a revolutionary weekly paper to supplement *Mother Earth* “to deal entirely with labor, its battles, hopes and aspirations” as the monthly “cannot devote itself exclusively to one particular phase”. The proposed paper would expand upon the articles on the class war in *Mother Earth* and would be “a fighting champion of revolutionary labor. We must carry our ideas to the men that toil” particularly given “how all important is the propaganda of direct

action and the general strike” and called on anarchists to work with them:

It is for us, as Anarchists, to point out to the workingman the real cause of his dissatisfaction, misery and oppression; to impress upon him the inefficiency of trades unionism, pure and simple; to convince him of the dangerous uselessness of parliamentary methods. We must discover to him his natural weapons and the powerful means at hand to make himself free; we must point out to him the methods

so successfully being used by his European brothers: the revolutionary tactics whose final destiny it is to free labor from all exploitation and oppression, and usher in a free society; the modern, efficient weapons of direct action and general strike..<sup>2</sup>

The journal hoped that “the terrible fear with which the solidarity of labor and the General Strike movement inspire the masters will teach the disinherited the world over to make common cause and to appreciate to the fullest extent the powerful weapon in their hands” and stressed that “the solidaric General Strike [is] labor’s great emancipator.”<sup>3</sup> An example of *Mother Earth*’s engagement with the class struggle can be seen in relation to the general strike in Philadelphia, which saw Voltairine de Cleyre raising the need to turn a general strike into a general expropriation in its April 1910 issue:

there is no doubt that the enemy recognises that the weapon of industrial warfare in the future will be the general strike, – and dreads it... do the workers perceive, that it must be the strike which will stay in the factory, not go out? which will guard the machines, and allow no scab to touch them? which will organise,

**“Let us act for ourselves, on the spot: the control of the factories should be in the hands of those who work in them; the means: direct action and the general strike ... All too long the toilers have felt themselves mere ‘hands’ and subjects. It is time to remember their rights as human beings and to realize their strength to assert these.”**

<sup>1</sup> *The International Anarchist Congress of Amsterdam (1907)* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2008), 124-5.

<sup>2</sup> “To Our Comrades”, *Mother Earth*, September 1907.

<sup>3</sup> “Observations and Comments”, *Mother Earth*, August 1908.



not to inflict deprivation on itself, but on the enemy? which will take over industry and operate it for the workers, not for franchise holders, stockholders, and office-holders? Do they? Or will it take a few thousand more clubbings to knock it into their heads?<sup>1</sup>

Another article insisted that “labor possesses the power, by means of united and direct action, forever to put a stop to the wholesale slaughter of capitalist greed... Let us act for ourselves, on the spot: the control of the factories should be in the hands of those who work in them; the means: direct action and the general strike, and *sabotage* which has accomplished such splendid results in the syndicalist movement of France and Italy... All too long the toilers have felt themselves mere ‘hands’ and subjects. It is time to remember their rights as human beings and to realize their strength to assert these.”<sup>2</sup> Goldman summarised the paper’s perspective on the general strike:

By the General Strike, Syndicalism means a stoppage of work, the cessation of labor. Nor need such a strike be postponed until all the workers of a particular place or country are ready for it... the General Strike may be started by one industry and exert a tremendous force... The General Strike, initiated by one determined organization, by one industry or by a small, conscious minority among the workers, is... soon taken up by many other industries, spreading like wildfire... Syndicalism recognizes the right of the producers to the things which they have created; namely, the right of the workers to help themselves if the strike does not meet with speedy settlement... the General Strike will become a fact the moment labor understands its full value — its destructive as well as constructive value, as indeed many workers all over the world are beginning to realize.<sup>3</sup>

The seeds planted in the International in the late 1860s had blossomed by the 1910s, as the anarchist perspective on the general strike had become well-defined – primarily spontaneous, spreading,

expropriatory and a means to create a social revolution rather than the revolution itself. It was recognised that the general strike could take many forms and anarchists sought the tactics needed to both promote general strikes and to push the ones which occurred towards revolutionary ends, based on an analysis of strike waves which had happened and the implications of previous conceptions.

### **Developments within Revolutionary Syndicalism**

Anarchist involvement in the French labour movement was one of the key factors in the rise of revolutionary syndicalism in that country. The anarchists raised many of their ideas within the movement – rejection of electioneering, direct struggle against capital, workers’ combat organisations taking over workplaces, and the general strike. It is fair to say, given the ignorance and distortion about anarchism, many consider these notions as syndicalist rather than anarchist – including the general strike.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is often proclaimed as *the* syndicalist strategy.

With these ideas now associated with the main French union federation, the CGT, they became more respectable and were discussed within Marxist parties, particularly by those on their left who could see the limitations of parliamentarianism. In 1904, leading French syndicalist Émile Pouget contributed a history of the general strike to a special issue of a leading French Marxist journal which discussed its various aspects and its evolution in syndicalist ranks.<sup>5</sup> He noted how many assertions by the enemies of the general strike failed to take into account how the idea had changed within syndicalist ranks, from a “folded arms” strike called on a specific day in the 1890s to a spontaneous, spreading strike which moved quickly to expropriation and workers’ control (as regards the latter, similar perspectives were expressed by British syndicalists in the 1910s<sup>6</sup>).

This is reflected in the syndicalist novel *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution* (1909) which Pouget wrote with Émile Pataud. In it the revolution was not a passive folding of arms but

<sup>1</sup> “A Study of the General Strike in Philadelphia”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* vol. 2 no. 1 (Spring 2022), 60.

<sup>2</sup> M.B., “Everlasting Murder”, *Mother Earth*, April 1911.

<sup>3</sup> Emma Goldman, “Syndicalism”, 95-6.

<sup>4</sup> Space precludes discussing the differences between revolutionary anarchism and syndicalism but this is addressed here: Iain McKay, “Precursors of Syndicalism IV: The

Anarchist-Communist Critique”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 78 (Winter 2020).

<sup>5</sup> “La Grève Générale et Le Socialisme”, *Le Mouvement socialiste : revue bi-mensuelle internationale*, June and July 1904.

<sup>6</sup> Iain McKay, “Tom Mann and British Syndicalism”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* vol. 1 no. 3 (Autumn 2021).

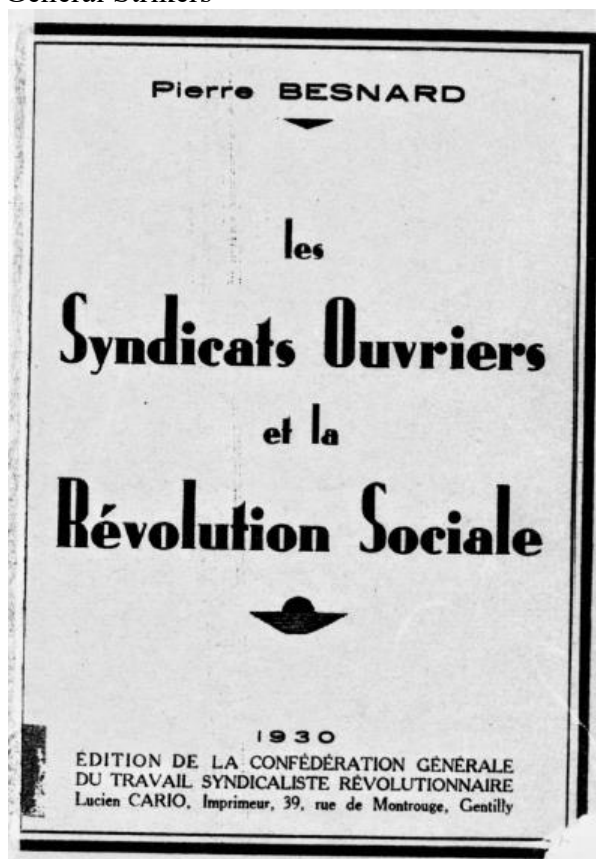
rather an active, insurrectionary and expropriatory movement which spread from a union dispute rather than being called for a specific day. The general strike “very soon changed into an insurrectional strike” and “the General Strikers occupied the centres of Government action, and expelled the representative of the State.” The unions “in the provision trade constituted themselves into commissions for provisioning” communities while others, “which, under Capitalism, had been societies for combat, changed into societies for production; and each in its sphere set itself to the reorganisation of its work”. They also saw the necessity for the “organisation of defence, with a Trade Union and Federal basis.” These “Syndicalist battalions were not a force external to the people. They were the people themselves” who “had the common-sense to arm themselves in order to protect their conquered liberty.”<sup>1</sup>

This vision of the general strike was repeated in 1930 by Pierre Besnard. The general strike, he explained, was “a *specifically syndicalist* weapon” which can deal “in a *decisive* manner with all revolutionary situations whatever the initial factors of the movements set in motion”<sup>2</sup> and contrasted it with action by political parties:

It is directly opposed to *insurrection*, the only weapon of the political parties.

It is, by far, more complete than that. In fact, whereas the latter only makes it possible to take power, the general strike not only provides the possibility of destroying that power, of getting rid of those who enjoy it, of preventing any party

from capturing it, it deprives capitalism and the State of all means of defence, while at the same time *abolishing* individual property, replacing it by collective property.



This was the “*insurrectionary and expropriatory general strike*” and “[o]n the duration of this [work] stoppage will depend the future of the revolutionary movement,” Besnard stressed.<sup>4</sup> The need was to restart production under workers’ management:

Let us, now, examine what are the characteristics of the general strike. I have said that it signified in the first place and above all, the cessation of production, and work, under capitalism.

This means that workers, then the peasants, must simultaneously stop work. Does this mean they must quit their place of work and abandon the means of production to the bosses? No. Unlike what happens during a strike, workers will have to at the same time *stop work, occupy* the place of production,

In a word, the general strike has a power of *immediate* transformation, and this power is exercised for the sole benefit of the proletariat, to whom the possession of the apparatus of production and exchange offers the means of *radically* transforming the social order.

The expropriatory general strike, with violence which the proletariat will invariably be obliged to use, will be, moreover, clearly *insurrectional*.

Its effect will be felt at the same time politically and economically, whereas insurrection permits a party to act only in the political field.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget, *How we shall bring about the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 94, 63, 121-2, 158. Kropotkin, it should be noted, suggested in his preface that the authors “have considerably attenuated the resistance

that the Social Revolution will probably meet with on its way.” (xxxvi)

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Besnard, *Les Syndicats Ouvriers et la Révolution Sociale* (Paris: CGT-SR, 1930), 249.

<sup>3</sup> Besnard, 249.

<sup>4</sup> Besnard, 252.

*get rid of the boss, expropriate him, and get ready to get production moving again, but in the interests of the revolution.*

The cessation of work and production will mark the end of a regime, the expropriation of the possessors of the means of production and exchange and at the same time the overthrow of State power.<sup>1</sup>

The similarities to the ideas expounded by the likes of Kropotkin and Malatesta are clear.

Just as the anarchists had refined their position over the years, so had syndicalists. This means that certain critiques raised by, say, the Bolsheviks were addressing a position which had long been discarded by leading syndicalists, reflecting the early years of the movement or held by similar, but by no means identical, movements such as Industrial Unionism (the IWW). This is to be expected – syndicalists, like anarchists, sought to learn the lessons of the strikes they were involved in as well as address the critiques raised against them by others in the wider socialist and labour movements.

### Conclusions

More, much more, could be written. The activities of anarchists and syndicalists during the 1917 Russian Revolution (which saw workers start to apply the ideas raised by libertarians twelve years before), in the near-revolutions which erupted across the world towards the end of the First World War and immediately after, the occupation of the factories in Italy in 1920, France 1936 and 1968 – the list is long.

However, the role of the general strike in anarchist theory, its birth and development, have been indicated from the First International to 1914 as well as changes sketched within syndicalism. As can be seen, many of the characteristics of what

was latter associated with revolutionary syndicalism had been developed within the Federalist-wing of the International and the anarchist movement which emerged from it. The anarchists in the 1870s saw the need to organise unions which would both fight for gains within capitalism and be the means of replacing it, using strikes and other forms of direct struggle against capital with the aim of turning these into a general strike and the seizing of the means of life by the workers themselves.

Anarchist support for a general strike is long-standing and is intimately linked to the rise of revolutionary anarchism within First International. However, this advocacy was not uncritical and it quickly recognised – driven by analysing actual mass strikes – the limitations of a simple “folded arms” general strike. Rather, the need to turn the strike into a revolution, to move beyond the



**Paris, 28 May 1936: 32,000 workers occupied the Renault plant. 100,000 more soon occupied every major engineering factory across the city. A strike wave then swept France, involving 2 million workers in 12,000 strikes and occupations**

ceasing of work to the seizing of workplaces was stressed. In short, the general strike was seen as a possible start of a social revolution but it had to go beyond this into expropriation and insurrection for it to achieve its potential. As Kropotkin summarised in 1904: “Expropriation as an end, and the general strike as a means of paralysing the bourgeois world in all countries at once.”<sup>2</sup>

Likewise within revolutionary syndicalism itself, with initial hopes of the general strike being a case of ceasing work with the demand for the capitalists to handover their property replaced with a recognition that such a vision was utopian and that the general strike, as anarchists had argued, had to swiftly move towards expropriation and insurrection.

<sup>1</sup> Besnard, 251.

<sup>2</sup> “Preface to the 1904 Italian Edition”, *Words of a Rebel*, lii.

Unsurprisingly, then, Alexander Berkman summarised this position in his classic 1929 introduction to revolutionary anarchism:

the social revolution can take place only by means of the *General Strike*. The General Strike, rightly understood and thoroughly carried out, is the social revolution.... its real meaning is revolution, that it is the only practical way to it. It is time for us to learn this, and when we do so the social revolution will cease to be a vague, unknown quantity. It will become an actuality, a definite method and aim, a program whose first step is the taking over of the industries by organized labor.... There is no man nor any body of men that can manage it except the *workers themselves*, for it takes the workers to operate the industries... the taking over of the industries... means... the running of them by labor. As concerns the taking over, you must consider that the workers are actually now *in* the industries. The taking over consists in the workers *remaining* where they are, yet remaining not as employees but as the rightful collective possessions.... The expropriation of the capitalist class during the social revolution-the taking over of the industries-requires tactics directly the reverse of those you now use in a strike. In the latter you quit work and leave the boss in full possession of the mill, factory, or mine. It is an idiotic proceeding, of course, for you give the master the entire advantage: he can put scabs in your place, and you remain out in the cold.

In expropriating, on the contrary, you *stay* on the job and you put the boss out.... [the workers] take possession (by means of their revolutionary shop committees) of the workshop, factory, or other establishment... the factory becomes public property in charge of the union of workers engaged in the industry, all equal partners in the general undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

Whether it should be existing unions or some new body created during the struggle (such as factory committees) is subject to debate by anarchists and syndicalists, but if both are organised in a libertarian fashion then it is of little importance (particularly as no union will have complete coverage and so any revolutionary situation will inevitably see new organisations being formed, regardless). Suffice to say, in areas dominated by reformist unions then federations of factory committees would likely be the preferred option (as was the case with Russian syndicalists in 1917, for example). These differences should not be used to hide the

similarities between both positions just as differences between communist-anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists should not obscure what they have in common, not least support for the general strike.

What is past is prologue. The key is to know the events and arguments of the past to understand, learn and apply their lessons in new circumstances and in ways which avoid repeating the mistakes made. Yes, undoubtedly new mistakes will be made but knowing the past can ensure we, firstly, know when we are being lied to by those interested in discrediting libertarian ideas and, secondly and far more importantly, build upon the activity and theory of previous generations of libertarians.

**What is past is prologue. The key is to know the events and arguments of the past to understand, learn and apply their lessons in new circumstances and in ways which avoid repeating the mistakes made.**

**“the social revolution can take place only by means of the *General Strike*. The General Strike, rightly understood and thoroughly carried out, is the social revolution....”**

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Berkman, *What is Anarchism?* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2003), 197-8, 207-8.

# The Federalist International

## The Geneva General Congress

(1-6 September 1873)

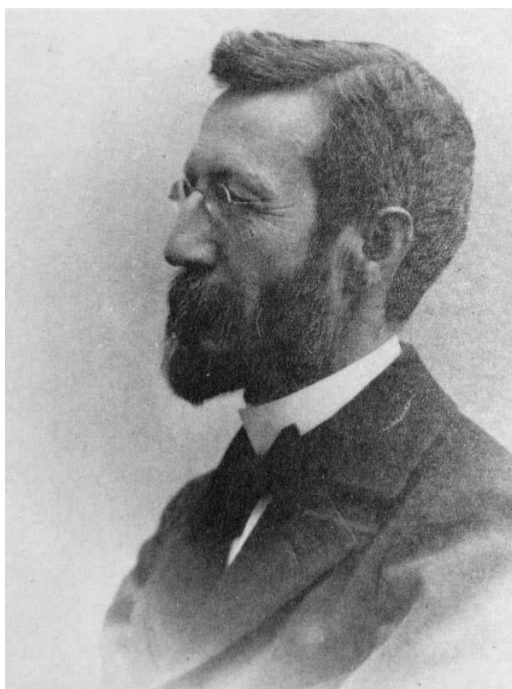
James Guillaume

*L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs* (Paris: Stock, 1909), 116-9, 120-1

The Congress then turned to the question of the general strike. In this session we heard Joukovsky, rapporteur of the Commission, then subsequently Manguette, Verrycken, Alerini, Guillaume, Costa, Brousse, Bert, Viñas, Ostyn, Spichiger and Hales. As a result of the decision the Congress had just taken, this discussion was not published in the minutes; but I can give a summary of it by means of the manuscript which has remained in my hands.

The Commission, said the rapporteur *Joukovsky*, thinks that the question of the general strike is subordinated to the more or less complete realisation of regional and international organisation of trades, and to the statistical work which the International must do in preparation for this strike. Furthermore, the general strike being nothing other than the social revolution – for it suffices to suspend work only for ten days for the present order to collapse entirely – the Commission believes that this question does not have to be decided upon by Congress, especially since the discussion would make our opponents aware of the means we intend to use for the social revolution.

*Manguette* and *Verrycken* explain that the Belgians understand the general strike as a means of bringing about a revolutionary movement. “If the Spaniards and Italians tell us that in their countries this is not the means that can be used to accomplish the revolution, this is not a reason for us to reject it in countries where workers are used to going on strike. What we want to examine is the possibility of making the movement international; we would like to see that when workers in a country rise in revolt, whether in the form of a general strike or under another form, the other peoples combine their efforts with those of the country in revolt.” *Verrycken* observes that if a general strike had been possible at the time of the Paris Commune, there is no



**James Guillaume (1844-1916)**

doubt the triumph of reaction would have been prevented; during the last Spanish revolution, the general strike would have been an effective means of paralysing Prussia and preventing it from stemming Spain's revolutionary movement.

*Alerini* cites, as an example of what can be achieved by a general strike, even if it is restricted to a single locality, what happened in Alcoy. In this town, the workers of certain trades were on strike; they were going to succumb and be forced to return to work without obtaining anything, when the Spanish Federal Commission (which was located in Alcoy) proposed a general strike by all the trades in the city, with the

commitment that, in no trade, workers would return to work before all other trades had obtained satisfaction. This general strike led to an armed conflict, in which the workers overthrew the local authority; the principal bourgeois were arrested as hostages; and when General Velarde arrived at Alcoy with an army, he had to negotiate; the hostages offered to mediate; the governor of the province promised that no prosecution would be brought against the insurgents; the terms that the strikers demanded of their bosses were accepted, and a levy was imposed on the bourgeoisie, with the proceeds of which the workers were compensated for the days lost during the strike. As a consequence, *Alerini* is a staunch supporter of the general strike as a revolutionary method.

*James Guillaume* notes that the idea of a revolutionary general strike is on the agenda; it is the logical outcome of the practice of partial strike; as these produce only temporary and incomplete results, it was recognised that the aim should be generalise the strike. The general strike, to triumph, will have to be international. But is it necessary that it breaks out everywhere at the same time, on a fixed day and upon a signal? No, we should

not even raise this question, and let it be assumed that it can be so. The revolution must be contagious. In a country where a spontaneous movement is going to erupt, we should not wish to postpone the explosion on the pretext of waiting for other countries to be ready to follow it.

*Costa* says partial strikes were nothing other than wool pulled over the workers' eyes. The general strike is an excellent revolutionary means. But the Congress does not have to pronounce on this matter; that would be to risk making the bourgeoisie smirk.

*Brousse* thought that, if the general strike was a practical means in certain countries, elsewhere, in Italy and France for example, this means could not be used. Why, in France, where the general strike is impossible, should we not make the revolution in the form of a communalist movement?

*Bert* tables the following draft resolution:

Considering that the general strike is the strike of all categories of trades in all localities,

Each partial general strike will be organised in a such a way that only one category of trade is on strike in the different localities, and that the category on strike is supported in solidarity by all the others. The proceeds of the wage increase obtained in this first victory must help support a second category of trade which will in turn go on strike, and so on until complete victory.

*Brousse* argues that such a proposal would be to organise the defeat of the workers.

*Costa* suggests another motion, which is:

Considering that the general strike is an excellent practical means to bring about the social revolution, but that, according to the statements of the delegates, if there are federations where this means can be used for the triumph of the revolution, there are others where this means is in practice impossible,

The Congress declares that it confines itself to noting these various statements, and that it leaves it to each federation to organise itself in order to find the means which could lead it as soon and most surely to the emancipation of the workers.

*Alerini* objects that it would be imprudent to publicise a declaration framed in such terms, that is to say openly advocating for social revolution.

*Costa* points out that he is not asking for it to be published.

*James Guillaume* puts forward the following motion, in which he avoided using the expression social revolution:

Considering that partial strikes can only provide workers with momentary and illusory relief, since wages, by their very essence, will always be limited to the means of subsistence strictly necessary to prevent the worker from starving to death,

Congress, without believing in the possibility of completely renouncing partial strikes<sup>1</sup>, recommend that the workers devote their efforts to completing the international organisation of trades, which will allow them one day to undertake a general strike, the only really effective strike to achieve the complete emancipation of labour.

*Viñas* is not in favour of strikes. What, according to him, kept the workers away from the revolutionary movement was the strike. Perhaps in Spain, if the workers had not been so absorbed in their numerous strikes, they would have been more successful at achieving their complete emancipation. It has been said that the general strike is a revolutionary means: *Viñas* denies it.<sup>2</sup> For this to happen, the workers who go on strike would have to be aware of the necessity of revolution. We must therefore work to make the exploited masses understand this necessity, and then they will make the revolution without needing the pretext of a strike.

*Ostyn* believes that the International is and must remain the great practical school of political and social economy, which many workers do not know. It is necessary to enlighten minds, this is the true way to achieve the emancipation of the workers.

*Spichiger* believes that partial strikes should not be condemned; he thinks we should seek to take advantage of even those movements which can only bring a moment of satisfaction. Without doubt we must try to make the workers understand that only the general strike can emancipate labour; but this will require long-term propaganda and, in the meantime, we must be careful not to oppose partial movements and to discourage workers who are not yet revolutionary from strikes.

*Joukovsky* says that the first question to be decided is whether Congress wants to pass a resolution on the general strike.

On his proposal, the chair (*Verrycken*) asked delegates to vote on the following question: "Does Congress want to adopt a resolution on the general strike?"

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<sup>1</sup> As requested by a few Belgian delegates at the Verviers congress on the previous 14 April.

<sup>2</sup> *Viñas* was thinking of the workers in Barcelona who, in July 1873, had held a peaceful general strike instead of rising up.

All the delegates answer yes, except Hales, who answers no, and Van den Abeele, who abstains because the Dutch Federation, in its Congress of August 10, voted that it would await the decisions of the General Congress on the general strike to discuss and adopt them if necessary.

The remainder of the discussion was deferred to the administrative session the following day.

[...]

In the eighth session, private, on Thursday morning, September 5, the discussion on the general strike was continued and came to an end.

The Commission, by means of Joukovsky, proposed a rather poorly worded declaration, the first part of which insisted on the need for regional and international organisation of trades; the second part said: "The general strike being nothing else than the social revolution, for it is enough to suspend all work for only ten days for the current order to completely collapse, for this reason, this matter is reserved."

*Manguette* and *Van den Abeele* argued against this draft declaration, which *Cyrille* and *Joukovsky* defended. *Hales*, employing for the first time, to my knowledge, an expression that has since become well known in Germany (*Generalstreik*, *Generalunsinn*), spoke thusly: "The general strike is impractical, and it is nonsense. In order to have a general strike, it would first be necessary to organise everywhere for this purpose: and when the workers' organisation is complete, the social revolution would be made." After a rather confusing discussion, in which *Alerini*, *Bert* and *Farga* spoke again, the Commission, reconsidering, presented a draft motion which it had just composed and which it

substituted for the statement initially proposed by it; Costa read it; the draft was as follows:

The Congress, considering that, in the present state of the organisation of the International, the question of the general strike cannot be given a complete answer, recommends to the workers, as a matter of urgency, the international organisation of trade unions.

*Farga* proposed adding a sentence recommending "active socialist and revolutionary propaganda." *Verrycken* supported *Farga's* amendment, on condition that the word "revolutionary" be removed, which, he said, "is often understood to mean fighting in the streets, and which would not be understood in Belgium." *Farga* replied that he willingly consented to the deletion of the word "revolutionary."

The new text of the Commission, supplemented by the *Farga* amendment, was then adopted unanimously, as follows (which was made known in the afternoon public session):

The Congress, considering that, in the present state of the organisation of the International, the question of the general strike cannot be given a complete answer, recommends to the workers, as a matter of urgency, the international organisation of trade unions, as well as active socialist propaganda.

The agenda then called for the continuation of the discussion on the revision of the general statutes. It was ten o'clock in the morning. To continue this discussion under the conditions of openness it deemed necessary, the Congress, adjourning the administrative session, declared itself in public session.

## Events in America

### Peter Kropotkin

"Affaires d'Amérique", *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne*, 5 August 1877

Our readers already know that during the past week the United States of North America has been the scene of insurrections which seemed, for a moment, to assume the characteristic of a great popular uprising. Up to this time we have drawn our information on these events only from the brief updates brought to us by telegraph, which is silent on the causes of the movement. But these causes are easy to guess.

We had already said some time ago that in the United States around 2 million workers were without work. The industrial crisis that we are experiencing in Europe is also deeply felt in America. Before, industrial workers without work would have gone to the Western States to seek employment in agriculture: there is still so much land to clear, or to cultivate more rationally, in America. But today, times have changed. Most of the

land available to the pioneer without capital has already fallen into the hands of the big stock exchanges (speculators). The small pioneer finds no place there; small-scale agriculture gives way to the big, which replaces the worker by the machine or else by the Chinese – those negroes of today.

Taking advantage of the abundance of unemployed workers, the bosses obviously reduce wages in all branches of industry and increase the number of hours of work; so much so that today wages in America have fallen, comparatively, as low as in Europe, and people work there (despite the ten-hour law) as amongst us, from 11 to 14 hours a day. The workers are resisting as much as they can, and during these past months we have seen strike after strike, but they were only

desperate attempts at resistance that almost all ended in the defeat of the worker.

But, not content with imposing beggars' wages, the bosses – who, it should be noted, in the “democratic republic” make the law as much as in Belgium or France – still take their measures for the future: they terrorise by hanging dozens of “Molly Maguires”, and they have recently passed laws which tend to abolish the freedom even to strike. Let us quote one – it gives an idea of the others: that, for example, of the State which says that whoever will *conspire* with another, or others, *to hinder in any way whatsoever* the operation of an industrial enterprise, will be sentenced to a heavy fine and to prison from twenty days to three months.

Finally, the legislative power having already fallen into the hands of the capitalists, these gentlemen are also trying to destroy the political rights of the people; they are abolishing, like the State of New York for example, universal suffrage and are already introducing the property tax for elections, while taking advantage of the power they are appropriating, as we have said in our second last number.

These are the general causes of the events which have just taken place in the United States. Their specific cause appears to have been the 10 per cent cut in driver wages made by the Baltimore-Ohio railway company.

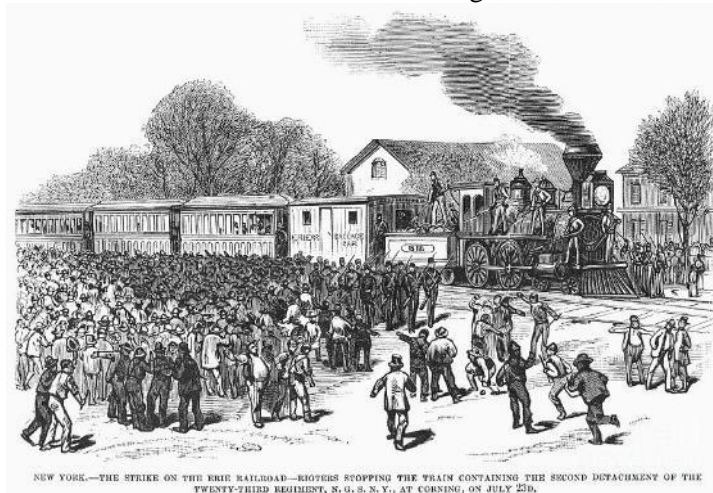
This reduction caused a strike to break out in Martinsburg. But this time, probably telling themselves that it is always the worker who suffers the consequence of the strike and almost never the boss, the strikers seem to have directly attacked the property of their bosses. The bosses asked for troops, and the *democratic* government, everywhere and always the faithful servant of the bosses, immediately sent the militia. The militia, arriving quickly, soon triumphed over the strikers in this little village. But the strike and uprising were already speaking with almost incredible speed over the entire surface of the United States. In two days traffic was suspended on all the railways. “The lower classes”, “the rabble” everywhere sympathised with the strikers; the workers of different trades left the factories and joined their brothers.

In many places the strike turned into a struggle of the people against their oppressors. In Baltimore, a city of 300,000 inhabitants, 5,000 men, armed with stones and a few rifles, attacked the militia; just as it was taking the train to go somewhere and protect sacred property. The militia fired, killing 10 men and wounding 29. Then the

furious people fell upon the militia, drove them back, destroyed and burned the train station, the telegraph and the line, and burned a number of wagons loaded with oil. At the same time the insurrection broke out in Pittsburgh, a large industrial city of 100,000 inhabitants. The militia, having arrived at the station, was repulsed and locked themselves into a machinery warehouse. The strikers, supported by other city workers, seized guns and cannons and besieged the warehouse; they soon forced the militia to abandon the warehouse, inflicting a loss of 10 men killed and many wounded, amongst others its general Pearson. The militia abandoned the town, reached the other bank of the river and fled into the mountains, pursued by the populace. Troop reinforcements sent by the government could not reach Pittsburgh. People destroy the train station and burn 2,000 wagons loaded with goods. “Terrible night in Pittsburgh!” exclaims the telegraph. “20 million fr. of damage!”

But the matter does not end there. The strike spreads all over the great railroad lines, and the insurrection breaks out in Reading, Harrisburg, Columbus, Cincinnati, Chicago, etc., in short, in all the great towns of

Pennsylvania, Ohio, and in certain cities of the States of New York and Missouri. Popular uprisings were expected in all the major cities of the United States, federal troops were concentrated, battleships were being armed. The bourgeoisie had a hard time. In New York, the arsenals were guarded by troops whom the people insulted, and the outcome of a popular



meeting was anxiously awaited. It took place; 10,000 men attended; but, for unknown reasons, it came to nothing.

According to the latest news it appears however that the movement is dying down. The railroad companies have found wretches to operate some of the trains; in many places strikers are laying down their arms and allowing themselves to be arrested.

This movement will have certainly deeply struck the proletariat of Europe and aroused its admiration. Its spontaneity, its concurrency at so many distant points communicating only by telegraph, the aid given by workers of various trades, the resolute character of the uprising from the start, the good idea of hitting the owners on their most sensitive nerve, their property, gains all our sympathies, arouse our admiration, and awaken our hopes.

But, to take full advantage of this admirable lesson given to us by our American brothers, let us also



mention the weak side of the movement. That it was not victorious was to be expected. It is not by a single insurrection that the people will manage to get the better of the current society. But for this step towards the great revolution to have its full impact, it lacked one essential thing: a flag, a principle in the name of what was the insurrection, the blood shed? In the name of 10 percent on the wage? – Obviously not. Such a fine movement must have had much deeper reasons: hatred against the bosses, against the present abhorrent order, aspirations, perhaps vague, but always right, towards social revolution, towards a new order of things. But these aspirations, these hatreds were not formulated, set out in broad daylight. It is certainly not only the desire to maintain their wages which inspired our American brothers on July 21. No; it is evident that they received their heroic impetus from a higher order of ideas; for, as we know well, all the socialist aspirations which are emerging amongst the proletarians of Europe also exist in America. But – unless the telegraph has carefully omitted it – we do not see these aspirations formulated. They acted wonderfully but they do not set a marker for the future.

Why? – Because let us note it well – the American trades organisations, the Trades-Unions, because obviously it is they which prepared the strike and the insurrection – *do not express all the aspirations of the people*. Confining themselves to the exclusive domain of wage questions, they are no longer the representatives of the main aspiration which is already penetrating the mass of the people, the aspiration for the fundamental reorganisation of society through social revolution.

On the other hand, we wonder what role the American Workingmen's Party has played in this movement – that party (composed for the most part of Germans) which, while propagating socialist *ideas*, neglects their

application and persists in eliciting in America, despite the general disgust of the *people* for politics, a parliamentary movement? On the eve of the movement it spoke, as usual, of elections, of action on the legal terrain – when a spark had already lit a revolutionary fire! Of elections when it was a question of organising the insurrection that was already roaring around them!

Hence – on the one hand, the organisation for revolutionary action *without* broadly posing the principles of socialism; on the other – the principle, but without revolutionary *action* and with an organisation made to stop every affirmation of the revolutionary act: such are the causes which have prevented the American movement bearing all the fruits which it could have done, if the American workers' organisation had been a synthesis of the two present organisations: the principle *with* the organisation necessary for achieving as much of it as possible, whenever the opportunity presents itself.

But the blood of our brothers in America will not have been shed in vain. Their energy, their unity of action, their courage will serve as an example to the proletariat of Europe. But may this noble bloodshed prove once again the blindness of those who amuse the people with the toy of parliamentarianism, when the powder keg is ready to burst into flames, unbeknownst to them, as a result of the slightest spark. May it also help to open the eyes of those who, by locking themselves into wage questions like the English [trade] unionists, do not want to know anything about immeasurably broader aspirations, the socialist aspirations of the people; may it do so as soon as possible! Time is pressing, for everything proclaims that the English proletariat will soon follow the example of his American brothers.

Respects to these noble and courageous fighters!  
Courage to imitate their example!

## International Bulletin

**Peter Kropotkin**

“Bulletin international”, *L'Avant-garde*, 11 August 1877

The strike of the railway workers of the United States of America and the popular uprising that followed are by far the most important events, perhaps the only ones, of the last two weeks. So we will return to that. Let us say first that these events have taken on a far greater significance than could have been foreseen initially. They were a general shock given to the immense republic. For two days, all traffic on the railways was suspended and for more than a week only a few passenger trains were running, and only on a few lines. Ports lack coal; the eastern States lacked goods; steamships from Europe were no longer taking passengers to New York; in a word, all the business of this immense cartel called America was stopped.

The government, for its part, took the same measures as a monarchical State; it appealed to force.

It put in pace federal troops; it sent convoys of arms to the bourgeois and it armed battleships. Meanwhile, the papers of the bourgeoisie sounded the reactionary alarm.

The free constitution of the United States has been suspended; the independence of the States, usually so jealously defended, largely trampled upon. Just think! sacred property was in peril! Faced with this danger, in America as in Europe, as in the parts of the world where this nettle, the bourgeois, had already been able to grow, there is no longer a political party, there is only a cartel; no more flags, no more symbols, a single international

coat of arms, a bag of coins on a red background of the workers' blood.

The arrests and convictions of the glorious rabble were made just as summarily as in our backward monarchies of central Europe, and, assuredly, since Paris in 1871, since Göschenen in Switzerland<sup>1</sup>, and these recent events show that for the defence of the capitalist order republics do not yield to monarchies. They even do it better and faster.

The events at Martinsburg and Pittsburgh, of which we spoke about in our last issue, were only the prologue of the insurrection. The strike spread with incredible speed over the whole area of the United States and in almost

all the major cities of eleven States it resulted in very serious popular movements. The character of these uprisings was the same everywhere: first, the strikers derailed locomotives to block the track, destroyed the track and, finally, by these combined means stopped all traffic. The government then sent troops to dislodge the strikers from the vicinity of the railway lines; but the people were on watch, and they did all they could to prevent the departure of the troops: they attacked them, armed with stones and a few wretched rifles. The militia fired. The people, furious like a wounded bull, threw themselves on the stations and destroyed them, burning them with all the assets of the companies they could lay their hands on. Sometimes, as in Pittsburgh, in Chicago, in Newark, enraged with the bourgeois militia, it ransacked the mansions of the rich, obtained arms from the stores and fought veritable pitched battles with the troops.

In the big industrial cities, workers left the factories and mills and joined the insurgents.

Ten thousand miners from the State of Pennsylvania quit work. In New York, in San Francisco, great popular assemblies took place, and the most incendiary speeches there found the best reception. If people did not move in those towns, the reason was the presence of numerous troops and bodies of bourgeois militias armed by the government in these special circumstances.

So today the character of these serious events seems to us to be well defined. The insurrection was a real popular uprising. The strikers were, for the most part, only hampering the progress of the insurrection by their pleas for patience, and by the blame they laid on the violence committed. Some, without considering that it was for them at least as much as for themselves that the people took up arms, betrayed the common cause, by coming to terms with the more pliable companies, when these agreed to not cut wages, and – what is worst! – handed over to the troops the same people who, unarmed, had risen up to prevent these same troops from marching against them.

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In closing, let us highlight in a few words the lessons contained in the American movement. This insurrection clearly shows the vicious and selfish side of those trade unions whose sole purpose is the defence of wages. All this immense shedding of blood (a deadly shedding, and which all the speeches could not prevent) has benefited the cause of socialism very little! For the uprisen people, while destroying property in their anger, did not proclaim any of those principles which have become so familiar in Europe through international propaganda: the abolition of wage labour, the establishment of collective property, the abolition of the State. The uprising had no flag, laid no principle, planted no marker. Enemy of individual property, and proving it by its acts, the people have not yet uttered the word of its abolition.

It also shows something else.

In Chicago, communists of the democratic-socialist school tried to propagate their principles – by words, when now it required to realise them in actions. Here is proof of what we have always

reiterated, that everything that is organised on the terrain of legal agitation becomes a useless weapon, finds itself disorientated, the day when tired of waiting the people rises.

Suppose that, on the contrary, that we had had the good fortune to have anarchist sections of the International Workers' Association in America, in the places which

<sup>1</sup> A reference to troops opening fire on Italian miners demonstrating for better working conditions and wages when

building the Gotthard tunnel in July-August, 1875. Four workers were killed and several were injured. (*Black Flag*)

had seen the momentarily triumphant of the popular insurrection? What would have happened? This: the people master of capital, of factories, of workshops, would have organised work for their own benefit; as master of the palaces, of bourgeois houses, they would have installed the families of workers in them; they would have created, in a word, a “Commune” as we understand it, and if they had suffered defeat, there would at least remain an immensely resounding *act* of propaganda for socialism.

Only two items of news for other countries. In Spain, the annual conferences of the Spanish Federations have ended and we will soon report on them; we already know, however, that they voted for a resolution expressing sympathy with the events of Kazan, Benevento and Berne.<sup>1</sup> In Italy, the Reggio section went to court for the publication of a revolutionary manifesto; amid indescribable enthusiasm, the defendants were acquitted. In Belgium, the organisation of the next congress is progressing.

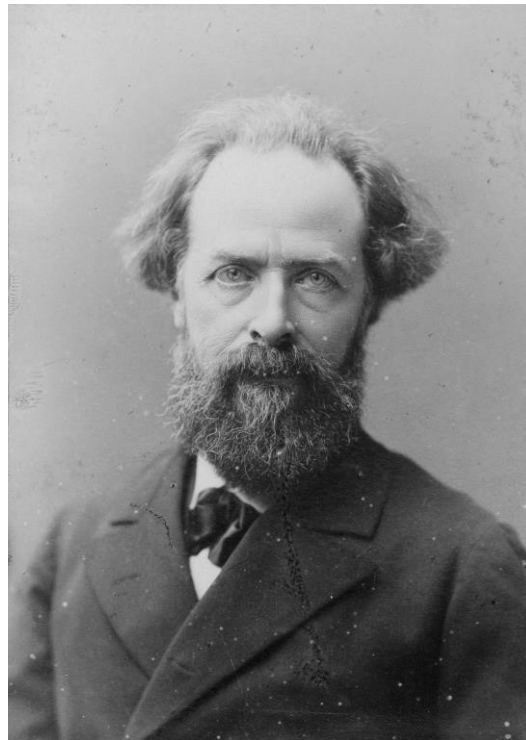
## The American Strike

### Elisée Reclus

*Le Travailleur*, September 1877<sup>2</sup>

We were overwhelmed with emotions when the telegraph brought us the news: striking workers have taken control of Pittsburgh. We did not even know there was an insurrection, and suddenly we learn that workers are holding the official and bourgeois world of the United States in check. For the conservatives of Europe, it was a day of dread; for all of us, men of the revolution, it was a great day of hope.

But, it must be said, the fearful of Europe were soon reassured and reality did not meet our sudden hopes. The strike of American workers was not a revolution; it was only partial and the great mass of workers remained separated from the movement. After twelve days of emotion, business seems to have resumed its usual course; the slave again gave his limbs to the chain and the God Capital retrieved all its serenity. However, this short period of fear for some, hope for others, will not have passed without leaving profound traces in the history of the United States. It is important to quickly study the strike in its causes, its twists and its consequences.



**Élisée Reclus (1830-1905)**

Americans, it is well known, are men who know little about restraint. They go straight to their goal. The capitalist, there, does not pride himself with philanthropy; the trader of human flesh, who sells white people after having trafficked black people, does not claim to bring happiness to his living commodity; he exploits his workers excessively, like his colleagues in Europe, but with less hypocrisy. In recent years, the decrease in work which has resulted in the United States in the increase in pauperism has enabled American capitalists to dictate starvation laws to the workers. Free to choose at their will from the crowd of those begging to work, they jumped on the opportunity to lower wages, while trying to sell to the public their products or services always at the same price or even on even more onerous terms.

Of all the groups of capitalists, those who united to operate the railways, and thus to command all of the exchanges between producers and consumers, are those who have the greatest power. Competition between the various lines is a rare occurrence. Almost all the

<sup>1</sup> This refers to: the demonstration in Kazan square, St Petersburg, on 6 December 1876 by members of the Populist *Zemlya i volya* (*Land and Liberty*) organisation and workers' associations. After a revolutionary speech and the raising of the red flag, the protest – the first where workers were involved – was repressed by the Tsarist police; the failed Benevento uprising of April 1877 which saw a group of Italian Internationalists (including Errico Malatesta) take up arms to provoke a general uprising of peasants in the Benevento province. Using their trial to expound their

anarchist ideas, the Matese gang were all later acquitted by the jury; the successful march and meeting organised by Internationalists in Berne (including Kropotkin, who mentions the event in his *Memoirs*) on 18 March 1877 to mark the Paris Commune. The Internationalists successfully repulsed the police who had attacked the march because they had raised the banned red flag. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/elisee-reclus-the-american-strike> (revised)

companies have banded together to keep transport prices high, and, alone to distribute the country's produce, they no longer have any orders to receive from the government or the public. Having together a capital that cannot be less than 25 billion and an income of two to three billion, presiding by that all the oscillations of credit, masters, by the purchase of votes, of all the local legislatures and of the government of the United States, these companies laugh at the poor farmer who would like to ship his products without leaving all the profit to capital, and repeatedly, while in England the destitute died of starvation and in Germany the typhus of hunger reigned, we saw American farmers forced to use their corn as fuel, so as not to ruin themselves on shipping costs.

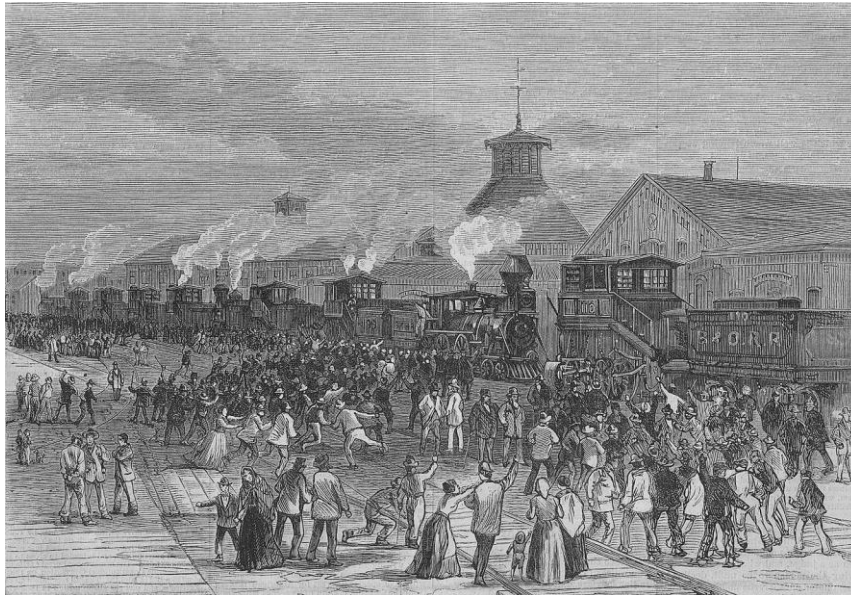
By the effect of the increasing concentration of capital, the companies themselves are owned by a small group of men. As Minister Sherman recently admitted in an official speech, the United States is the financial property of four individuals, the presidents of the railway companies Erie, New-York-Central, Pennsylvania, Baltimore and Ohio. It is they who hold the stock market and create at will the well-being or the ruin of the shareholders; they set in motion the pump, aspirating and treading, which makes capital flow from the pockets of petit bourgeois into that of the big ones. They have, it is true, only a modest official salary of 200,000 or 250,000 francs, but "Other people's money" is an inexhaustible mine for them. If they cry poverty, it is on behalf of the poor shareholders that they have ruined, and when those complain, they are satisfied by reducing the wages of the workers. In the space of the last four years, the price of a day has been lowered several times for all small railway employees: it is by 40 percent on average that we can assess the general decrease in salary, and on a few lines the payment of salary was several weeks late, even two months on the Baltimore-Ohio road. From decrease to decrease, the average salary no longer even reaches 4 francs per head of family, and it is with this sum that he must provide for the maintenance of his wife and children in a country like the United States where money has so little value. The United States, which once proudly compared itself to the countries of the old world as a 'promised land' for all the unfortunate, now has its proletariat as has England, France, Belgium or Germany. In Massachusetts, the model state, the number of those in need has risen in ten years from 22,000 to over 220,000; in the city of New York alone, 40,000 unfortunate people have no other resources than that of public charity; in the Union as a whole, nearly two million workers go without work. America, after receiving hundreds of thousands of Europeans every year, has in turn become a country of emigration: not only hopeless migrants are returning to their homeland, but also real *yankee* workers go seek their fortunes in South America, Australia and England.

A further 10 percent cut in wages has set off the storm on the Baltimore-Ohio line. It was July 16<sup>th</sup>. In the city of Baltimore itself, the mechanics, the drivers, the brakemen, numbering several thousand, went on strike; but the directors of the company, prepared for the event, had taken their measures: immediately the strikers were replaced by formerly starving people, who had registered to demand work, and the service was hardly interrupted.

But east of Baltimore, in a valley of the Blue Mountains crossed by the Potomac, things turned out differently. The Martinsburg workers, who went on strike like those of Baltimore, remained masters of the station from which they wished to be driven out, and did not let in the newcomers whom they came to put in their place. They told the Company that if their wages were lowered they would stop the service and not let any freight trains pass. The Governor of West Virginia, to which the Company immediately addressed itself as its natural ally, hastened to call in the local militia. It meets indeed, but composed in great majority of farmers and petit bourgeois exasperated by the rates of the Company, it only appeared in front of the station to cheer on the strikers; some militiamen even gave their weapons to the workers before returning to their villages. The boatmen of a large canal which passes through Martinsburg joined the ranks of the small insurgent troop.

On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Martinsburg strikers and their friends formed an army of 800 men and organised militarily to resist the Company. More than 80 freight trains were stranded in Baltimore and other eastern stations; earthworks rose on a favourable point above a curve in the line; large grain supplies and other foodstuffs that were in the station had been seized by workers in anticipation of a siege; as for the cattle found in the stables and the wagons, they had been released in the surrounding meadows. But passenger trains passed regularly and the government of the United States, taking advantage of this, was quick to use it to dispatch to Martinsburg old disciplined troops, accustomed to march, to slash and to kill on command. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, these old soldiers, soldiers of order, cherished children of Capital, were in the presence of workers in revolt and in such large numbers that it became impossible to resist them. Some insurgents, among others the one they had chosen as leader, the mechanic Zebb, were taken prisoner and the bulk of the band was forced to retreat west into the Cumberland Pass. The soldiers pursued them; but they could not cross the barricade of wagons opposed to them; they in turn retreated and the strikers celebrated their first victory. It is in the surrounding area, near the village of Charlestown, that John Brown, twenty years ago, gave the signal for emancipation of black people, and one could wonder if the strikers of Martinsburg in their turn would not have inaugurated a new war from which the freedom of white slaves would come out.

The events of the Potomac Valley caused great emotion throughout the working class of America, and the strike, which until then had been only an isolated fact, became general on the network of Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois; even in Canada, railway workers broke free from their company. In Baltimore, on the 21<sup>st</sup>, the dismissed workers assembled in front of the station; the crowd there followed them to boo the soldiers of two regiments which were hurriedly dispatched to Martinsburg; a conflict took place, in which the soldiers armed with their rifles and their sabres, won, not without difficulty, over the multitude armed with stones. Ten dead, twenty-five wounded remained on the pavement; but the track was partially destroyed and the station set in flames. In the town of Pittsburgh, the large coal and oil warehouse, a huge industrialised metropolitan area in eastern



**Blockade of Engines at Martinsburg, West Virginia**

Pennsylvania, the conflicts were much bloodier and the disaster more serious. A first call for militia by the government was unsuccessful; Only 300 men answered the call, only to disband immediately. Soon the federal troops appeared, arriving by hijacked railways whose employees were not on strike. As soon as they exited the cars, they were already charging the crowd, bayonets in front. From the first meeting, 70 individuals, dead or injured, were left on the battlefield. The exasperated crowd retreated into the hills to the east of the city and from there the struggle continued, throwing stones and bricks. In the evening, the troops, attacked from all sides, took refuge in the machine workshop, near the station, and there, like a fortress, continued firing on the attackers. These had no weapons, but they knew how to make some; they seized all kinds of projectiles, then, seizing the wagons laden with coal and oil, they light them and, by using the converging tracks, sent them to the machine workshop; the circle of fire gradually narrowed around the soldiers: they barely escaped, leaving behind the wounded that the fire consumed. Pursued by the crowd, the soldiers crossed the river, then dispersed in small bands, and only in the evening, the wounded general manages to regroup them in a fortified camp 16 kilometres away from the town; they had lost 25 of theirs during the retreat; all in all, nearly 500 men on both sides were killed or wounded. The fire had spread

from wagon to wagon, building to building, and from the machine workshop to the end of the freight yard, everything was burning on length of more than five kilometres. One hundred and twenty-five locomotives, over a thousand wagons, immense supplies, that was the loss of the day for the company.

Similar conflicts, though less bloody, took place in several other cities of the United States, in Reading, in Chicago, in Buffalo, in Columbus, everywhere where the company directors had at their disposal federal

troops to shoot at the people. The President of the United States, himself arrived by fraud in office, hastened to give his support to his friends, the honest Railroad Directors; he had placed the 25,000 Federal troops at their disposal and recalled General Sherman from the Indian border. It was necessary to go as fast as possible, to neglect the enemies on the outside to deal

with those on the inside. Order had to be ensured at all costs, that is, to maintain against the strikers the ten percent wage reduction imposed by the bosses. The ships scattered on the coast were summoned in all haste; they were assigned a combat post in front of the major coastal towns and captains were ordered to reduce to ashes the suburbs and workers' quarters, if the revolt was to break out there. There was even talk of decreeing a levy of 75,000 men, as Lincoln had done at the beginning of the Civil War. But the active resistance was already drawing to a close, and the riots had changed in nature almost everywhere. In many places where the crowd rose up, it had already forgotten the strike, the root cause of the national crisis; it was only obeying its own instinct, very legitimate, leading her to fight an enemy society, but it had no other goal than to enjoy the euphoria of battle for a few hours. In San Francisco, popular passion even ended up targeting the Chinese workers, as if these unfortunate people were responsible for the tiny wages to which the greed of white people doomed them. The last strike riot and the last massacre of unarmed workers took place on August the 2<sup>nd</sup> in Scranton, not far from where the movement had started, two weeks earlier. The repression was merciless. As for constitutional guarantees, the immunities of states and towns, and the rights which the

laws of the republic recognise for citizens, they were no longer of any importance. Laws are made only for the oppressed; they are not made for the oppressor, because it is he himself who legislates and he pleasantly ridicules his own work. It's for the one who took no part in their making to tremble before them.

Only one political figure, let it be said, to his honour refused to assemble the troops against the strikers, Mr. Williams, governor from Indiana. All the railway lines which converge on Indianapolis, the state capital, had fallen peacefully into the hands of the employees, through the flight of the directors; they insisted on returning to their stations, accompanied by soldiers and cannons. "Try to get home on your own," said to them the governor, "and if some violence is done to you, then I may think of defending you". So what a concert of curses on the part of all the honest people against this demagogue governor, this flatterer of the vile multitude who refuses to kill his electors, at the first summons of a few millionaires!

After the conflicts in Pittsburgh and Chicago, the strikers remained in control of a part of the network which can be estimated at about one-seventh of all American lines. It was enough to noticeably hamper trade and to increase the price of food and goods in large cities; but it was not enough to prevent the movements of troops, nor to force the companies to give in to the demands of workers. Moreover, the strike which the frightened bourgeois said had been resolved by a general conspiracy, unfortunately took place without order, without understanding; on a lot of lines, the workers had continued their service or remained available, while waiting for the way to cease to be blocked; and where the strike was serious, an infinity of starving people waited impatiently to be given the places which had become vacant. Between a bourgeoisie, knowing what it wanted, and a proletariat acting haphazardly, the outcome of the struggle could not have been in doubt. We can judge the lack of workers' solidarity by the fact that the most powerful association, that of the united mechanics, which has fifteen million francs alone, did not consider the moment an opportunity to intervene in anything. It allowed itself to make few threats, but neither through its men nor its money did it try to influence the outcome of the strike.

Once again, then, we have the proof that no strike, however important, can lead to the definitive success of the workers, if it does not turn into a revolution. No doubt it is true that if all the workers at once, those who

harvest the wheat and those who turn it into bread, the workers of the soil and those of the factory simply crossed their arms, waiting for the money handlers to deliver their bags of money, the social transformation could not be delayed; the strikers could dictate their conditions and take possession of the entire land and its tools. But when will we see this popular unanimity? For a long time still it can only exist in the domain of the ideal: it is from revolutionary groups marching in the vanguard and not from the entire army, who will start the fights which will decide of the future victory.

The complaints of American workers, numerous documents which they had published in the newspapers and which they handed over to legislators and congresses, testify that they are not yet arrived at the awareness of their rights. For the vast majority of them, the whole question seems to be that of salary and not that of property. They appeal to the feelings of their masters; they invoke their spirit of fairness; but all, or almost all seem to recognise in principle the essential difference which must exist between the capitalist and the poor; between the employer and the employee. Only a small

number conceive of a possible participation for their common benefits; but capital remains for them holy and sacrosanct. "Our goal," says the manifesto of a large working-class society, "is both to increase our salary and give the capitalist more security and more regular profits."

Thus, the workers of America, inferior to those who exploit them by the lack of unanimity, are also inferior by the lack of a principle that guides them. The bourgeois start from the specific idea that the land and its products must belong to the strongest, the most shrewd, the most cunning, and that misfortune must be the lot of the vanquished: property is for them a privilege to be maintained. And this starting point is unfortunately also the one that the workers have accepted. It suits them to stay clear of property, provided they have wages; privilege does not offend them, as long as they enjoy above the minimum. How different and stronger would their attitude be if, in agreement among themselves, they knew how to say to the bourgeois: "Your property is only theft and we do not recognise it; the laws you make to protect it are just a deception and we curse them; your whole society is

**"Your property is only theft and we do not recognise it; the laws you make to protect it are just a deception and we curse them; your whole society is only injustice and we want to destroy it to found a new society of right and freedom."**

only injustice and we want to destroy it to found a new society of right and freedom.”

Masters of the railroads as they were in some states for more than a week, the strikers, if they understood correctly that the merchants of New York and Boston have no right to seize all the country's traffic and to forcibly levy a traffic tax on the public, would have had time to expropriate the companies by virtue of their collective authority and to manage, for the benefit of all, the lines of railways of which they had temporarily become owners. It was then that the real revolution would have started and the public opinion of the peasants, of the small employees, of all those exploited by big capital, would have been in support of them. First of all, the sympathy of the people supported the strikers; food was brought to them, weapons even; public meetings were held in their favour; but as soon as commodity prices increased, as soon as general circulation was partially interrupted to the detriment of the ordinary advantages of civilisation, they ceased to wish them good; little by little opinion changed and became hostile to them. They felt it themselves and that is why they dispersed in many places where, from the first days, they had been the masters. The big question is still that of bread: the hunger of the producers caused the strike; that of consumers put an end to it.

But how different the results of the strike could have been if the workers, understanding their rights, had put themselves, in the name of the public utility, to manage for the satisfaction of the common interests the lines which they had power over. Thus in the State of Indiana, they had the fifteen railway lines converging regularly, like the spokes of a circle, towards the central station of Indianapolis, and consequently, the circulation of life within the very limits of the whole state depended on them. They suddenly stopped this commercial life by the strike; But what would have prevented them from notifying the farmers, workers' organisations, the petty bourgeoisie, that they were taking charge of transport, not only at reduced prices, but at cost price, that they would become agents of the whole Society for the distribution of products and would limit themselves to deducting from the daily income the part necessary for their personal maintenance. If they had acted in this way, by transforming the whole movement of the railways into a public service, the whole people, as soon as the first moment of astonishment passed, would have happily become their accomplice; a whole revolution was taking

place peacefully; an entire new social order of ideas was beginning to take shape! Even if, supported by all the armed force and all the resources of the government, the ousted capitalists had succeeded in regaining possession of their network of railways, the memory of the

**But how different the results of the strike could have been if the workers, understanding their rights, had put themselves, in the name of the public utility, to manage for the satisfaction of the common interests the lines which they had power over**

interregnum would have remained in the populations, one would have compared the two regimes, those of public service and capitalist exploitation, and sooner or later the forced expropriation of companies would have become inevitable. Let the workers not forget this in a future strike: what matters is not to maintain or increase their wages; it is to seize for the benefit of all the property that they are made to exploit without benefit to them!

And now that American society has returned to the usual calm and that capital has regained its so-called rights in crushing the proletarians and turning them into mud, so to say, what lessons have the masters drawn from the formidable insurrection they

have just escaped from. Some think that it would be good to regulate the exploitation of the human mater, by substituting the State for the companies. They imagine that by imitating the great Bismarck and by buying the railway network on behalf of the government, one would ensure to the public, at the same time, a more regular service, and to the worker, an existence more at peace. Later perhaps we could think of the acquisition of all the factories, then to that of the fields, and the whole society would become an immense army with its generals and its captains, sergeants and privates, all ordered in advance by the almighty State.

Those who think so, idealists of the bourgeoisie, are called dreadful communists by the right thinking, the worshippers of political economy. The vast majority of capitalists and the rabble around them have little care for such projects! For them, the question is quite simple. Force is sufficient to sustain the poor; but we must always arrange ourselves in such a way as to be able to apply this force. The army saved for the first time what they call society, that is, their money bags. Well! it is necessary to increase the army, to build barracks and fortresses in all the manufacturing towns; to train by military drill half of the people to shoot the other half ! Here the ideal of society as they understand it! The repression of the Paris Commune, that is their epic.

Thiers and his friend MacMahon ordering the massacres, these are their heroes, those they intend to imitate!

As for the workers, the failure of the strike made them change their tactics: it is through voting, through electoral agitation, that most of them are now considering winning over their bosses. A first triumph gave them great hope. In Louisville, the principal city of Kentucky, they succeeded in appointing six representatives of the local legislature out of seven; in Covington, near Cincinnati, they elected a senator. In other places they have also won lesser victories; in Ohio they think they are strong enough to make one of theirs dispute the first magistracy of the State: flatterers, the square runners aren't lacking when it comes to encouraging them in this way, and their journals are full of articles prophesying future victory. Under the influence of German ideas, they are thinking of organising themselves into a *Volkstaat* and want to seize the state to make its cogs work to their benefit.

We do not want to overlook the importance of this great workers' party which is now forming in all the

American states, outside of the two large bourgeois parties, the Republicans and Democrats. The definitive split between the exploiter and the exploited on the political field is already an important fact; but soon, we hope, American workers will have to recognise that the vote is an even more impotent weapon than the strike. Assuming that fraud does not slip into the ballot for the benefit of the masters, assuming that all representatives appointed by the workers remain faithful to their cause and only enter the bourgeois world to fight it, finally granting that the laws presented by their delegates are accepted by the legislatures and officially promulgated, who can guarantee us the obedience of capital? Those who have money, and who, through money, control the whole of society, will they give in, out of respect for the law? Will a new clause in the constitution suffice to make the coalition of all bourgeois interests disappear? No! This is not how workers will succeed in conquering their rights; it is not parliamentary cunning that will assure them bread. What they need is a full understanding of their rights and a firm will to seize them as soon as they have the strength. No rhetoric or petty politics, but action as befits men!

## **Expropriation**

**Peter Kropotkin**

*The Alarm*, 20 March 1886

**THE APPROPRIATORS OF HUMANITY'S BIRTHRIGHT FORCED TO GIVE UP THE STOLEN GOODS.  
THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION AND ITS TRANSFORMATION DESCRIBED BY PIERRE KRAPOTKINE.**

**The End of Human Misery, Anxiety and Social Degradation – The Redress**

**An Anarchistic Programme**

(Translated from *Le Révolté* by Henry Glasse<sup>1</sup>)

No social problem is more important for Revolutionists than that which deals with the expropriation of the rich in favour of the people, and the appropriation of all wealth by the latter. We invite all our comrades to study this problem under all its aspects, and to discuss it unceasingly, in view of its realisation, which must sooner or later force itself upon us, as the definite success or temporary failure of the revolution depends upon the manner in which the expropriation is applied.

As a matter of fact, no Socialist can doubt that any revolutionary effort is condemned in advance if it does not correspond with the interests of the great majority, and finds means for satisfying its requirements. It is not enough to have a noble ideal; man cannot live on great thoughts and lofty discourses alone; he requires bread; the stomach has more rights than even the brain, for it is the stomach which sustains the whole organism. If, on the morrow of the revolution, men do not see by the

force of evidence as clear as daylight that the situation has been totally changed to their advantage – if the upset ends merely in a change of persons and formulas, nothing will have been done, and once more we will have to set ourselves to the thankless task of Sisyphus endlessly rolling his massive rock uphill. In order that the revolution may be something more than a name, and that a reaction may not bring us back on the morrow to the situation of the day before, it is necessary that the conquest of the day should be worth defending, it is necessary that he who was wretched yesterday should no longer be miserable today. After the revolution of 1848, simple-minded republicans placed “three months of misery” at the disposal of the Provincial government. The offer was accepted with enthusiasm and, when the appointed time came, those who had accepted it did not fail to render payment for the three months, but they did so with volleys of grape-shot and wholesale

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<sup>1</sup> “L'expropriation”, *Le Révolté*, 23 December 1882 – later included as section III of Chapter XIX of *Words of a Rebel*. (*Black Flag*)



transportation. The unfortunate people had hoped that those painful months of waiting would suffice for the enactment of the salutary laws, which they expected would make them free men, and secure to them work and their daily bread. In place of *asking*, would it not have been better to take? Instead of making a parade of their misery, would it not have been preferable to put an end to it? Not but what devotion is a grand and beautiful thing, but it is not devotion, it is treason to abandon to their unhappy lot all those who march along with us. Let combatants die – good! but let their death be of some use! Let devoted men sacrifice themselves – quite right! But let the masses profit by the self-sacrifice of those valiant ones!

A general expropriation alone can satisfy the multitude of sufferers and oppressed. The matter must be made to pass from the domain of theory into that of practice; but in order that expropriation may correspond with its principle, which is the suppression of private-property and the restoration of all to all, it ought to be accomplished in vast proportions. On a small scale it would seem only vulgar pillage, on a large scale it would be the commencement of the Social Revolution. Of course, we should be altogether ignorant of the laws of history, if we were to imagine that all at once a whole vast country could become our field of experience. Europe and the world will not become anarchist by a sudden transformation, but we know that on the one hand the madness of the ruling classes, together, with their ambitions, their wars and their bankruptcies, and, on the other hand, the unceasing spread of our ideas, will have as their consequences great upheavals, that is to say, Revolutions. It is at such times that we can act. How many times already have revolutionists been taken by surprise, and allowed events to pass without taking advantage of them, and so have left propitious destiny still unattained!

Well, when these opportunities arise – and it is for you, comrades, to hasten their coming – when a whole district, or when large towns with their environs shall have shaken off their rulers, our work will be clearly traced out for us; the whole stock of instruments of

labour must return into the possession of the community, and the wealth detained by private individuals must be restored to its true master – everybody – in order that each may be able to have his ample share in consumption, the production may be continued in respect to all matters necessary and useful, and that our social life, far from being interrupted, may

**the whole stock of instruments of labour must return into the possession of the community... production may be continued in respect to all matters necessary and useful... without the manufactories and workshops... together with the means of defence, without the railways and other means of communication which will enable us to exchange our products with the free communities in our neighbourhood, and to combine our efforts for resistance and attack; without all these we are condemned beforehand to perish**

be renewed with greater energy. Without the gardens and fields which afford us the articles indispensable to life; without the granaries, stores, and warehouses which contain the accumulated products of labour; without the manufactories and workshops which supply the stuffs, the wrought metals, the thousand objects of industry and of art, together with the means of defence, without the railways and other means of communication which will enable us to exchange our products with the free communities in our neighbourhood, and to combine our efforts for resistance and attack; without all these we are condemned beforehand to perish, and to be stifled like the fish out of water, which cannot breathe, though bathed in the

immense ocean of the air. Let us remember the great strike of railway servants which took place in America some years ago. The great bulk of the public recognised that their cause was just; everybody was weary of the insolence of the railway companies, and rejoiced to see them at the mercy of their servants; but when the latter, having made themselves masters of the locomotives and railways, had neglected to make use of them; when the interchange of commodities continued interrupted, and food and articles of all descriptions had doubled in price, then public opinion changed sides, and people began to cry out “Let us rather have the companies that rob us and break our limbs than these fellows on strike who starve us.” Let us never forget that it is necessary that *all* the Interests of the people be protected, and that its needs, as well as its instinctive love of justice, be fully satisfied.

Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to recognise the principle, we must also apply it. Our opponents say to us, “Venture to touch the peasant’s plot of ground or the

mechanic's cottage and see how they will receive you." Very well! But we shall not interfere with the plot of ground nor with the cottage. We shall take good care not to attack our friends, who without knowing it today, will certainly be our allies tomorrow. The expropriation will be to their advantage. We know that there is an average of means below which men suffer want and above which they have superfluity. In each town, in each country, this average differs, but the popular instinct will not err, and without there being any necessity drawing up lengthy statistics on paper, or for filling a whole series of volumes with figures, the people will know how to recover what is its own. In our beautiful existing society, a feeble minority lays claim to the bulk of the national wealth, has town and country houses built for itself, and accumulates in banks the coin, notes and documents of all sorts which represent the wealth produced by labour. All this we must seize, and by one and the same blow shall set free the unhappy peasant whose plot of ground is burdened by a mortgage, the small shopkeeper who lives in constant dread of bankruptcy, and all that wretched crowd of persons who have not enough bread for the morrow. All this multitude may have been indifferent on the eve of the Revolution, but when the day of expropriation comes, how can it fail to see that it depends upon itself whether it is to remain free or to fall again into misery and eternal anxiety. Or, indeed instead of freeing itself, will it again have the simplicity to appoint a provisional government consisting of individuals with supple fingers and glibly wagging tongues, nor be contented until it has set up new masters in place of the old? Let it do its own work if it is to be done; let it confide it to representatives if it wishes to be betrayed!

It is not enough that the interested parties should come to recognise their Interest, which is to live without continual anxiety respecting the future, and without the humiliation of having to serve masters, it is also necessary that ideas should change with regard to

property, and that corresponding ideas of morality should be modified in consequence. We must understand and admit without hesitation or reserve that all the instruments and products of human labour are due to the united labour of all, and have one proprietor - - Humanity. We must clearly see that private property is a conscious or an unconscious theft of that which belongs to all; and we must be prepared to receive it with all alacrity for the common use and benefit so soon as ever the hour of redress shall sound. Take, waste not, for all is yours, and you have need of it. But destroy without delay all that has to be destroyed; the forts which are built to overawe the towns, the prisons, and those unhealthy quarters in which you have so long breathed an atmosphere loaded with poison. Take up your abode in the palaces and mansions, and make a bonfire of the piles of bricks and rotting wood which were your unwholesome dwellings. The instinct of destruction which is so natural and so just, because it is at the same time the instinct of renovation, will find ample room for satisfaction. How many antiquated obstructions there are to do done away with! Everything has to be re-modelled - houses, cities, agricultural and industrial appliances, and, in fact, the entire social apparatus.

To each great historical event there corresponds a certain evolution in human morality. It is certain that the morality of equals will not be the same as that of the charitable rich and the grateful poor. For a new world a new law is necessary, and it is indeed a new world which is giving notice of its near approach. Our adversaries, themselves, repeat unceasingly: "The gods are vanishing, the kings are going, the prestige of authority is disappearing." And what is there to take the place of the gods, the kings, and the priests, if not the free individual relying on his manhood? Blind faith takes flight! Make way for science! Gracious please and charity disappear! Make room for justice!

Note - For the information of American readers we would state the author of the above essay ["Expropriation"], Peter, or "Prince" Krapotkine, is a Russian by birth, blood relation of the reigning czar, and said to be the legitimate or legal heir to the throne of Russia. In his early life he was a trusted and influential member of the Emperor's Court. His espousal of the cause of human rights and labour's economic emancipation brought upon him the wrath of Russia's rulers, for which he has been twice doomed to transportation to the Siberian mines, but twice he made his escape. He is just now liberated in company with his colleague, Louise Michel from the French Bastille, where he has been incarcerated for being accused of belonging to the "International," and inciting the wage slaves to revolt against their masters. Pierre Krapotkine is known throughout the literary world as probably the greatest scientist of his time, being a voluminous writer and publisher of many scientific works on geography. To the labourers - the wage-slaves - of the civilised world he is known as an Anarchist, and foremost living champion of the Rights of Man!

- [Albert] P[arsons]. *The Alarm*, 20 March 1886

# The 1889 London Dock Strike

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## What a strike is

**Peter Kropotkin**

“Ce que c’est qu’une grève”, *La Révolte : Organe Communiste-Anarchiste*, 7 September 1889

We seek vainly in our recent memories for a single strike which has had the same importance as that which has broken out in the London docks and is still on going.

There have been more numerous strikes, there have been more violent ones. But none had the same profound meaning for the revolutionary-socialist idea.

First, the socialist movement was born within the better-paid trades and has grouped the elite of workers, these have always looked down on the unskilled. Men of the Fourth-Estate like to talk about the “unconscious masses, incapable of organising themselves, demoralised by poverty”.

It is known that we have always maintained the opposite view. And now these dock workers, who can neither attend socialist meetings nor read our literature, but who feel oppression and hate it more sincerely than well-read workers, come to confirm the fundamental idea of those who know the people and respect it.

The most complete solidarity reigns amongst the dock workers. And, for them, a strike is far harder than for mechanics or carpenters.

All that was needed was for Tillet, a very young man and of poor health, to devote himself for two years working on the outline of an organisation within the workers of the docks – while the socialists doubted he could ever succeed in his task – so that the thousand groups of workers associated with the loading of ships ceased their toil with a moving solidarity.

They knew well that, for them, a strike is starvation; but they did not hesitate.

Hunger with all its horrors! It is terrible to see these gaunt-eyed men, already exhausted by lack of food, barely dragging their feet after a twenty kilometre march to Hyde Park and back, collapsing, fainting at the doors of greasy-spoons where the crowd thronged to receive food vouchers and bowls of soup.

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An immense organisation, spontaneous, was born from the midst of these tough workers, which even socialists often referred to as a herd.

Every day hundreds of letters must be answered. Sums of 10 to 30,000 francs in aid – in great part pennies coming from collections – are counted, recorded,

distributed. Restaurants are improvised, supplied with provisions, etc. And, except Tillet, Burns, Mann and Champion – already experienced – all the staff consists of workers from the docks who simply came to offer their help. All this immense organisation is absolutely spontaneous.

It is the picture of a people organising itself during the Revolution, all the better for having fewer leaders.

It is useless to add that if this mass of 150,000 strikers did not feel that the bourgeoisie is united and strong at the moment, it would march as one man against the rich of the West-End. The conversations of groups in the street say it only all too well.

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But the strike has another even greater impact.

It has shown the organisational strength of a mass of 150,000 men coming from every corner of England, not knowing each other, too poor to be militant socialists. But it has also demonstrated in a way that brought a shiver down the back of the bourgeois to what extent a great city is at the mercy of two or three hundred thousand workers.

All the commerce of England has already been disrupted by this strike. The Port of London, this centre of universal commerce, is deserted. Ships arriving from the four corners of the globe flee it like a plague city and head to the other ports of England. Cargoes – mountains – of fresh meat, fruits, provisions of all sorts, arriving every day, rot on board ships guarded by troops. Wheat does not come in to fill the shops empty every day. And if the coal merchants had not hastened to grant everything that the coal loaders demanded, London would have found itself without fuel for its thousands of factories and its million homes lit every day. It would have remained in darkness if the gasmen had left work, as they had proposed, even though they had emerged victorious from a strike that had taken place last month. London would have lacked all means of communication if Burns had not told the tram drivers to stay at their work.

The strike spread like an oil stain. A hundred or so factories of all kinds, some very large, others small, no longer receiving the flour, lime, kaolin, oilseeds, etc., etc. that are delivered to them on a daily basis, have

extinguished their fires, throwing onto the streets new contingents of strikers every day.

It was the general strike, the stopping of the whole life of this commercial centre of the world, imposed by the strike of *three or four categories of labour that lay out the buffet*.

There are articles in the newspapers that smell of terror. Never have the bourgeois felt how much they are the subjects of the workers. Never have the workers felt how much they are the masters of society. We had written it, we had said it. But the *deed* has more impact than the printed word! The *deed* has proved this strength of the workers.

Yes, they are the masters. And the day when those anarchists who exhaust themselves in empty discussions will act like Tillet, but with firmer and more revolutionary ideas – the day when they will *work* amongst the workers to prepare the stopping of work in the trades that supply all the others, they will have done more to prepare the social, economic, Revolution, than all the writers, journalists, and orators of the socialist party.

We have often spoken of the general strike. We now see that in order to achieve it, it is not necessary that all workers cease work on the same day. It is sufficient to block the supply channels of the factories: thereby we have the bourgeoisie.

## The London Strike

Peter Kropotkin

“La grève de Londres”, *La Révolte : Organe Communiste-Anarchiste*, 27 September 1889

The big strike of the dock workers has just ended. On Monday, work was resumed. The wages demanded by the workers – that is to say, 60 centimes an hour, and 80 centimes an hour for work after six in the evening and before eight in the morning – will be paid on 4 November.

Before then, it will be 50 centimes per hour. No worker hired occasionally to help out may be paid less than 2 fr 50. Hourly work must be converted by 4 November into piece work, calculated to guarantee a minimum of 60 and 80 centimes an hour; the surplus will be distributed equally amongst the workers.

The strikers on the other waterfront (the south side) who had walked out to make common cause with the workers of the East End but who had later raised some special demands (to regain possession of what the bosses had stolen from them) also ended up getting pretty much what they had demanded and they return to work Monday.

The East-End is completely joyful. They are just rejoicing. These “idlers” welcome with applause the announcement that within a month there will be work for all, night and day!

Fireworks were set-off, they shake hands with joy when meeting, and the great demonstration on Sunday was a true festival.

Looking forward, the dock workers are forming a trade union.

\* \* \*

All the same, the result obtained is meagre. The docks companies had at first obstinately refused the demanded wages. They declared that since they only issue small dividends to their shareholders, the increase in wages would swallow all the dividends. They were proven to

be lying. The reason for the small dividends is that the companies had bought 10,000 hectares of wasteland on the banks of the Thames in anticipation of the immense profits this land would shortly yield.

The companies denied the fact. So they were asked to submit their accounts books to third parties and they refused, confident that the strikers would not be able to resist one week more.

Australia saved the situation. The Australian trade unions sent by telegraph 27,500 francs. The next day they sent another 37,000 francs. They continued sending money of 10,000 and 15,000 francs over the following days.

For their part, all the workers’ associations of England came to the aid of the strike.

On the other hand, the bourgeoisie, grateful to the strikers for the “perfect order” which reigned amongst them, grateful for having seen them withdraw their call for the general strike, and especially frightened by the excitement of the minds in the East-End, hastened to subscribe considerable sums.

The mayor of London left his hunting in Scotland and offered to mediate. He loudly expressed his sympathy for the strikers and in a conversation with the Archbishop of London said to him: “It is a scandal, this rebuff of the companies; it would be your duty to organise the general strike.”

Cardinal Manning hastened to seize this opportunity to remake the reputation of the clergy and took an active part in the negotiations to induce the companies to yield. All the Baptist chapels declared themselves in favour of the strike.

The companies finally decided to accept the terms of the strikers, but from 1 January 1890. A time when

shipping slows down, when unemployment begins. The strikers refused to accept these conditions.

The companies who said they would accept the strikers' rate after the expiry of contracts in progress, and especially the owners of the ships, were still trying to resist. And it was not until after fifteen or so new talks and new miseries for the workers that the companies proposed 4 November as the date of the new rate.

This date was accepted by the vast majority of the strikers.

Here in a few words is the history of this strike which will have an immense part in the history of the labour movement in England.

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A significant fact emerges from this strike. It was the solidarity of the destitute who were all ready, a month ago, to leave work to support the worst-paid of them.

They let that moment slip, will it repeat itself? What is certain is that in order that it may be repeated it will already need a concurrence of very special circumstances. It will certainly not repeat itself with the same ease. The moment that allowed the workers to make, at the very least, an imposing demonstration was lost, and the whole future movement will suffer.

Furthermore, the English spirit, its inclination to accept compromises – this spirit which has prevented any revolution for two centuries – has shown itself in all its strength. Never has the bourgeoisie, or at least the most intelligent part of the bourgeoisie, been so interested in a strike, never have such a mass of bourgeoisie been on the side of the strikers – Why? Because these strikers were docile, ready to accept a compromise; because these strikers and their leaders committed themselves *not to make socialism*: not to touch the foundations of bourgeois property, to mitigate exploitation whilst maintaining it. All that it would have taken for all the bourgeoisie to turn their back on the strikers, assemble the police against them, arrest the most energetic men was only a single speaker to have talked about expropriation during this strike.

It was the fear of socialism which produced the sympathy of the bourgeoisie. And if Burns now receives the compliments of the bourgeoisie and offers of seats in Parliament, it is because the bourgeoisie knows that Burns will come to Parliament no longer a socialist, no

longer a champion of expropriation, but a champion of the *preservation of property*, while seeking to mitigate the evils that result.

\* \* \*

So much for the surface details, which we relate as faithful chroniclers. Let us move on to the deeper aspects, which interests us much more.

The mass felt its strength. And this result alone takes precedence over all others. The workers felt that they

held the “buffet of heaven,” that on them depends the wealth and the misery of the country.

And during the long negotiations with the companies, the comment most often said in worker-London was this: “Well, if the companies are no longer interested in the docks as soon as it is necessary to pay the workers enough to live on – let them go to the devil! We won't delay them.”

Millions of workers have understood the *uselessness* of the employers, whose harmfulness they have known about for a long time.

\* \* \*

They also understood their strength in another way.

There were 200,000 workers, almost a million human beings, left without food. They had to be

fed. And, after the trial and error of the first days, *they were fed*.

It was not enough to collect the 50 to 75 thousand francs which arrived every day at the [strike] committee, sitting in the room of a darkened pub. They had to be shared, transformed into soup, into bread, into meat.

This has been done, and done in a way that proves the organising talents of the masses, talents that statist fools believe to be their privilege.

Without decrees, without farcical suffrage, without [army] stripes and without hierarchy, *by itself, anarchically, only with volunteers*, an immense organisation was created to satisfy the needs of a million men, women and children. An immense organisation of restaurants, improvised buffets, in which mountains of breads and preserves (corned beef) arrived every morning at a fixed time to 200,000 families covering a whole territory.

All in all, fewer children and women had no food during the second half of the month of the strike than

**There were 200,000 workers, almost a million human beings, left without food. They had to be fed. And... they were fed ... and done in a way that proves the organising talents of the masses, talents that statist fools believe to be their privilege**

under the bourgeois organisation of every man for himself.

Everything was done spontaneously, without election, by volunteers. “The anarchists are not so stupid when speaking of spontaneous organisation after all!” was said by thousands of workers.

\* \* \*

The advantages of federation have been demonstrated by the two strikes – that of the East-End and that of the other water front – marching together without merging.

It was enough for a few complaints from the “southerners” for the “northerners” to do right by their just claims, and complete cordiality was soon restored between the two, precisely because the men of the spontaneous committee did not seek to command both sides of the Thames at the same time.

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A system of “vouchers” was established spontaneously.

Finding inconveniences in distributing actual money to each of the strikers, the idea of issuing vouchers was quickly reached, which were immediately accepted by the shopkeepers and greasy-spoons of Whitechapel. And when a shopkeeper had received several pounds sterling worth of them (pound sterling, 25 francs), he tied them into bundles of one pound each and had them reimbursed in money at the pub where the subsistence volunteers sat

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And, finally, the strike demonstrated that with our current machinery there is no unpleasant work. There

should be none and all work can be made pleasant, provided that it does not become overwork and provided we have enough to eat while we work.

So, several companies have appealed to their administrative workers, the sons of directors and other young people to unload and even to load (which is more difficult) some ships.

The young men cheerily set to work. Some experienced men showed them how not to be crushed by a crane or to ensure that the ship’s load is not buffeted by the winds against the sides of the ship, and they worked tremendously, these lads exerted by cricket and other games of strength. Muscular work was a holiday for them after days spent at a desk. They lived on board the ship, sleeping in the first-class cabins, eating when hungry, drinking when thirsty, singing in the evening around the ship’s piano.

That is how we will work in the future. And, yet again, it was proved that Fourier was a thousand times right to speak of attractive work. This varied work, this happy labour in companionship was predicting the work of the future. It is only right to hate work which will be the same throughout life, which every day lasts until exhaustion, which will be rewarded only with a pallet [to sleep on] after a supper of dry bread, which will be a stamp of inferiority for the worker. It is cursed work. But there is varied work, work to the extent of strength, work aided with every modern machine – and this will be the work of the society that has achieved Expropriation, followed by Anarchist-Communism.

The dock companies have given us a free example.

Ah, if we had it repeated more often!

## About a Strike

### Errico Malatesta

“*A proposito di uno sciopero,*”, *L’Associazione*, 6 October 1889<sup>1</sup>

One issue that rightly preoccupies revolutionaries is how the revolution will come about.

The established society cannot last, they say, but still it does reflect huge interests, is backed by a heap of time-honoured prejudices, and, above all, is defended by a mighty military organisation that will fall apart just as soon as the spell of discipline is broken, but in the meantime is a redoubtable guard dog and means of repression. Where are we going to find the strength and the unity of action required to win? Plots and conspiracies are fine when it comes to mounting a specific action needing only a handful of people, but they are generally unable to determine a popular upheaval sufficiently widespread to stand a chance of winning. Spontaneous movements are nearly always too

small and too localised, they erupt too recklessly and are all too easily smothered to give any hope of turning them easily into a general uprising.

Reasoning along these lines, the conclusion almost always reached is that the best occasions for attempting a social revolution is provided by some political movement mounted by the bourgeoisie, or a war.

Though we are always ready to take the opportunity that wars and political upheavals may offer us for expropriation and social revolution, we do not believe that those are the most likely, nor the most desirable of circumstances.

A war can trigger a revolution, at least in the defeated country. But war arouses the evil seed of patriotic

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<sup>1</sup> *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014)

feelings, inspiring hatred of the country that won, and the revolution to which this might give rise – being largely prompted by the wish for revenge and confronted with the necessity of resisting invasion – has a tendency to go no further than a political to-do. There is even a danger that the people, irked by the depredations and bullying of foreign soldiery, might forget about the fight against the bourgeois and fraternise with the latter in a war against the invader.

A political upheaval carries the same sort of dangers, albeit on a smaller scale; the people blithely accept as friends all who are fighting against the government, and the socialists, who naturally would be trying to turn the turmoil into social revolution, would stand accused of placing victory in jeopardy and serving the government's interests.

Such events are becoming increasingly unlikely. The bourgeoisie has grown somewhat inured to uprisings ever since the emergence of the socialist party that threatens to dash victory from its hand, and the people, enlightened by experience and propaganda, are no longer so eager to let themselves be slaughtered for the glory and profit of their bosses. Then again, the bourgeoisie has no real incentive to make revolution – in the western European countries and in the Americas at any rate. In those countries, it is the bourgeoisie that actually governs. The fact that part of it finds itself in dire straits and facing bankruptcy and poverty does not depend on the political institutions and cannot be altered by a mere change of government. It is, rather, the outcome of the very capitalist system to which the bourgeoisie owes its existence. And, no matter how inevitable and imminent war may appear for a thousand economic and political reasons, it is always put off and becomes more and more unlikely to happen as the advances of international socialism make rulers frightened to plunge into the darkness that follows a great European war.

Anyway, wars and political upheavals are not dependant on us, and our propaganda, by its very nature, tends to make them increasingly harder and unlikely. It would therefore be very bad tactics on our part if we were to base our plans and hopes on events that we cannot and wish not to trigger.

In fact, we believe that the prejudice of waiting for opportunities that we cannot bring about ourselves is largely to blame for the sort of inertia and fatalism to which some among us sometimes succumb. Of course, he who cannot do anything or thinks he cannot do anything, is inclined to let things take their course and to leave it to the course of nature to sort matters out. And that very same prejudice may well be to blame for the fact that lots of sound socialists, whose warm love for the people and ardent revolutionary spirits we could not deny, believe they are obliged to lay down their weapons and wait for something to fall from the sky. Unable to bear such idleness, they throw themselves, just for something to do, into the electoral contest and then, bit by bit, abandon the revolutionary route altogether and discover that they have, against their wills, turned into vulgar politicians. How often what looks like – and may well have turned out to be –

treachery has started out as zeal and impatience that have lost their way!

Luckily there are other avenues by which revolution can come about, and among these it seems to us that labour agitation in strike form is the most important one.

The great strikes that have occurred over recent years in a number of European countries were already pointing revolutionaries towards that somewhat neglected method; but, of them all, the colossal strike by dock workers in London a short while ago has proved especially instructive.

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Here are the facts:

Following a short but busy propaganda campaign, the casual laborers of London docks, numbering in the region of 50,000, organised themselves into a union and quickly came out on strike. Casuals are jobbing workers who report to the gates of the yards each morning and, if there is work for them, are employed for the day or indeed for just several hours at a stretch. These are poor laborers living in cramped and fetid slums, feeding themselves or rather keeping their hunger at bay with waste food and tainted spirits, and dressing in rags. Living day to day, their work always uncertain, exposed to competition from all the starvelings pouring in from every part of England and the rest of the world, well used to vying with one another for a bit of work, scorned by workers from the

**SOUTH SIDE  
CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE,  
SAYES COURT, DEPTFORD.**

SEPTEMBER 10, 1889.

## GENERAL MANIFESTO.

Owing to the fact that the demands of the Corn Porters, Deal Porters, Granary Men, General Steam Navigation Men, Permanent Men and General Labourers on the South Side have been misrepresented, the above Committee have decided to issue this Manifesto, stating the demands of the various sections now on Strike, and pledge themselves to support each section in obtaining their demands.

**DEAL PORTERS** of the Surrey Commercial Docks have already placed their demands before the Directors.

**LUMPERS (Outside)** demand the following Rates, viz: 1. 10d. per standard for Deals. 2. 11d. per stand. for all Goods resting from 2 x 4 to 21 x 7, or for rough boards. 3. 1s. per std. for plain boards. Working day from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., and that no man leave the "Red Lion" corner before 6.30 p.m. Overtime at the rate of 6d. per hour extra from 5 p.m. including meal times.

**COYNEPORTERS (Inside)** demand 8d. per hour from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. 1s. per hour overtime. Overtime to commence from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Pay to commence from leaving "Red Lion" corner. Meal times to be paid for. Holders a licence from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Heavy labour (7s. 6d. per 100 qrs. manual, or with use of Steam 10s. 1d. All overtime after 6 p.m. to be paid at the rate of 4d. per qr. extra.

**OVERSIDE CORN PORTERS (S.C.D.)** demand 15s. 3d. per 100 qrs. for Oats. Heavy labour (7s. 6d. per 100 qrs. manual, or with use of Steam 10s. 1d. All overtime after 6 p.m. to be paid at the rate of 4d. per qr. extra.

**QUAY CORN PORTERS (S. C. D.)** demand the return of Standard prices previous to March 1889, which had been in operation for 17 years.

**TRIMMERS AND GENERAL LABOURERS** demand 6d. per hour from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 8d. per hour Overtime; Meal times as usual; and not to be taken on for less than 4 hours.

**WEIGHERS & WAREHOUSEMEN** demand to be reinstated in their former positions without distinction.

**BERMONDSEY AND ROTHERHITHE WALL CORN PORTERS** demand:  
1. Permanent Men 50s. per week. 2. Casual Men 5s. 10d. per day and 8d. per hour Overtime; Overtime to commence at 6 p.m. Meal times as usual.

**GENERAL STEAM NAVIGATION MEN** demand—1. Wharf Men, 6d. per hour from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 8d. per hour Overtime. 2. In the Stream, 7d. per hour ordinary time, 9d. per hour Overtime. 3. In the Dock, 8d. per hour ordinary time, 1s. per hour Overtime.

**MAUDSLEY'S ENGINEERS MEN.** Those receiving 21s. per week now demand 24s., and those receiving 24s. per week demand 29s.

**ASHBY'S, LTD, CEMENT WORKS** demand 8d. per ton loading Coals and Chalk. General Labourers 10% rise of wages all round, this making up for a reduction made 3 years ago.

**GENERAL LABOURERS, TELEGRAPH CONSTRUCTION** demand 4s. per day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., time and a quarter for first 5 hours Overtime, and if later, time and a half for all Overtime. No work to be done in Meal Hours.

Signed on behalf of the Central Committee, **Wade Arms,  
DEB. TILLET,  
JOHN BURNS,  
JOHN HARRIS,  
H. H. CHAMPTON,  
JAS. TOOMEY.**

Signed on behalf of the South side Committee, **FEL BULL,  
GEO. H.  
HUGH J.**

side to be sent to Mr. HUGH J. O'D.  
Central Strike Committee, Sayes Court.

better-off trades, they certainly satisfied every condition necessary to be regarded as unsuited to organisation and a conscious revolt against the exploiters. Yet it took only two years of propaganda carried out by a handful of willing men capable of addressing them in intelligible terms for these men to prove that they are well able to join forces, stand straight, and command the attention of the entire civilised world. Which just goes to show that the people are actually more advanced than some would believe, and that a slow but dogged elaboration is under way among the masses of the people, all unbeknownst to the philosophers, preparing them for the great day that will alter the face of the world.

The strikers were demanding six pence an hour (rather than five) for a day's work; and eight pence an hour for labour before 8 o'clock in the morning and after 6 o'clock in the evening; the abolition of the arrangement whereby work was sub-contracted to second-level exploiters who, in turn, often sub-contracted further; a minimum of four-hours work for those hired on, and a few other regulatory changes.

The strike of the casual workers had scarcely been declared when all the other unions connected with the loading and unloading of cargo ships – stevedores, coal porters, lightermen, carters, etc. – also stopped work, some of them not even seeking any improvements but just out of solidarity with the casuals. They rejected all compromise and any concessions until the casuals got what they wanted.

Carried away by example, other unions unrelated to the docks simultaneously tabled their own demands and went on strike.

And London, that great capital of monopolies, witnessed as many as 180 thousand people on strike, and impressive demonstrations by men with gaunt faces, dressed in rags, whose severe glowering struck terror into the souls of the bourgeoisie.

But there was more:

Workers employed in the gas plants offered to come out on strike. London would have been left in darkness come nightfall and the homes of the bourgeois would have been exposed to grave danger. The same offer was made by the tram-drivers, the steelworkers, and the woodworkers.

In short, there was quite an upsurge in enthusiasm, a rapture of solidarity, a reawakening of dignity that looked like bringing about a general strike; with production, transport and public services brought to a halt in a city of some 5 million inhabitants!

Other cities in England felt the impact of the example set, and more or less large strikes were erupting here and there. At home and abroad, the proletariat realised that the London workers were fighting in the common

cause, and extraordinary assistance flooded in from everywhere.

The strikers were to be admired for the steadfastness with which they endured the harshest privations, and for the fortitude with which they rejected any suggestion of compromise, for the intelligence they displayed in anticipating what would be needed for the struggle, and for the spirit of solidarity and sacrifice that prevailed in their ranks.

They strove to feed a population, women and children included, of upwards of half a million people; to raise subscriptions and collections across the city; to keep up with vast correspondence by letter and telegram; to organise meetings, demonstrations, and talks; to keep an eye out, put pen to paper, and stay alert lest the bosses successfully trick English or foreign poor into blacklegging; to monitor all the docks' entrances to see if there were people going to work and how many. All of this, stunningly well done by unsolicited volunteers.

There was one noteworthy incident: a shipload of ice arrived and a rumour was rife that this ice was meant for the hospitals. The strikers raced in such numbers to help unload it without a care for whether they would be paid for the job or not. The sick – and especially the patients in the hospitals – were not to suffer on account of the strike.

No doubt about it; such folk deserve to and are capable of looking after their affairs for themselves and, if free, would be guided in their labours by this care for the general good – something entirely absent from the bourgeois system of production!

Those workers possessed a wide-ranging, often instinctive, cognisance of their rights and their usefulness to society, and had the combative mentality required to make a revolution; they felt a vague yearning for more radical measures that might end their suffering once and for all, and erase from production all the bosses and go-betweens who, though they produce not a thing, claim the greater part of what is produced, and turn work, which should be an obligation – something to glory in and derive satisfaction from – into a hell of pain and a badge of inferiority.

The city was in uproar, provisions had largely been exhausted, many factories had been closed down due to coal shortages or lack of raw materials, and with the growth in discomfort, irritation was on the rise. On the street corners, talk was beginning to turn to raiding the wealthier districts.

A blast of social revolution was blowing down the streets of the great city.

Unfortunately the masses are still imbued with the authority principle and believe that they cannot and should not to do anything without orders from above. And so it was that the strikers were swayed by a committee of men who certainly deserve praise for the



part that they had played in the laying of the groundwork for the strike or for previous services, but who were plainly not suited to the position into which they had been hoisted by circumstances. Faced with a brand new situation that had moved beyond anything they had aspired to and for which they had no heart, they could not grapple with the responsibilities incumbent upon them and drive things forward, and they did not have the modesty and intelligence to stand aside and let the masses act. They began by hobbling the strike with an anti-general strike demonstration, and carried on doing all in their power to keep the peace and keep the strike within the parameters of the law. Later, after the moment of opportunity had passed, and weariness had begun to undermine the enthusiasm, they pressed for what they had previously rejected and issued a call for a general strike, only to retract it due to fresh fears and pressures.

The city's mayor and high clergy, who had been standing idly by, caring nothing for the workers' suffering, poured back into the city once they saw that things were dragging out too long and that business was in difficulty and facing ruination. Overcome as they were by tender feelings for the dearly beloved good folk, they offered to mediate... And after five weeks of heroic effort, the whole thing ended in a compromise, in the wake of which the workers returned to work with the promise that their demands would be met beginning on 4 November.

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Behold how easily a revolution may come about and, alas! How easily the opportunity can be allowed to slip away.

If only in London the general strike had been encouraged and allowed to proceed, the situation would have become very problematic for the bourgeoisie, and revolution would have quickly occurred to the people as the simplest solution. Factories closed; railways, trams, buses, carriages and cabs brought to a standstill; public services cut off; food supplies suspended; nights spent without gaslight; hundreds of thousands of workers on the streets – what a situation for a group of men, had they but had a little grey matter and a modicum of gumption!

If only a little plain and clear-cut propaganda on behalf of violent expropriation but been mounted beforehand; if some gangs of valiants had set about seizing and handing out foodstuffs, clothing, and the other useful items with which the warehouses were so packed and of which proletarians were in such dire need; if only other groups or isolated individuals had forced or tricked their way into the banks and other government offices in order to set them alight, and others had entered the homes of the gentry and billeted the people's wives and children there; and if others had only given their just deserts to the most grasping bourgeois and others put

out of action government leaders and any who, in time of crisis, might take their places, the police commanders, the generals and all the upper echelons of the army, taken by surprise in their beds or as they set foot outside their homes: in short, if only there had been a few thousand determined revolutionaries in London, which is so huge, then today the vast metropolis – and with it, England, Scotland, and Ireland – would be facing into revolution.

And such things, so very problematic and almost impossible to pull off – should they be put in readiness and prepared by some central committee – turn instead into the easiest thing in the world if revolutionaries, agreed on their aims and methods, act together with their comrades to push things in the direction they think best when the opportunity comes along, rather than waiting for anybody's opinions or orders.

There are more than enough people of courage, men of determination, in every city and town. If nothing else, the high crime rate would suggest as much; it is very often nothing but the unruly eruption of penned-up energies that can find no useful outlet in the present state of affairs. What is missing is the propaganda: when someone has a clear picture in his mind of the goal to be achieved and the means leading to it, he will act unsolicited and in the confidence that he is doing good and will feel no fear and no craven hesitancy.

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Let us own up to having made mistakes:

Back in the days when anarchist ideas were starting to gain ground within the International, two schools of thought regarding the strike were extant among the proletariat. Some, who did not subscribe to any broad ideals of wholesale emancipation and social change, reckoned that the strike was the best means available to the working man in bettering his circumstances and they reckoned that this, plus the cooperative, ought to be the last word as far as the workers' movement goes.

The others, the authoritarian socialists, grasped and spelled out plainly that the strike was an economic nonsense and that it was powerless to bring any lasting improvement, let alone emancipate the proletariat; but they conceded that it is a fine weapon of propaganda and agitation, made frequent use of it and advocated the general strike as a means of starving the bourgeoisie out and forcing them to surrender. The only thing was that, by virtue of their being authoritarians, they imagined that a general strike could be organised in advance to break out on a specified date scheduled on the agenda of some central committee, once the majority of workers had joined the ranks of the International, and bourgeois exploitation brought to a pretty much peaceful end.

We anarchists, sandwiched between the bourgeois prejudices of one faction and the authoritarian utopianism of the other, were ourselves perhaps

somewhat imbued with the old Jacobin mentality that paid small heed to the actions of the masses and thought the latter might be emancipated using the very same methods employed to enslave them, and we were quick to criticise the strike as an economic weapon and failed to give it its due as an index of moral rebellion.

Gradually we surrendered the entire labour movement into the hands of reactionaries and moderates.

We, who mean to engage with any insurrection, no matter how small, we who will feel ashamed if, once the barricades begin to go up somewhere, we do not do all in our power to echo the upheaval or rush to fill the breach, have witnessed tens of thousands of men turning their shields against capital, seen the struggle grow more embittered and taking revolutionary turns... and we have stood idly by, leaving the field open to that class of self-styled revolutionaries who show up primarily to preach restraint and tranquillity and turn everything into an opportunity for them to put forward a candidate.

It is high time we re-examined ourselves. We are certainly not swearing off other means of action at our disposal or that might suit us – but above all else, let us get back among the people.

The masses are led to big demands by way of small requests and small revolts: let us blend with them and

spur them forwards. Right across Europe, minds are at present inclined to big strikes by agricultural or industrial workers, strikes that involve vast areas and unions galore. Well, then, let us spark and let us organise as many strikes as we can; let us see to it that the strike becomes a contagion and that, once one

erupts, it spreads to ten or a hundred different trades in ten or a hundred towns.

But let every strike carry its revolutionary message: let every strike summon up men of vigour to chastise the bosses and, above all, to commit trespasses against property and thus show the strikers how much easier it is to take than to ask.

A revolution that grows out of a huge proliferation of strikes would have the merit of finding the question already posed in economic terms and would more securely lead to the comprehensive emancipation of humanity.

The tactics we propose will bring us into direct and unbroken contact with the masses, will provide us with a bridgehead for

importing and spreading our propaganda everywhere, and will allow us to set those examples and carry out that *propaganda by deeds*, which we are forever preaching but so rarely practise, not because of any lack of determination or courage, but for want of opportunity.

So let us be off in search of such opportunities.

**A revolution that grows out of a huge proliferation of strikes would have the merit of finding the question already posed in economic terms and would more securely lead to the comprehensive emancipation of humanity**

## **Go Away!**

### **Peter Kropotkin**

“Allez-Vous En !”, *La Révolte : Organe Communiste-Anarchiste*, 4 October 1890

The Congress of the Belgian Workers’ Party voted unanimously for the general strike. Convened to discuss universal suffrage and intended to be, in the thought of its leaders, an imposing expression in favour of universal suffrage, the Congress paid almost no attention to it. – “Universal suffrage? Well, it’s fine” – the workers’ delegates said to themselves. – “Let’s for vote for that and say no more about it, since there is something else that interests us infinitely more. That is the general strike.” And the dominant theme was the strike.

Instead of a political protest, the Congress has become an economic protest.

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Another labour Congress has just done much the same thing. This is the German Miners’ Congress, recently held in Halle. It was to be a democratic-socialist event. That did not happen. The democratic-socialists – their leaders, at least – are republican politicians. And the 240,000 miners represented at the Congress are above all workers. So they took care of their affairs first. And thereupon they passed the following resolutions:

“Reduction of the working day to eight hours; minimum wage for a miner no less than 4 marks (5 francs); arbitration tribunals to be half composed of workers delegated by their fellow workers; a mine surveillance committee for the safety and health of miners; a management

committee of the workers' insurance fund made up of workers; restriction of the currently unlimited right of employers to dismiss their workers; prohibition of the financial incorporation of industrial exploitation, Companies of this kind having for a base the distribution of dividends, that is to say profits drawn from labour and collected by rentiers: immoral speculation."

These demands will be presented in the form of a petition to the Reichstag. But as everyone knows in advance that the petition will fail – "it is therefore a future full of ominous possibilities, made even more worrying by the aggressive attitude of the bosses who unite against the workers" – the bourgeois press tells us.

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The English trade-union Congress, which we discussed in a previous issue, furthermore has done the same thing. It came out unanimously in favour of measures that they do not think that the bosses would grant, and, although composed of completely disparate elements, it found itself in agreement on a declaration of war on Capital.<sup>1</sup>

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Here, then, is the working-class opinion in three great industrial countries: the *formal* opinion, of course – that is to say, the one on which all, conservative workers and revolutionary workers, can agree.

But if we wanted to know their private opinion; if we were to ask what the workers are saying aloud without putting it into resolutions which must be endorsed by all the delegates present – reactionaries included – we can affirm that the general opinion of the workers of all countries is this:

"Under no circumstances do we want to work longer than eight hours.

"We do not want there to be a single industry in which they work more than eight hours a day.

"We know perfectly well – *and this is the main thing* – we know perfectly well, add the workers, that if this measure is taken, a lot of industries must perish. They are based on relentless exploitation and long hours. Well – *so much the better: let them perish! But then it is us who will seize them, it is us who take over their management.*"

This, in our view, is the main idea, the true meaning of all these decisions.

Already during the strike of the workers at the London docks, when the bosses proved by figures that they could not accept the workers' conditions [to return to work] without ruining themselves and shutting down a

whole large branch of industry, workers continually replied to them:

– "So much the better; my dears! All the more reason to demand it! If you cannot run the industry without making it impossible for us to live – *Go away!* That is all we ask of you!"

Any every time you talk to English workers – non-socialists or socialists – you get the same answer; -- "Let them go! We ask for no better. We are sure that in every city we will be able to organise work without there being any need to reduce the workers to misery."

And, without further ado, you are asked: – "Is it possible that we could organise here, in Liverpool, or in Southampton, the loading of ships and all trade, *by municipalising the docks?*"

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That is the generally held idea. And we maintain that if you speak to any one of the working-class agitators who know their milieu well – all will answer you:

"Yes, that is what the English, German and Belgian workers are thinking at the moment. They no longer want to work more than eight hours and, by issuing this ultimatum, they hope to push the bosses to the limit, fire them, and take over the management of the industry." There is only the small clique of misguided politicians in the labour movement who think otherwise and dream of the ministries of labour of the English empire, the German empire or the Prusso-Belgian empire.

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Another thing. – The misguided politicians in the movement, or who seek to make a steppingstone out of it, have moulded working-class opinion so much that at the moment there are a large number of workers who cherish the dream of obtaining eight hours from parliaments by legal channels. But are these the strength of the labour movement? Do these have the masses with them?

No, definitely not! The workers want the eight hours by any means.

They are determined to extract it from the bosses. They believe in the strike – in the general strike. In Belgium, the Marxist general staff talked in vain about universal suffrage. They did not listen to them. They shouted: "the general strike!"

In Germany, the Marxist general staff (those whose servile tactics Marx himself very often disapproved of) wants to lead the whole labour movement into the tranquil waters of parliamentarianism. But the large trades, especially the miners, are for this strike, the general strike.

<sup>1</sup> "Le Mouvement Ouvrier En Angleterre", *La Révolte: Organe Communiste-Anarchiste*, 13 September 1890.

Translated as "The Labour Movement in England", *Black Flag Anarchist Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3. (*Black Flag*)

Everyone knows that the general strike can bring about the revolution, and nevertheless everyone says: “so much the better!”

It is by the general strike that the workers want to get the eight-hour day. And this [work] day is for them only a means to say to the bosses: “Go away if you can only manage industry by brutalising us with overwork! Go away, we couldn’t be happier. Leave us industry and its tools – we do not need you, we will know how to make it work without you!”

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This is – we are deeply convinced – the true meaning of this immense international movement, born spontaneously from the very depths of the working class and which at this moment is spreading, still spontaneously, in spite of the obstacles raised by socialist politicians, in spite of the counter-campaign of the Bourgeoisie and its intrigues, in spite of the inertia of the anarchists who have not yet glimpsed what they have to do in the face of this great movement.

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As for us, it seems to us that our activity is clearly outlined before us.

We do not believe in eight hours. Eight, six, four or two hours working for the boss – that is two, four, six or eight hours too many.

We know that the misfortune of today’s society is not that the worker labours ten, twelve or fourteen hours, but that the boss exists.

We know that no matter how many hours you labour, as long as the bosses manage industry instead of the producers themselves – industry will remain exploitative.

But we also know that in every labour organisation there are a number of people who understand it as we do. And it is with them – with these strangers scattered in the mine, the factory, the construction site and whom we do not know yet – that we must find ourselves, reach agreement, join forces, it is to them we must adapt our ideas of anarchy.

And we know, moreover, that the eight-hour day in *all* trades is *absolutely impossible* as long as the whole of industry is what it is today. And we can say to the workers: “Do you want to work only eight hours?”

Nothing extravagant in your demand, far from it. Do you want it for all, or just for a few? For everyone, of course? So that will necessarily lead you to completely reshape industry, *to seize it*, to subject it to your management? Are you ready to go that far?”

Develop these ideas in front of every working-call audience. Demonstrate clearly this necessity and then ask your audience: – “Are you firmly determined to reduce your work even though this would require a complete transformation of society?”

And you already know the answer. It will be a mighty yes. But this “yes” – is expropriation.

This is what the permeation of ideas has done for the past twenty years. The workers no longer want to fatten the bourgeois thieves. And to put an end to it, the most intelligent amongst them do not shrink from

expropriation, while the less aware amongst them no longer oppose it.

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And as faith in the legal path disappears at the same time (and it depends upon us to definitely shake it), it is the general strike that the great mass is demanding to bring about the change. It is no longer to the king, no longer to the Republic, no longer to a Caesar, no longer to the radicals, no longer to the socialist politicians, that the masses make this demand. It is to the international coordination for the general stoppage of work on a given day – the next May 1<sup>st</sup>.

Can we hesitate under these circumstances? Our path is clear. Do everything, do the impossible, so that on that day the stoppage of work will be general; that *all workers*, well-off or living in poverty, in jackets or rags, are in the street.

Do everything to ensure that the streets are flooded with millions, not hundreds of thousands, like the past year.

Finally, do everything, do the impossible, do more than the impossible, so that, on 2 May 1891, not a single worker returns to the factory other than saying:

Eight hours to work, eight hours to sleep and eight hours to have fun! And if that doesn’t suit you

**Go away!**

And they will leave! The broom will be there!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kropotkin continued on this theme – and referenced this article – in the three-part article “Le 1<sup>er</sup> Mai 1891”, *La Révolte*, 18 and 25 October and 1 November 1890. This is

included as “1st May 1891” in *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014). (*Black Flag*)

# The 1893 Belgium General Strike

## Are we equal to events?

Peter Kropotkin

*La Révolte*, 5 May 1893

Events in Belgium certainly give food for thought. They were what will most likely be the *beginnings* of revolutionary movements in Europe, and they allow us to examine the situation of anarchists in those early days.

It is obvious that the social revolution will not begin with the expropriation of factories and homes. This may come later, if the revolution does not stop in its tracks. But, like all revolutions, it will start with something quite different, perhaps with a general strike, followed by the overthrow of governments, or even with political struggles.

Every revolution takes some time to develop. There is a certain inertia to overcome, ideas to spread, courage to awaken. Finally, the hope of a more or less peaceful settlement, so tenacious in the hearts of the people, must disappear little by little, so that the masses can take the triumph of the revolution into their own hands. All of this is easily forgotten, especially when one's head is turned by the legend of the great Revolution, manufactured by Louis Blanc and Jacobins in general.

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Well, the Belgian movement was everything that a revolutionary movement could be in its beginnings. It quickly stopped, it produced nothing, it is true; but it had in germ all that one can expect from a revolutionary movement the day it begins.

It was popular, and that is already immense. Hundreds of thousands of men took part in it; they were in the street. There was enthusiasm, especially at the beginning. The working masses had kept their promise. They had promised to go on a general strike at the signal, and they had done so, almost general. The workers were determined to prevent all work, and they paid for this decision with their privations and their precious blood.

They had kept their promise. But have the socialists in general and especially the anarchists kept theirs? Did

they embark on the movement with the resolution to inspire it with broader ideas, to give it a more revolutionary character? Have they demonstrated knowledge of the general situation and been able to take advantage of the mistakes of their opponents to extend the movement and, above all, to make it deeper? Did they? Did they even try?

Tried, perhaps; but then on such a microscopic scale that it is not even visible. And in a revolution, the facts must speak for themselves, very loudly, in order to be heard by everyone.

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You are probably now going to complain about the leaders of the Social Democracy. Easy task, because they lend themselves readily to attacks. But – why did we anarchists not do better than them, by comparison?

It is not a question of recriminations in the face of the enemy. Do better yourselves by comparison, and by that very fact you will have proved to the most inept that you were right.

To recriminate, especially during a time of struggle, is almost as criminal as siding with the enemy. There is no time to lose. We must act. And if you *know*

what to do, prove it *can* be done, by leading the masses to do it, by doing it yourselves.

We criticise the social democrats all the time. There are even enough comrades amongst us who live only for that and who would be very embarrassed if a meeting shouted “heard it!” at their criticisms.

Go further! Say what *you* propose to do and start doing it!

The Social-Democrats, we say, have done everything to put the people to sleep. – Very true, no doubt! But what have we done to awaken it? Have we been able to make the masses feel that there is a force capable of going much further than the democrats?

**It is obvious that the social revolution will not begin with the expropriation of factories and homes... like all revolutions, it will start with something quite different, perhaps with a general strike...**

The Social Democrats have organised the workers around a trifle, universal suffrage or cooperatives. This was to minimise the workers' demands. – Again very true! But what have we done to penetrate the masses, to organise them for broader principles than universal suffrage? What have we done to organise the workers by raising the level of their demands? For it is certainly not by trying to impress everyone and telling them “I don't care about anything; I vote for myself, do the same” that we manage to inspire in the masses that feeling of solidarity which alone can push them to general movements and revolutions.

The Social-Democratic leaders are aristos who don't care about the people. Very proper surrounds, especially for those at the top of the ladder. But, don't we also sin by the same aristocratism which consists in despising all those who have not reached the level of anarchist ideas? Are we by chance the white bone that is born an anarchist, as viscounts were once born viscounts?

We had our period of isolation, it was necessary for the development of ideas. But it's high time to return to the masses.

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We like to appear as terrorists. But terror is in all parties. Everyone has practiced it at certain times, from Robespierre who practiced it against our anarchist grandfathers as well as on the servants of duchesses, from the virgin of the priesthood, Charlotte Corday<sup>1</sup>, to the Italians, the Germans, the Poles and the Irish – all nationalists and just as haters of socialism as Robespierre was.

Certainly the anarchist count amongst them superb men with personal devotion.

But let us beware of making that our vainglory. All parties have them. All parties have had their grand

**But what have we done to penetrate the masses, to organise them for broader principles than universal suffrage? What have we done to organise the workers by raising the level of their demands?**

martyrs, their terrorists, their men and women giving their lives for an act of revenge. But all parties also know in advance that these acts will only be carried out by a few isolated individuals, and that is why they are all working on other things as well.

Let us be more modest. Like all parties we have had, and we have our terrorists, as we have our theoreticians of terrorism and even our talkers of terrorism.

The most arrant reactionaries have had their terrorists. Only, by sending their Corday kill Marat, whose death was the same as a victory [in battle] for them, they also knew how to raise the Chouans.<sup>2</sup>

Belgium had Moineau – this man who will be counted amongst the most beautiful martyrs of humanity.<sup>3</sup> But – did it have these agitators ceaselessly at work, travelling through every city, every town and every village – not only to hold a more or successful lecture there, but to leave – in every village – a group of friends put in contact with other

friends, sharing the same ideas, convinced after whole evenings of discussions, *conquering* the ranks of the other parties – convinced and ready to act together, the day when they will know that others are ready to do the same.

We have had our martyrs. We have had friends ready to storm a hall, ready to defend their arguments physically, ready to be torn to pieces by enraged adversaries.

But we have no yet had our Fenelli<sup>4</sup> – that fervent, persuasive man who went one day (in Bakunin's time) to Spain, travelling all over the country, taking one by one every man of worth to persuade them, to convince them, to bring them to anarchy thus grouping together a whole generation that has made the Spanish movement the most compact, the most widespread and the most

<sup>1</sup> Marie-Anne Charlotte de Corday d'Armont (1768-1793), known as Charlotte Corday was executed by guillotine for the assassination of Jacobin leader Jean-Paul Marat in his medicinal bath. In 1847, writer Alphonse de Lamartine called Corday the *l'ange de l'assassinat* (the Angel of Assassination). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> Royalist insurgents in western France during the Revolution. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>3</sup> Jules Moineau (1858-1934) was a Belgian militant republican, then collectivist and finally anarchist. After a series of bombings in 1891, he and 15 other activists were arrested and charged with “theft of dynamite and conspiracy”, saying at the trial he expressed “solidarity for all actions

which would lead to the revolution”. Sentenced to 25 years hard labour, he was granted early release in 1901 and re-joined the movement. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>4</sup> Giuseppe Fanelli (1827-1877) was an Italian revolutionary anarchist, best known for his tour of Spain between October 1868 and February 1869, introducing the revolutionary anarchist ideas of Michael Bakunin to the workers' movement and ensuring that it affiliated to the International Workers' Association. The Spanish Federation sided with the (majority) Federalist-wing of the International after the Hague Congress of 1872 when Marx expelled Bakunin. (*Black Flag*)

energetic anarchist movement in Europe. See its life: see Xérès.<sup>1</sup>

We haven't had our popular agitators – those who, identifying themselves with grassroots workers' movements, would travel the whole country, every town and every village, and be known everywhere, as Burns was in England<sup>2</sup> – unfortunately, social-democrats – known as brothers, living the same life, nourishing the same hatreds as the masses, but only endowed with a broader revolutionary idea; ready to pay with their own skin their share in the slightest workers' strike or uprising, however small in its results – always so serious for those who do it – and for this loved, listened to like better informed brothers.

And as we do not believe in lone individuals – it is numbers of such men that anarchists need at this moment.

A few men of this calibre, whom the masses would have *known*, not on the day they appear before a tribunal to be sent to hard labour, but known for a long time, in the workers' daily struggles – a few men determined to risk everything for the movement – and anarchist ideas would not have been what they still are for the Belgian people – a sphinx. The movement itself would have taken a completely different turn.

Even defeated, it would have left its mark in history.

Recrimination between comrades would be stupid, criminal. But fortunately we are not in the business of mutual adoration. Leave that to other parties. Let the future appreciate the good or bad that we have done. It is up to us, contemporaries of the great revolution which is approaching, to analyse for ourselves the causes of our weakness, to say bluntly what we think is necessary for the triumph of our ideas.

## Word in Season

*Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, June 1893

The lost opportunity in Belgium last April should be a useful lesson to all Anarchists. There is little doubt that if our comrades had devoted as much energy to an active propaganda in the labour movement as to talking bombs and dynamite, the result, when the opportunity for action came, would have been very different. What might have been the beginning of a social revolution in Belgium has ended in a miserable fiasco. The workers have returned broken spirited to their round of toil; the middle classes, by an extended franchise which gives them three votes to every one vote of a worker, have riveted the chains more firmly on the neck of the proletariat.

Whose fault is it? The fault of the Social Democratic leaders, who have done their utmost to concentrate the attention of the masses on electoral reform, and to delude them as to the effect such political changes can have in bettering the condition of the people? Surely in part their fault. But by no means entirely.

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Comrade Kropotkine, in an article in *La Révolte* for May 4<sup>th</sup>, addressed, of course, primarily to French-speaking Anarchists, has not minced matters. "Are we equal to the occasion?" he asks. And in the light of recent events does not hesitate to confess that the answer must be "No!"

It is all very well, he writes, to criticise the Social Democrats, but what have we Anarchist Communists been doing? The Social Democrats may have checked the aspirations of the people, but what have we done to arouse them? The Social Democrats may have organised the workers to agitate for petty objects, but what have we done towards organising them to agitate for larger ones? The Social Democratic leaders may indulge a bourgeois contempt for the masses, but are not we inclined to look down on all who have not risen to the level of Anarchist ideas?

There are Anarchists whose Anarchism seems largely to consist in posing as Terrorists; but what has such a pose to do with the reality of Anarchist Communism? All insurgent parties have practised terrorism in turn at a certain stage of their development. The French clericals had their Charlotte Corday, who stabbed the People's Friend, Marat; Italian republicans, German political reformers, Polish and Irish nationalists, all have had their Terrorists: heroic men and women who have taken their lives in their hands to individually accomplish some deed of what they believed to be justice. Of such the Anarchist movement has also its share. Quite lately the Belgian Anarchists have had their Moineau, a man who will be counted amongst the noblest martyrs of humanity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to the Jerez Uprising of 1892. Four anarchists were garrotted in Xérès for their role in the peasant revolt. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> John Burns (1858-1943) was an English trade unionist and politician, who came to national prominence as a leader of the 1889 London Dock Strike. Originally a member of the Social Democratic Federation, after the Dock Strike he was elected to the London County Council for Battersea as a progressive

before being elected as the Liberal Member of Parliament for Battersea. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>3</sup> Jules Moineau (1858-1934) was a Belgian militant republican, then collectivist and finally anarchist. After a series of bombings in 1891, he and 15 other activists were arrested and charged with "theft of dynamite and conspiracy", saying at the trial he expressed "solidarity for all actions which would lead to the revolution". Sentenced to 25 years

We have had our martyrs. Also we have had comrades ready to take a hall by assault, ready to defend their arguments by physical force, ready to be torn in pieces by enraged adversaries. What the French and Belgian movements have not yet had is men filled with persuasive power, travelling through all the land, as Fanelli did through Spain in the days of Bakunin;<sup>1</sup> winning the attention of the earnest and thoughtful in each village, each town, each district; leaving behind in each place a little group of convinced Anarchists, ready to federate with other groups, and thus form a revolutionary nucleus for the whole labour party. In Spain this propaganda formed an active, consciously Anarchistic element in the labour movement, which has never died down. Consequently the Anarchist Socialist movement there is larger, stronger, more influential than anywhere else.

It is not one or two but numbers of such men the Anarchist movement requires at this moment. Men *known* to the people, like Jack Burns is known in England, not merely when they come before some law-court to be condemned to penal servitude for some revolutionary act, but known long and well in the every-day struggles of the labour movement. Men known, loved and listened to as brothers, because while they have a larger revolutionary ideal they live the same life, are possessed with the same hates as the masses, and are ready to risk their skin in any strike and outbreak, however small its immediate object.

A few men of this sort, and the Belgian uprising would have turned out differently. Even if defeated, it would have left its mark on history.

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Very many of our readers will find themselves in hearty sympathy with the point of view expressed in the article we thus summarise. For some time past the reports in

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hard labour, he was granted early release in 1901 and re-joined the movement. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Fanelli (1827-1877) was an Italian revolutionary anarchist, best known for his tour of Spain between October 1868 and February 1869, introducing the revolutionary

our propaganda column have shown how English and Scottish Communist Anarchist groups are endeavouring to extend their activity through the country round them; how they appeal to the people Sunday by Sunday in large open air meetings in summer, and by means of a series of indoor lectures and discussions in winter; how many comrades are taking active part in their trades unions and other voluntary labour organisations. Letters from Bristol lately show that comrades in that centre have been taking active part in the recent labour

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troubles. There is an obvious tendency in the English Anarchist movement as it grows to take this practical direction. But, comrades, how slow the growth is, and how greatly the tendency needs strengthening! We cannot afford to overlook the lesson of the Belgian fizzle.

If we, as convinced Anarchists, have made up our minds that parliamentary action does more harm than good, it behoves us to make energetic use of all other agencies which seem to us less pernicious. We must protest against the parliamentary delusion by the way, but our main work is to use any and every existing voluntary association, which we can join without compromise of principle, as a means for introducing the thin edge of the Communist

Anarchist wedge into daily social life.

When every trade union, every co-operative society, every club, every voluntary association of workers has amongst its members several convinced Anarchists, looking at every question from the Communist Anarchist point of view, and steadily and continually pulling in the direction of Communist Anarchism, then a true Social Revolution will be an immediate practical possibility. Then there will be men in every district ready to seize the opportunity offered by a great strike,

anarchist ideas of Michael Bakunin to the workers' movement and ensuring that it affiliated to the International Workers' Association. The Spanish Federation sided with the (majority) Federalist-wing of the International after the Hague Congress of 1872 when Marx expelled Bakunin. (*Black Flag*)



or even a political disturbance or war. Let us continue to form special Communist Anarchist groups for mutual help in direct propagandist work. Let all who can do so devote their time to public speaking and writing. But let us take warning by Belgium and avoid the fatal mistake of standing aloof from the daily practical interests of the mass of our fellow workmen. A true Social Revolution

can never be brought about by a few enthusiasts. It is a change wrought throughout the inmost depths of the people; a change of heart and mind and spirit in enormous masses of men. Those over whom this change has already passed can only hasten it amongst their fellows by entering into and sharing their lives.

## The General Strike and The Revolution

**Errico Malatesta**

*The Torch* (London), August 1894

The tremendous commotion which some of the strikes of the past few years have produced in the social organisation proves they may be something far more important than a mere means of resisting the demands of the masters and of obtaining advantages more or less transitory and illusory. The strike can and will probably be the starting point of the Social Revolution at least in great industrial countries like England and the United States. Anyhow it would be the best of all the many possible starting points which Socialists and Anarchists could wish for the Revolution.

The question often poses itself of how the Revolution will come about. How shall we be able to destroy this powerful organisation of military and police which protects the Bourgeoisie. Where shall we find the strength and unity of action necessary for victory?

A great spontaneous insurrection with the avowed object of overthrowing the government and expropriating the Bourgeoisie is a very difficult, perhaps an impossible event, both on account of the mental condition of the masses and the powerful means of prevention and repression at the disposal of the governing classes. Plots and conspiracies can only embrace a very limited number of individuals and are usually impotent to start a movement amongst the people of sufficient importance to give a chance of victory. Isolated movements, more or less spontaneous, are almost always stifled in blood before they have had time to acquire importance and become general.

One opportunity which might be used as a starting point for the Social Revolution would be a war, anyhow in the conquered country, or some political agitation of a section of the Bourgeoisie.

But war develops patriotic hatreds and may result in the people, wounded in their national pride, irritated by the insolence of foreign soldiers, and obliged besides to resist invasion, making common cause with the Bourgeoisie and forgetting their own grievances. And a political agitation presents the great danger of turning aside the people from the social question and making it

fraternise with the Revolutionary section of the Bourgeoisie which will not fail to make show of the best intentions towards the Proletariat.

Besides wars and political agitations become daily more improbable for the Bourgeoisie would derive no great advantage from them and a growing fear of the Social Revolution and also because our propaganda and that of Socialists in general helps to make them impossible.

Thus, whilst ready to avail ourselves of any opportunity which may offer, and to use all means compatible with our principles and our object, we must seek elsewhere the means of starting amongst the masses the great movement which will sweep away the Bourgeois world, and the means which the events of the day point to is – the general strike.

A strike more or less general throughout one of the great

industries such as the mining or railway, with the stoppage it would cause in dependent industries would draw into the struggle enormous masses of people and could with comparative ease be converted into a Revolution.

The government would not be able, short of setting public opinion against it, to resort at once to an energetic military repression; the people would have time to get gradually drawn into the movement and

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understand the necessity for radical changes, and besides one of the chief advantages would be that the question would necessarily be in the realm of economics and its solution would affect the very basis of social organisation.

But for a strike to have such results, the strikers must, as the result of previous propaganda and through the influence of a certain number of men amongst them, [be] conscious of the goal to be obtained, understand the full import of the movement and consider themselves as men struggling not for a small private interest but in the interest of the whole proletariat.

A great strike before it can be converted into a Revolution causes real suffering to the mass of the people who are unwilling to undergo it in the interests of the strikers unless it sees at the end of the struggle some advantage for all. Besides there are always so many men whom hunger drives to replace the strikers that this tends to create antagonism between the militant section of the proletariat and those who would be most immediately benefited by the Revolution, such as the unemployed. The strikers must understand this and conduct themselves so as to draw along with them the whole population including the blacklegs.

A few facts selected from those which characterise recent strikes in the United States and which we extract from Stead's book *Chicago Today* will throw light on the situation.

In April 1894 a strike broke out in the bituminous coal trade which spread to sixteen states. The strikers blocked the rail lines and were so energetic that for some time they controlled the whole coal trade. The sympathy or hostility of the public depended on the use they made of this power: they only took into account the special interests of their trade:

Permission was refused to the town of Demoinis to obtain the coal necessary to keep the city waterworks going.

The Illinois Lunatic Asylum at Kantakee in which were 1100 inmates ran short of coal. To save the miserable lunatics from perishing of cold the strikers at first permitted them to have some coal but, on second thoughts, strike policy triumphed over humane considerations and the permission given on the 21<sup>st</sup> was rescinded on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Per contra permission was given to McBride, the president of the strikers and also a brewer, to obtain coal for his breweries where he had 5000 dollars worth of beer which would have spoiled if no coal could have been procured.

In the recent strike and boycott of the Pullman cars the strikers, helped by many sympathisers, had quite paralysed the railway traffic, and had at their mercy for a whole week the provisioning of Chicago.

In consequence the fruits and vegetables were rotting in the cars, and it has been calculated that the farmers lost £6000 per day as long as the strike lasted. Meat and fish rotted and the loads of ice melted away.

And in Chicago they were short of meat, vegetables, and coal, ice rose from 12s. a ton to 40s., beer ran short, except for corn, of which, fortunately there were large reserves, Chicago passed through days of want as painful as those Paris suffered during the siege. They began to fear that they would run short of water for Chicago pumps up all its water and the fuel for working the pumps had run low.

Trains full of women and children were sometimes blocked for days and in one case at least a whole hundred of suffering passengers were compelled to lie blistering in the midsummer sun with scanty food and no water. The strikers refused to allow their miserable hostages this necessary of life for thirty hours at a stretch.

Again the strikers used the worst violence against the blacklegs, who, after all, are but the slaves of misery. Here, for instance, is what a blackleg told a journalist:

I have been a railroader eight years. When business got slack last winter I was knocked off, and I have not worked five weeks altogether since the first of the year. I have a wife and three children depending on me and for six months we have been living from hand to mouth. When the agent who hired me to come to Chicago asked me if I would go, I told him I would see my wife first. I went home and found her in tears at the dreary outlook. My children were actually in want of bread and it didn't take me long to make up my mind to come to Chicago. I am a Union man at heart, but when wife and children are in danger of starving I feel it my duty to work for them, even should I be killed in the endeavour. There are lots of men here who feel the same way.

Why are the strikers so pitiless towards their brothers in misfortune whom they might have converted into brothers in arms, when we hear of no acts of personal violence against the big pots of the Railway and of Pullman City?

Clearly it was impossible for the strike to succeed, much less to turn into a Revolution when conducted on such lines. Indeed the reaction started in Chicago and if the troops had been powerless to destroy the strikers they would have been crushed by the populace.

When one is master of a situation one must take on oneself the responsibilities of that situation, otherwise one cannot hope to succeed.

Since the provisioning of Chicago depended on the strikers they should have undertaken it. And the mere

attempt to provision a town in the interests of the population instead of in that of the capitalists and tradesmen, even if unsuccessful would have been the greatest stride forward in the right direction yet made by the Social Revolution.

At the time of the London Dock Strike in 89 when all work was suspended a ship loaded with ice arrived. The rumour spread that this ice was for the hospitals and immediately a large number of strikers turned up to

unload the ship without raising the question of wages. They said that the sick, especially the sick in the hospitals, ought not to suffer through the strike.

This is a small fact but it proves the existence of human solidarity which if developed would give the labour movement a truly socialistic and Revolutionary aspect.

The grandest role the Anarchist could have in the worker's unions and in strikes would be to direct them in these lines.

## How to Get... What You Want

### Errico Malatesta

“Come si conquista... quel che si vuole,” *L'Agitazione* (Ancona) 12 April 1897 and *L'Agitatore Socialista Anarchico* 25 April 1897<sup>1</sup>

The history of the struggles that won the present type of suffrage in Belgium is interesting and very instructive. It shows how, through vigour and constancy associated with caution, a popular party managed, in the space of a few years, to bring a selfish, arrogant class to surrender, even though that class was determined to resist every concession and could call upon the economic and military might of the entire nation in the defence of its privileges. And this history might serve as an example for further struggles targeting much more effective gains for the good of the people.

*Avanti!* has received from its Belgian correspondent (A. Dewinne) an account of those events, which we know to be truthful. We think it might be useful to reprint it here, summarising some points for reasons of space, after which we shall offer our own observations.

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From 1831 to 1893, Belgium had an electoral arrangement referred to as census suffrage. In order to qualify for the vote, one had to pay a poll tax levy, which after the '48 riots was reduced to 42.32 Italian lire.

The levy was ordained by the Constitution, which can only be changed with the consensus of two-thirds of the members of Parliament, and the king's endorsement. Therefore, since it could not be expected for the bourgeoisie to be sufficiently self-sacrificing as to renounce its political privileges, electoral reform looked unattainable by legal means.

For 20 years, the radicals pressed for a revision of Article 47 of the constitution prescribing the poll tax levy. In 1870 they stood 4 candidates in Brussels and were defeated. Some radicals, elected in the provinces, proposed the revision but the Chamber refused to give it any consideration.

In 1881, Janson, the leader of the radical party, moved that the administrative vote be widened to include all who had reached the age of 21 and who could read and write; but, coming under attack in the Catholic and Liberal press and showered with insults, he withdrew that motion. “Ability to read and write” remained the radicals' formula, up until the emergence of the workers' party that forced them into campaigning for universal suffrage.

In 1883, Janson again moved a revision of Article 47, and the motion, after a stormy debate, garnered only 11 votes, with 116 against.

In 1884, the Belgian Workers' Party was founded in Antwerp, and instead of asking the bourgeois sitting in Parliament to grant workers the vote, the Belgian socialists addressed the workers directly, organising them on a sound economic footing.

In 1885, at the party congress held in Ghent, Dr. César de Paepe, the most intelligent Belgian socialist, first launched the idea of the general strike in order to secure universal suffrage – an idea that was enthusiastically embraced by the Walloon workers.

The following year, formidable strikes erupted among the miners of the Borinage, Liege, and Charleroi; the strikers demanded better pay and universal suffrage. Violence broke out pretty much everywhere; armed mobs roamed the Charleroi basin, smashing up machinery, looting offices, and torching castles.

The repression was terrible. Troops opened fire on the strikers, there were many dead, and a great number of mass arrests were made.

Once calm had returned, the ferocity exhibited by the bourgeoisie was proportional to its earlier scare. The courts were merciless, and frequent sentences rained down on the poor rebels.

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<sup>1</sup> *Complete Works of Malatesta* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2016) III.

The entire bourgeoisie realised that there was a lesson to be learned from these events. In fact, 1886 marks the beginning of the first social legislation, behind which the Catholic government today shields itself, but which they granted only out of fear of fresh upheavals. And so the regulation of female and child labour began. Just a little bit, though! Yet for the previous half century it had not even been a consideration.

However, the government remained hostile to any revision of the Constitution and, above all, to universal suffrage.

The following year, the Workers' Party debated whether or not the threat of a general strike should be carried out. A party congress was convened to decide, and the debates were very animated.

The miners' delegates wanted work abandoned immediately; other delegates, especially the ones from Brussels and Ghent, vigorously opposed the idea of a general strike, finding it premature and the preparations inadequate. The congress rejected the proposal by a slight majority.

The miners' delegates walked out, declaring that they would ignore the decision made and promote the strike.

And so the Workers' Party was split into two factions.

The dissidents held a new congress and a general strike was approved.

Within days, thousands of miners struck. The disturbances, violence and riots of 1886 resumed. In the mining basins in Hainaut revolvers were fired and dynamite bombs were going off pretty much everywhere.

The government dispatched its most terrifying butcher, General Vandersmissen to the strike area with absolute powers. When it came to the crackdown, this sabre-rattler was ruthless; he ordered his troops to open fire on the strikers without – as required by law – issuing any warning first.

In that instance, a great number of soldiers, worked up by the socialist propaganda, fired blanks; this was a serious choice, for which they could be shot on the spot if they were caught. Many workers were killed and wounded, mass arrests were made, and the General Council of the dissident socialist party was thrown in prison.

The predictions came true: the strike came to a painful and ineffectual end.

But the newspaper *Le Peuple* had pointed to the presence of agents provocateurs among the armed gangs that roamed the industrial regions, and the trial of the members of the General Council proved that *Le Peuple* had it right. It was proved that a certain Laloin, who had chaired the congress at which the general strike was approved, was an agent provocateur. And it was also

proved that one Pourbaix, who had set off dynamite bombs and issued revolvers to strikers, had had a secret night-time audience with the prime minister, Beernaert.

The upshot of the trial was the reconciliation of the two factions of the Workers' Party, which has always been indissolubly united ever since.

The Belgian socialists then laid the groundwork for a new general strike. Hundreds of comrades came forward as makeshift orators, writers, and organisers.

For four years, meetings were held in every region of the country – all of them calling for universal suffrage.

On August 10, 1890, Brussels witnessed a demonstration, which even the bourgeois press estimated was 80,000-strong; they marched through the streets of the city under torrential rainfall and a veritable hurricane without dispersing.

Once the huge crowd arrived at a suburban open space that had a commanding view of the entire city, before breaking up they made the following solemn pledge, of which everyone had a copy in writing: "Belgian workers swear that they shall not stop and shall not rest for a moment until they have won universal suffrage."

Scarcely had the party's orators read out the pledge than a formidable cry arose from the chests of all workers assembled in the vast clearing. "We swear it," they said, to endless applause, while the rain continued to fall in torrents.

It was an unforgettable sight.

From that day on, things happened quickly.

In November, the socialists organised another demonstration, the delegates from which were received at the town hall by Buls, the city burgomaster, and by Janson.

Buls and Janson, both of them deputies representing the capital, were approached by Volders on behalf of the Workers' Party, and promised to table a motion for review. They were true to their word and this time the motion was unanimously added to the agenda; but despite the lobbying by the left, the discussion of it was postponed until the 1891–1892 sitting.

It began indeed during the proceedings of February 2, 1892.

After lengthy, nit-picking debate, the Chamber passed a resolution in which it stated that Article 47 and several others from the Constitution relating to the reform of the Senate were in need of amendment.

The Houses were then duly dissolved. On June 14 elections were held. The socialists resolved to vote for the liberals so as to deny the Catholics a two-thirds majority in the Chamber.

The socialists' tactics had the desired outcome: the eighteen Catholic deputies from Brussels were replaced by eighteen liberals.

So the government no longer had its two-thirds majority.

The left's support was needed to get the electoral reform passed.

The Houses met on July 12, 1892, and appointed a 21-member commission to draw up, in agreement with the government, proposals to put before parliament. Proceedings were then adjourned until the November 8 session.

The proceedings that day were to be opened by the king. The socialists organised a large demonstration.

It was a Tuesday. Most of the workers from Brussels and surrounding areas went on strike. At around half past one that afternoon, a huge crowd gathered in the streets.

All the demonstrators wore leaflets on their caps that read: Long live universal suffrage.

Similar posters were affixed to the buildings lining the route of the procession.

At about two o'clock, out came the king with his staff: instantly, an immense chorus went up from the crowd: Long live universal suffrage – a cry that accompanied the king every step of the way.

When the king passed, Émile Vandervelde, who was standing among policemen, instead of presenting arms shouted out the fateful slogan and tossed a batch of leaflets between the legs of the king's horse. This was the signal for countless leaflets to start raining down on the king and the rest of the procession: the queen's carriage filled up with them. At one point, the king's horse, frightened, reared and looked as if it was about to throw its rider who, as white as a sheet, fled under the torrent of red leaflets and the deafening clamour of the crowd.

In parliament, Leopold II read a speech written by Beernaert, setting out the government's proposals: the king was acclaimed by all the deputies except for six radicals from Brussels who chanted Long live universal suffrage.

Outside, meanwhile, the crowds carried on demonstrating. At one point along the king's route stood the statue of the French general who had come to the Belgians' aid back in 1830; one worker clambered up it and placed a red flag in the general's hand. When the king saw, he turned his head and looked away as the crowd laughed uncontrollably.

So much for the first day.

In December, the government set out its proposals, according to which every citizen could vote who had

reached the age of 25, had been living in the same municipality for a year, and owned property to the value of at least 2,000 francs or had been living for a year in a house of a certain value determined by the law, or had a higher education qualification, or could show by examination that he could read, write, and calculate.

The various parties, too, tabled a number of bills.

The Workers' Party, which had no representatives in Parliament, clung to its formula: universal suffrage, 21 years of age, and 6 months' residency. And at one of its congresses it had resolved on a general strike should the Constituent Assembly reject universal suffrage.

The government's bill was approved by the twenty-one-man Commission but none of the Liberals backed it, and that ensured that it would be rejected by the Chamber.

The debates resumed on February 28 and continued until April 18 without any votes being taken.

On March 29, a radical Brussels deputy, Féron, presented a new draft proclaiming universal suffrage but awarding two votes to men with a family.

On March 19, the Workers' Party's General Council issued a manifesto in which it urged workers to prepare themselves for the general strike.

On April 11 and 12, the Chamber rejected all of the drafts submitted to it, including the ones that included universal suffrage.

This was the signal for the strike that within two or three days had spread impressively to Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp, and the centres of industry.

Brussels was placed under a state of siege. Conscripts were recruited, and the civil guard was kept on stand-by for eight days.

In Ghent, strikers entered factories where work was still going on and slashed the machine-belts, forcing the entire workforce to stop. Four days in, in Ghent alone, there were 25,000 strikers. In Antwerp, the dock workers dumped goods into the sea and set the dockyard on fire.

In Brussels, armed gangs roamed the streets, smashing the windows of the major stores with stones and shooting it out with the police.

On April 13, the police arrested three members of the General Council who were leading a demonstration: Volders, Nais, and Vandervelde.

The news of their arrests added to the mayhem: even the labour unions that did not follow the Workers' Party decided to strike. The court, however, thought it prudent to release our three friends. That same day, as he left the Chamber, Woeste, a minister of state and leader of the Catholic party, was beaten up by a Brussels socialist,

citizen Leveque, who was promptly arrested and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

De Mot, Liberal deputy for Brussels at the time, who had voted against universal suffrage, was forced to retreat into a theatre to escape mob violence.

On April 14, the gendarmes killed a woman in La Louvière, an important mining town with about 30,000 strikers.

In Verviers, there were another 30,000 strikers. The withdrawal of labour was complete: the deputies from that city did not dare come back home for fear of hostile demonstrations by the workers, who would wait for them every day at the station.

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, Buls, burgomaster of Brussels, while out walking the boulevards, received such a violent whack from a cane wielded by a person unknown that he collapsed, unconscious, and – in danger of death – was obliged to remain in bed for two months...

*Avanti* has so far not published the rest of the account and we do not have the details of the events following those recounted above. But the essence, all in all, is this: that in the face of the unrest in the country, the Parliament feared revolution and looked quickly for a settlement, granting, not quite universal suffrage, but a great deal. Not feeling strong enough to insist on universal suffrage pure and simple, the socialists made do, for the moment, with such success as they had achieved and postponed the fight until later.

Now let us take a look at the implications of the whole story.

It was by means of insurrection that Belgium gained her independence and constitution back in 1830, and it was through the riots in '48 that she secured a reduction in the poll tax. Thereafter, for 36 years between '48 and '84, the fate of the country was entrusted to the good intentions of the Parliament and not another single step forward was made in respect of either political reform or social reform.

In 1884, the Workers' Party was formed, which is to say, the workers started to take care of their own

interests. In '85 the idea of a general strike to press for universal suffrage was launched. In '86 violent strikes erupted, with accompanying armed gangs, machine-breaking, ransacking of plants, arson attacks on castles. "Order" was restored: the repression was terrible... but the very first "social legislation" dates from that year: inadequate and derisory though it may be, the bourgeoisie would never have passed it had they not been spurred to it by fear of further unrest.

In '87 there were further strikes, further violence, further revolts. Using agents provocateurs, the government tried to find a pretext for snuffing out the movement before it could become strong enough to win. But, as is often the case, government intrigues backfired because they served only to cement the union

between the workers, which had only momentarily been shattered, and thereby it gave renewed impetus to the feared movement.

Since then, worker organisation has gone from strength to strength and through demonstrations, rallies, strikes and revolts, the day came when the bourgeoisie had no option but to relent in order to avert revolution.

Let us now ask the parliamentary socialists: if the people, denied so-called political rights, were able, by virtue of the strength of their organisation, to impose their wishes upon the government, why do you say that nothing can be achieved unless deputies are appointed? And why, having managed to win universal suffrage with

admirable vigour, have they not managed to win anything worthwhile since then? Might it be because, whenever the people vote, they grow accustomed to looking to Parliament for everything and cease doing things for themselves?

Then again, all the effort put into securing the vote – for the right to appoint the people to whom they look for certain reforms – might that not have been effort better invested in going after the desired reforms directly?

But the parliamentary socialists could justifiably answer thus: what you would have us do – why haven't you done it yourself?

We shall explain that next time.

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# The Twentieth Century

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## The Armed Strike

Errico Malatesta

“Lo sciopero armato,” *Lo Sciopero Generale* (London) 2 June 1902<sup>1</sup>

We are promised the likely appearance of a new Spanish-language anarchist newspaper, entitled *The Armed Strike*.

Its title defines its programme.

Whether the planned publication comes off or not, we hope that the title will be taken up and become the motto of a brand new approach to revolutionary tactics. Words and slogans are of great importance in popular movements; and the expression “armed strike” may prove very useful, in that it is the happiest encapsulation of a pressing need at the present time. And it is good that it has come from Spain where there is already a mass of organized and conscious workers who have already shown what they are worth and who are better placed than anyone else to demonstrate the new tactics by practical example.

The propaganda for the general strike has done and is still doing an immense amount of good.

By pointing out to workers an effective means with which they can emancipate themselves, it demolishes blind and harmful belief in parliamentary and legislative methods; it banishes from the workers’ movement the ambitious types on the look-out for a springboard to power; it provides revolutionaries with the means of involving the great toiling masses in the struggle and poses that struggle in such terms that a radical transformation of social relations must naturally and well-nigh automatically ensue.

But the big benefits of this propaganda and the success it has had, have given rise to a grave danger that threatens the very cause it promotes.

The illusion has been forming that the revolution can be made almost peaceably, by folding one’s arms and reducing the bosses to discretion by simply refusing to work for them. And by dint of repetition of the great importance of the economic struggle, it has been all but

overlooked that, beside and defending the boss who keeps us hungry, there is the government that famishes and kills.

In Barcelona, in Trieste, in Belgium, the price of this illusion has already been paid in the blood of the people. The strike has almost entirely been mounted without arms and without any definite intention of deploying what very few there were – and with a few volleys the governments have restored order.

When thought of as merely a law-abiding, peaceful strike, the general strike is a nonsensical idea.

To begin with, given the proletariat’s circumstances and the specific nature of farm production, it can be *general* only in a manner of speaking; in actuality, it will merely be the handiwork of a more forward-looking minority – a forceful minority capable of deploying its moral and material energies on

the steering of events – but it will always be a numerically tiny minority that could only have a brief impact on the scales of production and consumption. But even if we supposed the strike to be authentically general, that would make things even more nonsensical – provided, we say again, that it be thought of in terms of a lawful, peaceable movement.

What would there be to eat? What would be used to purchase life’s necessities?

**The propaganda for the general strike has done and is still doing an immense amount of good... it demolishes blind and harmful belief in parliamentary and legislative methods... it provides revolutionaries with the means of involving the great toiling masses in the struggle and poses that struggle in such terms that a radical transformation of social relations must... ensue**

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<sup>1</sup> “The Armed Strike”, *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014).

The workers will have starved to death well before the bourgeois are forced to give up any morsel of their surplus.

So, if one wants to mount a general strike, one has to be ready to seize possession of the means of existence, despite any of the alleged rights of private ownership. But then along come the troops and one must flee or fight.

So, if we know that the strike will necessarily lead to a clash with armed force and turn into a revolution, why not say so and make our preparations?

Must this inept farce of periodical clashes, in which proletarian deaths are numbered in the hundreds with scarcely a soldier or policeman struck by a stone, carry on for all eternity?

Let us go on strike, but let us do so in circumstances in which we can defend ourselves. Since the police and the

troops show up wherever a clash between bosses and workers occurs, let us ensure that we are in a position to command their respect.

Revolutionaries should arm themselves so that they are ready to make the revolution whenever the opportunity arises. Non-revolutionary workers should arm themselves as well, if only to avoid being beaten like so many sheep.

Even with their savings, proletarians will never be in a position to amass the capital needed to fight the bosses' capital; but with a modicum of good will they may well get their hands on a revolver. And a mob of strikers armed with revolvers or any other weapons commands a lot more respect than one blessed with a strike fund, no matter how swollen.

Long live the general strike, but let it be an ARMED STRIKE.

## The General Strike in Holland

Peter Kropotkin

“Le Grève Générale en Hollande”, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 11 April 1903

The great strike of the workers on the railway and other transportation routes broke out in Holland on April 6. The decision had been taken on the Sunday night by two hundred delegates of the workers unions, meeting specially for this purpose.

Whatever the outcome of this movement, it will have an enormous importance in the annals of the struggles of labour for its emancipation. Let us recall its reasons.

We remember the strike which broke out in Amsterdam in November 1902. The National Federation of Transport Workers, which included about 15,000 organised workers in railways, docks and other transport, notified the syndicate of the canal transport companies bosses that as of 1 January no member of the National Federation would work next to unorganised workers, who were always hired by the bosses in order to lower wages.

On 6 January, the strike broke out in Amsterdam amongst the dock workers. The railway workers immediately made common cause with the dock strikers, refusing to touch the wagons laden with merchandise for the aforementioned bosses syndicate. And as the railway companies insisted that this should be done and refused to comply with the workers' demand, the latter went on general strike on 30 January.

The next day not a single train entered Amsterdam; not one left. We can imagine the flabbergasting of the bourgeois.

There are nearly 16,000 workers in Holland on the railways; they work from 14 to 16 hours and earn on average 20 to 22 francs per week. The State owns a few lines which it leases to a company to operate.

The demands raised by the strikers were as follows:

1. Recognition of the Union;
2. Not to require workers to move the merchandise of Companies against which the dock workers had gone on strike;
3. Pay the strikers for all the time of the strike;
4. Return all strikers to the positions they occupied before the strike, and not to take reprisals against any of the strikers.

The strike was spreading to the whole of Holland when the principal Company of the exploiters, and after it the State, hastened to accept the demands of the strikers.

The strike of the railway workers was thus victorious. A great lesson on labour solidarity had been given to the whole world.

\* \* \*

Thereupon the bourgeoisie, having at their command the State and representative government, decided to take measures. Italy had already given them the example, where a law, making labour on the railways *a public service of the State*, declared that any strike on the railways would henceforth be a crime, a rebellion.



In effect, this law took the necessary arrangements to ensure that in the event of a strike, the striking *workers* were immediately replaced by *soldiers*. In other words, as soon as a strike breaks out on a railway, they call up for army service – not this or that category of the army: they call up John – a worker on such-and-such railway, Peter – an engineer on such-and-such locomotive, Paul – a porter at such-and-such a station, and so on. In short, since the great majority of workers who work on the railways belong to all

categories of the army and its reserves, they are called to military service. Equipped as soldiers, numbered, belonging to this or that company and such and such a battalion, they will now be *deserters* and be sent for *court martial* if they refuse to work on the line to fatten some boss.

Hence we can see where we are going, with social-democracy preaching governmental capitalist, centralisation by the State and the abandonment of all that could disturb the Gentlemen worker deputies with their pleasant “work” by the fire. When we have Turati and a number of cigar manufacturers like Singer to represent workers’ interests, you have to expect stupid things.

Thus, in Holland, under some pressure from Germany which threatened to intervene in the event of a shutdown in transportation, the bourgeoisie proposed to mimic Italy. A certain doctor Kuyper therefore proposed a law according to which:

(1) A Parliamentary inquiry should be made;  
(2) Meanwhile, and to begin with, we would put into the war budget a provision so that, in the event of a strike, those of the militia who know the work of the railways could be sent immediately on site in the event of a strike to run *some* trains (*some* trains to begin with, and then *all* trains). In other words, the worker is no longer a free man who dispute his prices and conditions of labour with a company of exploiters. He is handed over to them by the State in shackles, for *obligatory labour*, just as convicts are handed over to gold miners companies in Russia;

And (3) introduce draconian laws to punish those railway workers who are on strike, as well as those who persuade them to stop work.

You can judge yourself these laws by this one subsection of the Kuyper Act. It seems absolutely incredible, but we translate verbatim:

“The civil servant of any public service,” says this bill, “and any person permanently or temporarily hired to work on a railway – if, in order to obstruct this service, he refuses after having received a legal order to carry out the work which he had undertaken to do according to the character of his contract – may be punished with

a maximum of *six months* imprisonment or a fine of 750 francs.

“If two or more persons carry out this obstruction as a result of a common agreement, the penalty shall be a maximum of *four years* imprisonment, without the alternative of the fine.

“The leaders and instigators of such a conspiracy shall have the same punishment, which can rise to *six years*, if they have succeeded in their object of creating an obstruction of the service.

“Whoever by his speeches or writings has advised him to

stop such work shall be guilty of instigation and shall be punished with a maximum of *five years* imprisonment or a fine of 750 francs.”

It is to oppose these iniquitous laws that the transportation general strike is proclaimed. “Protest against these laws, and increase our wages before the bourgeois have cut off the means of defence” is the slogan of the strike.

The workers are unanimous in their revolt.

The diamond cutters have just joined the railway workers.

\* \* \*

Workers of all nations, workers of all parties, your heart must have seethed when reading these despicable plans of the bourgeois schemers.

It is time, high time, that you rise up against these scoundrels who give themselves the high life and live on your sweat, your blood, your children’s blood.

Make common cause with the strikers of Holland. They are your brothers and – they are not spineless; they know how to proceed!

**The strike of the railway workers was... victorious. A great lesson on labour solidarity had been given to the whole world... the bourgeoisie... decided to take measures.**

# The General Strike and Socialism: An International Inquiry

Emilé Pouget

*Le Mouvement socialiste : revue bi-mensuelle internationale*, June and July 1904

## Opinions and Documents

Editorial secretary of *La Voix du Peuple*

It seems to me that I can contribute no better to the inquiry opened by *Le Mouvement socialiste* on the idea of the general strike than by seeking its genesis and quickly sketching its historical progress.

The realisation that this idea has not emerged as recently as it is too often thought will help break down, or at least attenuate, many prejudices against it. All the more so since to this realisation is added another whose value is undeniable: namely that the idea of a general strike arises, logically and inevitably, when the working class abandons the political illusion to concentrate its efforts to organisation, struggle and revolt on the economic terrain.

I. *The genesis of the general strike* – The idea of a general strike has no ideological prestige. It comes from the people and cannot claim a “lofty” origin. Neither sociologists nor philosophers have deigned to speculate on its account, analyse its formulas, to determine its theory.

This “common” origin explains – in part – the discredit which the idea of a general strike enjoys in certain circles where people pride themselves on a sort of intellectualism: it is distained there and it is considered to be a confused and insubstantial expression, emerging from the masses in a state of agitation... and, by that very fact, doomed to imminent disappearance.

No big name having made himself the champion of the general strike, it is refused all respect. If this disdainful attitude towards the general strike was peculiar of the bourgeoisie, there would be no reason to care about it. Unfortunately, its detractors are legion in the socialist elite.

This bias is inexplicable. It seems that one should give all one’s attention to the tactics that are being worked

out in the depths of the popular masses; it seems that there can be no better education, no more useful school of revolution than this study of life. Indeed, when the people do not let themselves be diverted from their path by the “spiritual directors”<sup>1</sup>, it is rare that their common sense does not suggest the best direction to them.

On the political plane, so many appetites and so many ambitions are tangled up that this clear-sightedness, atrophied by intrigues and conflicts [of interest] of all kinds, cannot manifest itself.

It is entirely different on the economic plane. There, the employee and the employer find themselves connected by opposition; their interests are opposed and no manoeuvre can obscure their antagonism. Besides, on the side of the workers, the conflicts become less significant as there are only problems to be gathered and not stipends.

Therefore, on the economic terrain, less favourable than any other for the development of diverting tendencies, the germination of the tactics and aspirations of the working

masses takes place without it having to fear too much the interference of the ambitious and the theoreticians, some dogmatising under the pressure of appetites, others in the name of abstract formulas.

The logical method of the struggle which, in the economic milieu, is indicated first of all is the strike, that is to say the refusal to work, the refusal, at least momentarily, to enrich the boss under too draconian conditions. Then, as a consequence, as a corollary of the growth of the workers’ organisation, the idea of generalising the work stoppage movement was born and took shape.

II. *The general strike in the International* – The International Workers’ Association was, at the end of

**The idea of a general strike has no ideological prestige. It comes from the people and cannot claim a “lofty” origin.**

<sup>1</sup> The “Director of the Conscience” (or spiritual director) is a title often given in the Roman Church to the priest acting as confessor, with power of absolution. (*Black Flag*)

the Second Empire, the expression of the economic demands of the working class. Also, very quickly it was led, under the logical pressure of the social struggle, to consider the possibility of a general strike. From its first congresses – from 1866 – the question of partial strikes arose and the usefulness of their generalisation was examined.

At the Brussels Congress, in 1868, it was declared “that the strike is not a means of completely freeing the workers, but that it is often a necessity in the present situation”; then, the possibility of a universal strike was considered, and it was laid down as a principle that “the social body cannot live if production is stopped for a certain time; that it would therefore suffice for the producers to cease producing to render impossible the activities of personal and despotic governments.”

Shortly afterwards, in March 1869, the newspaper *l'Internationale*, which was published in Brussels, said:

When strikes spread, they gradually connect, they are very close to turning into a general strike; and with the ideas of emancipation that now prevail in the proletariat, a general strike can only lead to a great cataclysm which would renew society.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, within the *International*, the phenomenon noted above appeared: the economic grouping of the workers favoured the blossoming of the idea of a general strike, to which was attributed its precise and definitive goal: capitalist expropriation. But the events of 1870 and 1871, and the weakening of the *International*, would divert the working class from this objective and give a more political orientation to the social movement.

Nevertheless, in 1873, the Congress of the Belgian Section which was held in Antwerp, notified the Federations to “prepare everything for the universal strike, renouncing partial strikes, except in the case of self-defence.”

A few weeks later, in September 1873, at the suggestion of Belgium which had asked for it to be put on the agenda, the question of the general strike was discussed at the General Congress of the *International* held in Geneva. Amongst the delegates to the Congress were citizens Andréa Costa and Paul Brousse.

The general strike was discussed in secret session<sup>2</sup> and the conceptions and objections that emerged at the time hardly differ from those that are current today. Some considered the general strike to be the equivalent of social revolution and to have as its corollary capitalist expropriation; others, on the contrary – and amongst

these were the Americans – regarded it merely as a movement of agitation for reform.

The report sent by the Federal Council of North America stated:

... If workers affiliated to the *Association* were to fix a certain day for the *general strike*, not only to obtain a reduction in hours and [against] a reduction in wages, but to find a means of living in cooperative workshops, in groups and in colonies, we could not help but... give them moral and material assistance.

The opinion expressed above is that of the general strike with a reformist goal, and it was by a movement of this category that the workers of the United States decided in 1886 to conquer the *eight-hour day*.

As for the Geneva Congress, in order not to give rise to an increase in repression, it was with the resolution below – which in no way reflects the ideas discussed at the secret session – that it closed the debate on the general strike:

The Congress, considering that, in the present state of the organisation of the *International*, the question of the general strike cannot be given a complete answer, *recommends to the workers, as a matter of urgency, the international organisation of trade unions*, as well as active socialist propaganda.

The recommendation formulated in this resolution, aiming at the formation of international trade groupings, is the clear indication of the internationalists' thought: they understood that the general strike would remain an abstraction without revolutionary value, as long as the working class had not created a strong economic organisation.

This recommendation can be taken as the testamentary thought of the *International*; henceforth, the great Association, already split in two after the Hague Congress in 1872, would decline to make way, after two more congresses, for other ways of grouping.

Social-democratic theories were, for a time, to acquire predominance; the economic orientation was to be abandoned in favour of parliamentary agitation and, inevitably, the idea of the general strike was to be forgotten.

So it often is with new ideas: a generation develops them, then, under the pressure of bourgeois persecutions, other discouraging causes, they fade from human memories and are not transmitted to the younger

<sup>1</sup> “Nouvelles de l'extérieur”, *L'Internationale*, 27 March 1869. This article was republished by Bakunin in “Organisation et grève Générale”, *L'Égalité*, 2 April 1869 – see Michael Bakunin, “Organisation and General Strike”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Summer 2022). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> The minutes of this important meeting exist and it is to be hoped that they will be published. [These minutes were later published by James Guillaume in *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs* Tome 3 (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1909) – *Black Flag*]

generation; the latter, in ignorance of the work accomplished, is obliged to begin again the development of the forgotten ideas from the beginning.

This is what happened with the general strike.

III *Revival of the idea of the general strike* – it reappeared in the United States – and this when in that country a powerful federation of trade unions had been formed. It appeared, with the spirit noted by the Federal Council of the *International* for North America at the Geneva Congress in 1873: the general strike was considered only under its reformist aspect – a means of action to win a partial improvement.

The platform for this first general strike movement was the conquest of the eight-hour day. It is needless to observe that it was not by recourse to legislative intervention, but simply by vigorous *direct action* against the bosses, by a mass uprising of workers on a date fixed in advance, that the Americans tried to wrest (and partially wrested) from the exploiters this reduction in working hours.

The initiative for this movement was taken by the Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions which, at its Congress in November 1885<sup>1</sup>, chose May Day 1886 for general action: it was agreed to stop work on this date until obtaining the reduction of the working day to eight-hours.

Thus it appears that the internationalists in Geneva were far-sighted when they advocated union organisation as the necessary soil for the flowering of the idea of a general strike.

The gigantic American agitation for the Eight Hours was really the consequence of a strong economic organisation and it was supported only by the groups putting economic concerns to the fore. Indeed, it was reluctantly, and with a forced hand, that the Knights of

Labor participated in the agitation. On the contrary, the young anarchist party, which had its centre of activity in Chicago, threw itself into the fray with ardour, while the socialist party, imbued with European theories, allowed the agitation to take place almost without participating in it.

IV *The general strike in France* – From the United States, the idea of a general strike – fertilised by the blood of the anarchists hanged in Chicago, following the May Day demonstrations of 1886 – was imported into France.

Here, it was as in the United States: the idea of a general strike, considered “unscientific”, left the theoreticians, socialists and anarchists alike, cold and seduced only the workers and the militants who took their inspiration more from social facts than from books.

Comrade [Joseph] Torelier<sup>2</sup>, one of the early militants of the carpenters’ union, a fiery and crude speaker, was one of the first in Paris to propagate the idea of a general strike, in its complete revolutionary

conception. As a delegate to the International Workers’ Congress held in London in November 1888, he developed – without much response – the new idea.

At the end of the same year, in Bordeaux, a national trade union Congress was held, and the general strike was advocated and adopted. This congress was organised by the *Fédération [nationale] des syndicats* which, a few years later, would pose as an opponent of the general strike and gradually disappear after the split at the Nantes Congress in 1894.

This Federation was imbued with the mindset of the “French Workers’ Party”; also, the general-strike resolution adopted at this Congress was often recalled by the socialists who did not belong to this fraction. Here it is:

Considering:

and builder of the trade union movement. Like Louise Michel and Pouget, he was imprisoned following the 9 March 1883 demonstration of the unemployed in Paris and in August 1888 he spoke at a navvies strike alongside Louise Michel and Charles Malato, proclaiming that “it is only through the universal strike that the worker will create a new society, in which we will find no more tyrants”. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>1</sup> The motion was originally passed at its October 1884 Convention. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Jean-Marie Tortelier (1854-1925) was a carpenter, militant anarchist, revolutionary syndicalist and supporter of the general strike. A popular speaker at public meetings, he left no writings, pamphlets or correspondence and alongside Fernand Pelloutier and Émile Pouget was a libertarian activist

That the monopolisation of the tools and capital in the hands of the employers gives the bosses a power that diminishes by the same amount that which the partial strike puts in the hands of the workers;

That capital is nothing if it is not set in motion;

That then, by refusing to work, the workers would at once annihilate the power of their masters;

Considering:

That the partial strike can only be a means of agitation and organisation;

Congress declares:

That only the general strike, that is to say the complete cessation of all work, or the Revolution, can lead the workers towards their emancipation.

It should be noted that at this Congress – where nevertheless the thought of the “French Workers’ Party” dominated the debates – a motion was passed, “inviting the trade unions constituted, or in the process of being constituted, not to become subservient to any political party, whatever it may be, the only way to reach the unanimity of the trade”.

So, while this Congress declared itself in favour of the fundamentally economic means of action which is the general strike, it warned the workers against the dangers of political subjugation.

Can we not infer from these two characteristic votes that if the socialists of the “French Workers’ Party” had not moved away from the orientation indicated by this Congress, they would have been good workers for strong trade union organisation? Purely economic organisation, which took six years to emerge above the internal struggles between groups with divergent tendencies, and which was not an accomplished fact until the split at Nantes in 1894, had prepared the birth of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* at Limoges in 1895.

It was not so! The propagandists of the “French Workers’ Party” quickly rejected the idea of a general strike. However, before coming to condemn it categorically, they stopped at an intermediate theory, the general strike *by industry*.

In May 1890, at Jolimont in Belgium, an International Congress of Miners was held where, at the suggestion of citizen Keir Hardie, “the principle of the general strike” was adopted “to ensure the triumph of the eight-hour day...” The next Congress decided the date of this

general movement in all the coal mines of Europe was to be fixed for 1891.

A few months later, in October 1890, at the Congress of the “French Workers’ Party” held in Lille, the following resolution was adopted:

Considering that the general strike strictly speaking, that is to say the concerted and simultaneous refusal of work by all workers... supposes and demands in order to succeed a socialist mindset and workers’ organisation which the proletariat has not arrived at... ; that the only strike which, under these conditions, is not illusory or premature is that of the miners of all countries... the Congress decides:... to support the international strike of miners, should it be passed.

How did the “Workers’ Party” which, at the Congress of Bordeaux, had declared itself in favour of the revolutionary general strike and, at the Congress of Lille for the general strike by trades, came to make itself a systematic opponent of this revolutionary means of action?

Let us simply observe that the theory of the “French Workers’ Party”, placing the conquest of power at the forefront, could only with difficulty accommodate itself to the idea of a general strike, which placed economic action at the forefront.

Besides this cause, there is another which seems to have influenced it: the *pacifist* conception of the general strike which, under the simple-minded term the *folded arms strike* was for a moment very fashionable, would not have pleased it.

This theory was in particular propagated by militants of the P.O.S.R.<sup>1</sup>; they considered the general strike as having to be limited to a suspension of all work, of all transport of objects or foodstuffs of primary necessity. A quick outcome: starvation of the capitalists, it is true; but also, and by extension, starvation of the workers. It is true that, to counter this last inconvenience, certain militants advocated the creation of “reserve” stores to deal with supplying the people in the event of a general strike.

It is on these conceptions – confused because they are embryonic – and that no one is endorses today, that the current critics of the idea of a general strike base themselves to proclaim themselves opponents. They would be better advised to look for other arguments, because, by basing their criticisms on outdated nonsense, they show a regrettable lack of research, as much as of the scientific spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> The Revolutionary Socialist Workers’ Party (*Parti ouvrier socialiste révolutionnaire*, POSR) was a French socialist political party founded by Jean Allemane (1843-1935) in

1890 as a split from the Federation of the Socialist Workers of France (FTSF). It dissolved to help form, with the FTSF, the French Socialist Party in 1901. (*Black Flag*)

IV *The general strike at trade union congresses* – Very quickly, the idea of a general strike progressed and spread, mainly with trade union organisations.

In 1892, the Congress of Bourses du travail<sup>1</sup> which was held in Tours and that of the unions which was held in Marseilles adopted the principle of the general strike. In Marseilles, citizen Briand was the champion of the new idea. The following year, at the trade union Congress held in Paris, the general strike was again discussed and enthusiastically approved.

Despite this, its conception lacked precision: it seduced the militants, by its power, attractive and radiant, which made it a marvellous leaven of agitation; they loved its solidarity generating power.

But the definition that was given was still confused.

Many saw in the general strike only an effective means of effecting minor improvements; fewer were those who expected from it what it is the expression of – that is to say, the social revolution.

This vagueness and this impression of the general strike formulas can also be explained by a lack of sufficient propaganda. This was seen at the trade union Congress which was held in Paris in 1893. It was the day after the closing of the Bourse du travail; the excitement and the fighting spirit were so great that the discussion suffered as a result.

The great majority of the delegates declared themselves in favour of the general strike, considered as a substitute for the expression “Social Revolution”. But despite this, its supporters did not give the impression of an impressive unity of views. A proposal was made – and which was rejected – to declare a general strike immediately.

The commission which was mandated to present a report on the question expressed itself as follows:

The declaration of a general strike is serious; to succeed, it is not needed that everyone accepts the idea. A majority is sufficient. Sometimes even a trade or two, like that of the miners or

railroad employees, if there is traction for the movement.

Fifteen days of stoppage in these trades, or even amongst the miners alone, and all the steam stops...

It can be observed that after success, the movement can be restarted for another section. There is a flaw in this objection: who knows where a general strike might end?

We are told that there is nothing easier to do: all we have to do is sit idle for a week and our exploiters will be forced to starve to death – but

we are not told how we will manage to eat ourselves.

We will therefore have to take over bakeries and butchers, and ensure the lives of all those who produce.

If we do not do this, the general strike is not possible: if we go that far, why not go further?

... Let us know where we want to go and, when we do, if we start, let us go all the way. The general strike of trades is the Social Revolution. Are you ready for it?

... Two special cases can lead to the general strike of trades. The first is for the complete emancipation of the workers by abolishing wage-labour. The second is to prevent a fratricidal war between peoples. In the latter case, it can only be international...

To endorse its report, a commission of nine members was appointed. It received the mandate to study and propagate the idea of a general strike. It took the title the *Committee for the ORGANISATION of the general strike*, without seeing the inconsistency of such a name: it is logical that we “prepare” the general strike and very pretentious to claim to “organise” it.

This Commission, with modifications indicated by experience, continued since then, under the more

<sup>1</sup> The *Bourse du Travail* (French for “labour exchanges”) were initially created by the Republican government of Gambetta to gain the support of working-class voters. Originally intended to help workers find work (hence their name), the *Bourses du Travail* were placed under the control of newly legalised trade unions (in 1884) and were transformed by these into a meeting place for all local trade unions as well as a cultural centre for workers’ education and mutual. Revolutionary syndicalists like Fernand Pelloutier

saw them as a means of building class solidarity between trade unions as well as seeing them as a key organisation during and after the revolution to co-ordinate production and consumption in the absence of both the state and capitalists. The nearest British equivalent are trades councils. With the formation of the CGT in 1895, a trade union branch was meant to affiliate to both its industrial federation and its local *Bourse du Travail*. (*Black Flag*)

appropriate title of the *Propaganda Committee for the General Strike*.

This pretentious qualifier – “Committee for the ORGANISATION” – served the opponents of the general strike. They had an easy argument to prove the naivety of such a title: they objected, with good reason, that we can hope to “make” the general strike, but not “organise” it in advance.

This was, moreover, one of the theses upheld at the Congress of Trade Unions in Nantes, in 1894, by the dissidents of the “French Workers’ Party” who withdrew from the Congress “in order”, they said, “to put an end once and for all to this utopia, this mischief-maker of the general strike.”

The question of the general strike dominated this whole Congress; depending on whether it was going to be rejected or accepted, the orientation of the Trade Unions would be dominated by parliamentary concerns or dominated by economic concerns. The discussion lasted three whole days and, with the consent of the Congress it ended up being limited to being between Raymond Lavigne, against the general strike, and A. Briand, for.

The latter showed that workers being forced into “street action” had become impossible thanks to improvements introduced in military weaponry; so that all that remains for them is to reduce the force of the government by generalising the centres of the revolution – an outcome which the general strike alone seems capable of producing.

The vote was taken and 65 votes were in favour of the general strike and 37 against.

It is necessary to observe that the discussion focused on the general strike, considered as an equivalent to the Social Revolution. In addition to this observation, it is also useful to note that this vote, which definitely steered the trade union organisations onto the economic path, was issued at the height of the anarchist repression of 1894. This is the best proof of the importance of this current.

Since then, not one trade union congress has ended without a vote confirming the principle of the general strike. In 1897, at the Congress of Toulouse, a motion was adopted stipulating that “the general strike is synonymous with revolution.”

At the Paris Congress in 1900, a wide debate began on the question and a few quotations will suffice to indicate its extent and scope:

If you want the general strike, said one delegate, you must have thought beyond your immediate and current action, you must have agreed what will be the role of your trade in society on the day of victory? It is necessary

that, for example, the bakers know, in their respective region, the needs of consumption, the means of production, etc.

Another delegate spoke as follows:

When we declare the general strike, we will have to have the courage to take to the streets. The general strike will not be the strike of worker cowardice... it will be strike of all energies, the conquest of the means of production...

Another explained:

If we conduct a general strike, it is to seize the means of production, to dispossess the current possessors who, certainly, will not leave readily; it is necessary that this general strike take on a revolutionary character, which moreover events will themselves dictate...

And he rightly added:

Between the conception of a general strike thus understood to a general strike of a trade, there is an abyss.

The quotations above, clear and typical, which it would be easy to extend and multiply, are the expression of the opinion prevailing at the Congress.

If there could previously still have been a slight doubt about the conception that the workers’ organisations have of the general strike, it was no longer possible: these quotations have shed full light [on it] – they have eliminated any possibility of ambiguity, indicating with sharp precision that the general strike must be revolutionary and expropriatory.

The Congresses that followed (Lyon, 1901, and Montpellier, 1902) only confirmed the viewpoint expressed at the Paris Congress.

VI. *The Committee for the general strike*<sup>1</sup> – It would be going beyond the scope of this study to analyse the propagandist work of the *Committee for the general strike*, as well as to want to indicate its successive changes. Currently, it is made up of a number of delegates to the Confederal Committee. Its practical mission is to enter into relations with the sub-committees for the general strike existing in many towns and which are made up of one delegate per union adhering to the principle of the general strike. Its propaganda is expressed in meetings, in manifestoes inspired by events, in pamphlets, etc.

Amongst the publications of the Committee there is one -- *Grève générale réformiste et Grève générale révolutionnaire* [*Reformist general strike and Revolutionary general strike*] – from which I borrow a

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<sup>1</sup> There is no section V in the original text. (*Black Flag*)

few extracts, the precision of which will save me theoretical repetitions:

In the present circumstances, it is said, if one confines oneself to limiting hypotheses to the possibilities achievable in the present environment, the revolutionary general strike appears as the **one and only effective** means for the working class to emancipate itself entirely from the capitalist and governmental yoke.

The general strike, even restricted to the conquest of minor improvements, has, for the workers – because it is an **economic weapon** – far more fruitful favourable results than the efforts made through parliamentary channels to force the public powers to an intervention favourable to the exploited.

The general strike – whether *revolutionary* or purely *reformist* in character – is the result of the effort of **conscious minorities** who, by their example, set the masses in motion and carry them along.

The main passages of this pamphlet are set out below, the scope of which will not escape anyone.

I end this too long exposition of the general strike – in the hope that the documents which I wanted to accompany it will awaken the reflection of militants that

other concerns have hitherto diverted from its examination.

Isn't the time right? Everywhere there is evidence of an electoral weakening of political socialism: there have been legislative defeats in Belgium and, in France, municipalities have returned to the bourgeois.

Certainly, social ideas are definitely progressing – the revolutionary idea is also progressing. A secondary cause must therefore explain this apparent decline.

Doesn't this cause lie in the very mechanism of universal suffrage which leads to the neglect of the educational task and the workers' education, in order to limit oneself too much to rallying a majority?

Should it not be concluded that universal suffrage does not have the dynamic value that some have attributed to it and that nothing definitive can be build upon the shifting sand of the electoral masses?

On these points, we can differ in appreciation... But there is one on which everyone can agree:

It is to recognise that, on the economic terrain, the good seed always germinates; there, on this stable basis, no disappointment is to be feared – all progress acquired is definitive. Consequently, given that the Revolution in gestation must be social, it is (without political preoccupations of any kind) in economic milieus – and by accepting the means of action which are appropriate to them – that the work of liberation must be prepared.

## Direct Action and the General Strike in Russia

### Peter Kropotkin

“L'Action directe et la Grève générale en Russie”, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 December 1905<sup>1</sup>

It will be remembered that after being rendered detested by the massacres of January 22 in St. Petersburg, by the slaughters which accompanied the great strikes in Poland a few days later, as well as by the atrocities that marked the reign of the police throughout the empire, Tsar Nicholas II finally in August resigned himself to sign the manifesto that established the famous Duma.

This was a general disappointment. Russia, without doubt, was right to call for the holding of elections, but the franchise was so limited that less than one hundred thousand people alone, out of 135 million inhabitants who make up the empire, were to be allowed to vote. The peasants, who are 90 million, were only to be allowed have to elections *with three degrees*, so that they were given in the final analysis only a few thousands of voters. Finally, the Duma only had the right to give advice to the autocrat. He alone, in his Council of State which he appointed, was to continue to decide upon everything.

So a few fanatics of parliamentarianism and the most timid of the liberals were the only ones to propose accepting such an electoral system and such a Duma.

Furthermore, the stage of siege continued to exist, the press dared not speak, the governors acted in the provinces with a rigour of satraps, exiling on their own initiative the malcontents. The empire was ablaze and embattled. In Poland, police, gendarmes and spies were being killed at a rate of three a week; in Baku and Nakhchivan, the Tatars massacred Armenians; in the Baltic provinces, insurrection was permanent, and in Riga and Reval there were all out battles in the streets; Finland threatened a general uprising; in Odessa, half the ships in the port were burned and the sailors of the [Battleship] *Potemkin* had risen. The whole of Russia was champing at the bit.

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<sup>1</sup> An English translation entitled “The Revolution in Russia and the General Strike” appeared in *Freedom*

(November/December 1905) under the name “S” along with the letter “The Revolution in Russia.” (*Black Flag*)



Meanwhile, in October the general strike which had been talked about for a long time broke out, which as early as February Poland had successfully tried, and, as a result, the Revolution took another step forward.

Even though no newspaper appeared any more in St. Petersburg, the workers' Council published its Bulletin every day; they could see in the street the delegates of the council, whose names and addresses were not known but the assembled crowd listened. They had been appointed by the workers themselves – just like the insurrectional Commune of 10 August 1792 – and an executive of eight members had been taken from their midst.

Today it appears that the 300,000 workers of St. Petersburg are divided into groups of 500, and each group appoints a delegate. This very much reminds us of the Central Committee which preceded the Paris Commune of 1871, and it is certain that workers across the country should organise on this model. In any case, these councils represent the revolutionary strength of the working class.

Would you like to know how censorship was abolished? While Witte's functionaries painfully developed a bad little law on the press, on 3 November the workers' delegates established the freedom of the press. They put in their Bulletin the following announcement: "If as of tomorrow an editor of a newspaper sends his paper to the censor before sending out of the printers, we will confiscate all the copies in the streets, we will invite the printers to walk out of the print-shops, while instructing the strike committee to compensate them; but if they do not quit, they will be boycotted and their presses smashed."

Thus the preventative censorship was abolished in St. Petersburg. It was the same in Moscow a little later. And today, November 24, we learn that a similar measure has just been taken by the printers' union for "all books and other printed matter."

This is direct action at work and these are the first results. Let it not then be said that the workers of the Latin nations, by preaching the general strike and direct action, have taken the wrong path. The Russian working

people, by applying these for themselves, have proven that their brothers in the West were perfectly right.

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It is true that it is just political reforms that have been achieved so far, reforms that do not add a gram of bread and meat to the usual meagre diet of the worker. Certainly. But revolutionaries will not limit their action to just achieving these reforms.

And already, while the *legal* working day in Russia is eleven hours (66 hours a week), as in Germany, the

country of the Social-Democrats, the Russian workers, at least in St. Petersburg, only work, strictly speaking, eight hours a day and often even 42 hours a week.

They proceed by *direct action*. They do what we have always recommended: after eight hours of work, they say good-night to the boss and leave. So the heads of industry are despairing. On Monday, the workers had worked ten or eleven hours, and on Tuesday they left after eight hours! On Wednesday, they do the same and then the boss, furious, closes his factory and nobody works anymore. And this has been repeated everywhere since 22 January. In the end, the workers will force the bosses to accept eight hours and it will be all to the good. It will probably still be four or

five hours too long, given their awful wages. But a victory won by direct action is always a great victory.

And then it is certain that the workers who succeeded in forcing the autocracy to capitulate will also force capitalism to do so. They will do more. They will be able to find forms of communal industrial organisation. But first they must first send packing the hypnotisers [*endormeurs*<sup>1</sup>] who tell them: "Just make the political revolution; it is too early for the social revolution."

This is what happened in Moscow. The bakers went on strike. Printers and typographers did likewise. Again, the socialist organisations had nothing to do with it:

shortly after joining the International, Bakunin wrote a series of articles for *L'Égalité* on this issue entitled "Les endormeurs." ("The Hypnotizers," *The Basic Bakunin: Writings, 1869–1871* [Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1992]). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>1</sup>Kropotkin is referring to those who seek to beguile, smooth-talk or otherwise pacify the working class with hopes of change by means of reforms legislated by politicians rather than, as anarchists argued, by direct action and economic self-organisation. It should be noted that in June-July 1869,

they were workers who wanted to improve their condition.

The government sent in troops. But the workers had had enough of massacres. Three hundred armed bakers, some with revolvers, barricaded themselves into a granary and fought a real battle with the Cossacks there. The latter obviously had the upper hand, and the bakers were massacred. But all the proletariat took up the cause of the victims, and while the socialist theoreticians strove to prove the impossibility of any general strike, they, the workers, began to go through the workshops, putting a stop to work everywhere.

After a few days the strike was absolutely general, both in the city and on the railway lines which converged there. The great city was hungry, and we can imagine what the workers had to suffer but they held out. The provisions which arrive daily from neighbouring provinces rotted along the railway lines. There was no bread, no water, no gas nor electricity – complete darkness – no smoking factories, no trams, no newspapers, except the announcements of the strike committee. By the thousands, travellers were crowded, camped and hungry in the stations; hundreds of letters piled up in the post office, which rented special warehouses to store them.

Then, little by little, the strike burst out from Moscow over the provinces. Petersburg, Poland, Finland, and soon all industrial Russia followed Moscow. The enthusiasm of the workers spread to the other social classes. Shop assistants, bank and commercial employees, teachers, then actors, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers and even judges made common cause with the strikers. They saw waiters turning off the lights after 7 o'clock. In Finland, the maids were given by the strikers the order to work only from 7 am to 7 pm.

It was a whole people going on strike. All, except the troops. And yet, were not officers and officials in uniform not seen at the meetings of the strikers and soldiers amongst the columns of demonstrators?

And what exasperated the authorities was that the demonstrators avoided any conflict with the troops. Thus, in Moscow, a column of strikers approached the platform for the Petersburg line. It sees the company [of soldiers], immediately stops, turns back, disbands – and a quarter of a hour later you could see the locomotives of that line, launched at full speed, destroy each other and the wagons aflame, a few hundred steps behind the company!

Then Nicholas II, after sometimes consulting with the reactionaries and sometimes with Witte, seeing that the former dared not risk their heads to save the autocracy, decided in favour of the second, and signed the 30 October manifesto which was, in short, an abdication of the autocracy.

A new force was thus established by the strike: the force of the workers asserting themselves for the first time and setting in motion this lever of any revolution – *direct action*.

\* \* \*

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We must say a few more words about the other powerful element of the Russian Revolution – these are the peasant revolts.

We know that the French Revolution would have come to nothing if the peasant revolts had not continued for four or five years, until the abolition of feudal rights without redemption (June and July 1793).

It is the same in Russia. The peasant insurrections have lasted for more than a year. But, as always, they grow at the beginning of winter to decrease at the time of the harvest, when everyone is exhausted in the

fields. Furthermore, while last winter they broke out mainly in the West, they now take place in the East. It is the village assembly that decides they will begin on such a day. On that day, they harness their carts and go to the lord. They take from the granaries what they need of corn, from the forests what they need of wood, then they return in the utmost order. If there is no resistance from the lord, then nothing will be touched but the wheat and the wood. It is only if the lord requests troops that they ransack and burn all his property. But the peasants have still never killed anyone. Those who kill are the defenders of property. Thus they have just massacred over a hundred peasants in a province of Tambor.

Then, everywhere, with a remarkable unity, the peasants declare that the land belongs to them and take possession of it. On this point, all peasant Russia agrees. Many would still consent to the introduction of some kind of redemption by the State but, they say, the land must “be ours.” It is the *unanimous* will, expressed in congresses, of which two general ones have taken place taken place officially so to speak and others have been held by the revolutionaries in over a hundred villages.

It may be taken for granted, against some revolutionaries in the cities who fear the contrary, that the government will never succeed in gaining the

sympathy of the peasants. Their demand for the land far exceeds what any feudal or bourgeois government can grant. The peasant revolt will continue until the day when they finally decide to *take the land themselves*.

It is equally obvious, furthermore, that the revolution will not be the work of a few months, but of several years. At the very least, what has been accomplished so far proves that this revolution will be of a social nature. No one can predict how far it will go in this direction. But it is impossible that a half-century of socialist development will be wasted and the revolution will feel the effects of the propaganda that has been directed against capital since 1848.

## Social Democracy and the General Strike

*Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, October 1906*

The Social Democratic Congress at Mannheim, it must be said without prejudice, would have had no interest whatever for the Socialist world had it not been for the consideration of a question forced upon it by the progress and 'development of trade unions and their new tactics – the General Strike. The history of Social Democratic Congresses will not make a very inspiring study for future generations. Not because of the quarrels and personalities which are more or less inevitable in all active organisations, but because of the *causes* of these quarrels, the motives: that underlie the trickery and the wire-pulling which absorbs three-fourths of their time. That is why the Mannheim Congress was for the most part a dull repetition of those that have gone before.

At last after years of hostility and aloofness and sometimes of calumny and bitter attacks, the Marxists are discovering that labour unions are a growing force to be reckoned with; and they begin to recognise that the time has arrived for them to reconsider their attitude towards them, since if they can be harnessed to the car of the Social Democratic party it may help it out of the rut of political sterility where this cumbersome anomaly has been sticking fast for years. On the other hand, should they escape from the leading strings of the politicians, should they be left free to develop their own methods of direct attack on the economic side rather than the political; taking the initiative in these struggles instead of consulting the leaders – then they see clearly that the days of Social Democracy as at present organised will be few in the land.

Clearly the force of the General Strike is now fully recognised except by the most hopeless of Socialist reactionaries. But it is equally clear from Bebel's resolution that it is to be employed solely in the interests of the political party of which he is the head, and that never may the exploited and downtrodden worker adopt this means of combatting the robbers without first asking the consent of the political bosses. Some compromise, however necessary to secure the

Nevertheless, bourgeois elements have already faded behind the two great forces of the peasants and the workers, and the two great means of action have been the general strike and direct action.

There is every reason to believe that the workers of the cities will understand the strength conferred by direct action added to the general strike and, imitating in this the peasant rebels, they will likely be led to get their hands on all that is necessary to live and produce. Then they can lay in the cities the initial foundations of the communist commune.

goodwill of the trade unions, and to this end the resolution of Dr Braun (Nuremberg) urging the General Strike as indispensable not only for the political but also for the trade union aims of the Labour movement was allowed discussion. Finally, the adoption by the Congress, by 386 to 65 of the second part of the resolution declaring trade unions to be indispensably necessary organisations for the improvement of the social conditions of the workers, and to *be as essential as the Social Democratic party itself*, gives a pretty clear idea of the immense influence the labour organisations are gaining in Germany. And the fear that the Social Democrats have lest they should slip from their grasp may be gathered from the further declaration that "it is absolutely necessary the trade union movement should be imbued with the spirit of Social Democracy," and that every member of the party should work for this end.

All this forebodes the struggle that has to be fought out not only in Germany but in all countries where the two parties exist – between those who "fight" by the ballot and those who fight by direct action. In a word, between those who would hold to the State through "the conquest of political power" and those who are for expropriation and the free federation of the workers. In France this struggle has commenced, in Italy, as we explain in our "International Notes," it is developing in its own way; in England it is a question of the immediate future; in America we fear that the workers will wait until Gompers and his party are head and ears in the mud of American politics.

The situation, however, so far as Germany is concerned has its own peculiar interest. Here we have the spectacle of a nation where revolution is overdue. Perhaps the most pitiable exhibition in the whole course of the Congress was the abject plea of Bebel that "the Germans had much for which the people of Russia were still struggling." But the people of Russia are also struggling for much that the German Social Democrats dare not breathe of in the Reichstag. No wonder their

sterile political tactics are a byword even among their own supporters, and are the laughing-stock of the ruling classes. It is—for this reason that men like Dr Barth can gibe at them for having no power whatever in administrative affairs, for being excluded, as he says, from the humble post of a night-watchman, and being denied any share in the work of elementary education, “a condition of things that is not met with in any other country in the-world.”

The truth is, where the spirit of revolt has been crushed – and Social Democracy has done this for Germany – their three million votes have little terror for the powers that be. That is why “free speech” and “free assembly” are such a mockery in the best educated nation in the world! That is why rampant militarism has the privilege of killing inoffensive citizens. Yes, in Germany a revolution is overdue, and this happens because Social

Democracy bars the way. And now arises the question whether the one great hope of Germany, as for the civilised world – a revolutionary labour movement – shall achieve its real aim, its complete emancipation by its own efforts and through its unions, or whether it shall allow that “old man of the sea,” political action, to destroy its force.

For ourselves, we believe that the German workers have learned their lesson; that the future is for the General Strike and Direct Action. We are assured that many members of the unions are working for this end. And if the comrades who are sharing in this struggle hold firm to the arduous yet inspiring work that is-needed to ensure success, the results will bring Germany the freedom that should have been hers in the past, and must be hers in the future.

## The First May and the General Strike

*Mother Earth, May 1907*

With the Spring awakening of Nature the dormant energies of the people are revived – the oppressed feel their self-consciousness and the joy of combat stirring within them.

Stormy March – the red month of revolution; stirring May – the fighting month of the proletariat striving for independence.

The basic revolutionary idea of the first of May has characterised all the battles of labour in modern times, and the historic origin and development of that idea prove its great significance for the labour movement.

The May idea – in the relation of its revolutionary spirit to labour struggles – first manifested itself in the economic battles of the Knights of Labor. The final theoretical aim of that organisation – founded by Uriah S. Stephens and fellow workers in 1869, and bearing a pronounced radical character in the beginning of its history – was the emancipation of the working classes by means of direct economic action. Its first practical demand was the eight-hour day, and the agitation to that end was an unusually strenuous one. Several strikes of the Knights of Labor were practically General Strikes. The various economic battles of that period, supported by the American Federation of Labor during its young days, culminated, on the first of May, 1886, in a great strike, which gradually assumed almost national

proportions. The workmen of a number of large cities, especially those of Chicago, ceased their work on that day and proclaimed a strike in favour of the eight-hour day. They thus served notice on their capitalistic masters that henceforth they will not be submissively exploited by the unlimited greed of the capitalists, who

had appropriated the means of production created by the many generations of labour, thus usurping the position of masters – the kind masters who had cordially leave labour the alternative of either prostituting their brawn or dying with the families of starvation.

The manly attitude of labour in 1886 was the result of a resolution passed by the Labour Congress held at St. Louis, one year previously. Great demonstrations of a pronounced social revolutionary character took place all over the country, culminating in the strike of two hundred thousand workmen, the majority of whom were successful in winning the eight-hour day.

But great principles of historic significance never triumph without a blood baptism. Such was also the case in 1886. The determination of the workmen to decide to sell to the purchasers of labour was looked upon by the exploiters as the height of assumption, and condemned accordingly. Individual capitalists, though unwilling, were nevertheless forced to submit to the demands of organised labour;

**The determination of the workmen to decide to sell to the purchasers of labour was looked upon by the exploiters as the height of assumption, and condemned accordingly**

perceiving, however, in the self-respecting attitude of the working masses a peril threatening the very foundations of the capitalistic economic system, they thirsted for revenge ; nothing less would satisfy the cannibalistic masters but human sacrifices : the most devoted and advanced representatives of the movement – Parsons, Spies, Engel, Fischer and Lingg – were the victims.

The names of our murdered brothers, sacrificed to propitiate an enraged Moloch, will forever remain indivisibly linked with the idea of the first of May. It was the Anarchists that bore the brunt of those economic battles.

In vain, however, did organised capital hope to strangle the labour movement on the scaffold; a bitter disappointment awaited the exploiters. True, the movement had suffered an eclipse, but only a temporary one. Quickly rallying its forces, it grew with renewed vigour and energy.

In December, 1888, the American Federation of Labor decided to make another attempt to win the eight-hour day, and again by means of direct economic action. The strike was to be initiated by a gigantic demonstration on the first of May, 1890.

In the meantime there assembled at Paris (1889) an International Labour Congress. A resolution was offered to join the demonstration, and the day which three years previously initiated the eight-hour movement became the slogan of the international proletariat, awakened to the realisation of the revolutionary character of its final emancipation. Chicago was to serve as an example.

Unfortunately, however, the direction was not followed. The majority of the congress consisting of political parliamentarists, believers in indirect action, they purposely ignored the essential import of the first of May, so dearly bought on the battlefield; they decided that henceforth the first of May was to be “consecrated to the dignity of labour,” thus perverting the revolutionary significance of the great day into a mere appeal to the powers that be to grant the favour of an eight-hour day. Thus the parliamentarists degraded the noble meaning of the historic day.

The first of may “consecrated to the dignity of labour!” As if slavery could be dignified by anything save revolutionary action. As long as labour remains mere prostitution, selling its producing power for money, and as long as the majority of mankind are excluded from the blessings of civilisation, the first of May must remain the revolutionary battle cry of labour’s economic emancipation.

The effect of the Paris resolution soon manifested itself : the revolutionary energy of the masses became dormant ; the wage slaves limited their activity to mere appeals to their masters for alleviation and to political

action, either independent of, or in fusion with, the bourgeois parties, as is the case in England and America. They quietly suffered their representatives in Parliament and Congress to defend and strengthen their enemy, the government. They remained passive while their alleged leaders made deals with the exploiters, hobnobbed with the bourgeois, and were banqueted by the exploiters, while oppression steadily grew in proportion and intensity, and all attempts of the wage slaves to throw off their yoke were suppressed in the most merciless manner.

Only a small minority of the working class, especially in the Latin countries, remained true to the revolutionary spirit of the first of May; but the effect of their noble efforts was materially minimised by their international isolation, repressed as they were by the constantly growing power of the governments, strengthened by the reactionary political activity of the labour bodies.

But the disastrous defeats suffered by labour on the field of parliamentarism and pure-and-simple unionism have radically changed the situation in recent years. To-day we stand on the threshold of a new era in the emancipation of labour : the dissatisfaction with the former tactics is constantly growing, and the demand is being voiced for the most energetic weapon at the command of labour – the General Strike

It is quite explicable that the more progressive workingmen of the world should hail with enthusiasm the idea of the General Strike. The latter is the truest reflex of the crisis of economic contrasts and the most decisive expression of the intelligent dissatisfaction of the proletariat.

Bitter experience has gradually forced upon organised labour the realisation that it is difficult, if not impossible, for isolated unions and trades to successfully wage war against organised capital; for capital *is* organised, into national as well as international bodies, co-operating in their exploitation and oppression of labour. To be successful, therefore, modern strikes must constantly assume ever larger proportions, involving the solidaric co-operation of all the branches of an affected industry – an idea gradually gaining recognition in the trades unions. This explains the occurrence of sympathetic strikes, in which men in related industries cease work in brotherly co-operation with their striking bothers – evidences of solidarity so terrifying to the capitalistic class.

Solidaric strikes do not represent the battle of an isolated union or trade with an individual capitalist or group of capitalists; they are the war of the proletariat class with its organised enemy, the capitalist regime. The solidaric strike is the prologue of the General Strike.

The modern worker has ceased to be the slave of the individual capitalist; to-day, the capitalist *class* is his

master. However great his occasional victories on the economic field, he still remains a wage slave. It is, therefore, not sufficient for labour unions to strive to merely lessen the pressure of the capitalistic heel; progressive workingmen's organisations can have but one worthy object – to achieve their full economic stature by complete emancipation from wage slavery.

That is the true mission of trades unions. They bear the germs of a potential social revolution; aye, more – they are the factors that will fashion the system of production and distribution in the coming free society.

The proletariat of Europe has already awakened to a realisation of his great mission; it remains for the American workers to decide whether they will continue, as before, to be satisfied with the crumbs off the board of the wealthy. Let us hope that they will soon awaken to the full perception of their great historic mission, bearing in mind the battle scars of former years. Especially at this time, when organised capital of America – the most powerful and greedy of the world – is again attempting to repeat the tragedy of 1887, American labour must warn the overbearing masters with a decisive "Thus far and no further!"

## **International Anarchist Congress: Resolutions**

*The International Anarchist Congress: Held at the Plancius Hall, Amsterdam, on August 26<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, 1907* (London: Freedom Press, 1907)

### *Anarchism and Syndicalism*

#### **(a) SYNDICALISM**

The Anarchists assembled at Amsterdam, considering:

That the present condition of society is characterised by the exploitation and slavery of the producing masses, thus causing an unavoidable antagonism of interests between them and those who profit by their labour;

That the Syndicalist organisation founded on the basis of economic resistance and revolt, all questions of political doctrine put aside, is the specific and fundamental organ of this conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and all bourgeois institutions;

That it is desirable for a revolutionary spirit to be infused into this organisation in order to guide it

towards the expropriation of the capitalists and the suppression of all authority;

That none but the workers themselves being able to expropriate and take collective possession of the instruments and produce of labour, the Syndicate will eventually transform itself into a productive group, thus having in itself the living germ of the society of tomorrow;

Advise the comrades in all countries, without forgetting that Anarchist action cannot be entirely contained within the limits of the Syndicate, to take an active part in the independent movement of the working classes, and to develop inside the Syndicates the ideas of revolt, individual initiative, and solidarity, which are the essence of Anarchism.

#### **(b) THE GENERAL STRIKE**

The Anarchists assembled at Amsterdam declare that the General Strike with Expropriation is a remarkable stimulus to organisation and the spirit of revolt when advocated as the manner in which the total emancipation of the proletariat can be accomplished.

The General Strike is not to be confounded with the political General Strike, which idea is nothing but an

attempt of the politicians to use the General Strike for their own ends.

By the extension of strikes to whole localities, districts, or trades, the working class moves towards the General Strike with Expropriation, which will mean the destruction of society as it now exists and the expropriation of all the instruments and means of production.

#### **(c) SYNDICALISM AND THE GENERAL STRIKE**

The International Anarchist Congress considers the Syndicates as organisations fighting in the class war for the amelioration of the conditions of labour, and as unions of productive workers which can help in the transformation of capitalist society into Anarchist Communist society.

The Congress also, while admitting the eventual necessity of the formation of special revolutionary Syndicalist groups, recommends the comrades to support the general Syndicalist movement.<sup>1</sup>

But the Congress considers it the duty of Anarchists to constitute the revolutionary element in these organisations, and to advocate and support only those

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, syndicalism refers to trade unionism as such rather than the revolutionary kind usually associated with the term syndicalism. (*Black Flag*)

forms of direct action which have in themselves a revolutionary character, and tend in that manner to alter the conditions of society.

The Anarchists consider the Syndicalist movement as a powerful means of revolution, but not as a substitute for revolution.

They recommend the comrades to take part in a General Strike even if proclaimed with the aim of capturing the political power, and to do all they possibly can to make

their Syndicates put forward questions of economic rights.

The Anarchists further think that the destruction of capitalist and authoritarian society can only be realised through armed insurrection and expropriation by force, and that the use of the General Strike and Syndicalist tactics ought not to make us forget other means of direct action against the military power of governments.

## The Spanish Uprising

Emma Goldman

*Mother Earth*, June 1909

WITHIN the last two weeks organised authority has been shaken to its very foundations by the revolutionary uprising in Spain.

To think that neither the influence of religion, with its power to dull the human mind, nor the army with its lead and iron methods, no longer serves as a safeguard against revolution! Moreover, the rebels, once having thrown off the bridle, know no bounds. They actually "burn churches and outrage nuns." What beasts! What brutes!

In view of the fact that these blood-curdling stories emanate from a servile and prostitute press, ever ready to malign and misrepresent the least revolt against tyranny, one will do well to carefully weigh and measure these reports. But even if they were true, if the Spanish people really burned churches and maltreated the *cuervos negros*<sup>1</sup> what of it? Has not the Catholic Church, especially in Latin countries, driven the people to despair; has it not for centuries lived off their sweat and blood; has it not used every means to lash them into submission and rob them of their energies and manhood? Were the people of Spain to retaliate a million-fold, it would sink into insignificance compared with the countless crimes and black terror of the Catholic Church.

Politicians and vote hucksters only can maintain the lie that religion is a "private affair." Revolutionists the world over have realised long ago that religion is one of the greatest obstacles to the emancipation of mankind, hence the strongest support of tyranny and oppression.

The most striking feature of the present uprising does not consist in what has or has not been done to churches and nuns. Much rather it is to be found in the tremendous anti-military spirit and the recognition of that most effective weapon, the General Strike.

While it is true that the Moroccan war – a struggle for the enrichment of a handful of speculators – has fanned

the spark of popular discontent into fire, it is much more true that the anti-militarist agitation, carried on in Latin countries for years, has paved the way for the present revolt.

Militarism, like the church, is one of the strongest bulwarks of our present system. This has become particularly apparent during recent years. Governments employ armies not merely to subdue weaker nations and conquer territory, but to silence the slightest cry of

discontent at home. Realising this, the revolutionary elements in every land have inaugurated a wide-spread agitation against militarism. The present Spanish uprising – the most heroic and inspiring revolutionary event of recent years – is the direct result of those efforts. And the General Strike?

True, a leading German Socialist not long ago declared the General Strike to be general nonsense; and when asked if the workers of the world should prevent the possible coalition of European powers against the Russian Revolution by the declaration of a General Strike, he scornfully ridiculed the suggestion. How foolish the "Sage of Berlin" must feel in face of the fact

**True, a leading German Socialist not long ago declared the General Strike to be general nonsense... How foolish the "Sage of Berlin" must feel in face of the fact that the General Strike has since proved such a tremendous weapon in the hands of labour.**

<sup>1</sup> Black Crows – popular expression of scorn for the black clergy.

that the General Strike has since proved such a tremendous weapon in the hands of labour.

Yet another cause, no doubt, aided in preparing the Spanish uprising – the memory of Montjuich, that hell of the modern Spanish Inquisition.

Twelve years ago a bomb exploded during a religious procession at Barcelona. Immediately three hundred workmen were arrested and tortured in the most fiendish manner: hot irons, the thumbscrew, and rack were employed to extort confessions. When, finally, the majority of the victims perished, and a cry of indignation arose all over Europe, the few survivors of the torture were released. Perchance among the

participants in the present revolt are friends and relatives of those victims. This, together with the unspeakable oppression, exploitation, and forced military service suffered by the Spanish people, sufficiently explains the present revolution.

I am not optimistic enough to hope that the heroic and self-sacrificing efforts of our Spanish brothers will forever abolish torture and tyranny. But as a forerunner of a greater and more effective storm they are wonderfully encouraging and invigorating. Those who have the revolutionary spirit can learn from Spanish events the great power of anti-militarism and the General Strike.

## ***Mother Earth*: Observations and Comments**

### **Observations and Comments**

*Mother Earth*, March 1910

The Philadelphia general strike is without doubt the most important event in the history of American labour. It is no exaggeration to say that it marks a new epoch in the industrial life of the country.

There have been great strikes before, sympathetic strikes, and even general strikes of a *particular* industry. But never before has the country witnessed the workingmen of *an entire city* – a great industrial centre – make common cause and rise as one man in aid of striking fellow-workers.

This splendid manifestation of solidarity indicates the final passing away of the small, isolated strike. It begins a new era of the practical application - on a large scale of the motto, "An injury to one is the concern of all."

It is a dangerous innovation. It sounds the death knell of wage slavery. The masters realise the peril. Hence their frantic efforts to break the general strike, no matter at what cost of suffering and blood.

In a struggle of this character – given equal determination – the winner will be he who best understands the final aim and most effective methods. So far it is still the masters who have this advantage. Their aim is the subjugation of labour; their tactics, trickery and brutal force. In both, aim and methods, they have the whole machinery of government - municipal,

State, and Federal - at their command. For governments exist just for that purpose: to uphold Things as They Are and to secure to the robber barons the fruit of others' labour.

The workingmen, on the other hand, have but *one* weapon – their numerical strength and producing power. If they fail to make energetic use of that, they are doomed to defeat. If they are too cowardly to resist, actively, police brutality, they will be clubbed into submission. If they foolishly rely on the Messiah of arbitration, they will be cheated out of victory.

All this American labour is gradually being taught by bitter experience, by the example of their more advanced fellow-workers of Europe, and by the propaganda of the general strike idea, which – by the way – was first suggested and advocated by the much-hated Anarchists.

The general strike of Philadelphia is but the first articulate cry of the awakening giant. Whatever its outcome, it is a tremendous moral victory, a long step on the road towards emancipation. Before long other cities will follow the example of Philadelphia; strikes will assume national and international proportions, finally culminating in *the* strike of enslaved labour for the possession of the earth and the fulness thereof.

### **Observations and Comments**

*Mother Earth*, April 1912

An editorial in the *N. Y. Call* (March 19<sup>th</sup>) unwittingly illumines the stupefaction of Socialist politicians over the fact that the General Strike is becoming a universal factor in the labour struggle. Think of it! Socialist congresses and theoreticians have persistently denounced and opposed the general strike idea; they have condemned it as "general nonsense," the miscarriage of an overheated Anarchist imagination, and fought it by all means, fair and foul. And here – *horrible dictu!* – the General Strike is even winning great victories! Listen to the *Call*:

Some idea of the rapidity with which events are moving throughout the world of labour may be obtained by a glance backward at the status of the general strike as it appeared but a short time ago to Socialist congresses and party theorists. But a year or so ago the German Socialist convention, in discussing the question, came to the general conclusion that it was a most uncertain weapon, doubtful as to practicability, and only seemingly



possible of use under peculiar circumstances, which could not very well be defined. And but a few months ago J. Ramsay MacDonald, looked upon by many as the most practical British Socialist, in a lengthy essay, reached much more unfavourable conclusions regarding it, leaving the distinct impression that it was on the whole both impossible and impractical.

But today, in Mr. MacDonald's own country, we not only see a general strike in the mining industry, but one so entirely possible and practical that those taking part in it look upon their victory as practically secured already. In addition, it is now stated that there is every likelihood that the existing general strike may very shortly become still more "general" by the transport workers and practically all the other unions in the country laying down their tools. And there is none today in England, whether capitalist or Socialist, to deny the possibility of this occurrence.

Very well. But why not be honest about it? The story of the General Strike is not all told, without pointing out that it was the Anarchists who since the days of the *Internationale* have steadily advocated direct fighting methods and propagated the General Strike, and that for this they were denounced by the Socialist politicians as madmen and *agents provocateurs*.

## Observations and Comments

*Mother Earth*, August 1912

A certain magazine recently expressed the opinion that the Anarchists had but one aim, to destroy. Indeed, it is sufficient but to mention three especially evil-breeding institutions that we want to destroy; three nightmares that permit man neither to lead a healthy life nor give him a chance to breathe.

We wage war against private ownership, the State, and the Church. We strive toward a communist Anarchist society; that is, a social condition that will afford every individual free scope to develop. Therefore, we proclaim the right of everyone to the enjoyment of life, according to individual inclination and requirement, made possible by the free participation of each in the various activities of life, for the benefit of all.

The means to this end are propaganda, direct action, the general strike, and, finally, the mental and material social revolution – a general uprising of labour, of the real wealth producers of the world.

We encourage every popular movement that tends to advance the decisive struggle and bring about the final culmination.

We welcome and aid every direct struggle of labour against the ruling classes and corrupt institutions. On the other hand, we condemn all palliatives and shams, like the participation in parliamentarism, the belief in the possibility of harmony and fair play between the exploiters and their victims, the hope in protective labour legislation, and similar superstitions. Our efforts aim to awaken the proletariat to an understanding of its true interests and to inspire the masses with those purposes and ideals which will enable them to secure their own emancipation and to enjoy the fruits of their victory.

There is, no doubt, much destruction in these principles, but it is destruction that is necessary to rear a healthy, sound society in place of our Augean stables.

## Observations and Comments

*Mother Earth*, February 1913

We read in a certain Social Democratic paper that direct economic action may serve its purpose in the immediate, everyday struggle of the worker against his master, but that the final emancipation must inevitably be brought about through political action.

Peculiar logic! Direct economic action is the very reverse of political indirection. The latter begins big, with high-flown phrases and promises, and ends with empty soap bubbles and compromises. Direct action, on the contrary, began with small, insignificant local strikes and is developing into a tremendous world movement of the cooperation of all workers for the final General Social Strike.

The field of the General Strike is so far-reaching that it embraces every function of social life. Its effects are of such vital importance that even the biggest and most important political activities cannot for a moment be compared with it. In its results the General Strike signifies the eradication of exploitation and injustice, and the triumph of new society based on economic independence and social equality – voluntary communism.

**The means to this end are propaganda, direct action, the general strike, and... the mental and material social revolution – a general uprising of labour**

## Observations and Comments

*Mother Earth*, August 1914

Were the workers of Europe conscious of their power, this war could not last a day. Indeed it could not have been begun; the lords of war and wealth would not dare think of it.

You need guns and ammunition, you need food and clothing and a thousand other necessities to keep the navy and the army of a country in fighting trim. Suppose the workers, *even now*, refuse to supply food to the armies of Europe; suppose the railroad employees in Austria, Germany, France and Russia refuse to haul the soldiers on their trains, and blow up the railroad tracks, mobilisation would be paralysed at once, the military plans upset and the armies disorganised, with mutiny breaking out among the soldiers.

This could be accomplished if the workers in the respective countries had been prepared for such action by the agitation of the militant, revolutionary element. Indeed, the Anarchists of Europe and other anti-militarists have for years been carrying on such a propaganda. They have persistently advocated the General Strike as the most powerful and effective weapon of labour to check the aggression of capital and the blood-thirsty ambitions of government. But the

official Social Democracy has constantly opposed and hindered this propaganda, ridiculing the efforts of the Anarchists, and declaring the General Strike idea to be general nonsense.

It is the fault of the Social Democracy of Europe that the workers have remained unprepared to stem the tide of human slaughter. The Social Democratic parties in their narrowness, their treachery to the ideal and their political wool-shearing are directly responsible for the gigantic crime of the present European war.

And well they know it. The moment the war broke out, they began to talk big of a General Strike. But too late. No preparation had been made by them for it; indeed, they did their utmost to paralyse the possibility of the General Strike.

May the rank and file of the international Social Democracy, so cruelly duped by their misleaders, learn the significant lesson. We sincerely hope that they will that they will realise the utter futility of the efforts spent in parliamentary activity, and that they will turn to the only effective weapon of labour – DIRECT ACTION and the GENERAL STRIKE.

## The General Strike and the Insurrection in Italy

**Errico Malatesta**

*Mother Earth*, August 1914 (*Freedom*, July 1914)

The events which have taken place recently in Italy are of the greatest importance, not so much in themselves, but as an indication of the disposition of the Italian people and of what we can anticipate in the near future.

The immediate cause of the outbreak was a massacre of unarmed demonstrators by the gendarmes of the town of Ancona.

For over a year the revolutionary and labour organizations of all political shades had been carrying on an agitation in favour of several victims of military despotism and for the abolition of *disciplinary battalions*, to which are sent all young soldiers known to hold anti-monarchial and anti-bourgeois opinions. The treatment is barbarous, and the unhappy young men are submitted to all kinds of moral and physical tortures.

As the meetings and demonstrations were held all over Italy, but on different dates, they seemed to make but little impression on the government; and the Trades Council of Ancona proposed, therefore, to organize manifestations in the whole country on the same day, that day to be the date of the official celebration of the establishment of Italian unity and the Monarchy. As on these occasions great military reviews are always held, the comrades thought that the government would be

obliged to postpone the review in order to hold the troops ready to preserve "order," and the attention of the whole public would be drawn to the object of the demonstration.

The idea put forward by the Ancona comrades was everywhere received with enthusiasm by all the opposition parties. The Minister ordered the police to prevent any public demonstrations. Of course, that did not deter us. In fact, we had counted on the police prohibition to give more publicity to the demonstration and to instigate the masses to resistance.

To stop the people who were leaving a meeting-hall from going to the central square to demonstrate, the gendarmes fired on the unarmed crowd, killing three workers, and wounding twenty more. After this massacre, the gendarmes, frightened, rushed to the barracks for shelter, and the people were left masters of the town. Without anybody even mentioning the word, a General Strike was soon complete, and the workers collected at the Trades Council to hold a meeting.

The government tried to prevent the events of Ancona from being telegraphed to other parts of the country; but nevertheless by-and-by the news became known, and strikes broke out in all the towns of Italy. The two

Federal Labour organizations of Italy, the General Confederation of Labor, which is reformist, and the Labor Union, with revolutionary tendencies, proclaimed a General Strike, and the same was done by the Railwaymen's Union.

These strikes and demonstrations in several towns provoked new conflicts with the police, and new massacres. At once, without any common understanding, one place ignorant of what the other was doing, as communications were broken off, the movement assumed everywhere an insurrectional character, and in many places the Republic, which meant for the people the autonomous Commune, was proclaimed.

All was going splendidly ; the movement was developing, and the railway strike, spreading on all lines, paralyzed the government ; the workers were beginning to take measures of practical Communism in view of reorganizing social life on a new basis ; when suddenly the Confederation of Labor, by an act which has been qualified as treachery, ordered the strike off,

thereby throwing the workers into confusion and discouraging them.

The government was not slow to profit by this condition, and began to restore "order."

If it had not been for the betrayal of the Confederation, though we could not yet have made the revolution for lack of necessary preparation and understanding, the movement would certainly have assumed larger proportions and a much greater importance.

In every way these events have proved that the mass of the people hate the present order ; that the workers are disposed to make use of all opportunities to overthrow the government, and that when the fight is directed against the common enemy – that is to say, the government and the bourgeoisie—all are brothers, though the names of Socialist, Anarchist, Syndicalist, or Republican may seem to divide them.

Now it is up to revolutionaries to profit by these good dispositions.

## To the Anti-Militarists, Anarchists, and Free Thinkers

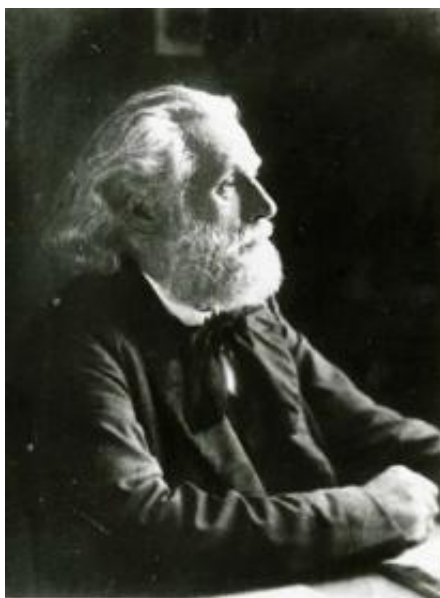
**F. Domela Nieuwenhuis**

*Mother Earth*, February 1915

At this most earnest time, when the whole of society seems to be disrupted, we also want to raise our-voice which has as much right to be heard as that of the other parties. For it was indeed we who have ever been the only ones who opposed militarism under the motto, "Not a single man and not a single penny for militarism." All the other parties, from the clerical to the Social Democrats, have always been in favour of militarism. They have proved it again and again by voting for the military budgets, thus enabling the governments to carry on war, because without money no soldiers are to be had.

For twenty-five years we have been propagating the only practical means to make war impossible: the proclamation of the *General Strike in case of war*, and the *International Boycott of the powers at war*.

The proletariat alone, or the producing workers, have it in their power to stop or to hinder war in a practical manner. Shortly before the threatened war, the



**Ferdinan Domela Nieuwenhuis  
(1846-1919)**

International Socialist Bureau gathered in session at Brussels. That was the appropriate moment for a practical resolution, namely, to answer the order for mobilisation with a general strike

Undoubtedly the leaders in the different countries would have been arrested, perhaps executed. That is possible ; but in such a case they would have died on the field of honour, and a grateful humanity would have remembered them as benefactors, rather than if they had fallen on the bloody field of war. There is no choice ; either one has a principle, or none. If we have a principle we must serve it with loyalty, and die for

it if necessary ; otherwise we have no principle. Many would have been sacrificed, but in any case not as many as will be demanded by the war. And those who would have been sacrificed would have died in a noble, beautiful cause, and not to further the power of the capitalist class. And if it is objected that the party was too weak, then we ask, "How do we know that ? Have

we ever tried it?" If not, then an attempt should have been made.

Every revolution in the history of the past was initiated, not by the majorities, but by the minorities ; but unfortunately it has been proven true what Schiller once said, "Our century gave birth to a great epoch, but the great moment found a petty generation."

In Brussels they delivered themselves of beautiful, brilliant speeches; but what was necessary were not samples of oratory but deeds. Lassalle very truly said that the princes are served better than the people: the servants of the princes are not orators like the servants of the people, but practical men who know how to act. Quite true ; and therefore in decisive moments the people talk and do not act. The Brussels Congress could have done something else if they lacked the courage for militant action. Instead of brilliant talks, they could have issued an explanation to be read in the different parliaments of the various countries when the demand for war appropriations was made. That explanation should have read as follows:

"We, the Social Democrats, declare that we have not the least responsibility for the misdeeds of the governments, and we hereby announce that we do not want to become participants in the manslaughter of war. They, the governments, have directed the ship of state into a swamp, and they will have to pull it out again without our assistance ; and we therefore declare ourselves against the war appropriations and resign our commission as representatives of the people to clear ourselves from all criminal responsibility."

I ask what effect would such an attitude have had upon the people ? One hundred and twelve vacant places in the German Parliament, 102 vacant places in the French Chambers, and similarly in Austria, Belgium, Holland, England — the effect would have been tremendous. They would have proved that they are men who could be relied upon.

The Italian Social Democratic Party acted much better. They informed the government that they would, in case of a war with Germany and Austria, proclaim a revolution. This argument has to a great extent helped to keep Italy neutral. Even the attitude of the Russian

In view of the declared European war – the result of capitalism, made possible by militarism, which sets the people of Europe against each other in armed camps – this gathering energetically protests against the horrible human slaughter that defies all culture and humanity, and also protests emphatically against international Christianity, as well as the international Social Democracy, both of which misuse their influence with the people to cultivate national prejudices and antagonisms.

In view of the circumstance that each day might see the invasion of Holland by a foreign army, and that the wage worker has no quarrel with the workers of other nations,

and that he has no interest in the defence of arbitrary boundary lines, nor in the preservation of ruling dynasties or of any existing regime,

and that he is doomed to a miserable existence and poverty under any and all flags and governments, and that under no government will he enjoy greater rights and well-being, than he has the power and courage to take;

Social Democracy was more courageous than that of the Germans: the representatives protested against the war, and left the assembly hall. They did not want to vote for the government war budget, as did the German Social Democracy, which made common cause with the Kaiser. A party so powerful as the German Social Democracy, with four and one-half million votes, knew nothing better to do than to offer voluntarily its services to the government, without having the least influence upon the situation.

The national idea has everywhere suppressed internationalism, and thus the latter has everywhere suffered de feat. Here, too, it holds good: Scratch internationalism, and you find nationalism underneath. Must we therefore remain passive, weep and helplessly wring our hands ? On the contrary, now is the best time for a fruitful propaganda, for the ears of the masses are open to listen to our ideas. Twelve million women have voiced their protest to the Ambassador and to the English Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey. That is a good beginning, and it should continue. If the twelve million women should throw themselves between the fighting armies, what would be the result ? Wouldn't the further continuation of the war become impossible? What would be the effect if the transport workers, the railroad and coal workers should combine to make the war impossible, as they combined in Great Britain to secure higher wages! These three industries could, if they would, make an end to the gigantic crime of human slaughter.

Indeed, there is much to be done. Our voices as anti militarists, as Anarchists and free thinkers must be raised much louder and more powerfully in all the countries where burns the torch of the war, and also where the torch is still to be lit.

Instead of "Not a man and not a penny for militarism" we see the last man and the last penny taken from us, and we meekly, submit. We lack the courage to fight for our own interest, but we have enough of it to protect the coffers of the capitalists. How long yet?

In Amsterdam we found it necessary, in these ambiguous days, to make clear our position, and to present to the world the following manifesto:

in further consideration that the defence of boundary lines involves greater misery and destruction than no defence, and that demonstrative refusal to defend would probably result in a more powerful inspiration toward peace;

that in any case the insignificant material possessions and the petty political liberties which the Holland worker enjoys are not worth the shedding of human blood,

and that under a different government the struggle of the proletariat, even if possibly made more difficult, must at the same time also be furthered, and in no case hindered,

and considering, finally, that to defend boundary lines, under whatever pretext, would henceforth preclude and make impossible agitation against any form of militarism,

and that the struggle against militarism is of the utmost importance, because militarism, as an organised power, is the strongest weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

This gathering declares itself ready to continue its struggle against every economic and political oppression, and energetically to further the cause of liberty and well-being with the old tried methods, but protests emphatically against the spilling of human blood in defence of nationality, by leaving each one free to act according to circumstance.

DOWN WITH NATIONAL HATRED!

AWAY WITH BOUNDARY LINES!

DOWN WITH WAR!

LONG LIVE THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF WORKERS!

## Reflections on the General Strike

Emma Goldman

*Freedom*, August-September 1926

Since the press has regained its freedom to speak authoritatively on subjects it knows least about, the papers have been filled with long dissertations on the merits and defects of the General Strike. Most writers have little to say in its favour, or have shown much misunderstanding of the nature and meaning of the subject. This is as it should be as regards the bourgeois press. It is either ignorant of the historic mission of the General Strike or it cannot afford to interpret correctly the signs of our times. Naturally, the bourgeois press is too deeply concerned to tell the truth. We need not, therefore, be surprised to read all sorts of rubbish about the great event which for nine days so disturbed the placidity of the middle class.

Much more surprising is the lack of understanding displayed on the subject by many writers on the Labour press, especially the writers who choose to pose as the Left Wing section in the Trade Union ranks. Thus, they lay the entire blame for the failure of the strike at the door of the Right Wing leaders, who they tell us were cowardly and at the same time childish callous.

Messrs. Thomas, Clynes, and the rest, we are assured, were simply carried off by their feet by the promises of Sir Herbert Samuel, the chairman of the Coal Commission, who, though posing as interested in the fate of the miners, is in reality a devoted servant of the ruling class.<sup>1</sup>

Far be it from me to hold a brief for or excuse the Trade Union leaders who went down so ignominiously at the very moment when the General Strike was gaining such momentum. Having watched for nearly two years the sayings and doings of Messrs. MacDonald, Thomas, and their colleagues, one could, without being a prophet, predict exactly their stand in such a vital event as a General Strike.<sup>2</sup> But to lay the entire blame for the collapse of the strike upon them may be an easy way out for those who are equally responsible, but it does not explain the share of the muddle of the ultra-red leaders, the Left Wing Trade Unionists.

If these good people would only look into themselves they would have to admit that they have aided and abetted the growing centralisation of Trade Unionism,

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<sup>1</sup> James Henry Thomas (1874-1949) was a British trade unionist, head of the National Union of Railwaymen, and Labour Party politician; John Robert Clynes (1869-1949) was a British trade unionist and Labour Party politician. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> James Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) was a British Labour Party politician who helped found the party. He was

opposed to syndicalism, writing the book *Syndicalism: a critical examination* in 1912. MacDonald was the first Labour Party politician to become Prime Minister, leading a minority Labour governments in 1924 and in 1929-31. After heading a National Government from 1931 to 1935, he was later vehemently denounced by and expelled from the party he had helped to create. (*Black Flag*)

which excludes initiative on the part of the workers in any great economic issue. And they would have to admit also that they have never taken the slightest pains to acquaint the workers with the historic significance of the General Strike, nor have they prepared the masses for the moment when the General Strike will be imposed upon Labour. Far from doing that, the so-called “Red” Trade Unionists have always joined in the cry of their conservative colleagues, pointing to the General Strike as “impracticable Syndicalist or Anarchist nonsense.”<sup>1</sup> They have, therefore, themselves to blame for what they now consider a betrayal on the part of the Right Wing elements.

While British Trade Unionism deserves credit for having been the pioneer in establishing the right of workers to organise, and in having built up a powerful institution in the economic struggle, it must at the same time be pointed out that it has remained stationary and is hopelessly out of date as a fighting organisation. Trade Unionists have laid much more stress on the need of rigid centralisation, of huge funds, of the antiquated idea of contracts between Labour and Capital, than on the fighting spirit of the workers, so that at the present time Trade Unionism has become ultra-respectable. It owes its position and the consideration accorded to it by the Tories to its inherent conservatism. At the same time the workers are nowhere so hampered in their movements, so hedged in by the Trade Union machinery, and so lacking in power of decision and initiative, as they are in England.

Naturally, out of such an old-fashioned institution no new vital fighting force could come. The question then is: How did the General Strike happen after all? The answer is that conditions are stronger than theories. The conditions of the miners had become so appalling, and the mine-owners so determined to increase the woe of the miner’s life, that a General Strike was inevitable – inevitable because Labour at large was made to realise that a reduction of wages and an increase of hours for

the miners must needs affect their own economic conditions.

I insist that a clear-cut understanding of the nature and scope of an issue is indispensable if the issue is to be met adequately and fought successfully, and it is precisely because Trade Union leaders have neglected to instruct the rank and file that they were not able to meet the issue. But for this neglect the General Strike would from its very inception have been truly general, which it most assuredly was not. Neither would the General Council have failed so completely in utilising the splendid spirit demonstrated by the workers during the strike.

The General Council, however, showed both ignorance and lack of vision. That was best demonstrated by the way the men were called out after the General Strike was decided upon. Instead of bringing about a complete stoppage of production, the strike was inaugurated on the instalment plan, the workers being called out bit by bit. Thus, while the printers, not nearly so important to the success of the General Strike, were called out, the men employed in the power, light, and food services were

allowed to go on – a ridiculous situation, which many of the workers realised: but, bereft of voice or decision in the matter, they had to submit.

Of course, knowing that the rank and file had never been taught to face an issue to its last consequences, the General Council no doubt felt that a complete General Strike, if not settled within twenty-four hours, may lead to serious results. Most of them had been trained in terms of the House of Commons, in closed-door negotiations and wire-pulling. Besides, they were much more concerned in safeguarding the Trade Union funds, which the Government threatened to confiscate. On the other hand, the Left Wing members, who are such devotees of the Moscow Dictatorship for Russia, were not very eager to see the General Strike lead to a Dictatorship in Great Britain. Neither the one nor the other realised that there is a third way out. A General Strike can be truly effective only if a new spirit will penetrate Trade Unionism, the spirit of Syndicalism,

the party which was embracing direct action tactics (as expressed by Rosa Luxemburg’s 1906 work *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*). The leadership could invoke the authority of Engels, who had dismissed it in his inaccurate 1873 diatribe *The Bakuninists at Work*. (*Black Flag*)

**A General Strike can be truly effective only if a new spirit will penetrate Trade Unionism, the spirit of Syndicalism, which is after all the only basis for economic organisation to meet the needs of the modern economic struggle**

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the pre-war comment by German trade unionist and moderate Social Democratic politician Carl Legien that a “general strike was general nonsense” (ironically, during he successfully countered the right-wing Kapp Putsch of March 1920 by calling for a general strike across Germany). This slogan summarised the position of leadership of German Social-Democracy against the left of

which is after all the only basis for economic organisation to meet the needs of the modern economic struggle. Besides that, Syndicalism prepares the masses for fundamental social changes on a federative libertarian basis, away from the State and its crushing dictatorship.

A General Strike which has its roots in Syndicalism and free initiative for activity as a vision for the workers is the only strike which is likely to compel the enemy's attention. The General Strike was not of that nature, hence it could not achieve what it set out to do, namely, to force the mine-owners to meet the demands of the miners, and to pave the way for greater economic improvements for all the workers. As it is, the miners were betrayed, and the Labour leaders are now engaged in recriminations, a sorrowful spectacle after such a great beginning.

And yet, the General Strike was not in vain. That it should have happened at all in Great Britain is among the wonders of our day. Still greater is the spirit of solidarity so admirably demonstrated by the workers. One had to be in London during the nine historic days

to see their fine fortitude and the joyous abandon to the situation, their utter disregard of the hardships the strike entailed for them, to realise that the General Strike was not in vain. No amount of political wire-pulling, of constant talk in the House of Commons, nor yet endless discussions on Socialism in the Labour press, has struck so deeply into the minds and hearts of the masses, nor have they aroused such profound interest in the social question. On the other hand, the General Strike has demonstrated to the ruling class how very close to the abyss it stands, how great the menace it has escaped – this time.

We Anarchists, who have always stood the brunt of ridicule and condemnation because of our stand on the General Strike, are now vindicated. We have proved that we stand much closer to the realities of life and the social struggle than our political opponents. All the more reason why we should increase our efforts to bring to the workers a better understanding of the meaning, purpose, and efficacy of Syndicalism and its most effective weapon in the economic struggle – the General Strike.

## Seizure of the Factories in Italy, 1920

### Armando Borghi

*Vanguard: A Libertarian Communist Journal, July-August 1935*

*(Editor's Note: The question raised by comrade Borghi, former secretary of the Italian Syndicalist Union, is of interest now only to the students of the Italian revolutionary movement of 1920. It goes to the very heart of revolutionary tactics and helps us understand why that movement was an abortive one. Every revolution – and Italy was on the eve of such a revolution in 1920 – has such crucial moments as described by comrade Borghi. The lack of resolute action at such a juncture leads to failure and the triumph of the counter-revolution. The seizure of the factories in 1920 was one of such critical moments when the destinies of the Italian revolution – and of the world revolution too for that matter – became suspended in the balance. Whose fault was it that the balance tipped in the direction of the Fascist counter-revolution – that is what comrade Borghi answers in this article.)*

The first of August will be the fifteenth anniversary of the seizure of the factories in Italy. This is a long time for those who prefer to forget, but it is not long enough for those who wish to disguise the historical truth. However, it is no time at all for us who may have neither forgotten anything nor disavowed any of these events. The communists are not among those who like to make the truth known. I have just read a choice morsel of Spanish prose levelled at the anarchists by a specialist in parrotry. His name is Ferragut. In the March, 1932 issue of *Mundo Obrero* his name appears under the title “The Anarchists, The Russian Revolution, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.” This may seem a little late, but it is always timely, for the same absurdities are continually propagated by the communists by orders from Moscow. The piece is as follows:

“The example of Italy in 1920, where the anarchists limited themselves to the seizing the factories with the hope that the capitalists and the bourgeoisie would abdicate, proves how

empty and chimerical the conception of the anarchists is concerning force of resistance and attack.”

The above proves one thing perfectly: How great, how vast and deeply rooted is the ignorance (or the dishonesty) of these reporters of cock and bull stories of which Moscow has become the nursery ground for years.

Just the opposite of the quotation is the truth.

First: The seizure of the factories in Italy was not the work of the anarchists. This movement was undertaken under the responsibility of the labour unions.

Second: The anarchist workers were just *one* element, though a considerable factor, in only one workers organisation, the Italian Syndicalist Unions. This organisation was a minority. Opposed to it (especially in times of revolutionary action) there was the General

Confederation of Labour.<sup>1</sup> The latter was powerful for the following reasons: a) It was looked upon favourably by the government because it had *from the time of its formation* (1906) to the Red Week (1914) always betrayed, repudiated, suppressed and set up barriers in the way of any direct action movement. b) Since its formation it was protected by the Socialist Party with which it was linked officially for the purpose of achieving electoral gains. c) It had made use of its collaboration with the government during the war (though it pretended to be against war under guidance of the Socialist Party) to become numerically powerful. d) During the post war events it was protected by the left wing of the Socialist Party (the wing that was actually leading the Socialist Party in 1920). Now this left wing was formed in 1920 by the Bombacci, the Serrati, the Gennari, etc.: that is, the very people who were then the proteges of Lenin and the “communists” of the Socialist Party. (The Communist Party of Italy was organised a year later by the same Bombacci, Serrati, etc.)

*During the occupation of the factories, the trustworthy friends of Moscow, Bombacci, Serrati, etc., were in cordial and official relationship with the reformist leaders of the Confederation of Labour and were working together against the anarchists, against their newspaper Umanita Nova, edited by Malatesta, and against the Italian Syndicalist Union, which was not anarchist but which was for direct action and very much influenced by the anarchists.*

But what were the reproaches of the Confederation of Labour and the communist extremists who were at the head of the Socialist Party? What were their common reproaches *against the anarchists*? They are as follows: The anarchists wished to proceed too quickly with force; their actions were precipitant; they were demoralising the well-disciplined forces of the Confederation of Labour; they did not care to understand that a revolution comes *by itself*, by a strange *fatality*.

What was the anarchist reply to this point of view?

They replied that they had done well to seize the factories:<sup>2</sup> that this movement would have been sterile if not carried out to its logical end at that moment of revolutionary upsurge following the war; that one could not retreat and that at that time one could not stop on the

slope without causing a violent reaction; that it was a good tactic to *arm* oneself; that direct appropriation had to be extended to strengthen and support the movement; that without killing the watchdog of property, that is, the state, nothing could be taken at all.

But just think: It was the anarchists who believed they could get rid of the bourgeoisie at once! Not only must one be entirely ignorant of Italian affairs, but also an imbecile to think that everyone would foolishly believe this idea of the *renunciation* of power by the bourgeoisie, which has been a part of Marxist fatalism against which the anarchists have fought for forty years. It is just this “mechanical” conception of historical materialism which makes the whole social structure depend on the economic factors. It is in opposition to this that the anarchists have fought most with the Marxists: be they the opportunistic Marxists, or the partisans of a “temporary” dictatorship.

And it is precisely against the same conception of historical materialism that the latter communists had been led to believe that it is sufficient to deny the bourgeoisie the right to vote, to give it exclusively to the proletariat; gradually to crush capitalism by means of the dictatorial state! The vote, always the vote, is the lever of the socialists as well as for the communists to destroy the bourgeoisie.<sup>3</sup> It is always this same fatalism which makes the communists believe (if they still do believe it) in the certain disappearance of the classes after the temporary period of dictatorship. The anarchists still believe that the capitalists must be driven away by force. So you see they are not so naive when it comes to the idea of *resistance and attack*.

Fifteen years after these Red Days, we can still prove with many documents that with or without previously seizing the factories, it was the historical moment for the Italian revolution. The government could not stop it; the bourgeoisie believed it inevitable; the working class was ready for the fight. Only the tactics of delay, of obstructionism, treachery, electoral illusions (referring to the last electoral attempts), of well-prepared sabotage by the communists of the Socialist Party together with the leaders of the Confederation of Labour, only these could succeed in rendering worthless the efforts of the anarchists, the Syndicalist Union and of a few sincere socialists who were soon expelled from the party for being tainted by... anarchism.

**...direct appropriation had to be extended to strengthen and support the movement; that without killing the watchdog of property, that is, the state, nothing could be taken at all.**

<sup>1</sup> There were anarchists in the Confederation of Labour, but they were scattered and without directing influence.

<sup>2</sup> The seizure of the factories was not originally the realisation of a revolutionary conspiracy. It began as a union drive of the metal workers to restore the wage level. It was only after the

industry attempted to *lock them out*, that the workers replied by *locking themselves in*.

<sup>3</sup> The Socialists believe in the unlimited power of the vote in the hands of the proletariat. The communists in its power to crush the bourgeoisie when the vote is denied to them.



# The London Congress of 1881

Iain McKay

Kropotkin's speech on the nature of the coming social revolution amounted to an articulated programmatic statement... He emphasized the need for workers themselves to make the revolution and the important role of workers' organizations, in which anarchists were to be involved, prior to the revolution... true revolutionary organizations can only be composed of workers...<sup>1</sup>

The 1881 London Congress is considered by some – usually non-anarchists – as a defining moment in anarchist history. James Joll, for example, suggests in his history of anarchism that “a number of leading revolutionaries, including [Peter] Kropotkin and [Errico] Malatesta, met in London and asserted their faith in the policy that illegality alone would lead to revolution, while many of them... called for the study of the technical sciences such as chemistry, to make bombs.” Indeed, those anarchists “who had not... gone over to the idea of legal political action were now committed to the tactics of ‘propaganda by the deed’ in its most extreme form. It is from anarchist actions over the next twenty years that the traditional picture of the anarchist is derived – a slinking figure with his hat pulled over his eyes and a smoking bomb in his pocket.”<sup>2</sup> This is considered so well established that no references to support the claims were provided.

A similar picture is provided more recently by historian James Green who proclaimed that this “new ‘Black International’ formed in London” was the product of the following ideological milieu:

The anarchists who formed the new International Working People's Association in London acted on their belief that socialist propaganda could not effectively reach workers through trade unions and political parties; nor would revolutionary change result from strikes, mass demonstrations and election campaigns... revolutionaries

must resort to a new method – “propaganda by deed”. These revolutionaries believed an *attentat*, a violent act planned by a secret conspiracy and committed by a dedicated militant, could impress the world with the evil of the despotic state and with the fearless determination of those who intended to destroy it. Many European anarchists believed such deeds would terrorize the authorities who were targeted, arouse the masses and trigger a popular insurrection.<sup>3</sup>

This leads Green to suggest that the Chicago Anarchists “faithfully adhered to the lesson they had learned from Karl Marx: that socialism could be achieved only through the collective power of workers organised into aggressive trade unions”.<sup>4</sup> Phil H. Goodstein likewise states that Kropotkin “rejected union organisation as being but another form of hierarchy and authority inimical to the anarchist ideal. Rather, he insisted, anarchist militants should organise themselves into small circles from which they would seek to educate the masses about the nature and goodness of anarchy.” This lead, eventually, to a reevaluation and “[by] 1892, the leaders of international anarchism, including Malatesta and Kropotkin... recognized the lamentable state of the anarchist movement. They sent out a circular at this time suggesting that anarchists involve themselves in the new

<sup>1</sup> Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 146.

<sup>2</sup> James Joll, *The Anarchists* (Cambridge: Methuen, 1979), 109-110.

<sup>3</sup> James Green, *Death in the Haymarket* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 93.

<sup>4</sup> Green, 130. It is churlish, but essential, to note that this was Bakunin's position within the International and *not* Marx's who sought to turn it into an organisation of political parties and mocked Bakunin for holding the position Green attributes to him! See my “Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism,” *Anarchist Studies* 20: 1 (Spring 2012).

syndicalist movement which was beginning to grow in Latin Europe.”<sup>1</sup>

What is significant about summaries like these is the lack of supporting evidence. Green, for example, does not refer to Caroline Cahm’s essential account of Kropotkin’s activities and ideas in his book despite it having the most detailed account of the 1881 London Congress available in English and being available since 1989.<sup>2</sup> This reflects a general disinterest in understanding anarchist ideas by Green in favour of uninformed comments suggesting that the Chicago Anarchists remained Marxists due to their support for union struggle as if that were not Bakunin’s position rather than Marx’s (who sought to turn the International into an organisation which contested elections).

Neither Joll, Green nor Goodstein consulted the reports of the Congress nor discuss the wide range of views expressed. Yes, there were those attending who were infatuated by dynamite and extreme language – encouraged by the agents provocateurs who also attended – but that was not the position of all who organised or attended the event, quite the reverse.

Given this, it makes sense to consult the report of the 1881 Congress to get a better idea of what had been discussed at it and which was not reflected in the final motions. Once that is done, a far more informed awareness of differing anarchist perspectives will be gained and a better understanding of the dynamics of social movements, not least the relationship between those considered as “leaders” or theoreticians and those who share the same label.

### Revisiting the Congress

The 1881 Congress is used for numerous purposes. The whole division of the American International Working People’s Association into a proto-

syndicalist “Chicago” section and a “pure” anarchist section in New York is premised with the assumption that individual terrorism is *the* definitive “anarchist” tactic while collective class struggle is not anarchist at all. The fallacy of this assertion can be seen from two awkward facts.

First, that Bakunin never suggested the former and wholeheartedly supported the latter. Even the condescending Bolshevik historian of the First

International, G.M. Stekloff, had to admit “[h]ow far, in this respect, [the attendees of the 1881 Congress] had departed from the teachings of their master, Bakunin! With all his faults, he had to the last continued to put his main trust in the mass movement of the workers; and we can hardly suppose that he would have voted for the resolution of the London Congress.”<sup>3</sup>

Second, that in 1881 many of the attendee’s contributions, not least Kropotkin’s, echoed Bakunin’s ideas and urged

anarchist involvement in the workers’ movement as the means of creating and securing a social revolution. This can be seen from consulting the report of the Congress in *Le Révolté* rather than relying, as Green does, on summaries provided by others (James Joll, in this case). Perhaps needless to say, Stekloff likewise carefully avoids quoting any of the delegates who *did* advocate participation in the workers’ movement and instead concentrated on the worse excesses, for obvious reasons.

Before presenting an aspect of the 1881 Congress which seems to have been forgotten, there is a need to debunk a few common mistakes made by Green and others. The 1881 Congress was not seeking to create a “new” International, least of all a “Black” or Anarchist International. As *Le Révolté* noted before the event, the Congress was to relaunch the International Workers’ Association:

The International Workers’ Association is the common ground on which this agreement [between “the Socialist-

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<sup>1</sup> Phil H. Goodstein, *The theory of the general strike from the French Revolution to Poland* (Boulder/New York: East European Monographs, 1984), 46, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> G.M. Stekloff, *History of the First International* (Martin Lawrence: London, 1928), 360.

Revolutionaries of the two worlds”] was established, and henceforth the great Association which, ten years ago, made the bourgeoisie tremble, will take on a new life.<sup>1</sup>

Neither was it just anarchists who gathered in London for the aim was for “to see revolutionary-socialists of all shades enter in bulk into the ranks of the great INTERNATIONAL WORKERS’ ASSOCIATION.”<sup>2</sup> While definitely anti-parliamentary, the call was for “all those who... want the next revolution to be the SOCIAL REVOLUTION, [to] come and combine their efforts by grouping around the same flag, the red flag of the INTERNATIONAL WORKERS’ ASSOCIATION.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, at one stage it was suggested that the organisation be called “International Socialist Revolutionary Association.” As such, its intended audience was wider than anarchists:

the community of radicals (excluding the orthodox socialists) in London and New York during the first years of the 1880s was an amalgam of discontented, displaced, and largely antistate socialists. They included antiparliamentarians, nihilists, social revolutionaries, Blanquists, and anarchists.<sup>4</sup>

The same can be said of other countries and so the delegates who attended included not only anarchists but also dissident Social-Democrats, Blanquists and others who shared little other than an opposition to parliamentary tactics.

As well as grouping many shades of anti-parliamentarian socialist, it should also be recalled that the Black Flag did not become associated with anarchism until 1883 with Louise Michel raising it in Paris during an unemployed workers demonstration in March, “the Black Flag came to

play a crucial role” in anarchist protests around official Bastille day celebrations” in July<sup>5</sup> and the launching in Lyons of the journal *Le Drapeau noir* in August. Even then it took decades before the Social-Democrats and Leninists had made the red flag a travesty of what it used to mean for it to become the definitive anarchist symbol. As such, the notion that the 1881 Congress sought to form a “Black International” is unlikely.<sup>6</sup>

In short, the 1881 Congress was neither new, “Black” nor exclusively anarchist: it was viewed by its organisers and attendees as old, Red and embracing all Revolutionary-Socialists.

While the contributions made at the Congress expressed a range of views, it is fair to say that it is those most infatuated with dynamite and “propaganda by the deed” have been stressed in accounts of it. In terms of the latter, such fixation projects backwards subsequent assassinations onto the term which, at the time, did not have such a strict meaning: it referred to a range of activities – from popular revolutions like Paris Commune to demonstrations organised in the face of official opposition.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, most of the acts subsequent labelled “propaganda by the deed” were in fact acts of revenge against officials associated with repression of anarchists or workers – in short, they were not considered as acts of propaganda nor viewed as provoking out of nowhere some mass revolt.<sup>8</sup>

### **Syndicalism *avant la lettre***

That the delegates had a range of views can be seen from the many who favoured what would become termed “syndicalism” but which had earlier been championed by Bakunin and other militants within the First International including the Spanish and Jura Federations which sent delegates to the 1881

has since been called the Black International” in a lengthy document written for the Pittsburgh Congress of October 1883. Sadly, he did not indicate who called it that other than himself. This document also appears to be the source of the much quoted but apparently apocryphal 1872 quote by Bismarck: “Crowned heads, wealth and privilege well may tremble should ever again the Black and the Red unite!” (Chester McA. Destler, “Shall Red and Black Unite? An American Revolutionary Document of 1883”, *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4 [December, 1945], 447).

<sup>7</sup> Caroline Cahm summarises well the evolution of the term – and indicates Kropotkin’s opposition to it.

<sup>8</sup> Nunzio Pernicone and Fraser Ottanelli, *Assassins against the Old Order: Italian Anarchist Violence in Fin de Siecle* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

<sup>1</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 23 July 1881.

<sup>2</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 9 July 1881.

<sup>3</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 23 July 1881.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German anarchist movement in New York City, 1880-1914* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 111.

<sup>5</sup> C. Alexander McKinley, *Illegitimate children of the Enlightenment: anarchists and the French Revolution, 1880-1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 194.

<sup>6</sup> The source of this name appears to be the American socialist Burnette G. Haskell, who wrote of Bakunin being expelled by Marx in 1872 from the First International with “30 of the delegates with the aid of whom he established what

Congress. Thus the summaries provided by Green and others would undoubtedly have come as a surprise to the delegates sent by Spanish unions or those, like Kropotkin, who viewed the Spanish movement as a model for others to follow. To quote the delegate from the Spanish Regional Federation:

Despite the persecution of the International in Spain, the organisation has remained intact since 1873. It is purely economic, consisting of organised trades and mixed sections. The strike by organised trades is not the goal, it is a means; and it is used for different purposes, either to organise workers or as a means of attack... We do not think that the revolution can be made by a *coup de main*, but we are sure that if there is no powerful workers' organisation and men of action amongst the mass of workers, the revolution could easily be conjured away by the bourgeoisie...

It is only in the workers' organisation that we can find the necessary revolutionary force. If, instead of entertaining theoretical discussions, we had begun to work in the workers' organisation, we would already have had a force which, at this moment, would have only had to be brought together internationally.<sup>1</sup>

The Jura Federation delegate likewise noted that "despite the so-called sovereignty of the people, poverty has also shown that political struggles must disappear in order to make way for the economic struggle, the only one that can serve and benefit the

proletariat." "All expressions of working-class life," he continued, "strikes, demonstrations caused by unemployment and lack of work were followed and supported by the groups. Ongoing relations with workers not yet organised have been found absolutely necessary and will continue." The delegate of the Socialist-Revolutionary Groups of Bern and Basle likewise wanted "the Congress to result in a strong organisation of the proletariat of all countries". A delegate from circles in Brussels and Verviers was "also in favour of organisation by

**"All expressions of working-class life, strikes, demonstrations caused by unemployment and lack of work were followed and supported by the groups. Ongoing relations with workers not yet organised have been found absolutely necessary and will continue"**

trades, but outside of any political concerns." This would "achieve the Revolution" and "forces the workers to take of their interests." They were "supporters of strikes" and argued that defeats were "mainly due to the lack of agreement, the lack of revolutionary organisation."<sup>2</sup> Such views were again advocated by the Spanish Federation's delegate:

The bases of the organisation [in Spain] are the trades; besides these, in each locality there are mixed sections, composed of people belonging to various trades. The Spanish Federation... attaches great

importance to this organisation of trades. It is convinced that this kind of organisation is the only one which enables it to unite the great mass of workers, to sow the ideas of social revolution with full force and to prepare the forces which, on the day of the revolution, without waiting for orders from anywhere, will seize the instruments of labour and social capital... on the day of the revolution... where it is well organised, it will show real strength.<sup>3</sup>

This was echoed by the delegate from the Union of Building Workers of Catalonia who explained "the need to organise trades" for they were of "the opinion that during the next revolution, it is the

<sup>1</sup> "Le Congrès International de Londres", *Le Révolté*, 23 July 1881.

<sup>2</sup> "Le Congrès International de Londres", *Le Révolté*, 23 July 1881.

<sup>3</sup> "Le Congrès International de Londres", *Le Révolté*, 23 July 1881.

workers themselves who must seize the instruments of labour, we must, wherever we can, organise this force which alone will be able to accomplish the revolution.” The delegate of the German Socialist-Revolutionary groups in Switzerland agreed that “the organisation of trades, as it exists in Spain, is excellent. The trades must be organised, and men of action must enter into these organisations” and so we “must therefore declare loudly that the emancipation of the workers is our goal and the organisation of workers – our means.” The Jura Federation delegate stressed it was “in favour of organisation by trades, in order to oblige workers to take care of their interests” and it “declare[d] itself against any participation in politics.” Strikes were “a powerful means of action, especially if they assume a revolutionary character.”<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, given claims of a divide between New York and Chicago groups in the IWPA, the delegate from the German Revolutionary Socialists of New York lamented that “revolutionary workers” had not been able to “penetrate” a recent brewers strike “since the opportunity for making revolutionary propaganda was very good.” While “not forgetting” the “necessity of secret organisation,” they were “of the opinion that we must penetrate into all workers’ organisations. We do not deny the necessity of open propaganda, since this must attract to us the mass which still remains outside the movement”.<sup>2</sup>

Another perspective was raised by the Italian delegates – Malatesta and Merlino – who seemed to want to turn the International into an anarchist federation which would stress the political aspects of the revolution although they also wanted an “organisation which puts us in constant contact with the masses and gives us a means of propagating our ideas amongst them, of pushing them to revolt.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Kropotkin and the Labour Movement in 1881**

It was Peter Kropotkin who was the most vocal advocate of anarchists working within the labour movement at the Congress. The delegate of both *Le Révolté* and a Lyons Revolutionary-Socialist group, he defended “anarchist-communism as the goal and, as a means, *popular* revolution, prepared by

the revolutionary action of the worker himself against his enemies.” Through its newspaper and pamphlets, the former “seeks to speak to the great mass. It does not speak to the converted, but above all to those who are not yet completely converted.”<sup>4</sup> This perspective permeated his longest contribution at the Congress:

The delegate of *Le Révolté* does not believe that the question of a programme can be neglected. To know what kind of organisation we want to establish, we must determine the goal we are aiming for. If we thought, for example, that it was enough to overthrow the government, to put ourselves in its place and decree the revolution, we could form ourselves into an army of conspirators, having all the characteristics of the old secret societies with their leaders and deputy leaders. But that is not how we conceive of the revolution, at least in the Jura Federation and in Lyon. We believe that, in order for the next revolution not to be conjured away by the bourgeoisie, it must deal a decisive blow to individual property: it must proceed, from the very beginning, with taking possession, by the workers, of all social wealth, to put it in common. This revolution can only be made *by the workers themselves*: it can only be made when the workers of the towns and the peasants, rebelling against all power, in each locality, in each town, in each village, *themselves* seize the wealth now belonging to the exploiters, without waiting for this benefit to come from any government.

For this it is necessary that the great mass of workers not only constitute itself outside the bourgeoisie, but that, during the period which will precede the revolution, it must have its own action. Until now, the socialist party has been rather theoretical: it left *action* to bourgeois revolutionaries. Now it must become a party of action, but a party of *action which* is its own, and this kind of action can only be conducted when there exists a strong *workers' organisation*.

We were told about the role of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. The

<sup>1</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 23 July 1881.

<sup>2</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 23 July 1881.

<sup>3</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 6 August 1881.

<sup>4</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 6 August 1881.

revolutionary bourgeoisie can conspire, it can overthrow a government – it cannot make a revolution. It is the people, only the people, who can overthrow the regime of individual property.

As soon as this is admitted, the character of the organisation which we have to form follows immediately. It is the mass of workers we must seek to organise. We, the small revolutionary groups, must submerge ourselves in the organisation of the people, draw inspiration from their hatreds, from their aspirations, and help them to translate those aspirations and these hatreds into actions. When the mass of workers is organised and we are with them, to strengthen their revolutionary idea, to germinate within them the spirit of revolt

against capital – and the opportunities for that will not be lacking – then we shall have the right to hope that the next revolution will not be conjured away, as previous revolutions have been: that it will be the social revolution.<sup>1</sup>

This reflected his perspective that “the International Workers’ Association... represents an idea, a principle: it is the emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves, and this other: the economic revolution above all, any political movement must be subordinated to the goal of economic revolution”.<sup>2</sup> Arguing against the fixation of some attendees on “chemistry”, Kropotkin stressed the importance of written and oral propaganda – rather than just vaguely defined “deeds” – in building a mass movement in both towns and villages:

**“This revolution can only be made *by the workers themselves...* when there exists a strong *workers’ organisation.... It is the people, only the people, who can overthrow the regime of individual property.... It is the mass of workers we must seek to organise. We, the small revolutionary groups, must submerge ourselves in the organisation of the people*”**

For propaganda in the countryside, he recommends the dissemination of tens and hundreds of thousands, if possible, of little leaflets, which explain in a few words the aim of the International and its ideas about

the organisation of society which should, in our opinion, arise from the next revolution. Let it be said frankly that we want the expropriation of the land of all those who do not cultivate the land themselves and the placing of these lands into common ownership, at the disposal of the communes. Let us say it at the same time, openly and without reticence and without rhetoric, to the peasants, a few words, on a leaflet, and let these leaflets be disseminated to the masses... And what is needed for the Revolution is to be able to rouse, lead, the great mass of the people. Without this uprising of the masses, no revolution can be victorious...<sup>3</sup>

Kropotkin also recognised the need for a more formal approach to organisation, arguing “that it is necessary to institute regular Congresses, and that this be stated in the federal pact. Regular Congresses give a certain vitality to the party, and serve to fortify the organisation... Groups prepare better for the Congress when we know in advance that it will take place and when.”<sup>4</sup>

This perspective was not reflected in the Congress resolutions and while the need for propaganda in the countryside was recognised, the need for propaganda by deeds and the study of chemistry were included. “Again,” Kropotkin argued, “this is only one means of struggle, while there are so many others which, unfortunately, are completely

<sup>1</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 6 August 1881.

<sup>2</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 6 August 1881.

<sup>3</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 20 August 1881.

<sup>4</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 20 August 1881.

neglected at the moment.”<sup>1</sup> He returned to these arguments in articles written in the months following the congress which amount to a critique of its resolutions and a defence of the position he had championed at it.

First to appear was an account of the Spanish labour movement, contrasting it positively with France for the former had remained “[f]aithful to the anarchist traditions of the International” with anarchists bringing “the assistance of their energy to the workers’ organisation and work to build this force that will crush capital on the day of revolution: the revolutionary trades union”<sup>2</sup> This was followed by a two-part article on workers organisations which expanded upon his arguments made at the London Congress as regards the necessity of a programme.<sup>3</sup> It is worth quoting at length:

To be able to make the revolution, the mass of workers must be organised, and resistance and the strike are excellent means for organising workers. They have an immense advantage over those advocated at present (worker candidates, forming a workers’ political party, etc.), namely not diverting the movement, but keeping it in constant struggle with the principal enemy, the capitalist. The strike and the resistance fund provide the means to organise... It is a question of organising in every town resistance societies for all trades, to create resistance funds and to fight against the exploiters, to unify the workers’ organisations of each town and trade and to put them in contact with those of other towns, to federate them across France, to federate them across borders, internationally. Workers’ solidarity must no longer be an empty word but must be practiced every day, between all trades, between all nations.... It was by organising resistance against the boss that the International managed to group more than two million workers and to build up that force before which the bourgeoisie and governments trembled... The use of the

strike did not prevent the Sections of the International from grasping the social question in all its complexity. On the contrary, it helped them as it was used to spread the idea amongst the masses at the same time....

The goal of the revolution being the expropriation of the holders of society’s wealth, it is against these holders that we must organise. We must make every effort to create a vast workers’ organisation that pursues this goal....<sup>4</sup>

It also should be noted that this perspective had been raised a few months before the Congress, in an article written in February 1881 which concluded that anarchists had “to organise the workers’ forces – not to make them a fourth party in Parliament but to make them a formidable ENGINE OF STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITAL. We have to group workers of all trades with this single purpose: “war on capitalist exploitation!” And we must prosecute this war relentlessly, every day, by the strike, by agitation, *by every revolutionary means.*”<sup>5</sup>

In short, Kropotkin at the London Congress was seeking to resurrect the International as an “Internationale grévistes” – a strikers International – with anarchist groups at its head. This anarchist participation within the labour movement built upon the work of Bakunin and his associates, best expressed by the example of the Spanish anarchist and labour movements. Like Bakunin, he stressed the necessity of anarchists to build a revolutionary labour movement which rejected political action in favour of strikes and other forms of what was later to be termed “direct action” but which Kropotkin called “the direct struggle against capital.” Like Bakunin, he also saw the necessity of anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence this mass movement. As he put it in 1914:

My opinion is absolutely that which was expressed by Malatesta... The syndicate is absolutely necessary. It is the only form of worker’s association which allows the direct struggle against capital to be carried

<sup>1</sup> “Le Congrès International de Londres”, *Le Révolté*, 20 August 1881.

<sup>2</sup> “Le Mouvement Ouvrier en Espagne”, *Le Révolté*, 12 November 1881; Peter Kropotkin “The Workers’ Movement in Spain”, *Words of a Rebel* (Oakland: PM Press, 2022), 239.

<sup>3</sup> “L’organisation Ouvrière”, *Le Révolté*, 10 and 24 December 1881.

<sup>4</sup> “L’organisation Ouvrière”, *Le Révolté*, 24 December 1881; Kropotkin “Workers’ Organisation”, *Words of a Rebel*, 247-250.

<sup>5</sup> “Les Ennemis du Peuple”, *Le Révolté*, 5 February 1881. Kropotkin “Enemies of the People”, *Words of a Rebel*, 234.

on without a plunge into parliamentarianism. But, evidently, it does not achieve this goal automatically... There is need of the other element which Malatesta speaks of *and which Bakunin always professed*.<sup>1</sup>

It is this recognition of the necessity for anarchist groups – in other words, the equivalent of Bakunin’s Alliance – which differentiates Kropotkin’s anarchist-communism from revolutionary syndicalism as well as seeing the need for federations of community and interest groupings to complement federations of workers’ associations in the economic sphere.

### **Kropotkin, an unheeded leader?**

This is not to suggest that Kropotkin’s position was then reflective of anarchist opinion everywhere, far from it. As he recounted from the Lyons trial in 1883:

“Did you ever hear the International Workingmen’s Association spoken of at Lyons?”

“Never,” he replied sulkily.

When I returned from the London congress of 1881, and did all I could to have the International reconstituted in France, did I succeed?

“No. They did not find it revolutionary enough.”<sup>2</sup>

It took under the 1890s before French anarchists recognised the importance of working within the labour movement, a position championed again by Kropotkin in the years following the 1889 London Dock Strike. Thus some of the conventional wisdom on the development of anarchism is at best incomplete, at worse wrong. Thus we discover that Kropotkin rather than Emile Pouget first raised sabotage (*ca’canny*) within the anarchist press (in 1891).<sup>3</sup> Likewise it was Kropotkin rather than Fernand Pelloutier who initially championed

anarchist involvement in the labour movement in 1890.<sup>4</sup> This follows consistently from his arguments made at the London Congress of 1881 and in articles written before and after it.

Accounts of the Congress also reflect the standard account of the differences between collectivist and communist anarchism, especially in Spain. “Between 1878 and 1880,” states George R. Esenwein, “the ideological drift towards communism was given impetus by two distinguished theoreticians, Peter Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus... By 1880, Kropotkin, along with most of the anarchists outside of Spain, had come round to accepting the doctrine.”<sup>5</sup> This was reflected in changing tactics:

With regard to the day-to-day practice of anarchism, the communists were at odds with the collectivists... The communists were intractably opposed to trade unions, which were viewed as essentially reformist bodies... invariably accompanied by the three most iniquitous features of capitalism: bureaucracy, hierarchy, and corruption... they preferred to set up small, loosely federated groups composed of dedicated militants... The communists’ deep hostility towards trade unions was matched by their equally profound faith in the power of spontaneous revolutionary acts. Quite understandably, they tended to shun strikes and other forms of economic warfare in favour of violent methods, extolling above all the virtues of propaganda by the deed.<sup>6</sup>

Spanish communist-anarchists “knowledge of the theory was derived largely from foreign anarchist sources, especially in the pages of *Le Révolté* (Geneva), where articles by Malatesta, Kropotkin, and other leading proponents of communism frequently appeared.”<sup>7</sup> Yet, as can be seen from the London Congress of 1881 and his writings for that journal, Kropotkin’s anarchist-communism was *not* the same as that of the Spanish militants.<sup>8</sup> Instead,

<sup>1</sup> quoted in Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), 280-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 420.

<sup>3</sup> “Les Grèves Anglaises”, *La Révolte*, 21 February 1891; “The English Strikes”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Winter 2022), 64-5.

<sup>4</sup> For example, “Le Mouvement Ouvrier En Angleterre”, *La Révolte*, 13 September 1890; “The Labour Movement in England”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Winter 2022), 62-3.

<sup>5</sup> George R. Esenwein, *Anarchist ideology and the working-class movement in Spain, 1868-1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 109.

<sup>6</sup> Esenwein, 108-9.

<sup>7</sup> Esenwein, 111.

<sup>8</sup> It may be suggested that as these articles were published anonymously and only identified as Kropotkin’s relatively recently (namely by Caroline Cahm), the readership would have no way of knowing these were reflective of his ideas. However, articles in *Le Révolté* were usually published



it was the strategy of the collectivists which Kropotkin pointed to as being correct and to be emulated by anarchist-communists in France and elsewhere. This, it must be stressed, is a recurring theme of Kropotkin's writings across the decades.

This raises important questions on the nature of role and influence of those considered "leaders" within the anarchist movement. The fact that the leading advocate of communist-anarchism expounded ideas which so many suggest – explicitly or implicitly – as alien to it means that these commentators' notions of what it is are distinctly flawed. It would be better to acknowledge that just as anarchism itself has many tendencies – mutualism, collectivism, communism, syndicalism, etc. – so these sub-tendencies themselves have many tendencies.

Anarchist-communism is not a monolith and its grassroots adherents can be very selective in what they take from what are considered its leading theoreticians and activists. Hence, for example, the constant conflicts within the Italian movement between Malatesta and anti-organisationist anarchist-communists and his preference to work with Spanish collectivist-anarchists who shared his labour orientated strategy rather than communists who shared his preferences the distribution of goods in a future free society.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, it is reflected in the clear differences between Kropotkin's essentially collectivist strategy expounded in 1881 and that of French and Spanish anarchist-communists who rejected it in favour of dynamite bluster and a self-defeating ultra-radicalism.

### **Conclusion: a missed opportunity**

The assumption that if self-proclaimed anarchist-communists advocated a certain strategy it was

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without an author indicated and, as such, all had the same influence.

<sup>1</sup> Davide Turcato, "European Anarchism in the 1890s: Why Labor Matters in Categorising Anarchism," *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labour and Society* 12 (September 2009).

because they were following the lead of the theoreticians of anarchist-communism, most obviously Kropotkin, must be rejected and a more dynamic perspective based on what was actually advocated used. This can be seen from Kropotkin's

contributions at the London Congress of 1881 and the articles he wrote for *Le Revolté* on the same theme compared to what is asserted as being communist-anarchist ideas on strategy. These contributions, moreover, are identical to those raised before and after the Congress showing a remarkable consistency over the near 50 years he spent in the anarchist movement.<sup>2</sup>

The London Congress was not a success. Kropotkin did not manage to get his ideas fully accepted and included in its resolutions. Here, the role of agent provocateurs should not

be discounted. As is well known, one delegate, from the journal *La Révolution Sociale*, was, like the newspaper, funded by the Parisian prefect of police (who also wrote articles for it). As Kropotkin later recalled:

To start a paper, subsidized by the police, with a police agent at its head, is an old plan, and the prefect of the Paris police, Andrieux, resorted to it in 1881...

The paper was of an unheard-of violence; burning, assassination, dynamite bombs, – there was nothing but that in it. I met the man, the editor of the paper, when I went to the London congress, and... my opinions concerning him were settled. At the congress, during which he introduced all sorts of terrible resolutions, all present kept aloof from him...

To make a long story short, he was unmasked a couple of months later, and the paper was stopped forever on the very next day. Then, a couple of years after that, the

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), Iain McKay (ed.).

prefect of police, Andrieux, published his Memoirs, and in this book he told all about the paper which he had started, and the explosions which his agents had organized at Paris, by putting sardine-boxes filled with something under the statue of Thiers.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the negative impact of the desire to gather together all anti-parliamentarian socialists at the Congress must be acknowledged:

The temporary phase of anarchism was determined by various factors. There was the reaction against the turncoats who went over to parliamentarism. (Andrea Costa and Paul Brousse among others); indignation against the authoritarian socialists who were busy scrambling for seats in parliament; the example of fortitude and sacrifice set by Russian nihilists. This period was also marked by the influx into anarchist ranks of many revolutionary socialists, of old French Blanquists and German Social-Democrats, who were chiefly attracted by the spirit of thorough-going revolt which characterised the anarchists; these newcomers brought with them a narrow and rigid outlook, typical of authoritarians, which caused libertarian thinking to grow torpid, immobile, stationary and dogmatic... this ran counter to the ideas of Malatesta or Kropotkin<sup>2</sup>

Thus notions of the “anarchist” or “anarchist-communist” nature of the Congress resolutions were shaped not by anarchists like Kropotkin but

rather the Paris police and non-anarchist attendees as well as anarchists influenced by them far more than by Kropotkin. As such, to use the resolutions of the Congress or the activities of certain anarchist-communists to define the theory or the ideas of its leading advocates like Kropotkin is both unfair and inaccurate – particularly as very definitive claims are made with very little research or evidence provided.

Looking at the contributions of actual anarchist delegates, a radically different perspective of anarchism becomes clear and one which links far more concretely to the ideas championed in the International by Bakunin and his associates. As such, the Congress must be considered as a missed opportunity for if Kropotkin’s arguments had been heeded then the turn – or, more correctly, the *return*, given “Bakuninist” ideas within the First International – to syndicalist tactics would have started a decade earlier and social-democracy would have not made the advances it did in France, Italy and countries.

While speculating about alternative historical paths can be an entertaining

activity, it is ultimately a fruitless one. Far better to revisit the accounts of the past and challenge the assumptions made by even the most informed commentator by discussing the contributions made and linking these to both the wider movement then current and those of the immediate past and future. Once that is done, a different understanding of the 1881 London Congress becomes possible, one which challenges the conventional wisdom and better explains the interaction of the ideas of those deemed to be leaders and the activists who are assumed to follow them.

**Looking at the contributions of actual anarchist delegates, a radically different perspective of anarchism becomes clear and one which links far more concretely to the ideas championed in the International by Bakunin and his associates**

**“I ask the court not to confuse my speeches with resolutions concerning the diffusion of chemical knowledge.” – Peter Kropotkin, Lyon Trial, 1883**

<sup>1</sup> Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 445-6.

<sup>2</sup> Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), 148-9.

# The Lyon Trial

Nicolas Walter <sup>1</sup>

The first organised anarchist movement in the world appeared in France. It originally rose and fell during the Second Republic, between the Revolution in 1848 and the coup d'état of Louis Napoleon in 1851. It rose and fell again at the beginning of the Third Republic, between the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and the suppression of the commune movement in 1871. In 1872, as part of the reaction against the left by the "liberal" regime, the Chamber of Deputies passed a law banning the International Working Men's Association, which drove all socialist – including anarchist – activity underground or into exile.

An émigré movement soon appeared in Belgium, Spain, and especially Switzerland, and a clandestine movement also appeared in south-eastern France, especially in Lyon (where there had been a brief revolutionary rising, joined by Bakunin, in September 1870). In 1874, 29 anarchists were tried in Lyon for membership of the International, and 26 of them were imprisoned. In 1877, a French section of the anti-authoritarian fraction of the International was formed by delegates of a dozen groups meeting in Switzerland. Anarchists also participated in the legal National Labour Congresses held from 1876 to 1879.

In 1879 the Chamber of Deputies passed an amnesty for those who had taken part in the communes of 1871. The resulting return of prisoners and exiles stimulated the rapid growth of the socialist movement, but also its division between anarchists and various parliamentary fractions. In 1881, the anarchists withdrew from the National Labour Congress, and several of their leaders attended the International Revolutionary Congress in London – the last such event for 26



Kropotkin in court

years, and the effective end of the First International.

By this time, there was a lively anarchist movement in France, especially in Paris and Lyon, and it was in Lyon that the first open anarchist papers began to appear. (*La Revolution Sociale*, which was published in Paris in 1880-81, doesn't count, since it was produced by a police spy!) Between February 1882 and June 1884, no fewer than nine militant papers appeared and were banned in succession.

Meanwhile, there were two significant developments in the movement itself. One was the direct participation of anarchist individuals and groups in popular agitation, especially in the labour movement; the other was the

deliberate perpetration by anarchist individuals of personal violence, under the influence of the Russian populists, whose campaign of terrorism had culminated in the assassination of the Tsar in March 1881.

Both developments emerged in the Lyon area in the early 1880s. A bitter labour dispute in the mining town of Montceau-les-Mines, seventy miles north of Lyon, led in the normal way to outbreaks of violence. The difference was that the clandestine organisation which threatened to attack bosses, officials and blacklegs, and which in August 1882 attacked religious symbols such as roadside shrines and chapels and even attempted a local insurrection, called itself the Black Gang (*Bande Noir*) and seemed to be anarchist. (A similar organisation called the Black Hand (*Mano Negra*) operated in Andalucía in southern Spain at the same time, and provided an official excuse for the persecution of anarchists, many being arrested and several being executed in 1883.)

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<sup>1</sup> *Freedom*, 24 January 1983.

In October 1882, the trial of 23 alleged members of the gang began. By the time it ended in December, only nine were actually found guilty (and sentenced to between one and five years' imprisonment) and no connection with anarchism was proved. But the affair had greatly increased fear and hatred of the real anarchist movement, which strongly supported the Montceau events. These continued long after the 1882 trial, and led in 1884 to further strikes and riots which supplied the material for Emile Zola's novel *Germinal* (1885).

Meanwhile, events in Lyon had led to another trial, this time of real anarchists. In October 1882, bombs were exploded in a fashionable restaurant and a recruiting office. Those responsible were never traced, but official suspicion was directed at the anarchists, whose speakers and writers had supported the militancy at Montceau, and whose current paper had attacked the restaurant as a place which would be destroyed as "the first act of the social revolution". Particular suspicion fell on an activist called Antoine Cyvoct, who took refuge in Switzerland and then Belgium and wasn't tried in Lyon until December 1883 (he was sentenced to death but reprieved, being imprisoned until 1898).

During autumn 1882, the authorities used the Lyon bombs to allege a widespread anarchist conspiracy. From October to December, dozens of militants were arrested, not only in Lyon but elsewhere in France, and charged with involvement in the International. The climax came in January 1883, with the Trial of 66 (there were in fact only 65 defendants, but Victor Berlioz-Archaud, who was one of them, was counted as two). Fourteen (including Cyvoct) were still at large, but 51 were present in the magistrates' court (*police correctionnelle*) in Lyon. They included some of the leading anarchists in France – especially Joseph Bernard and Toussaint Bordat from Lyon, Etienne Faure and Jean Ricard from Saint-Etienne, Pierre Martin from Vienne, Felix Tressaud from Marseille, and Emile Gautier from Paris. They also included Peter Kropotkin, which had important results for the trial and later for the anarchist movement in Britain.

Kropotkin, who came from an aristocratic military family in Russia, had become an anarchist during a visit to Switzerland in 1872. He worked in the Russian populist movement in St Petersburg from 1872 until his arrest in 1874, was imprisoned from 1874 until his escape in 1876, and then lived in Western Europe until the Russian Revolution in

1917. After staying in Britain for a few months, he settled in Switzerland, working with James Guillaume on the *Bulletin de la Federation Jurassienne*, and with Paul Brousse on *L'Avant-garde* and the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. After another visit to Britain in 1877, he worked for few months in Paris, narrowly escaping arrest in 1878, and stayed for a few months in Spain before returning to Switzerland. There he began *Le Revolte* in 1879, which became the leading French-language anarchist paper. He was already well known as a scientific researcher and journalist, and as a propagandist for the Russian populists, and he now became well known as a leading figure in the international anarchist movement and the main propagandist for anarchist communism.

In July 1881, he attended the International Revolutionary Congress in London, being the delegate of the "Lyon Revolutionary Party" as well as of *Le Revolte*. On his return to Switzerland in August he was expelled. He moved to Thonon, on the French side of Lake Geneva until his wife had taken her degree at Geneva University, made a speaking tour of the most active centres in south-eastern France during November, and then moved to Britain. But they were depressed by the low level of political life in this country, and he later considered this period to have been "a year of real exile". Saying, "Better a French prison than this grave", they returned to Thonon in October 1882, and he continued to edit *Le Revolte*. But two months later he was arrested, and joined his comrades in a French prison.

The Lyon trial was held from 8 to 19 January 1883. The defendants were officially tried for being members of a socialist organisation, but the prosecution concentrated on their anarchism. The individual defendants were given considerable opportunity to explain their ideas in public – which was only fair since they were in effect on trial for their ideas – and this opportunity was seized by several of them, especially Gautier and Bordat, and above all Kropotkin. His interrogation on 9 January and his defence speech on 15 January made a great impression not only in France but abroad. On 12 January, a collective declaration, which had been drafted by Kropotkin and signed by 47 of the defendants, was read out in court by Tressaud, and this also made a wide impression.

At the end of the trial, five defendants were acquitted, four (Kropotkin, Gautier, Bernard, Bordat) sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and

42 to shorter terms. The appeal by most of them (not Kropotkin) was heard from 26 February to 6 March and was dismissed on 13 March, though some of the sentences were reduced. A full account of the trial was printed in *La Revolte* on 20 January and reprinted as a pamphlet, *Comptendu du proces de Lyon* (1883); a more detailed account of the whole case was published by Jean Grave (who had taken over *Le Revolte*) as a book, *Le Proces des anarchistes decant la police correctionnelle et la cour d'appel de Lyon* (1883).

The case received wide publicity in France, and far from suppressing anarchism it gave a sharp stimulus to the growing movement. On 9 March 1883 an unemployed demonstration in Paris was led by anarchists carrying a black flag to loot bakers' shops; for their part Emile Pouget and Louise Michel were sentenced to eight and six years' imprisonment respectively in June. And during 1883 and 1884 anarchist papers began to appear in Paris, *Le Revolte* moving there in 1885.

The case also received much publicity abroad, and was the subject of prominent coverage in the British press. The leading newspaper, *The Times*, published daily reports of the trial and a long editorial welcoming the verdicts and sentences. It noted that "the chief interest, of course, attached to the defence of the Russian refugee, Prince Kropotkine (sic)". The liberal papers, especially the *Daily News*, gave as much coverage and much more sympathy.

In the United States, the press coverage included a long account of the trial in Benjamin Tucker's anarchist fortnightly *Liberty* on 17 February, containing a translation of the Declaration. In Britain there was no anarchist paper – Johann Most's German *Freiheit* having been suppressed in May 1882 – and indeed there was no real anarchist movement yet. The main arena for libertarian activity was still to be found in the local Radical Clubs, and in such broader left-wing organisations as the Democratic Federation and the Labour Emancipation League, which had been formed in

1881 and 1882 respectively. The most important single focus was still the international club in London which brought together native and foreign anarchists; it used several names (especially the Social Democratic Working Men's Club) and several addresses (especially 6 Rose Street, Soho), and was at this time called the International Socialist Club and based at 15 Poland Street, Soho.

Members of this club, calling themselves the "International Socialist Federation", published a translation of the Lyon Declaration on 23 January 1883. According to Max Nettlau in the third volume of his history of anarchism – *Anarchisten and Sozialrevolutionaire* (1931) – the organisation probably had no real existence, but in the British chapter of his bibliography of anarchism – *Bibliographie de l'anarchie* (1897) – he comments that the leaflet was probably the first real anarchist

publication in this country. The English version is different from the American version in *Liberty* a few weeks later, being slightly more fluent and less literal. (It omits the opening sentence: "What anarchism is, what anarchists are, we shall explain".)

A year later, the English version was reprinted in the radical monthly *Republican* (which often reported anarchist events and publications) as "Anarchistic Manifesto", with George Standing's editorial comment: "The

ideas expressed have no practical bearing upon English politics; but they are reproduced here in order that the anarchist views may be known from authoritative sources" (April 1884). Another year later, an incomplete and inferior translation was published in the first issue of the individualist monthly *Anarchist* as "The Lyons Anarchist Manifesto", described as "substantially a copy of a declaration of the principles of Anarchists, which was read at the Lyons trial", with Henry Seymour's editorial comment: "Although a general and comprehensive statement of Anarchistic doctrine, I take exception to the exclusively communistic portions thereof" (March 1885).

**"...when the noble words of Kropotkin's defence rang through the length and breadth of France, they found an echo in the hearts of all honest seekers after truth"**

One explanation for all this attention being given to such a document for so long is that it was a virtually unique short statement of anarchist beliefs connected with a particularly dramatic episode. Another is suggested by an article in the second issue of the *Anarchist* by Charlotte Wilson, who had been converted to anarchism by the Lyon trial. Writing as “An English Anarchist” (a pseudonym she had already used in a series of four articles on anarchism in the Social Democratic Federation weekly *Justice* during November and December 1884), she described recent developments of organised anarchism in France and Britain:

When the Lyons trial fixed public attention on the minds of men, who in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century were considered sufficiently dangerous to be condemned for their opinions alone, the corrupt and hypocritical clique which calls itself “Society” contented itself with a sneer at mad fanaticism, and congratulating itself that the disturbing element was suppressed, passed on to seek some fresh excitement. Nevertheless, when the noble words of Kropotkin’s defence rang through the length and breadth of France, they found an echo in the hearts of all honest seekers after truth [April 1885].

It was indeed the cult of Kropotkin’s personality which attracted so much attention to the case outside France, especially in Britain, as symbolised by the repeated publication of the Declaration he had drafted. It was also symbolised in March 1883 by a petition for his release which was supported by dozens of liberal intellectuals in this country (including Swinburne, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Leslie Stephen, John Morley, and Patrick Geddes). But such pressure could not overcome the hostile pressure of the Russian government, which had been secretly applied to the Swiss and French governments throughout Kropotkin’s exile, until growing protests in France eventually brought amnesties for all the anarchists in prison.

Kropotkin was finally released after three years, in January 1886. He stayed for a time in Paris, writing and lecturing, but in March he moved to Britain, where he lived for more than 30 years. He became the most prominent member of the growing anarchist movement in this country. He joined Charlotte Wilson’s group, and, after working for a few months with Seymour and the *Anarchist*, they began the monthly *Freedom* in October 1886. The scattered seeds sown by the Lyon trial at last began to bear real fruit in Britain.

## The Arrest of Kropotkine

*Liberty* (Boston), 20 January 1883

From “L’Intransigeant” and “Le Révolte” we glean the following details of the French government’s outrageous arrest of Pierre Kropotkine:

On Friday, December 15, Madame Kropotkine, wishing to go from Thonon to Geneva to consult a doctor on behalf of her brother who was a victim of lung disease, made arrangement to take the train leaving a few minutes after four o’clock, and was already in one of the railway carriages, when the district attorney, accompanied by a few policemen, invited her to step out again to be searched. Madame Kropotkine asking him for what reasons this search was demanded, he replied that she was accused of transmitting her husband’s correspondence with Anarchists living in Geneva, that the orders given by the examining magistrate at Lyons were explicit, and that she would have to follow him in order that they might be carried out. In vain did she explain why she was going to Geneva, and that her business in that city was of vital importance, involving, if not the salvation of her brother’s life, at least its preservation for as long a time as possible; in vain did she hand over the little basket which she carried to the

attorney with the request that to inspect it at once that she might not miss the train; he only replied with the order, several times repeated, to follow him in the name of the law.

She was then led into one of the rooms in the depot, while Kropotkine, who had accompanied her to the train and had witnessed the whole scene, was kept in sight by a few policemen in the waiting-room. It took an hour and a half to find in Thonon a woman willing to undertake the contemptible task of searching her; and even then, in the absence of any one else to execute the *explicit orders* of M. Rigot, the examining magistrate at Lyons, it was the police commissioner’s wife who, at the bidding of her husband, had to begin the exploration of Madame Kropotkine’s person. The *explicit orders* of this rascal having been executed, and his wife having brought him, as the results of a *half-hour’s* search, the compromising papers destined for the Geneva Anarchists – consisting of two numbers of the Russian journal called the “Golos,” two books (one French and the other Russian), a memorandum-book, and a wallet – the attorney then declared to Kropotkine that they were

going to search his dwelling. Kropotkine observing that such a search probably had already been made in his absence, the official rejoined:

“Do you think, Mr. Prince, that we would ever consent to violate your domicile in your absence?”

Nevertheless, on reaching his house, accompanied by the attorney and his subordinates, Kropotkine saw that the police had been there; everything had been upturned, downturned, and ransacked. Although Kropotkine had warned the officers that there was a dying man in the house, his brother-in-law, a young man of twenty-one, confined to his bed with tuberculosis, whose death the slightest emotion might precipitate, the commissioner rushed brusquely into the chamber, compelled the sick man to rise, and made a minute examination of every nook and corner of the apartment. For an hour they kept the unfortunate man, shaking with fever, from all communication with the rest of the household, who had been put in the kitchen. Finally, overcome by intense suffering, he fell back upon the foot of his bed like an inert mass. A little later, when his sister arrived to relieve him and bestow upon him the necessary cares, the officers did not leave her alone with the sick man, but remained continually in the chamber, so provoking him in his agony that, collecting what remnants of strength were left him, he seized an alarm-clock, which lay upon a table at his bedside, to throw it at the heads of the officers who poked their noses through his doorway. Exhausted by this effort, his weak arm fell, and he sank into the arms of Madame Kropotkine.

All this was going on on the ground-floor, while the attorney and a number of others were searching Kropotkine's study on the floor above. But though they searched a long time, they evidently did not find what they expected. They seized, nevertheless, some unfinished manuscripts, among them the preface of a work on Anarchy. Then they found some English letters concerning Kropotkine's scientific and literary labours for English publications. But these letters, as well as those of his wife (in Russian), they did not touch. Next they seized two letters – one from Geneva, the other from Paris – of absolutely no importance.

But the *pièce de résistance*, the pearl of their discoveries, was two other letters: one from London, in which the writer claimed to be the bearer of hundreds of thousands of francs for Kropotkine, which he would deliver to the Russian revolutionist if the latter would

meet him in London; the other, of a similar nature, from a man in Switzerland. On both of them Kropotkine had written: “The work of international police-spies.” Of such letters Kropotkine receives dozens every month. Further than this the plunderers got no booty and departed at a late hour.

The excitement proved fatal to the unfortunate consumptive, who expired a few days later in the arms of his sister and his brother-in law. The day after his death, while Kropotkine was caring for his suffering and distracted wife, and while a doctor whom he had called was at her bedside, the house was surrounded by

## **“Of what consequence are governmental prosecutions, if they gain us the sympathy of those whom we esteem?”**

the police, and the commissioner, girt with his scarf, presented himself upon the ground-floor, in a room adjoining that where lay the corpse, and asked for Kropotkine. The latter having been called, the commissioner read to him a warrant for his arrest issued by the examining magistrate at Lyons, and told him at the close that he might

have a few hours in which to prepare for his departure. Kropotkine, then opening the door of the next room, showed him the body of his brother-in-law, and, telling him that his wife had had a fainting-fit and that a new and sudden emotion might endanger her life, asked a delay of two days in which to assure himself of his wife's health and break to her the news of his arrest less brutally, the house in the meantime to be guarded by the police. The commissioner and his men, who, old soldiers of the Empire, were by no means tender-hearted, recoiled at the picture that confronted them, and, perceiving, in spite of their thick skins, the utter ignominy of an arrest made at such a time, did not wish to take upon themselves the responsibility of such an act. The commissioner therefore ordered one of his men to report the situation to the district attorney with Kropotkine's request, the latter giving his word of honor to appear two days later before the examining magistrate at Lyons, or, if his word should not be accepted, then in the custody of the police. The doctor entering at this moment, the commissioner took occasion to ask him if what Kropotkine had said concerning the health of his wife was correct, and the doctor confirmed Kropotkine.

After a wait of *fifteen minutes* the officer returned with the attorney's answer. The latter, he said, had *telegraphed to Lyons* the request of Kropotkine and had just *received the reply*. The magistrate allowed Kropotkine a few hours in which to prepare for his departure, and ordered that he be taken at five o'clock to the prison in Thonon there to spend the night, that he

be permitted on the following morning to attend the burial of his brother-in-law guarded by four officers, and that immediately afterwards he be sent to Lyons. In view of this answer, Kropotkine, after telling the commissioner that it was not alone to be able to attend his brother-in-law's funeral that he had asked for a delay, but to assure himself concerning his wife and give her the care which her condition called for, declared that he was ready to go at once.

The inhabitants of Thonon exhibited much sympathy for him at his departure. On his arrival at Lyons he was committed to the St. Paul prison on two charges: first, of having been connected with an association between Frenchmen and foreigners, whose object is social upheaval and whose methods are assassination and pillage; second, of having been the chief instigator and organiser of this association in France, and especially of having visited Lyons to foment revolt in secret meetings.

Of the ridiculous allegations upon which these charges are based the following are fair specimens: (1) that Kropotkine, replying to a young man of St. Etienne who had urged him to start the revolution, said the time was not yet ripe; (2) that he wrote to a committee of workingmen, who had invited him to attend a private reunion, that he could not give his presence at any but a public meeting; (3) that he wrote to the "Droit Social" declining to become a Contributor to that journal; (4) that he corrected the proofs of a pamphlet on Nihilism, the author of which had requested him to point out whatever material errors he might discover. And yet, held upon such trifles as these, the French magistracy declined to accept for him the proffered bail of no less a person than the eminent radical and millionaire member of the British house of commons, Joseph Cowen of Newcastle.

At Rochefort's request Georges Laguerre, the lawyer who recently defended the miners of Montceau with great ability, bravery, and eloquence, consented to take charge of Kropotkine's case, but Kropotkine, on receiving the offer, declined it in the following letter:

*My dear Rochefort:*

I thank you earnestly for your kind remembrance and your friendship, and I beg you to warmly thank the friends who remember me. Of what consequence are governmental prosecutions, if they gain us the sympathy of those whom we esteem?

Extend my best thanks also to M. Laguerre for his kind offer. I shall engage no counsel, but defend myself. Most of my comrades will do the same.

What is the use, indeed, of a defence based on legal grounds when the material facts on which the prosecution is based are *null*? The charge

amounts simply to constructive treason, a prosecution of a class.

Accept a hearty handshake and my good wishes.

Pierre Kropotkine.

In consequence of his arrest, his wife underwent a severe nervous crisis, which created no little anxiety among her friends. Fortunately she came out of it safely.

The event caused much discussion in the newspapers, and the Gambettist organs insinuated that Élisée Reclus was avoiding France in order to escape the fate of his fellow-worker in the revolutionary movement.

Thereupon M. Reclus wrote the following letter:

*Monsieur Rigot, Examining Magistrate at Lyons:*

Sir,— I read in the Lyons "Republican" of December 23 that, "according to the warrant," the two chiefs and organisers of the "revolutionary Anarchists" are Élisée Reclus and Prince Kropotkine, and that I do not share my friend's imprisonment for the sole reason that French justice cannot go beyond the frontier to arrest me.

You know, however, that it would have been very easy to arrest me, since I have just passed more than two mouths in France. Nor are you ignorant that I returned to Thonon to attend the burial of Ananieff the day after Kropotkine's arrest, and that I pronounced a few words over his grave. The officers who were stationed immediately behind me and who repeated my name had only to invite me to follow them.

But whether I reside in France or in Switzerland matters little. If you desire to institute proceedings against me, I will hasten to respond to your personal invitation.

Name the place, the day, and the hour.

At the appointed time I will knock at the door of the prison designated.

Accept, sir, my civilities.

Élisée Reclus.

It is needless to say that this letter was not heeded. The trial of Kropotkine, Emile Gautier, and a number of other Anarchists began at Lyons on the 8<sup>th</sup> instant — not before a jury, but before a tribunal of three judges — with what result is not yet known. *Liberty* will keep its readers informed concerning the sequence of this shameful affair.

In this issue we can only give the following encouraging news sent by cable to the New York "Sun:—"



The French Socialists have enjoyed a great triumph in the trial of Prince Kropotkine and his fifty-two brother Anarchists at Lyons. If the trial had been designed as an elaborate scheme for the propagation of Socialism, the result could not have afforded more satisfaction to its projectors. The whole affair was practically controlled by Prince Kropotkine. He was cool, courteous, and self-possessed, and in his replies to the president of the tribunal showed his entire mastery over his judges. The ability which he

disclosed was extraordinary, and the exasperation of the court was complete. All of the prisoners took a firm stand, gave their testimony sometimes with unconcealed sarcasm, and betrayed no apprehension of the result. So far the trial is a failure. Not one has been identified with the International, which was the immediate intention, while all have boldly avowed their political beliefs and practices.

## The Trial of the Anarchists at Lyons

*Liberty* (Boston), 17 February 1883

In accordance with our promise to keep our readers informed concerning the trial of Kropotkine and his fifty-one fellow Anarchists at Lyons, we present the following condensed report of the judicial (?) proceedings:

The trial began on Monday, January 8, before three judges, the offense of affiliation with the International [Workers'] Association with which the prisoners were charged not being one of those which juries pass upon.

The prisoners were interrogated successively by the presiding magistrate, who first addressed himself to Bordat, a light-haired young man of twenty-seven. Bordat, who answered with firmness, dignity, and precision, admitted that he belonged to the Lyonese Revolutionary Federation, that he was one of the editors of the "Droit Social," that he had attended the Geneva Congress in his individual capacity, and that he was there put on a committee with Elisée Reclus to draw up an Anarchistic manifesto.

*The Court.* — Did you not declare at a conference on September 9, 1882, that the Anarchists recognised no authority, not even revolutionary authority? Have you not said that the miners of Montceau did well in blowing up crosses and churches?

*Bordat.* — These statements are inaccurate. But the acts at Montceau were legitimate because the *bourgeoisie* provoked them. I approve what is called propagandism by acts only when there is provocation on the part of the *bourgeoisie*.

*District Attorney.* — What do you mean by those words, "provocation on the part of the *bourgeoisie*"?

**"I am of those who think that the social transformation of which we dream and from which justice must result cannot be accomplished without revolution"**

*Bordat.* — I mean such things as were done at Montceau, where they compelled workingmen to abstain from expressing their political and religious opinions.

*The Court.* — But where was the provocation for the acts committed at Lyons?

*Bordat.* — I decline all responsibility for them and condemn them.

*The Court.* — Is not your programme the abolition of authority?

*Bordat.* — Yes.

*The Court.* — And the abolition of property?

*Bordat.* — Not exactly. I desire, on the contrary, the extension of property, its universalisation. I would not take from one to give to another. I am an enemy of the State as well as of God.

*The Court.* — You pretend, I believe, that the Lyonese Federation was affiliated with no association?

*Bordat.* — Yes. I am not in favour of secret associations, and the International can be nothing else.

In the examination of Emile Gautier, one of the most active of the Anarchists, the prisoner admitted that he had taken part in the formation of groups.

*The Court.* — Your programme includes the abolition of property and of the State?

*Gautier.* — Exactly so.

*The Court.* — You have advocated revolution?

*Gautier.* — I am of those who think that the social transformation of which we dream and from which justice must result cannot be

accomplished without revolution. That is a fact which I establish, history in hand. I consider the acts at Montceau as precursory signals of revolution. When one sees such cracking in the social structure, its downfall is near. Just as the revolution of '93 was preceded by three hundred minor riots, so the social revolution will be preceded by numerous disturbances. Never does the thunderbolt leap from a cloudless sky. We belong to an international party, as we have a right to do, but not to an established association.

*The Court.* — Do you admit that you have held relations with Elisée Reclus?

*Gautier.* — Yes, and I regret but one thing, that they were not more frequent.

The next notable feature occurred in the examination of Tressaud, a Marseilles youth of twenty-two.

*The Court.* — Your aim, you say, is to overturn republican government and universal suffrage?

*Tressaud.* — I never said so; I have spoken only of the present government.

*The Court.* — We are under a republican government.

*Tressaud.* — No, sir.

*The Court.* — The tribunal is not of your opinion.

*Tressaud.* — That is to be regretted.

*The Court.* — Did you not tell the examining magistrate that you were in favour of the abolition of property and of the family?

*Tressaud.* — Yes. I do not wish the labour of all to benefit only one or a few privileged persons.

*The Court.* — What means do you intend to use for the realisation of your projects?

*Tressaud.* — Peaceful means, if possible; violent means, if necessary.

*The Court.* — You are an Anarchist?

*Tressaud.* — Yes, but not an Internationalist, and it is for affiliation with the International that I am here.



**Kropotkin at the trial**

On Tuesday Pierre Kropotkin was called to the bar.

*The Court.* — Have you not been, since 1879, the supporter and principal editor of the “Révolté”?

*Kropotkin.* — I need not reply to such a question, for I do not see why French magistrates ask me what happens in the office of a journal published at Geneva. Moreover, if the government had deemed it so dangerous, it could have prohibited its entrance into France, which it has not done.

*The Court.* — Proofs were found at your house showing that you were the principal editor

*Kropotkin.* — Once more, sir, I do not hide the fact that I have been editor of the “Révolté,” but I ask what that has to do with the facts which led to my arrest.

*The Court.* — Have you not made speeches urging workingmen to take possession of property and with a view to induce them to overthrow the government which extended to you a generous hospitality?

*Kropotkin.* — I have always propagated Anarchistic doctrines to the best of my ability.

*The Court.* — Did you not take part in the London Congress as the delegate of the “Révolté”?

*Kropotkin.* — That did not happen in France. I was the delegate of a Swiss journal to a meeting held in England. I do not see how that concerns a French tribunal.

The judge then read from the “Révolté” reports of Kropotkin’s speeches at the London Congress, and asked the prisoner if they were correct.

*Kropotkin.* — Yes, I spoke thus, and have never denied it, but I repeat that the presiding judge of a French tribunal has nothing to do with speeches made at London by the delegate of a Swiss journal.

The judge then read the resolutions adopted at the Congress.

*Kropotkin.* — I ask the court not to confuse my speeches with resolutions concerning the diffusion of chemical knowledge. At the

Congress there were many young people who desired to study chemistry. I opposed this as impractical, although I believe that all the sciences are necessary to the people who desire a better social state; but I considered that a course of study, to end in such a result, must be broad and not inclusive of chemistry alone. I think that, when a party, like the Nihilists of Russia, finds itself in a position where it must either disappear, subside, or answer violence with violence – I think, I say, that it has no cause to hesitate, and must necessarily use violence. This idea is so just and so humane that you yourselves, gentlemen, in France, applauded Vera Zassoulitch for firing at the oppressive magistrate, General Trépow.

Here the court and the district attorney interrupted with protests.

*Kropotkine.* — I beg you to remember that, as magistrates, it is your duty to respect the decision of a jury and bow before the verdict which it pronounced. Now, the jury acquitted Vera Zassoulitch.

*The Court.* — Were you not expelled from Switzerland on account of the London Congress?

*Kropotkine.* — The Federal Council expelled me at the demand of the Russian government, because I had protested by posters, put up by permission of the police, against the hanging of Sophy Perovskaya and her five friends<sup>1</sup> – a punishment so horrible that the correspondent of the London “Times” declared that he had never witnessed so hideous a spectacle, even in Asia Minor, where he had seen many frightful executions. That is why I was expelled, as everybody knows.

The court then asked Kropotkine about his journeys to Lyons and Vienna before he went to London, Kropotkine answered that everybody knew the objects of his visits from the band of spies that followed at his heels. The court, not being able to digest the word “spy,” came to the defence of the police agents, saying that Kropotkine’s expression was insulting to them.

*Kropotkine* (resuming). — A foreigner, moreover, is considered an outlaw, especially if the foreigner be a Russian exiled by his government which exercises so powerful an influence over France – I beg pardon, over Switzerland. I did not conceal my intentions, and the letters announcing my journeys were written for no other purpose than to call

together as many friends as possible. I have always preached Anarchistic doctrines wherever I have gone.

*The Court.* — What! you urged the overthrow of the government? That was a bad way of showing gratitude for hospitality.

*Kropotkine.* — I make a great difference between the nation and the government.

*The Court.* — You went to Saint Etienne?

*Kropotkine.* — I am really astonished at being asked this question and not what I went to Lyons for, since my arrest was in consequence of the events that occurred in this city.

*The Court.* (confused). — What did you go to Lyons for?

*Kropotkine.* — To talk about Anarchy in a *café* to a meeting of two hundred persons.

The examination ended by Kropotkine’s denial that he belonged to the International [Workers’] Association.

Two sensations followed; the first created by the fainting of Madame Kropotkine, who soon recovered, however, and insisted upon remaining in court; the second by Bordat, who suddenly rose and, in the name of four comrades and himself, said: “We have just been insulted by an officer, a captain decorated with the Legion of Honour. This gentleman has just said to us, ‘I fixed your friends of the Commune, and, if I had you, I would fix you as I did them.’” [This officer was afterwards imprisoned by his superior for thirty days.]

On the following day, January 10, Pejot was examined. Being asked if he had said certain things, he answered: “I should like to know whether I am on trial for affiliation with the International or for an offence of speech.”

*The Court.* — When have you gone to Geneva?

*Pejot.* — Whenever I needed to go there.

*The Court.* — Did Elisée Reclus call upon you?

*Pejot.* — That is my affair.

Pinoy, in his examination, admitted that at a public meeting he had thrown a glass of water in the face of a journalist who had not the courage of his opinions.

*The Court.* — Were you not once condemned for vagrancy?

*Pinoy* (with great energy). — Yes, and society’s condemnation is found precisely in the fact that a young and strong workingman may find himself obliged to steal or beg in order to live,

<sup>1</sup> Sophia Lvovna Perovskaya (1853-1881) was a Russian Empire revolutionary and a member of the Populist group *Narodnaya Volya* (*People’s Will*) who helped orchestrate the

assassination of Tsar Alexander II of Russia, for which she was executed by hanging. (*Black Flag*)

while a multitude of idlers die of indigestion over their gold.

*The Court.* — Did you not strike Officer Marton?

*Pinoy.* — That does not regard the International.

Next came Nicolas Didelin.

*The Court.* — You are accused of having urged the conscripts to strike. Why did you refuse to do your twenty-eight days' military service?

*Didelin.* — I consent to tell you, although I do not understand why you ask me about facts which have not the slightest relation to the International. I refuse to do my twenty-eight days because there are religious devotees who are exempted from it; because I wish no more standing armies; because I would like to see war disappear; because the soldiers who shot the people in 1871 —

*The Court.* (interrupting). — You are excusing insurrection. The men upon whom the army fired in 1871 wished to overthrow the government of the Republic.

*Didelin.* — The men of 1871 had sustained a terrible siege, and wished, on the contrary, to found the Republic.

*The Court.* (continuing to interrupt). — I see that there are people in this hall who agree with you; the tribunal is not of your opinion. Let us drop this subject, then.

In conclusion Didelin declared that the officer who arrested him insulted him and treated him in a cowardly manner.

*The Court.* — That must be false. Everybody knows that the police are very polite.

After the prisoners had been interrogated, the government called several witnesses, most of them policemen, not one of whom was able to connect any of the accused in the slightest degree with the International or show the existence of the International at all. The district attorney then summed up his case, claiming that the London Congress proved the existence of the International, that Kropotkine's relations with members of the Lyonese Federation proved that society to be a

section of the association, and that the fact that all the other prisoners belonged to Anarchistic groups in relation with Kropotkine proved then, to be affiliated with the International.

The defence began January 12 with the reading by Tressaud of the following manifesto signed by forty-six of the accused:

“What Anarchy is, what Anarchists are, we are about to tell.

“Anarchists, gentlemen, are citizens, who, in a century in which liberty of opinion is preached everywhere, have thought it their right and their duty to recommend unlimited liberty.

“Yes, gentlemen, we are, the world over, some thousands perhaps some millions — for our only merit consists in saying aloud what the masses think beneath their breath — we are some millions of labourers who demand absolute liberty, nothing but liberty, complete liberty.

“We wish liberty — that is, we claim for every human being the right and the means to do everything which pleases him and only that which pleases him; to satisfy integrally all his needs without any other limit than natural impossibilities or the needs of his equally worthy neighbours.

“We wish liberty, and we believe its existence incompatible with the existence of any power whatever, no matter what its origin or its form, be it elected or imposed, monarchical or republican, inspired by divine right or popular right, by consecrated oil or universal suffrage.

“History tells us that all governments are alike and of equal value. The best are the worst, A little more cynicism in some, a little more hypocrisy in others. At bottom always the same practices, always the same intolerance. Even those apparently the most liberal have in reserve, beneath the dust of their legislative arsenals, some convenient little law against the International for use against troublesome oppositions.

“The evil, in other words, in the eyes of the Anarchists does not reside in one form of government rather than in another. It is in the governmental idea itself, in the principle of authority.

**“Yes, and society's  
condemnation is  
found precisely in the  
fact that a young and  
strong workingman  
may find himself  
obliged to steal or beg  
in order to live, while  
a multitude of idlers  
die of indigestion over  
their gold”**

“Our ideal then, in a word, is the substitution in human relations of the free contract, perpetually revisable and dissoluble, for administrative and legal tutelage, for imposed discipline.

“The Anarchists propose, therefore, to teach the people to live without a government, as they are already beginning to learn to live without a god.

“They will learn, likewise, to live without proprietors. The worst of tyrants, indeed, is not he who imprisons you, but he who starves you; not he who takes you by the collar, but he who takes you by the stomach.

“No liberty without equality! No liberty in a society where capital is monopolised in the hands of a minority which grows smaller every day, and where nothing is evenly distributed, not even public education, though paid for by everybody’s mite.

“We believe, for one part, that capital — the common patrimony of humanity, since it is the fruit of the labours of past and present generations — should be put at the disposition of all in such a way that no one may be excluded from its use, and that no one, on the other hand, may monopolise a portion to the detriment of the rest.

“In short, we wish equality, real equality, as a corollary, or rather, a primary condition of liberty. From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs; that is what we wish, sincerely, energetically; that is what will come, for no prescription can prevail against claims at once legitimate and necessary. That is why they wish to stigmatise us in every possible way.

“Rascals that we are! We demand bread for all, knowledge for all, work for all; for every person also independence and justice.”

No witnesses were called by the defence, but the prisoners in turn defended themselves, some by counsel, some by their own lips. One of them, Joseph Bernard, said that no evidence having been offered to connect him with the International, he should confine himself to answering the attacks upon his socialistic theories. Then he eloquently depicted the vices of existing society, and laid bare its monstrous iniquities. “The economist, J. B. Say, says that labourers are condemned to perpetual misery, and that there are only certain circumstances which permit them to improve their condition. Do you know what those circumstances are? Well, never have I dared to say it in my speeches, I a revolutionist! and yet they are plainly stated in the great economist’s work on political economy – fire and pillage. They accuse us of wishing crime; but the present society has killed millions of labourers. Is not the real criminal the man

who sustains its unhealthy organisation? We wish no crime, since we wish no more war; we do not wish to kill the *bourgeois*, but only to put them in a position where they will have to produce to satisfy their wants”. Bernard then explained that the Revolution does not mean brute force placed at the service of insurrection, but the transformation of society, and concluded by saying that whatever the sentence that awaited him, he would recommence that which he had done, and that, when the workingmen should go down into the streets to put an end to the miserable conditions under which they live, he would be with them.

On January 13 Emile Gautier was heard. He spoke as follows:

“Have I the right to be an Anarchist? That is the real and only question in this case.

“It appears, indeed, from the government’s argument that the International and the Lyonese Federation are identical; now, I do not belong to it. This International does not exist then as an association, and consequently does not fall under the law of 1872. The Association is a precise and strictly defined thing. Where are the headquarters of the society which you pursue? Where is its treasury? What are its statutes? Are not the Jesuits and Freemasons international associations? Are not the financial societies equally international? We are charged with wishing no more country. Ask, then, the barons of finance what country is theirs.

“The old International was really an association, but it fell at the Congress of the Hague. The law of 1872 punishes affiliation with the International; now it is certain that the word affiliation means reception into a society after certain formalities and engagements. Have you proofs of our participation in the association? The government has failed to find the slightest trace. The conclusion, then, is self-evident: the International does not exist.

“Or rather, my mistake; it has existed for three months by virtue of this prosecution, and yesterday it issued, armed and equipped, from the brain of the government’s attorney, as Minerva issued from the brain of Jupiter. I did not imagine that justice had the power to resuscitate the dead.

“I am going to tell you what does exist. There are citizens of different nationalities who have the same thoughts, and who grasp hands over the frontiers from North to South and from East to West. There are individuals and multitudes who hold ideas in common. I am of these great criminals who think that the government has nothing to do with the distribution of my friendships. The question now is whether in this

country of France it is permissible to entertain friendly relations with foreigners. Now, among the foreigners with whom I am reproached for entertaining relations, there is a Frenchman, Elisée Reclus, who by his talent and his character honours his country. If this man is so disorderly that one cannot shake hands with him and remain guiltless, why is he not here? Why have I not met him in any jail during my tour of the penitentiary world in eighty days?

“It was my right to see this grand patriot, as it was Rochefort’s right to receive Parnell, Gambetta’s to be the friend of the Prince of Wales, Grévy’s to greet Kalakaua, king of the Sandwich Islands, as ‘my cousin.’

“If they apply this law of 1872, should they not prosecute the Legitimists, who take their orders from Frohsdorf? For that is an international act. Do not the Free Thinkers continually maintain relations with foreigners? They hold international congresses. Free Thought, which exists for but one end – to destroy religion – falls also under this law of 1872.

“Are not the Republicans who hold relations with men like Castelar, Parnell, and Bradlaugh guilty of internationalism?

“Does not ‘Justice’ number German socialistic deputies among its writers? Has not the ‘Intransigent’ published subscription lists from the socialists of Amsterdam and Rotterdam for the miners of Montceau-les-Mines?

“Why, then, do they not prosecute the Legitimists, the Republicans, the Collectivists, and the Free Thinkers, and why do they reserve the thunders of the law for the Anarchists?

“We are in the presence of a *procès de tendance*; the prosecution is against our opinions. The government’s attorney has said that as long as there are any Anarchists left he will prosecute them. Well, I am going to tell you what Anarchists are.”

Gautier then explained his views, which are but the application of absolute liberty. His well-chosen words charmed all present and convinced the audience in the court-room. The stupefied magistrates listened with

profound attention to the prisoner as he delivered the following peroration:

“They reproach us for excusing insurrection, but are not governments guilty of the same offence? Is there not in Paris a column commemorative of victorious insurrection? Is not the national festival of the Fourteenth of July the glorification of insurrection?

“You, gentlemen, who sit at this tribunal you are insurgents, since you judge us today in the name of the Republic which overthrew the imperial monarchy. If Bazaine had been in Paris September 4, you would now be judging us in the name of the emperor.

“On entering you deliberative chamber you will say to yourselves, gentlemen, that these fifty-two workmen, who have been so long in prison awaiting trial, have already paid sufficiently dearly for the right to have an opinion – the only crime which you charge upon them – and you will hasten to restore them to their families; for to condemn is not to reply, and there is no proscription which can save a worn-out political system. Remember that in 1871, after the wicked hecatomb of thirty-five thousand Parisians, it was

thought that seals had been placed upon the tomb of assassinated socialism, and today socialism is stronger than ever.

“It will not be the condemnation of these fifty-two prisoners which will kill the Anarchistic party.

“In spite of your prosecutions our proselytes will increase; and after your persecution, should there remain but one Anarchist, I shall be that one.”

The most notable event of the trial occurred on January 15, when Kropotkine spoke in his own defence, as follows:

“I believe, gentlemen, that you must have been struck with the weakness of the arguments of the public ministry to prove that we belong to the International.

“You must naturally conclude that the International does not exist; besides, the government has almost confessed as much, since the district attorney said that he would not cease to prosecute Anarchists.

**“why do they reserve  
the thunders of the  
law for the  
Anarchists? ... the  
prosecution is  
against our  
opinions... and after  
your persecution,  
should there remain  
but one Anarchist, I  
shall be that one”**

“The question, therefore, stands differently, and it is now plain that this prosecution is one of opinion – I will say more – a prosecution of the moment, for the law has been applied so little since 1872 that it seemed a dead letter.

“Since that time workingmen have not ceased to hold relations with foreigners. Has any one concluded from that that the International [Workers’] Association has been re-established?

“This prosecution, independently of its character, is essentially a class prosecution. The law of 1872, indeed, divides society into two classes, since it is aimed only at the International Association of Working People. Is this not proved by the fact that the *bourgeoisie* have a right to associate with foreigners with impunity and without the interference of the law?

“For instance, lately a number of French deputies attended the unveiling of a monument erected to the Italian revolutionist, Mazzini, who spent all his life in efforts to get Austrian, French, and Italian sovereigns killed. Have they been prosecuted?

“Are not meetings of Italian and French Republicans frequently held in Paris? In the face of this prosecution of opinion, of the moment, and of a class, I have hesitated to defend myself, but above us there is a higher judge – public opinion. For it I speak.

“Certainly, it would have been a very fine thing if we could have declared ourselves members of the International; but we cannot, because that grand association of the labourers of the entire world has not existed in France since the iniquitous law of 1872 destroyed it.

“For my part, I should have been proud to confess that I belonged to the society of which the great patriot, Garibaldi, said: ‘It is the sun of the future.’

“Never shall I consider it a crime to say to the labourers of two worlds: Labourers, when the *bourgeoisie* plunge you into misery, a truce to hatred; join hands across the frontiers; be brothers!

“Oh! You say, Mr. Attorney, that we have no country! Do you suppose that my heart beats no faster when a Russian song rings in my ears than when I listen to a French song? Do you suppose that my love is no greater for the airs of my own country and that I do not prefer the cottage of the Russian peasant to the French mansion?

“But I love France, because I consider that this beautiful country marches at the head of the other nations; I am ready to aid in her development, and I am not alone.

“When the German soldiers burned, to the cries of *Vive l’empereur!* the cottages of your peasants, Bebel and Liebknecht in Germany made their protest heard.

“So many legends have been related regarding me that I am forced, to my great regret, to give here a few details about my life.

“My father was an owner of serfs, slaves, and from my infancy I had an opportunity to witness scenes like those of which you have read in that celebrated book, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’ At that time I learned to love the oppressed, and took an oath never to side with the oppressors.

“Later I entered the school of the czar’s pages; I saw the court from the inside and learned to despise it.

“That was in 1862. At that time a liberal wind was blowing through Russia, and reforms began to be talked of.

“Having the privilege of choosing the corps in which I should serve, I did not hesitate to choose a regiment of Cossacks in Siberia, thinking that in that unhappy country I could labour for the reforms so much desired. I was the governor-general’s aide-de-camp, and in that position did all the good I could. I was unsophisticated and believed that the government intended to execute reforms. The Polish insurrection broke out, and a terrible reaction followed. After two years I saw that the government did not wish to do anything; I devoted myself to science and travelled through Siberia.

“Finally I left Siberia, and at the age of twenty-six took my seat upon the benches of the mathematical faculty at St. Petersburg. During the four years that I remained there, a great socialistic movement developed itself.

“In 1873 the government arrested me and my brother, and I spent two years and a half in prison. My brother, who had been authorised by a special decree of the emperor to finish a geographical work on Siberia, succeeded in publishing the first volume; the second remained in the hand of the jailers. In that prison I heard above me the cries of the unfortunates who had gone mad, and I suffered doubly. Nine of my companions became insane. Eleven committed suicide. At the end of two years, scurvy and dyspepsia having got the

better of me, I was removed to a hospital, whence I escaped. My comrades remained in prison four years without a trial, and were judged in the famous trial of the one hundred and ninety-three.

“In Switzerland, to which I came under the name of Levachoff, I found the working people in the same situation. Everywhere I saw the same wretchedness. I have seen great manufacturing towns where the children had only dirty and bad-smelling courts to play in. I have seen women searching in heaps of filth for some remains of vegetables to devour. I have seen poverty in London, and I have taken upon myself the mission of labouring for the social transformation.

“In 1881 I was expelled from Switzerland and went to Thonon, where I remained two months. Before going to England I visited Vienna, Saint Etienne, and Lyons. This is the journey for which I am reproached. I returned to Thonon October 12, 1882, and I do not need to tell you that I had nothing to do with the Montceau-les-Mines affair, for I was in London when it happened.

“They have sought to represent me as the chief of the Nihilists and as a great dynamiter. You have seen from the words of my comrades that they wish no chief. I continually receive letters containing dynamite proposals. My wife, who is in Lyons, herself receives propositions concerning infernal machines. In Thonon some persons called upon me, ostensibly to ask employment as gardeners of servants, but really to spy me: I gave them ten sous out of pity for the necessity that compelled them to follow so villainous a trade. The next day the Lyons “Républican” said: ‘Our correspondent has seen Prince Kropotkine, who told him that he was the chief of the Anarchistic movement.’

**“A society which is divided into two distinct classes — one which produces and yet possesses nothing, and another which does not produce and yet possesses all — is a society without morality and self-condemned”**

“I am a socialist. A society which is divided into two distinct classes — one which produces and yet possesses nothing, and another which does not produce and yet possesses all — is a society without morality and self-condemned. A working man’s labour represents an average of ten thousand francs a year, and his annual

wages are but two thousand, and often only one thousand francs. By the side of this misery are displayed the unbridled luxury, the foolish waste, the shameful depravity of that *bourgeoisie* class so well depicted by the modern novelist, Emile Zola. By what means can this shameful social injustice be reformed? Science is impotent to remedy it, and labour always benefits the well-to-do. Even John Stuart Mill insists upon the necessity of a social transformation.

“It was by violent expropriation that the *bourgeoisie* stripped the nobility and the clergy of their land and their wealth.

We demand the application of the Convention’s decree: ‘The land belongs to all.’ Is this a crime? No; for it is necessary to apply it to the welfare of all and not to the profit of a class. The district attorney has said that I was the founder of Anarchy; but how about Proudhon and Herbert Spencer and all the great thinkers of 1848?<sup>1</sup>

“We do not cease to labour and to study, and, instead of coming to discuss with us, they imprison us, they condemn us, because we defend these utopias – as you call them – which will be truths tomorrow. Our idea has been planted, had has grown in spite of everything, in spite of persecutions, and it has developed with astounding rapidity. Be sure that our condemnation, our imprisonment, will bring us new proselytes. Persecution, you know, attracts sympathy. For the rest, in condemning us, you will not solve the question – you will enlarge and circulate it.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that double-issue of *Le Révolté* (20 January 1883) on the trial makes no mention of Kropotkin mentioning Hebert Spencer: “I have been accused of being the father of anarchism. That is too much of an honour. It was Proudhon who first stated it in 1848, and Bakunin and other socialists who popularised it.” (“The Lyon Trial”, *Words of a*

*Rebel* [Oakland: PM Press, 2022]). Neither does the pamphlet *Le procès des anarchistes devant la police correctionnelle et la Cour d’appel de Lyon* (Lyon, Imprimerie nouvelle, 1883), which (on page 100) has Kropotkin named “the immortal Proudhon” alone as the father of anarchy. (*Black Flag*)



“Finally I tell you that the labourers of France and Europe who know that the International does not exist, have their eyes fixed upon you, and will say, if you condemn us, that for the *bourgeoisie* and the labourers there are two weights and two measures.

“What a revelation for them!

“Do not foment hatreds; repression has never served a good purpose. Prosecuted twice under the empire, the International rose in 1870 more glorious and stronger than ever. Crushed in the streets, after the Commune, under thirty-five thousand dead bodies, socialism, stronger than before, has infused new life into the blood of old disciples. Its ideas on property have spread to a formidable extent and Bismarck himself has admitted the uselessness of law against socialists.

“Gentleman, believe me, the social revolution is at hand; before ten years it will break

out; I live among the labourers, and I affirm it. Inspire yourselves with their ideas, go down into their ranks, and you will see that I am right.

“Permit me to tell you what I think. Do not excite the vengeance of labourers, for thereby you will prepare new misfortunes. You know that persecution is the best means of spreading the idea. Is that what you wish? Do you desire for France a future of massacres? For, I repeat, ten years will not go by without a social revolution.

“What is it necessary to do in view of this revolution? Will you sulk, shut your eyes, wish nothing, know nothing? No, you should frankly study the movement, frankly inquire whether, perchance, we may not be right. I adjure you, every man of heart who hears me, the question is serious and inevitable.

“Perhaps you will deem it very audacious of me to use such language to a court; but if only two or three persons are struck with the truth of my words and consider them a salutary warning, I shall not have paid too dearly by a few years of imprisonment for the satisfaction of having done my duty.

“If I, by counselling you to look at the certainty of a social revolution, could avoid the shedding of a few drops of blood, oh! I could die within the walls of a prison and die satisfied.

“If, however, my warnings do not suffice and the social revolution bursts forth by force and by the fault of the *bourgeoisie*, I shall be found with my friends.”

In spite of these warnings the tribunal, on January 19, sentenced Kropotkin, Bernard, Bordat, and Gautier to imprisonment for five years, a fine of one thousand francs, ten years of police supervision, and five years of exclusion from civil rights;

three others to imprisonment for four years, a fine of one hundred francs, ten years of supervision and five years of exclusion; four others to imprisonment for three years, a fine of five hundred francs, ten years of supervision, and five years of exclusion; five others to imprisonment for two years a fine of three hundred francs, ten years of supervision, and five years of exclusion; twelve others to imprisonment for fifteen months, a fine of two hundred francs, and five years of exclusion; eight others to imprisonment for one year, a fine of one hundred francs, and five years of exclusion; and ten others to imprisonment for six months, a fine of fifty francs, and five years of exclusion. The remaining five or six were acquitted.

Gautier and a number of his comrades have appealed from the verdict, but Kropotkin steadfastly declines to take any further steps in his own behalf.



### The Reading of the Judgement

**This trial... during which all the accused took a very firm attitude, preaching our doctrines for a fortnight had a powerful influence in clearing away false ideas about anarchism in France, and surely contributed to some extent to the revival of socialism in other countries.**

– Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*

# The unemployed demonstration of 9 March 1883, a snapshot of anarchism in the early 1880s

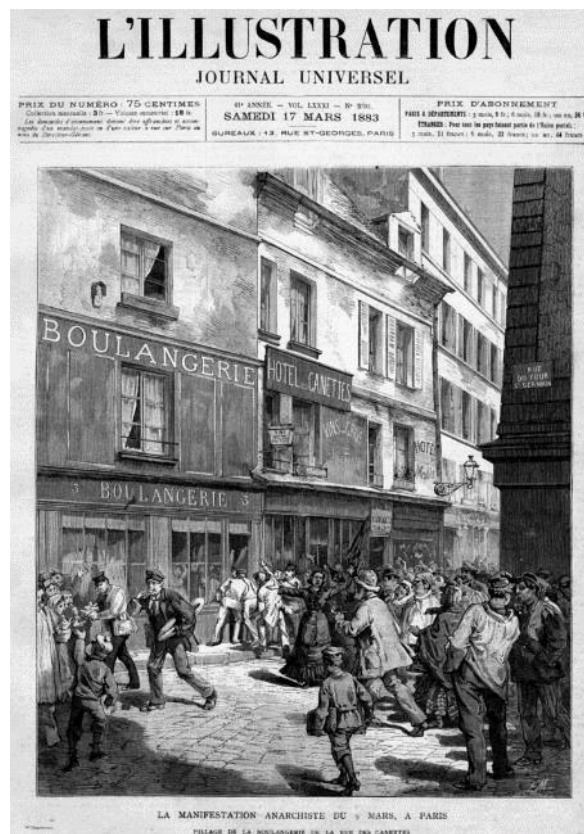
Constance Bantman

The ‘Anarchist demonstration’ of 9 March 1883 was a turning point for the French movement and its public perception. It is often mentioned in histories of the movement as one of the earliest appearances of the black flag, and therefore as a symbol of the movement’s wider visibility; perhaps more interestingly, it provides a snapshot of French anarchism in the early 1880s, a time when the ideas developed throughout the 1870s in small circles were gaining new recruits in France and internationally. The demonstration was, famously, a landmark in Louise Michel’s transition to anarchism and in the young Émile Pouget’s own emergence as an anarchist activist; the extensive press coverage of the event and its ramifications tells us about these prominent militants in relatively new ways. A closer look at the demonstration, its heavy-handed policing and the trial which followed in June 1883 brings fascinating insights into the links of anarchism with organised labour protest, in this pivotal period when the ruthless repression which followed the Commune started to be eased – but only to give way to an equally uncompromising stance regarding street and labour agitation. In this respect, the demonstration and its aftermath clearly set the tone for the highly repressive treatment of

anarchism by the police and the courts, and point to the articulation of the ethos of defiance and resistance which was to become so central to anarchism in the following decade.

## A context of economic crisis

While it has mainly gone down in history because of its associations with looting and hence illegality and violence, the 1883 demonstration – often referred to as the ‘Manifestation des Invalides’, after the site of the initial gathering – is just as important for the fact that *bakeries* were looted, by *unemployed workers* (*‘sans travail’*, as they were known at the time). This, in turn, is a welcome reminder of the nascent anarchist movement’s deep involvement in labour protests, in a period characterised by a massive economic slowdown; this effort to mobilise workers was at the very least a legacy from the First International, and not just a rare forerunner of the movement’s embrace of organised labour protest from the early 1890s onwards, with syndicalism. It was indeed a trade union that had called for the March 1883 demonstration of unemployed workers, on the Esplanade of the Invalides – the latter being an imposing symbol of military power in the very heart of bourgeois Paris,



almost directly across the Elysée Palace, the official residence of the president of the young Third Republic erected on the ruins and bloodshed of the Paris Commune. As Jean Maitron points out in his authoritative *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France*, this kind of mobilisation can also be linked specifically with the future propaganda conducted in the period of syndicalism, whereby anarchists and syndicalists endeavoured – usually without success – to reach out to marginal groups across France. The 1883 mobilisation also points to the anarchists’ engagement with ‘bread and butter’ issues, which tends to be backgrounded in accounts of this decade, where propaganda by the deed or indeed accounts focusing on the fascinating cultural politics of anarchism occupy centre-stage. Pouget himself stated during the June trial that he had taken part in the demonstration in order to ‘protest against the situation of unemployed workers’.

However, English-style open-air protest meetings were prohibited in France – a fact that demonstrators and authorities were well aware of, and repeatedly referred to. The meeting was therefore banned but went ahead regardless, led by ‘the unavoidable Louise Michel’ and guarded by a very heavy police presence. The date – just days before 18 March, the anniversary of the Paris Commune – had subversive connotations, and the demonstration was expected to be the first in a series of similar events; the atmosphere was clearly febrile when it came to labour protests. Police forces from all over Paris were mobilised for the gathering, including the mounted police. By around 1pm, the large esplanade was completely full, and after the police dispersed the demonstrators, they made their way to the affluent Boulevard Saint Germain. Louise Michel and Émile Pouget carried a black flag, and about 5-600 demonstrators were estimated to have taken part. Around 15 or 20 of these went on to loot three bakeries in the Latin quarter, shouting slogans like ‘*du pain, du travail ou du plomb*’ (bread, work or lead) and ‘*Nous voulons du travail et du pain*’ (we want work and bread). There were also rumours of a black flag carried by Michel in the left bank demo, with the slogan ‘*du pain ou la mort*’ (bread or death) on it in white. Pouget and a certain Mareuil were arrested; four arrests were made near the Elysée, including for window breaking. Among those arrested were students, several unemployed men, and artisans.

Even the conservative press acknowledged that this was not ‘a serious riot’ but rather a ‘disorder’. The

conservative *Moniteur Universel*, interestingly, saw the scuffles as evidence of a failure of political pedagogy, dispelling any hope of a ‘*République sociale*’ (a loaded term referring to ideas of social redistribution via the state), and wondering how ‘serious citizens, enlightened as to their rights and their duties, could have been so mistaken regarding those of M. le Président de la République, as to go and ask him for some bread’. These remarks and the core demand of the demonstration – that individuals should not be allowed to starve under any condition due to poverty and unemployment – are, of course, still acutely topical.

A subsequent raid at Pouget’s house yielded 600 copies of an antimilitarist pamphlet, leading to a second charge against him. According to Maitron, the pamphlets referred to notions of propaganda by the deed which, while ‘quite puerile’, contained revolutionary turns of phrase which could only draw the judges’ attention.

### **Repression and reaction: anarchists in court**

The much-publicised trial started in late June, with Michel, Pouget and Mareuil being charged with incitation to bread plunder by a gang (!). Another six individuals who had not been detained after the demonstration were among the accused, charged with incitement to murder and plunder, inciting the military through the distribution of anti-militarist pamphlets. According to Maitron, the hearings juxtaposed very sincere declarations, most notably from Michel, with testimonies from demonstrators who were clearly in the thralls of propaganda by the deed; such conflations would be repeated time and again in the anti-anarchist trials of the next years, pointing to the opacity of anarchism for the authorities as well as the political usefulness of such mass trials.

The inventory of the material evidence produced at the trial and painstakingly cited in the press is a clear forerunner of the judicial treatment of anarchism which was to prevail henceforth, whereby even anodyne objects were presented alongside far more compromising items and regarded as suspicious because of their assumed connections with an anarchist conspiracy. The items produced in 1883 included lists of addresses based all over France, bits of broken plates, a revolver found at Pouget’s place, a handkerchief containing 74 silver coins, Pouget’s notebook, three files sharpened into the shape of a dagger, a printing press, 600 copies of the manifesto ‘*A l’armée*’, as well as the black flag. This was a

mixture of subversive antimilitarist literature, possible weapons, symbols of ‘allegiance’ to anarchist ideas, as well as written documents suggesting – in the vaguest terms – a possible anarchist ‘conspiracy’.

Just over a decade later, in August 1894, thirty men identified as anarchists (not always correctly) would appear in the infamous ‘Trial of the Thirty’, charged with criminal conspiracy. Among those accused was the now notorious Pouget, who had been editing the riotous *Père Peinard* since 1889; by the time the trial began, he had already fled to London, where he would very soon relaunch his paper. What is especially interesting in the 1894 trial, and already incipient in the 1883 one, is the legal harassment inflicted on anarchist journalists, editors and writers, at a time when espousing and sharing anarchist ideas was considered hugely transgressive, or indeed illegal. The inclusion in the evidence of lists of addresses and a notebook is an early hint of this obsession with the anarchist written word and those who read it, which soon evolved into a full-blown ‘conspiracy’ in the minds of the authorities and public opinion. Just as the large anti-anarchist trials of the following decade endeavoured to do, the Invalides prosecution sought to depoliticise and criminalise anarchism – a strategy denounced by Pouget during his trial speech in 1883, along with the ‘inquisitorial’ methods used to corner the accused.

While Pouget was especially compromised due to the evidence found at his place, Michel was of course the centre of attention at the trial, and some papers even described it as ‘Le procès de Louise Michel’. Her cross-examination was characteristically fearless and witty, as she explained that she had attended the demonstration despite being certain that ‘peaceful demonstrations are pointless’, and had seized a black flag because ‘the cry of hunger should not go unnoticed’. She declined to comment on the allegation that a third of those who had taken part in the demonstration had prior convictions, stating instead that ‘had the police not got involved, there would not have been any disorder’. Far from distancing herself from her co-defendants, she described Mareuil as a ‘clever young man’, and Pouget as ‘very intelligent’, the right person to take things in his hands as ‘the moral level had really declined’. When asked through periphrases mentioning ‘chemistry’ whether Pouget was involved in terrorism, she simply commented that ‘his taste for chemistry was

no surprise to [her], and [she] could only encourage it’. Pouget’s own defence regarding this rather damning piece of evidence could almost be described as banter, as he wondered out loud whether it was now forbidden to dabble in chemistry and ballistics.

Michel’s by-then characteristic bravery and indifference to the very real risk of a prison sentence remain astounding, but are the least surprising aspect of her statement; whether truthful or not, the mention of Pouget dabbling in explosives catches the eye, as does this altogether rare testimony of links between Michel and Pouget, two leading figures of the pre-1914 French and international movements who rarely appear together in the press or in archives, not least because these events of 1883 remain poorly known. While the focus was firmly on Michel, it is also tempting to spot between the lines of trial reports the signs of the emergence of a future great activist. One journalist noted that Pouget remained ‘unshakeably level-headed during his interrogation’, and his characteristic political sharpness is already plain to see, as he questioned the legality of using unpublished material as evidence against him, mocked the portrayal of anarchism as a conspiracy and exposed the dubious legal underpinnings of the proceedings – even eliciting laughter from the audience at one point.

Michel was sentenced to 6 years in prison and Pouget, to 8 years. She ended up at Saint Lazare prison and then in Clermont by July. She was released twice to visit her beloved mother, who passed away in January 1885, to Michel’s deep grief. Michel was freed in January 1886 when an amnesty was passed, after consistently refusing a personal pardon. Pouget was also freed in 1886, after 3 years as a common prisoner in Melun prison. For both of them, and for the French and international movements, a new period of intense activism was starting. There were similar demonstrations of unemployed workers until 1885, but without similar incidents, even at a time when anarchist publications raised more or less explicit calls to violence. Just two months before the Invalides demonstration, in January 1883, the ‘trial of the 66’ had taken place in Lyon, with 66 anarchists accused of being affiliated to the International – another sign that for the authorities too, both French and international, a new era was also beginning, and new patterns of repression were emerging.

# The Trial of Louise Michel

*Liberty* (Boston), 21 July 1883

The great interest felt by the readers of *Liberty* in our report of the trial of Kropotkin and his companions at Lyons moves us almost as much as the importance of the event to pursue a similar policy regarding the more recent trial of Louise Michel and her friends at Paris. Accordingly we present the following detailed report:

The defendants in this celebrated case, besides the famous Louise herself, were as follows: Émile Pouget, book-agent, aged twenty-three years; Eugene Mareuil, shoemaker, thirty-three years; Jacques Moreau, also called Gareau, printer, twenty-three years; Paul Martinet, hosier, twenty-six years; Henri Enfroy, lithographer, thirty years; Madame Bouillet, tavern-keeper, fifty-four years. Léon Thiery and Claude Corget, who had been released on bail, did not appear for trial, and consequently were defaulted. The nature of the charges against the prisoners can best be described by the following extracts from the indictment:

“Placards on the walls of Paris summoned labourers out of work to meet on Friday, March 9, 1883, in *l’esplanade des Invalides*. The police having dispersed those who met in answer thereto, a certain number of them, led by Louise Michel, Pouget, and Mareuil, started for the Boulevard Saint Germain, through the greater portion of which they marched. Louise Michel walked at their head, carrying a black flag; she was supported on either arm by Pouget and Mareuil; following them were five hundred persons uttering cries of ‘Down with the police’ and ‘Vive la Révolution!’ About three o’clock they reached a bake-shop kept by one Bouché. Fifteen or twenty individuals, of whom five or six were armed with loaded canes, rushed into the shop, crying ‘Bread, labour, or lead!’ and threatened the baker with their canes, which they raised to strike him. They took some loaves, which they threw to those remaining in the street, and on leaving broke a pane of glass in the shop window. Resuming their march, they stopped a second time before the bake-shop of Madame Augereau. Louise Michel struck the earth with her flag-staff, and a woman’s voice was heard to cry: ‘Go on!’ At this command about fifteen individuals entered the bake-shop crying: ‘Bread; we are hungry!’ Others followed; they took loaves and cakes and broke windows and plates. After this second pillage they again took up their line of march and stopped before the bake-shop of Madame Moricet. Louise Michel, still escorted by Pouget and Mareuil, waved her flag-staff, rested it upon the ground, and began to laugh,

as Madame Moricet says, who was watching from her shop. At this double signal the shop was invaded by a large number of individuals, crying: ‘Labour or bread!’ Madame Moricet immediately cut off some slices, which she offered them, but that did not suffice. The shop was pillaged, the invaders taking loaves and cakes and breaking empty plates. An officer of the peace being informed of what was going on, started with a few subordinates in pursuit of the crowd. He caught up with it at the Place Maubert, pushed through it, and confronting Louise Michel, Pouget, and Mareuil, said to them: ‘I arrest you.’ Pouget sprang forward to give Louise Michel a chance to escape, and outraged the officer by branding him repeatedly as a coward and a rascal. In the tumult Louise succeeded in escaping; with the aid of one of her accomplices, she took possession of a carriage stationed at the Quai des Tournelles. A few moments later the coachman found his vehicle on the Pont Marie, but Louise Michel had disappeared. . . . The pillage of the shops is not denied; Louise Michel admits that she was between Pouget and Mareuil, at the head of the band which invaded the shops; that it was her design to parade through the streets of Paris with the persons who had been driven from the esplanade; and that, to guide them, she carried before her ‘the black flag of the strikes;’ but she denies having stopped intentionally before bake-shops or having given in any manner whatever the signal to pillage them.”

The indictment then says that upon the person of Pouget were found seven receipts for postal packages, a loaded six-barrelled revolver, and seventy-one francs in change, and that he at first gave a false address in the hope that a friend would be able to remove from his room several articles thus catalogued in the indictment:

“Search of his room resulted in the discovery of three files sharpened like daggers, a copying press, six hundred copies of a sixteen-page pamphlet entitled ‘To the Army,’ a large number of Anarchistic journals and pamphlets, and some incendiary and explosive instruments. These instruments consist of capsules of fulminate of mercury used to explode dynamite cartridges, and bottles containing a solution of a phosphate in a mixture of weak petroleum and sulphuret of carbon. An expert’s examination shows that this solution is so dangerous that a few drops poured upon wood or any

combustible material suffice to induce immediately a rapid combustion.”

The indictment further charged that, on that same ninth of March, Pouget sent several packages of the pamphlet, “To the Army,” to Amiens, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Vienna, Rouen, Rheims, and Troyes; that the package sent to Troyes was received by Enfroy, and its contents distributed among the soldiers by Enfroy, Moreau, and Martinet; and that the package sent to Rouen was received by Madame Bouillet, who delivered it to Corget.

The trial of these charges began on Thursday, June 21, before the Court of Assizes in Paris, the presiding magistrate being M. Ramé. The public were excluded from the courtroom; nevertheless, it was filled by witnesses, journalists, and lawyers. On a table lay the celebrated black flag and the articles seized at Pouget’s room. It was noticed that the stolen loaves did not appear in the collection. Attorney General Quesnay de Beaufort appeared for the government, M. Balandreau (by direction of the court) for Louise Michel, M. Pierre for Pouget, M. Zevort for Mareuil, and M. Laguerre for the remaining defendants. At twenty minutes past eleven the prisoners were brought in, causing a great sensation in the court-room. Louise Michel was dressed in black. Her pale face showed that the three months which she had spent in prison while awaiting trial had not been without their effect. She was very calm and responded smilingly to the salutations of her friends. Henri Rochefort, Lissagaray, the historian of the Commune, and several others crossed the room to shake hands with her. After the reading of the indictment, M. Ramé proceeded to examine Louise Michel, who answered the questions asked her very clearly, calmly, and resolutely.

*The Court.* — Your age?

*Louise Michel.* — Forty-seven.

*The Court.* — Your profession?

*Louise Michel.* — Teacher and woman of letters.

*The Court.* — Your last residence?

*Louise Michel.* — The prison of Saint Lazare.  
[Laughter]

*The Court.* — Have you ever been condemned?

*Louise Michel.* — Yes, in 1871.

*The Court.* — I know that, but that is a matter with which I cannot deal, since you have been amnestied. Have you not been condemned since?

*Louise Michel.* — I was condemned January 9, 1882, for having taken part in the Blanqui manifestation.

*The Court.* — You take part, then, in all manifestations?

*Louise Michel.* — I am always with the suffering.

*The Court.* — Was it as one of the suffering that you took part in the manifestation of March 9?

*Louise Michel.* — It was my duty to be there. At that time there were fifty thousand labourers out of work who thought it wise to assemble in demand for bread, and as I foresaw that, in accordance with the usual treatment administered by our governors to the vile multitude, the crowd would be swept away by cannon, it would have been cowardly of me not to accompany them. So I went with them, though knowing that a peaceful manifestation could result in nothing.

*The Court.* — Did you ask your friends to come with you?

*Louise Michel.* — No; I was not in favour of the manifestation. Nevertheless I attended it because it had

been decided upon in a meeting.

*The Court.* — Did you know Mareuil?

*Louise Michel.* — No.

*The Court.* — Did you know Pouget?

*Louise Michel.* — Yes; I had known him for several months, and I regret very much that on March 9 he, as well as Mareuil, tried to prevent me from being taken.

*The Court.* — You knew that Pouget busied himself with politics.

*Louise Michel.* — Yes; and that is why the young man interested me. In these days, when the moral level is lowering so rapidly, it is well that some young people are thinking about the misery of the people. That is better than frequenting cafés and bad places.

*The Court.* — Was not Pouget your secretary? Did you not give him the names of your followers? Did you not entrust to him the task of spreading your ideas?

*Louise Michel.* — Pouget was not my secretary; he has several times sent pamphlets, not to my followers, but rather to persons curious to know what our ideas and demands are.

*The Court.* — You take part in revolutionary propagandism?

*Louise Michel.* — Yes; it is the object of my life.

***The Court.* — You take part in revolutionary propagandism?  
*Louise Michel.* — Yes; it is the object of my life.**

*The Court.* — And Pouget, too?

*Pouget.* — Yes; I admit it, and I will always admit it.

*The Court.* — Had you an appointment with Pouget and Mareuil at the manifestation?

*Louise Michel.* — No; we met there by chance.

*The Court.* — Do you believe the manifestation was made by labourers out of work?

*Louise Michel.* — Yes, sir.

*The Court.* — Nevertheless, out of thirty-three individuals arrested on that day, thirteen had previously been convicted of robbery.

*Louise Michel.* — I could not inquire into the civil status and judicial record of each one.

*The Court.* — Did you believe that the manifestation could procure work for the labourers?

*Louise Michel.* — Personally I did not, but, I repeat, I went there from duty; moreover, if the police had not interfered, there would have been no trouble.

*The Court.* — Did you not desire to get up a private manifestation of your own?

*Louise Michel.* — I followed the crowd of unfortunates who were clamouring for bread. I asked for a black flag, and an unknown person brought me black rag on the end of a broomstick.

*The Court.* — Who brought you this flag?

*Louise Michel* (with firmness). — Even if I knew his name, I would not tell it to you.

*The Court.* — One might think, from the flag, that the manifestation had been arranged in advance.

*Louise Michel.* — No one who knew that the flag consisted of a bit of black stuff on the end of a broomstick would believe it, and no more do you, sir. I wished to show that the labourers were dying of hunger and in need of work. It is the flag of strikes and famines.

*The Court.* — Did you put yourself at the head of the manifestation which marched into Paris.

*Louise Michel.* — When given the flag, I was being followed by poor children from twelve to fifteen years old, in rags, crying from hunger. I know not what road we took. I marched straight ahead without stopping.

*The Court.* — Were not Mareuil and Pouget near you, holding you by the arms?

*Louise Michel.* — Yes; they insisted on protecting me, though I begged them to let me alone.

*The Court.* — Why did you stop in front of Madame Augereau's bake-shop?

*Louise Michel.* — I probably stopped several times, but I do not know where. We were followed by *gamins* crying for bread. I could not trouble myself about the crumbs that might be given them. The first bakers gave bread and sous voluntarily. I confess that this almsgiving humiliated me, but it was no time to recriminate.

*The Court.* — The bakers say, on the contrary, that the individuals who entered their shops were armed with clubs.

*Louise Michel.* — There were none among us who had clubs. The people crying "Bread or lead" is one of the theatrical effects of the police.

*The Court.* — The prudent baker closed his shop; he was not reassured.

*Louise Michel.* — In presence of the people it was scarcely worth while.

*The Court.* — They demanded labour and bread.

*Louise Michel.* — Yes, and those who accompanied us were all hungry.

*The Court.* — You have a peculiar theory about bread. Do you believe that a man may take it when he is hungry?

*Louise Michel.* — I believe that the poor have that right.

As for me, I would not condescend to take it or ask for it. If at any time I should need it after working for the Republic all my life, I would throw this existence in its face.

*The Court.* — That would be one of your theatrical effects.

*Louise Michel.* — We need no theatrical effects. Have we not continually before us the frightful spectacle of misery? It was not my intention that they should take bread; I know very well that one day's sustenance amounts to nothing.

*The Court.* — This manifestation recalls the worst days of the Revolution. For the riots then began with pillage of the bake-shops.

*Louise Michel.* — It is not my fault if we are still in the days of '89, and if the misery of the people is as great now as it was then.

*The Court.* — You pretend not to know that the bake-shops were pillaged; it is as if you should say that you do not see the gentlemen of the jury.

*Louise Michel.* — Exactly; just now I did not see these gentlemen; now I see them, because you have just

**"It is not my fault if  
we are still in the  
days of '89, and if the  
misery of the people  
is as great now as it  
was then."**

called my attention to them. In the street I was thinking of poverty and did not see what was going on around me; my mind was not upon the bake-shops.

*The Court.* — But you waved your flag before Madame Augereau's bake-shop.

*Louise Michel.* — I do not know Madame Augereau, and did not stop there, perhaps I waved my flag; not having the arms of Hercules. I was obliged to lower it very often.

*The Court.* — But you gave the signal for pillage by saying: "Go on!"

*Louise Michel.* — I may have said those words, but not as a signal. I do not remember them. Such proceedings would have had to be arranged in advance; that is out of the question.

*The Court.* — They have pillaged and broken windows.

*Louise Michel.* — I have not concerned myself about the pillage of such or such a bake-shop; you know very well that that is nothing to me; I have seen pillage and murder in 1871 of a very different character.

*The Court.* — Do not the bakers deserve protection?

*Louise Michel.* — Do not those who produce all and have nothing merit some regard?

*The Court.* — You find this pillage very natural, then!

*Louise Michel.* — I did not say that. But I speak seriously and repeat to you that I stopped before no bake-shop; I would perhaps have done so, had I believed it possible in that way to give bread to the poor forever.

*The Court.* — Do you admit having laughed?

*Louise Michel.* — The spectacle was not such as to make me laugh. I was thinking of poverty and that street as full of people as a hive is of bees, and I said to myself that it is not the bees who eat the honey. There is nothing amusing about that.

*The Court.* — They have broken plates.

*Louise Michel.* — What is a plate?

*The Court.* — Then the manufacturers in your eyes merit no regard?

*Louise Michel.* — None whatever. When we are put in prison, do they see that our families are fed?

*The Court.* — The shop-keepers say that the crowd did not rush in upon them until a signal was given.

*Louise Michel.* — It is not true. It was a movement of children dying of hunger.

*The Court.* — How did it happen, then, that they passed five bake-shops without pillaging them?

*Louise Michel.* — That proves that I am right. Here is a letter in which some one writes me that bread was distributed voluntarily.

*The Court.* — You can give that to your lawyer. It is reasonable to suppose that they entered at a signal.

*Louise Michel.* — Monsieur, had I done that I should have been mad and should now be at Saint Anne instead of here.

*The Court.* — Oh, there are persons whom vanity or a desire for popularity move to senseless acts.

*Louise Michel.* — You know very well that I am neither vain nor desirous of popularity. I went to the manifestation because it was my duty.

*The Court.* — Arrived at the Place Maubert, you said to the officer: "Do me no harm; we ask only bread."

*Louise Michel.* — Pardon me; I would not turn coward in ten minutes. I said to my friends: "They will do us no harm."

*The Court.* — Were Pouget and Mareuil arrested in your stead?

*Louise Michel.* — Yes.

*The Court.* — You ran away?

*Louise Michel.* — I beg your pardon, I am not in the habit of running away. I went because my friends demanded that I should not allow myself to be arrested that day. Another time I will not listen to them; that will save me from being charged with cowardice.

*The Court.* — Do you know the pamphlet: "To the Army"?

*Louise Michel.* — What I know is this — that, when the Orleanists were tampering with the army, I spoke of the necessity of distributing pamphlets, and then I began to tamper with the army in the interest of the Republic. They wished to destroy this Republic which is not ours but is a door opening to the future. I did not make the pamphlet, and I no more read the pamphlets of my friends than they read mine.

*The Court.* — Are you familiar with Pouget's special studies regarding incendiary materials?

*Louise Michel.* — Everybody studies chemistry now. For my part I read the scientific reviews and seek to put at the disposition of labourers all physical forces which may help to diminish their misery.

*The Court.* — You may be seated.

*Louise Michel.* — I have a word to say about the revolver found in Pouget's hands. That revolver belongs to me.

*The Court.* — That matters little. The indictment does not take the revolver into consideration.



*Louise Michel.* — Pardon me, that matters much, because, if I passed the weapon to another, that shows the manifestation was peaceful.

*The Court.* — Do you call a manifestation peaceful in which three bake-shops were pillaged?

*Louise Michel.* — Ah! in 1871 the Versailles government did not confine itself to pillaging bake-shops.

Having finished with Louise Michel, M. Ramé turned his attention to Pouget, who answered his questions with an imperturbable *sang-froid*.

*The Court.* — You have means of existence. Why did you go to the manifestation?

*Pouget.* — I went to protest against the situation of fifty thousand labourers in misery.

*The Court.* — Did you not expect to meet Louise Michel there?

*Pouget.* — Not at all.

*The Court.* — Who gave her the black flag?

*Pouget.* — I do not know.

*The Court.* — Did you not hold Louise Michel by the arm?

*Pouget.* — The fact is of no importance.

*The Court.* — The prosecution will say that those who were at the head were the chiefs.

*Pouget.* — One may be at the head and not be chief.

*The Court.* — What *role* had you to play in the manifestation?

*Pouget.* — I had none.

*The Court.* — You expected to be arrested?

*Pouget.* — No, for I thought the government would have sense enough to let the manifestation alone.

*The Court.* — Oh, yes, of course, it is the government which does all the wrongs.

*Pouget.* — Quite correct, sir.

*The Court.* — Nevertheless, you gave a note to a friend that day asking him to remove certain objects from your room. Who was that friend?

*Pouget.* — I will not name him. Moreover, the note was written after my arrest. I did that because I know that the police have a habit of taking anything they please when they search premises, and that it is impossible to recover articles thus taken.

*The Court.* — Did you know of the pillage of the bake-shops?

*Pouget.* — I did not learn of it till later. I only knew that the bakers were giving bread and sous.

*The Court.* — Did you call the officers cowards?

*Pouget.* — I may have said some sharp words, but I do not recall them.

*The Court.* — You had a revolver upon you.

*Louise Michel.* — Monsieur, that revolver was mine.

*Pouget.* — I maintain that the revolver is mine.

*The Court.* — Either way the fact is of no importance. Neither of you are prosecuted for that.

*Louise Michel.* — It will be shown that the revolver belongs to me.

*The Court.* — You had seventy-one francs in change upon you.

*Pouget.* — Yes, that sum was the result of a collection taken up at a meeting in behalf of those condemned at Lyons.

*The Court.* — But you never said this before.

*Pouget.* — I did not wish to say so at the preliminary examination.

*The Court.* — It has been thought that this money was to pay those taking part in the manifestation. [Laughter.]

*Pouget.* — Seventy-one francs for ten or fifteen thousand persons! The share of each would have been meagre.

*The Court.* — When was this meeting held?

*Pouget.* — Two nights previously.

*The Court.* — Why did you keep the money two days?

*Pouget.* — Louise Michel did not hand it to me until that morning.

*The Court.* — Receipts for postal packages were also found upon you.

*Pouget.* — Yes; the packages contained journals and copies of "To the Army."

*The Court.* — You assumed the name of Martin in sending them.

*Pouget.* — Yes, but I did not know that there was any real individual corresponding to the address.

*The Court.* — You know the consequences to Martin. He was implicated in this prosecution and he is dead.

## **"I went to protest against the situation of fifty thousand labourers in misery"**

*Pouget.* — I do not think that his death is attributable to his arrest.

*The Court.* — Where did you get these pamphlets?

*Pouget.* — From Herzig.

*The Court.* — Yes, from Herzig of Geneva. Geneva is now the cancer of Europe.

*Pouget* (energetically). — The cancers are the governments.

*The Court.* — You have distributed a good many of these pamphlets.

*Pouget.* — Not many, since out of a thousand I have still six hundred left.

*The Court.* — Does this pamphlet express your sentiments?

*Pouget.* — You have told me that this is not a prosecution of opinions; therefore I shall not reply.

*The Court.* — Certain manuscripts were seized at your residence, not yet published, but intended for publication – notably one on the coming Revolution.

*Pouget.* — It seems to me very droll that you should busy yourself about that.

*The Court.* — It is a part of your examination. This pamphlet says: “To kill an employer, to kill a deputy, is better than a hundred speeches.”

*Pouget.* — You are conducting a prosecution of opinion.

*The Court.* — Gentlemen of the jury, it is necessary to read also some passages from: the pamphlet “To the Army.”

*Pouget.* — Read the whole of it. You should not read extracts only.

*The Court.* — I will read what I choose. You can say what you please in your defence. [After reading.] This is the pamphlet you are distributing throughout France. Nothing could be more abominable than this pamphlet.

*Pouget* (coldly). — It is no more abominable than the mitrailleuse volleys of 1871 fired by the Versailles troops.

*The Court.* — Nothing like it was ever before brought to the attention of justice. I have a right to condemn it before the jury.

*Pouget.* — You have no right to anticipate the verdict of the jury.

*The Court.* — Do you recognise the chemical products seized at your residence?

*Pouget.* — Yes; chemical studies please me.

*The Court.* — But it is chemistry applied to politics that you study.

*Pouget.* — I tell you again that you are conducting a prosecution of opinions. All the products seized at my room are in the market. Have I used them? Can you prove that I intended to use them? Well, then! why not prosecute all people who study chemistry?

*The Court.* — All who do as you do will be prosecuted in the courts.

*Pouget.* — Oh, I know that you would like nothing better.

*The Court.* — You have declared war upon society; it defends itself; sit down.

*Pouget.* — One word more. Among the documents seized was my will. I demand its restoration. I need it for my defence.

*The Court.* — The document has no bearing upon the case.

*Pouget.* — You cannot judge whether or no it may be of service to me. If you are unwilling to produce it, it is because you have opened it. I assert that you have violated this will; it is an infamy of justice.

*The Court.* — Assert what you will, and draw conclusions if you think best; for my part, I decide, in virtue of my discretionary power, that this document shall not be restored to you till after the case is finished.

*Pouget* (in a louder voice). — It is an infamy of justice to have violated this will.

At this point a short recess was taken, after which the judge, who had in the meantime undoubtedly reflected, announced amid laughter that the will in question might be demanded at the clerk’s office. Next came the examination of Mareuil.

*The Court.* — You were not out of work on March 9. You are a very good workman. Why did you go to the manifestation?

*Mareuil.* — It was my duty. I have lived in poverty for thirty-three years. My mother drowned herself because of poverty at the age of sixty-six. I could not abandon my brothers. No one will pretend that I have not done my duty.

*The Court.* — That has led to your imprisonment pending trial.

*Mareuil.* — Yes; I have been kept in a sort of secret confinement for more than three months. But what matters it? I went to the Champ-de-Mars to give my voice in favour of the labourers out of work.

*The Court.* — We hear the best reports about you. What did you hope to accomplish by going there?

*Mareuil.* — To show that I was there to sustain my brothers.

*The Court.* — Did you know Louise Michel?

*Mareuil.* — Only from hearing her in the meetings; but I know that she is the best of all women.

*The Court.* — Did you assist in the pillage of the bake-shops?

*Mareuil.* — No; I was not aware of it; I only heard children saying they had received bread.

*The Court.* — You are accused of having cried: “Down with the police! Down with Vidocqs!”<sup>1</sup>

*Mareuil.* — No, I did not say those words. I said nothing, and allowed myself to be arrested without resistance.

*The Court.* — Did you not do that to let Louise Michel escape?

*Mareuil.* — To that I will not reply.

*The Court.* — You belong to no society, and are not engaged propagandism?

*Mareuil.* — Before becoming a skilled workman it is necessary to be an apprentice. I have had no instruction in socialism, and am not prepared to engage in propagandism.

Enfroy was next questioned.

*The Court.* — You have been convicted of robbery four times?

*Enfroy.* — Yes; but I ask permission to explain. Gentlemen, I had the misfortune to be the son of a girl. I never knew my mother. I was brought up by an old woman who lived herself upon the public charity. My adopted mother died when I was twelve years old. I was too young to work; I lived as I could, and I was several times convicted of taking part in robberies of cherries or potatoes. (Profound sensation). Since I attained the age of manhood I have worked. I am married and have children, and I defy any one to point to any act of mine committed during my thirteen years of manhood which stains my honour. Since I learned to labour and became a socialist, I have never been convicted.

*The Court.* — Were you in correspondence with Pouget?

*Enfroy.* — No.

*The Court (to Pouget).* — But you sent a package to Enfroy.

*Pouget.* — Yes; I knew him to be a socialist.

*The Court (to Enfroy).* — What did the package contain?

*Enfroy.* — Thirty pamphlets and socialistic journals.

*The Court.* — You gave them to Moreau.

*Enfroy.* — Yes; to relieve myself of them.

The judge then addressed himself to Moreau.

*The Court.* — How many pamphlets did you receive from Enfroy?

*Moreau.* — Twenty. The next day I gave them to various comrades.

*The Court.* — Who threw copies into the barracks at Troyes?

*Moreau.* — I do not know. Perhaps some one came from Rheims to distribute them at Troyes.

*The Court (to Pouget).* — You sent a package to Rheims also?

*Pouget.* — Yes, but that package contained only journals. There were no pamphlets in it.

*The Court.* — It pleases you to say so. But how happens it—

*Pouget.* — It pleases me to say so because it is the truth. I am not the only Anarchist in France and in Navarre. Others may have sent pamphlets to Rheims. [Laughter.]

Martinet, on being questioned, admitted that he had received a dozen of the pamphlets, but said that his wife burned them up.

Madame Bouillet was the last of the defendants to be examined.

*The Court.* — You have never been convicted?

*Bouillet.* — I am fifty-four years old, and was never arrested before.

*The Court.* — Do you know Pouget?

*Bouillet.* — This is the first time that I ever saw him.

*The Court.* — Are you an Anarchist?

*Bouillet.* — I do not know what that means. [Laughter.]

*Pouget.* — Madame Bouillet did not know what the package contained. I wrote her a note, asking her to hand it to a person who would call for it.

*The Court.* — Who was that person?

*Pouget.* — I decline to say.

*The Court (to Madame Bouillet.)* — Why did you accept a package to hand to persons whom you did not know?

*Bouillet.* — My God! that is simple enough; anybody would have done the same.

The will demanded by Pouget was at this point delivered to him. He looked at it and said; “I beg you to

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to police spies, named after Eugène-François Vidocq (1775-1857) was a French criminal who became a spy for the Paris Police before being the founder and first

director of the crime-detection *Sûreté nationale* in 1813, two years after he had organized a plainclothes unit, the *Brigade de la Sûreté* (“Security Brigade”), in Paris. (*Black Flag*)

notice that, without notifying me or any one else, they have opened a will deposited at my residence.”

*The Court.* — We are not here to judge the conduct of the examining magistrate.

*Pouget.* — It is an infamy of justice.

*The Court.* — I cannot allow such language. By virtue of the criminal code I call upon you to sit down.

The examination of the prisoners being finished, the hearing of the witnesses was begun, Boucher, the baker, being first called. He testified that about twenty individuals with loaded canes entered his shop crying: “Bread, labour, or lead,” and that he said to them; “There is bread; take it, but do not break anything.”

*The Court.* — Did you notice who was at the head of the crowd?

*Witness.* — No.

*The Court.* — Did you not see a woman in black with a black flag?

*Witness.* — Yes.

*The Court.* — Do you recognise her among the accused?

*Witness.* — No.

*The Court.* — Were the people who entered your shop children?

*Witness.* — No, they were reasonable men [Laughter],— of a reasonable age, I mean.

*The Court* (to Louise Michel). — You said they were children.

*Louise Michel.* — Undoubtedly I said that children were shouting that bread had been given them; as for the people with loaded canes, we do not know them; they are not ours; they are not among these accused; I do not know whence they come — or, rather, I know only too well.

*The Court.* — Whence, then, do they come, in your opinion?

*Louise Michel.* — From the police.

Madame Augereau, baker, testified that she saw Louise Michel stop before her door, and that several persons entered who stole nearly all her bread besides breaking two windows and a plate.

*The Court.* — Do you recognise Louise Michel?

*Witness.* — No, her back was turned to the shop.

*The Court.* — Did she wave her flag?

*Witness.* — I do not know.

*The Court.* — Did she shout: “Go on”?

*Witness.* — I did not hear her.

*The Court.* — Did you give your bread voluntarily?

*Witness.* — No.

*Louise Michel.* — Before the examining magistrate bakers admitted that they gave bread, but I do not trouble myself about that.

Mlle. Rosalie Augereau, aged seventeen, daughter of the preceding witness, testified that she heard a woman say: “Go on,” but she could not say that the words were uttered by Louise Michel. All she could say was that she heard a woman’s voice. This young lady added that she heard the noise of the flag as it struck the ground.

*Louise Michel.* — Did it make much noise?

*Witness.* — I saw it, but did not hear it. [Laughter.]

Moricet, another baker, testified that he was asleep when his little girl came to awaken him, saying, “They are robbing our house.” He went down and found his shop full of people. A well-dressed individual reassured him with these words: “Say nothing to them; let them alone.”

*The Court.* — Did Madame Moricet give her bread voluntarily?

*Witness.* — A portion of it; afterwards the people helped themselves.

*The Court.* — Were the pillagers

*gamins?*<sup>1</sup>

*Witness.* — There were *gamins* among them, but also well-dressed people of thirty.

*Louise Michel.* — I have nothing to say. If it pleases you to condemn me, well and good. I consider that you have a right to accuse me of revolutionary propagandism, but of pillage,— no.

*M. Pierre* (one of the lawyers for the defence). — Well-dressed people, I imagine, take no orders from Louise Michel.

Then came Madame Moricet, who said that a crowd headed by a woman with a flag came in front of her shop. The woman stopped, laid down her flag, looked at her, and began to laugh. Some cried: “Bread or

<sup>1</sup> Street urchins. (*Black Flag*)

Labour!" The witness said she could give them no labour.

*Louise Michel.* — This testimony is extremely clear,— so clear that I do not understand it at all. How did I laugh, Madame?

*Witness* (opening her mouth and attempting a huge laugh). — Like that, and I did not know why, for I do not know you.

*Louise Michel.* — Madame, I am very disconsolate, but you dreamed of that laugh. And if I had blown my nose, Madame, would that have been a signal also? You were frightened, that is all. You were under an hallucination.

Carnat, the officer who made the arrests, testified that Pouget resisted and called him a coward and a rascal.

*The Court.* — Did not Louise Michel say anything?

*Witness.* — She said. "Do me no harm."

*The Court.* — Did she add: "We ask only bread?"

*Witness.* — I did not hear her.

*M. Zevort.* — Did you hear Mareuil say anything?

*Witness.* — No.

*Louise Michel.* — I did not say: "Do me no harm." I said: "They will do us no harm."

*M. Pierre.* — Have you not heard that there were other women in the manifestation?

*Witness.* — I have heard rumours to that effect.

*Louise Michel.* — I beg the defence to let the accusation rest upon me rather than upon any other person.

Then came several officers to testify to the words used by Louise Michel when they tried to arrest her. Their statements varied, and Louise Michel pointed out the contradictions, adding: "I repeat that I said; 'They will do us no harm!' It is of little importance whether I afterwards said these words: 'We ask only bread.'"

*The Court* (excitedly). — It is of more importance than you think. These words, repetitions of those uttered in the bake-shops, would prove that the pillage resulted from an inspiration which you shared if you did not provoke.

*Louise Michel* (ironically). — I see that I am judged in advance.

*The Court* (recovering possession of itself). — No; the jury will judge you.

Louise Michel smiled.

The government then called M. Girard, an expert, who had analysed the contents of Pouget's bottles. He testified that one of them contained a combination of phosphorus and sulphuret of carbon, which was an exclusively incendiary preparation.

*Pouget* (placidly). — I am sorry to contradict the expert. I defy him to pour the contents of the bottle on the floor and thereby set fire to it.

*The Court* (to the expert). — Can you prove your statement?

The expert took a sheet of paper and poured a few drops of the liquid upon it.

*Pouget.* — If you take paper, especially blotting-paper, it will be easy; but you should try wood.

The paper took fire, and the jurors opened big eyes.

*The Court.* — Would this substance set wood on fire?

*Witness.* — Yes, if there were enough of it.

*Pouget.* — It would take a barrel or it.

*The Court.* — What have you to say?

*Pouget* (ironically). — I thank the expert for the lesson in chemistry which he has given me. When I am free, I, like him, will perform experiments in public.

At this point the court adjourned. On the next day the witnesses for the defence were heard.

Emile Chaussebat, a painter, testified as follows: "On the day of the manifestation, I was at work opposite Moricet's bake-shop. A crowd came along, headed by Louise Michel, carrying a black flag. She passed by without stopping a second. She was followed by several hundred people. The baker and his wife threw bread to the poor. But when they did so, Louise Michel was a hundred yards away".

*Louise Michel* — I thank the witness. It is fortunate that there are some who do not lie.

Henri Rochefort next took the stand.

*Louise Michel.* — I beg Citizen Rochefort to tell what he knows about the seventy-one francs found upon Pouget at the time of his arrest.

*Witness.* — Before going to the prefect of police to surrender herself, Louise Michel came to me and told me that the newspapers had had a great deal to say about this sum of seventy-one francs, but that it was the result of a collection taken up on behalf of those recently condemned at Lyons, and that she had herself handed it to Pouget. She told me, also, that the manifestation was an entirely peaceful one. She refused a red flag which was brought to her, but deemed it her duty to accept a black flag offered her by an unknown person. I confess that I was extremely surprised to hear that Louise Michel was accused of pillage, she whom

—

*Louise Michel.* — I beg you, Rochefort, do not speak of that.

*Witness.* — She whom I saw on board the frigate "Virginia," which took us together to New Caledonia.

*Louise Michel.* — No, I beseech you.

*Witness.* — My dear Louise, I am here to tell the truth, not to save your modesty. I have seen you at a distance of three hundred leagues south from the Cape of Good Hope, the thermometer scarcely above the freezing point, without stockings and almost without shoes, because you had given all that you possessed to your companions—

*Louise Michel.* — No, no, do not speak of that. If I had known, I would not have asked you to come to testify.

*The Court.* — Please allow the witness to proceed; otherwise, I shall be obliged to have you removed from the court-room.

*Witness.* — In New Caledonia Louise Michel made her hut a hospital where she received and cared for the sick, sleeping herself upon the ground.

*Louise Michel.* — Do not continue. I do not call my friends to make me suffer.

*Witness.* — So be it! I will add no more. I do not wish to displease Louise Michel.

Vaughan, a sub-editor of “*L’Intransigeant*,” was next heard.

*Louise Michel.* — I ask Citizen Vaughan to tell what he knows about the seventy-one francs and about the revolver which I had on the day of the manifestation.

*Witness.* — On the evening of March 9 Louise Michel told us at the newspaper office that the seventy-one francs found on Pouget were destined for the families of those recently condemned at Lyons. The next day she repeated the same thing at my house.

*The Court.* — You believe this, then?

*Witness.* — I believe anything that Louise Michel affirms. As concerns the revolver which Louise Michel carries by my advice because she is the object of constant threats and lives in a lonely quarter, I know that she gave it to Pouget, not liking to carry so heavy a weight in the pocket of her dress.

*The Court.* — Disregard the pistol.

*Pouget.* — Yes, for I should be obliged to claim it as mine.

*Louise Michel.* — The information given by Citizen Vaughan is very accurate. I beg him to add nothing further.

*Witness.* — Very well. But Louise Michel will permit me to bear testimony here to my respectful affection for her and to say that I am very proud to be her friend and fellow-socialist.

*Louise Michel.* — I shall always look to it, Citizen, that my friends have no cause to be ashamed of me.

Citizen Rouillon was next heard.

*Louise Michel.* — I will ask Citizen Rouillon whether, in a meeting of Blanquists held previous to March 9, I did not say that, personally, I had no confidence in the success of the proposed manifestation.

*Witness.* — I affirm that Louise Michel did so say to me.

*Louise Michel.* — I would like you, further to tell these gentlemen how our families are treated. For we, too, have families.

*Witness.* — It is within my knowledge that Louise Michel has received numerous abusive letters, threatening her and hers with violence. Even now I have some of those letters upon me. I know that very lately a miserable scamp went to the house of Louise Michel’s mother, and gave my name in order to get the door opened. At the house of Madame Michel was a friend, Madame Biras, who was caring for her. This lady opened the door without mistrust, and was immediately struck violently on the head with a cane. Fortunately the door was chained; otherwise the poor woman would have been seriously injured. The malefactor, having struck the blow, rushed hastily away, meeting my wife upon the steps, who gave me his description the next day. I advised that a complaint be made at the office of the police commissioner, which was done. I will add that the guilty party has not been found.

*The Court.* — What relation is there between this circumstance and the case in hand?

*Louise Michel.* — I asked this witness to come here to show that we, too, have our families; and that, as you have charged us with occasioning the death of an individual (M. Martin), from chagrin, after a few days imprisonment, we likewise have cause to complain of the sorrows which afflict our friends.

The witnesses having been heard, Attorney General Quesnay de Beaurepaire began his closing argument. “The manifestation of March 9,” he said, “failed. This failure carried with it disappointments. Among the disappointed were people who, too insignificant to attract attention otherwise, are fond of adding to their stature by mounting stilts. Of these people was Louise Michel. Much good has been said here of Louise Michel. This good I hold as established. But it only proves that a person may be humane and charitable to her own, to those that think as she does, and at the same time feel a burning, implacable hatred towards others. Seeing that the manifestation did not succeed, Louise Michel desired to have a manifestation of her own. She called for a black flag, ‘the flag of revolt,’ as she styled it at Lyons; then, like Semiramis, she placed herself at the head of the crowd, using the flag as a standard, which was to serve as a signal in front of the bake-shops. This manifestation was not peaceful, as the accused pretend; for among those taking part were people armed with loaded canes. It led to pillage. The pillage is undeniable. Louise Michel says that she did

not see it; but the broken windows and plates? She says disdainfully that it was a matter of a few crumbs of bread. Certainly, if we were bakers, we should not agree with her. This woman undoubtedly did not take part in the pillage herself. I do not accuse her of it. I say that I believe her to be absolutely incapable of doing such a thing. But it is certain that she saw fit to preach pillage.

Why? Because in her fanaticism she believed that a social war was at hand. For this she should be condemned." He closed this portion of his argument by expressing regret at not being able to award to Louise Michel the eulogy bestowed upon the women of the old Roman republic. "She kept the house and spun the wool;" and added, with questionable taste, "Why did she not profit by the lesson given her by chance when she was presented, upon *l'esplanade des Invalides*, with a broomstick?" Turning then to Mareuil and Pouget, he maintained that the former was an honest working-man, a simple supernumerary<sup>1</sup>, dragged into the affair, deserving much indulgence; while the latter, on the contrary, the secretary of Louise Michel, was a dreamer of crimes, an organiser of social war, deserving all the severities of justice. He declared further that Enfroy, Martinet, and Moreau were unquestionably guilty, but abandoned the charges against Madame Bouillet. He concluded with these words: "In a free country the liberty to think and the liberty to struggle for the triumph of one's ideas are sacred things. But the accused who speak here in the name of liberty are simply guilty persons. That is why I ask you to apply the law."

The floor was then given to Louise Michel, who spoke in her own defence. Her remarks were somewhat discursive, but bristled with good things. We reproduce some of the passages:

"This prosecution is a political one, and Anarchy is the prisoner at the bar. I am forced, then, to speak of Anarchy, and to tell the story of the manifestation of March 9. I shall pay no attention to the comparisons and epithets which the attorney general has indulged in regarding me personally. We are not the assassins. The assassins are those who in 1871 crushed our

brothers as a mill-stone crushes grain. General Galliffet shot under my eyes two brave merchants who in no way participated in the Commune. . . . There is one feature of this trial quite frightful, which must astonish you exceedingly, namely, to see a woman struggle with you, robe against robe, for we are not

accustomed yet to see a woman think. And yet in this troublous epoch has she not a right to think and to struggle side by side with the human race? . . . An effort has been made to deny the peaceful character of the manifestation, on account of the devastation of two or three bake-shops. Is this serious? We did not ask bread for two or three days; we sought bread for the future, for all who are ready to work. . . . I believe that entire humanity is entitled to its inheritance. We lack the sense of liberty just as certain animals living under ground lack the sense of sight. We wish liberty, and, in order to have it in its entirety, we must begin to practise it. . . . We are all victims of authority. I would rather see Kropotkine and Gautier in prison than in the Cabinet, because in prison

they can do good and labour for the realisation of a future which will not see on the one hand beings eternally wretched and on the other beings eternally gorged. . . . The attorney general said just now that I was once a schoolteacher. If I had not believed in liberty and equality, I should still be one. I should not have gone to New Caledonia, and my mother would not be subjected today to the vilest and most cowardly insults. . . . The threat of twenty years in prison, for few miserable morsels of bread does not trouble me. Such things do not affect those who have seen and suffered all. Is there anything left for me to see and suffer? I think not, gentlemen. Pardon me, I have yet to see the dawn of liberty. . . . I am charged with being implacable. It is true. I am implacable in the struggle, not against men, but against ideas. Our ideal is that the law of the strong should be replaced by right. And if I must pay for this affirmation by twenty years' imprisonment, I

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<sup>1</sup> A casual worker, in other words. (*Black Flag*)

shall be happy if I thereby aid in the triumph of right and justice. . . . We are tired of the present situation; you, also, are tired of it, gentlemen; only, as you see the evil from a greater distance than we, you are more patient. You say that we wish to make a revolution. That is an error. We cannot make revolutions; events do that. Some monstrous act will precipitate a revolution one of these days, and then perhaps you will be more indignant than we, in consequence of having retained your faith in the government longer. . . . But we are very far from Moricet's bake-shop. Must we go back to it? No; it is distressing to discuss this miserable affair. If you wish to condemn me, do I not daily commit offences for which I might be attacked? I have but one word to add. Come what may, provided liberty and fraternity shall one day prevail, our own sufferings are of little moment."

On the next day, June 23, the concluding day of the trial. Pouget was heard. He spoke in substance as follows:

"The attorney general said yesterday that the deeds charged upon us are violations of the common law. I protest energetically against this assertion. They all belong to the domain of politics, but I know why they are classed here as common law offences. The law for the exile of second offenders is about to be promulgated; nominally it deals only with those condemned under the common law, but it is really aimed at political offenders; it is important, therefore, to accuse the latter of common law offences. This is hypocritical, but one instance of hypocrisy more or less is a small matter to the government. . . . Duty called me to *l'esplanade des Invalides*. I knew very well that the manifestation would not procure bread for the labourers without work, but I saw in it an opportunity to show my scorn for the wealth-gorged classes favoured by society. Natural laws, the declaration of the rights of man, proclaim that men have a right to assemble freely and unarmed. This right is recognised and acted upon in England and Belgium. Here it is denied, at least to labourers. Other manifestations are tolerated. When the

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centenary of Victor Hugo is to be celebrated, thousands of men can meet unhindered on the Champs-Elysees. Workingmen, on the contrary, if they wish to assemble, are not permitted. That is the way in which the government observes the principle: The law is equal for all. On March 9 we committed no offence. Had they a right to disperse us? No. And certainly not with the brutality which was used. The law requires three readings of the riot act; it was not read at all. As for the black flag, it is the flag of misery. How can it be treated as seditious unless misery itself is seditious. Now for the question of

pillage. We are told that we are plunderers. But if that is so, why did we pass so many jewellers' shops without touching them? Frankly, this is not serious; but then, it was necessary to deceive the public into the belief that this was the beginning of an insurrection. An insurrection! Are insurgents accustomed to begin insurrections unarmed? And with the exception of my little revolver who of us had weapons?. . . . I come to the second part of the accusation, which in my judgment should have been tried separately. we have been repeatedly told that this was not a prosecution of opinions; consequently I was greatly astonished at finding in the indictment passages from unpublished manuscripts. Can I be condemned for an intention? I

am charged with having certain dangerous chemicals at my house. How long since it was forbidden to study chemistry? If I am to be condemned for that, all those who pursue similar studies ought to be likewise prosecuted. . . . The attempt is made to connect the second accusation with the manifestation of March 9. There is no relation between the two. But the government wishes to frighten people. It is nonsense to look upon us as conspirators. Conspiracies are contrary to Anarchistic theories. We act in broad daylight. Nothing is less rational than to confound revolutions with conspiracies. We are revolutionists, not conspirators. . . . The provocations contained in the pamphlet, 'To the Army,' are no stranger than those which fall from the lips of our governors when it is a question of shooting down the people. It must not be forgotten, further, that from a legal standpoint the provocation of soldiers to disobedience is punishable only when it refers to a definite



order of an officer. The provocations are as legitimate as those which M. Grévy used in 1830 in order to start a revolt against the government of Charles X [Laughter.] No one dreams of prosecuting M. Grévy. We are no more guilty, than he.”

The lawyers then addressed the jury in behalf of their clients, after which Louise Michel arose and made the following declaration:

“The attorney general says that I am the principal accused party. Since this is so, I alone should be held; there is no necessity of prosecuting the others; they should be released, it being decided that I have made fanatics of them. Yes, I accept the *role* of principal accused. I am accustomed to sacrifice myself. But I repeat that I am a political prisoner. The prosecution, whatever the attorney general may say, is political and nothing else. The jurors will not lose sight of that. As for my theories, which have been incriminated, you know them. What I want is the Revolution, which will cause poverty to disappear. I hail the Revolution, which is inevitable, and I hope that it will come soon to bring liberty and equality to the suffering.”

The jury then retired, and, after deliberating an hour and a quarter, returned a verdict of guilty against Louise Michel, Pouget, and Moreau, acquitting the other prisoners.

“Have you anything to say regarding your sentence?” asked the judge.

“Nothing”, calmly answered Louise Michel and Pouget.

“For six years I have been exploited,” said Moreau, “and I always shall be.”

The judge retired, deliberated three-quarters of an hour, and then, reappearing, sentenced Louise Michel to six years’ imprisonment and ten years’ police supervision, Pouget to eight years’ imprisonment and ten years’ police supervision, and Moreau to one year’s imprisonment. The sentences were greeted with an explosion of indignation. Cries went up on all sides of *Vive Louise Michel!* “You condemn her,” shouted one citizen, but the people will acquit her.” It was some time before order could be restored. The prisoners took their sentences calmly, and Louise Michel was confined in the prison of Saint Lazare. Paris was excited from one end to the other, and even the conservative journals

condemned the severity of the court. The result was cried by newsboys under the windows of the sick-room of Louise Michel’s mother, who thus learned for the first time of her daughter’s arrest, the fact having been carefully kept from her. An active agitation for the amnesty of all political prisoners is in progress throughout France, but thus far it has resulted in nothing.

**“I am a political prisoner. The prosecution, whatever the attorney general may say, is political and nothing else... What I want is the Revolution, which will cause poverty to disappear. I hail the Revolution, which is inevitable, and I hope that it will come soon to bring liberty and equality to the suffering.”**

## Louise Michel’s Defence Statement

*Mémoires de Louise Michel* (1886)

22 June 1883

It is a real political trial that we are being subject to; it is not us who are being prosecuted, it is the anarchist party that is prosecuted through us, and that is why I had to refuse the offers made to me by M. Balandreau and our friend Laguerre, who, not long ago, undertook to heartily defend our comrades in Lyon.

M. the Advocate General invoked the Law of 1871 against us; I do not bother to find out if this law of 1871

was not made by the victors against the vanquished, against those whom they then crushed as the grindstone crushes the grain; it was the time when they hunted the Federal in the plains, when Gallifet pursued us in the catacombs, when on both sides of the streets of Paris were heaps of corpses.<sup>1</sup> There is one thing which surprises you, that frightens you, it is a woman who dares to defend herself. You are not used to seeing a

<sup>1</sup> The Communards called themselves “Federalists” (*fédérés*); Gaston Alexandre Auguste, Marquis de Gallifet, Prince de Martigues (1830-1909) was a French general who was

commander of troops during the repression of the Paris Commune. (*Black Flag*)

women who dares to think; you want, according to Proudhon's expression, to see in woman a housewife or a courtesan!

We took the black flag because the demonstration was to be above all peaceful, because the black flag is the flag of strikes, the flag of those who are hungry. Could we take another one? The red flag is confined to the cemeteries, and should only be taken back when it can be defended. But, we could not do that; I told you and I repeat it, it was an essentially peaceful demonstration.

I went to the demonstration. I had to go. Why was I arrested? I have travelled across Europe, saying that I do not recognise borders, saying that all humanity has the right to the heritage of humanity. And this heritage will not belong to us, accustomed to living in slavery, but to those who will have freedom and who will be able to enjoy it. That is how we defend the Republic and when we are told that we are its enemies, there is just one thing to reply, that we have founded it on thirty-five thousand of our corpses.

You speak of discipline, of soldiers who fired at their commanders. Do you believe, M. Advocate General, that if at Sedan they had fired at their commanders who betraying them, they would not have done well? We would not have had the muds of Sedan.

M. Advocate General has talked a lot about the soldiers; he praised those who reported anarchist manifestos to their commanders. Are there many officers, are there many generals who have reported the largesse of Chantilly and the manifestos of M. Bonaparte? Not that I put Orleans or M. Bonaparte on trial, we only put their ideas on trial. You have acquitted M. Bonaparte, and we are being prosecuted; I forgive those who commit crime, I do not forgive the crime. Is it not the law of strong which dominates us? We want to replace it with right, and therein lies our crime.

Above the courts, beyond the twenty years in prison that you can pronounce, beyond even life in prison if you wish, I see the dawn of liberty and equality breaking. But wait, you too, you are tired of it, you are sickened by what is going on around you!... Can you watch in cold blood the proletariat constantly suffering from hunger whilst others gorge themselves?

We knew that the demonstration at the Invalids would not succeed, and yet it was necessary to go there. Today we are in complete poverty... We do not call this regime a republic. We would call a regime the republic where we could move forward, where there would be justice, where there would be bread for all. But how does your republic differ from the Empire? What say you of freedom for the tribune with five years of prison afterwards?

I do not want the cry of the workers to be lost, you will do with me what you will; it is not about me, because a large part of France, a large part of the world, is becoming more and more anarchist. We are sick of seeing power such as it was under M. Bonaparte. We have already led many revolutions! Sedan has rid us of M. Bonaparte, we made one on 18 March.<sup>1</sup> You will doubtless see them again, and this is why we march full of confidence towards the future! Without individual authority, there would be light, there would be truth, there would be justice. Individual authority is a crime. What we want is authority for all. M. Advocate General accused me of wanting to be a leader: I have too much pride for that, for I cannot demean myself and to be a leader is to demean yourself.

Here we are very far from M. Moricet's bakery, and I have some difficulty returning to those details. Must we talk about these crumbs distributed to children? It was not this bread that we needed, it was bread from work that we demanded. How can you expect reasonable men to take pleasure in grabbing some bread? I do not mind that kids collected crumbs, but it is tedious for me to discuss such trivial things. I prefer to return to grand ideas. Let the youth work instead of going to the café, and they will learn to fight to improve the plight of the wretched, to prepare for the future.

They know only of homeland to make a home for war; they know only of borders to make them the subject of intrigues. We conceive of homeland, family, in a wider, more extensive sense. Here are our crimes.

We are in an age of anxiety, everybody seeks his path, we will speak anyway: Come what may! Let freedom be created! Let equality be created, and we will be happy!

**“the black flag is the flag of strikes,  
the flag of those who are hungry.  
Could we take another one?”**

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the Paris Commune. (*Black Flag*)

# Albert Camus and the Anarchists

Nick Heath<sup>1</sup>

Born in French Algeria into a poor family in 1913, Camus lost his father in the Battle of the Marne in 1916. He was raised by his mother, who worked as a charlady and was illiterate. Winning a scholarship, Camus eventually began a career as a journalist. As a youth, he was a keen footballer as well as being a member of a theatrical troupe.

From his time as a goalkeeper, Albert Camus always had a team spirit. He had a generous, if sensitive nature, and always sought the maximum unity, seeking to avoid or bypass rancour.

Many intellectuals writing about Camus have obscured his support of anarchism. He was always there to support at the most difficult moments of the anarchist movement, even if he felt he could not totally commit himself to that movement.

Camus himself never made a secret of his attraction towards anarchism. Anarchist ideas occur in his plays and novels, as for example, *La Peste*, *L'Etat de siège* or *Les Justes*. He had known the anarchist Gaston Leval, who had written about the Spanish revolution, since 1945. Camus had first expressed admiration for revolutionary syndicalists and anarchists, conscientious objectors and all manner of rebels as early as 1938 whilst working as a journalist on the paper *L'Alger Republicaine*, according to his friend Pascal Pia.

The anarchist Andre Prudhommeaux first introduced him at a meeting in 1948 of the Cercle des Etudiants Anarchistes (Anarchist Student Circle) as a sympathiser who was familiar with anarchist thought.



**Albert Camus (1913-1960)**

Camus also supported the Groupes de Liaison Internationale which sought to give aid to opponents of fascism and Stalinism, and which refused to take the side of American capitalism. These groups had been set up in 1947–48, and intended to give material support to victims of authoritarian regimes as well as exchanging information. Supporters included the Russian anarchist Nicolas Lazarevitch, exiled in France, as well as many supporters of the revolutionary syndicalist paper *La Révolution Proletarienne*. Camus remained a friend and

financial supporter of RP until his death.

Albert Camus's book *L'Homme Révolte* (translated into English as *The Rebel*), published in 1951, marked a clear break between him and the Communist Party left. It was met with hostility by those who were members of The Communist Party or were fellow travelers. Its message was understood by anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists in France and Spain, however, for it openly mentions revolutionary syndicalism and anarchism and makes a clear distinction between authoritarian and libertarian socialism. The main theme is how to have a revolution without the use of terror and the employment of "Caesarist" methods. So Camus deals with Bakunin and Nechaev among others. "The Commune against the State, concrete society against absolutist society, liberty against rational tyranny, altruistic individualism finally against the colonisation of the masses..."

He ends with a call for the resurrection of anarchism. Authoritarian thought, thanks to three

<sup>1</sup> *Organise!* Spring 2007

wars and the physical destruction of an elite of rebels, had submerged this libertarian tradition. But it was a poor victory, and a provisional one, and the struggle still continues.

Gaston Leval responded in a series of articles to the book. His tone was friendly, and he avoided harsh polemic, but he brought Camus to book on what he regarded as a caricature of Bakunin. Camus replied in the pages of *Le Libertaire*, the paper of the Fédération Anarchiste (circulation of this paper was running at 100,000 a week in this period). He protested that he had acted in good faith, and would make a correction in one of the passages criticised by Leval in future editions.

The general secretary of the Fédération Anarchiste, Georges Fontenis, also reviewed Camus's book in *Le Libertaire*. To the title question "Is the revolt of Camus the same as ours?", Fontenis replied that it was. However he faulted him for not giving due space to the revolutions in the Ukraine and Spain, and for portraying Bakunin as a hardened Nihilist and not giving credit to his specific anarchist positions. He ended by admitting that the book contained some admirable pages. A review by Jean Vita the following week in *Le Libertaire* was warmer and more positive.

These measured criticisms from the anarchists were in contrast to those from the fellow travellers of the Communist Party, like Sartre and the group around the magazine *Les Temps Moderne*. This marked the beginning of Camus's break with that other great exponent of existentialism. The criticisms of this group were savage, in particular that of Francis Jeanson. Camus replied that Jeanson's review was orthodox Marxist, and that he had passed over all references to anarchism and syndicalism. "The First International, the Bakuninist movement, still living among the masses of the Spanish and French CNT, are ignored", wrote Camus. For his pains, Camus was "excommunicated" by Jeanson from the ranks of the existentialists. These methods disheartened Camus. He also received stern criticism from the Surrealists for the artistic conceptions within the book. It looked like the anarchist movement were Camus's best supporters.

Camus marked this break in other ways too. He had made a pledge to himself to keep away from intellectuals who were ready to back Stalinism. This did not stop him from wholeheartedly committing himself to causes he thought just and

worthwhile. In Spain a group of anarchist workers had been sentenced to death by Franco. In Paris a meeting was called by the League for the Rights of Man on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1952. Camus agreed to speak at this. He thought it would be useful if the leader of the Surrealists, André Breton, should appear on the podium. This was in spite of the attack that Breton had written in the magazine *Arts*, over Camus's criticisms of the poet Lautreamont, admired by the Surrealists as one of their precursors.

Camus met with the organisers of the event, Fernando Gómez Peláez of the paper *Solidaridad Obrera*, organ of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT, and José Ester Borrás, secretary of the Spanish political prisoners' federation FEDIP, asking them to approach Breton without telling him that Camus had suggested it. Breton agreed to speak at the meeting even though Camus would be present. Gómez then told Breton that Camus had suggested he speak in the first place, which moved Breton to tears. Later Camus told the Spanish anarchists that because he had not replied to Breton's anger in kind that a near-reconciliation was possible. Camus and Breton shared the podium and were even seen chatting (for Breton and the Surrealists links to the anarchist movement see "1919-1950: The politics of Surrealism"<sup>1</sup>).

Camus took a position of the committed intellectual, signing petitions and writing for *Le Libertaire*, *La révolution Proletarienne* and *Solidaridad Obrera*. He also became part of the editorial board of a little libertarian review, *Témoins 1956*, getting to know its editor, Robert Proix, a proofreader by trade. Camus, via Proix, met up with Giovanna Berneri (Caleffi) the companion of the gifted Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri, who had been murdered by the Stalinists in Spain in 1937. Camus also met Rirette Maitrejean, who had been the erstwhile companion of Victor Serge, and had been involved in the Bonnot Gang affair and trial. Rirette had been working as a proof-reader for the paper *Paris-Soir* for a long time. Camus also became a friend of the anarchist veteran Maurice Joyeux, who was later to remark that of all contemporary literary works *The Rebel* was the book that most closely defined the aspirations of the students and workers in May 1968.

Again in 1954 Camus came to the aid of the anarchists. Maurice Laisant, propaganda secretary

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<sup>1</sup> <https://libcom.org/article/1919-1950-politics-surrealism>

of the Forces Libres de la Paix (Free Forces of Peace) as well as an editor of *Le Monde Libertaire*, paper of the Fédération Anarchiste, had produced an antimilitarist poster using the format of official army propaganda. As a result he was indicted for subversion. Camus was a character witness at his trial, recalling how he had first met him at the Spanish public meeting.

Camus told the court, “Since then I have seen him often and have been in a position to admire his will to fight against the disaster which threatens the human race. It seems impossible to me that one can condemn a man whose action identifies so thoroughly with the interests of all men. Too few men are fighting against a danger which each day grows more ominous for humanity”. It was reported that after his statement, Camus took his seat in a courtroom composed mainly of militant workers, who surrounded him with affection. Unfortunately Laisant received a heavy fine.

Camus also stood with the anarchists when they expressed support for the workers’ revolt against the Soviets in East Germany in 1953. He again stood with the anarchists in 1956, first with the workers’ uprising in Poznan, Poland, and then later in the year with the Hungarian Revolution. Later in

1955 Camus gave his support to Pierre Morain, a member of the Fédération Communiste Libertaire (the Fédération Anarchiste had changed its name in 1954 following rancorous struggles within the organisation). Morain was the very first Frenchman to be imprisoned for an anti-colonialist stand on Algeria. Camus expressed his support in the pages of the national daily *L’Express* of 8<sup>th</sup> November 1955.

Camus often used his fame or notoriety to intervene in the press to stop the persecution of anarchist militants or to alert public opinion. In the final year of his life Camus settled in the Provence village of Lourmarin. Here he made the acquaintance of Franck Creac’h. A Breton, born in Paris, self-taught, and a convinced anarchist, he had come to the village during the war to “demobilise” himself. Camus employed him as his gardener and had the benefit of being able to have conversations with someone on the same wavelength. One of the last campaigns Camus was involved in was that of the anarchist Louis Lecoin who fought for the status of conscientious objectors in 1958. Camus was never to see the outcome to this campaign, as he died in a car crash in 1960, at the age of forty-six.

## **Bread and Freedom**

### **Albert Camus<sup>1</sup>**

If we add up the violations and the many abuses which have been revealed to us, we can foresee a time when, in a Europe of concentration camps, only prison guards will be free, who will still have to imprison each other. When only one remains, he will be named the head guard and this will be the perfect society wherein the problems of opposition, the nightmare of twentieth-century governments, will be finally, and definitively, resolved.

Of course, this is only a prophecy and although governments and police forces around the world are striving, with great good will, to reach such a happy outcome, we are not there yet. Amongst us, for instance, in Western Europe, freedom is officially viewed favourably. Basically, it makes me think of those poor cousins that we see in certain bourgeois families. The cousin became a widow, she lost her natural protector. So they took her in, gave her a room on the top floor

and tolerate her in the kitchen. They occasionally parade her in town, on a Sunday, to prove that they are virtuous and not dogs. But for everything else, and especially on special occasions, she is requested to keep her mouth shut. And even if a police officer casually violates her a little in a corner, they do not make a fuss about it, she has been through worse, especially with the master of the house, and, after all, it is not worth getting into trouble with the proper authorities. In the East, it must be said that they are more forthright. They have settled the business of the cousin once and for all and flung her into a closet with two sturdy locks. It seems that she will emerge in fifty years, more or less, when the ideal society will have been definitively established. Then they will have celebrations in her honour. But in my opinion she may be somewhat moth-eaten by then and I do fear that they may no longer make use of her. When we add that these two concepts of freedom, that of the closet and that of the kitchen, are each

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<sup>1</sup> This talk was originally published as “Restaurer la valeur de la liberté” (“Restoring the value of freedom”) in the September 1953 issue of *La Révolution Prolétarienne*, a French syndicalist journal. The title was changed when it was

reprinted later the same year. “Bread and Freedom”, incidentally, was also the title of the Russian translation of Kropotkin’s *The Conquest of Bread*. (*Black Flag*)

determined to prevail over the other, and are obliged in all this commotion to further reduce the movements of the cousin, it will be easily understood that our history is more that of servitude than of freedom and that the world in which we live is the one just spoken of, which leaps out at us from the newspaper every morning to make of our days and our weeks a single day of outrage and disgust.

The simplest, and therefore most tempting, thing is to accuse governments, or some obscure powers, of these wicked ways. Besides, it is indeed true that they are guilty, and of a crime so impenetrable and so long-lasting that we have even lost sight of its beginnings. But they are not the only ones responsible. After all, if freedom had only ever had governments to guard its growth, it is likely that it would still be its infancy, or definitively buried with the inscription "an angel in heaven". The society of money and exploitation has never been charged, so far as I know, with ensuring freedom and justice. Police States have never been suspected of opening law schools in the cellars where they interrogate their subjects. So, when they oppress and exploit, they are doing their job, and whoever gives them unchecked disposal of freedom has no right to be surprised when it is immediately dishonoured. If freedom today is humiliated or in chains, this is not because its enemies have used treachery. It is actually because it has lost its natural protector. Yes, freedom is widowed, but it must be said because it is true, it is widowed by all of us.

Freedom is the concern of the oppressed, and its natural protectors have always come out of oppressed peoples. In feudal Europe it was the communes which maintained the ferments of freedom, the inhabitants of the towns and cities who ensured its fleeting triumph in 1789, and since the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was the workers' movements assumed responsibility for the double honour of freedom and justice, which they never dreamt of saying were irreconcilable. It was the manual and intellectual workers who gave freedom a body, and who made it advance in the world until it become the very principle of our thought, the air that we cannot do without, that we breathe without even noticing it, until the moment when, deprived of it, we feel we are dying. And if, today, freedom is declining across such a large part of the world, it is undoubtedly because the business of enslavement has never been so cynical nor better equipped but it is also because its true defenders, through fatigue, through despair, or through a false idea of strategy and efficiency, have turned away from it. Yes, the great event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the

abandonment of the values of freedom by the revolutionary movement, the progressive retreat of the socialism of freedom before Caesarian and military socialism. From that moment, a certain hope has disappeared from the world, a solitude has begun for every free man.

When, after Marx, the rumour began to spread and gain strength that freedom was a bourgeois hoax [*balançoire*], a single word was misplaced in this definition, but we are still paying for that misplacement in the convulsions of our century. For it should have been said merely that bourgeois freedom was a hoax, and not all freedom. It should have been said specifically that bourgeois freedom was not freedom or, in the best of cases, that it was not yet [freedom]. But

that there were freedoms to be conquered and never relinquished. It is quite true that there is no freedom possible for the man tied to his lathe all day and who, when evening comes, huddles with his family in a single room. But that condemns a class, a society and the servitude it presupposes, not freedom itself which the poorest of us cannot do without. For even if society were suddenly transformed and became decent and comfortable for all, it would still be barbaric if freedom did not reign there. And because bourgeois society talks of freedom without

practising it, must the workers' society also give up practising it, boasting only of not talking about it? Yet the confusion took place and freedom was gradually condemned in the revolutionary movement because bourgeois society used it as a mystification. From a just and healthy distrust of the prostitution that this bourgeois society inflicted upon freedom, we have come to distrust freedom itself. At best, we have postponed it to the end of time, praying that in the meanwhile we will not talk about it anymore. It was declared that justice was the first necessity and that freedom would be seen to later, as if slaves could ever hope to achieve justice. And vibrant intellectuals announced to the worker that it was bread alone that interested him and not freedom, as if the worker did not know that his bread also depends on his freedom. And certainly, faced with the long injustice of bourgeois society, the temptation to go to such extremes was great. After all, there is perhaps not one of us here who, in action or thought, has not yielded to it. But history has moved forward and what we have seen must now make us reconsider. The revolution made by the workers triumphed in 1917 and it was then the dawn of real freedom and the greatest hope that this world has known. But that revolution, surrounded, threatened

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within and without, armed itself, equipped itself with a police force. Inheriting a conception and a doctrine that unfortunately rendered it suspicious of freedom, the revolution gradually weakened as the police grew stronger, and the world's greatest hope ossified into the world's most effective dictatorship. The false freedom of bourgeois society is no worse off, however. What was killed in the Moscow trials and elsewhere, and in the camps of the revolution, what is murdered when a railway worker is shot, as in Hungary, for a mistake at work, is not bourgeois freedom, it is the freedom of 1917. Bourgeois freedom can meanwhile engage in all its mystifications. The trials, the perversions of the revolutionary society give it both a good conscience and arguments.

Ultimately, what characterises the world we live in is precisely this cynical dialectic that pits injustice against enslavement and which strengthens one by the other. When they bring into the palace of culture Franco, the friend of Goebbels and Himmler, Franco, the real victor of the Second World War, to those who protest and say that the rights of man enshrined in the charter of UNESCO are mocked every day in Franco's prisons, they answer with a straight face that Poland is also at UNESCO and that in terms of respecting public freedoms, one is no better than the other. An idiotic argument, of course! If you have had the misfortune to marry your elder daughter to a sergeant in a battalion of convicts [*bataillons d'Afrique*<sup>1</sup>], this is no reason to marry the younger sister to an inspector in the Vice Squad: one black sheep in the family is enough. However, the idiotic argument is effective, as is proved to us every day. To those who bring up the slave in the colonies crying out for justice, they are shown the

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<sup>1</sup> The Battalions of Light Infantry of Africa (*Bataillons d'Infanterie Légère d'Afrique*) were French infantry and construction units serving in Northern Africa which were made up of men with prison records who still had to do their military service or soldiers with serious disciplinary problems. Created in 1832, they were disbanded in 1972. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> Závěš Kalandra (1902-1950) was a Czechoslovak historian and theorist of literature. In 1923 he joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, but he was expelled due to his criticism of Stalin's policy. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1939 and imprisoned until 1945 in various concentration camps, after the war he was branded a Trotskyist and executed for

prisoners in Russian concentration camps, and vice versa. And if you protest against the assassination in Prague of an opposition historian like Kalandra, two or three American Negroes are thrown in your face.<sup>2</sup> In this disgusting one-upmanship, only one thing does not change, the victim, always the same, only one value is constantly violated or prostituted, freedom, and then we realise that together with it justice is also debased everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

How then to break this infernal circle? It is obvious that we can only do this by restoring, right now, in ourselves and around us, the value of freedom – and by never again agreeing to it being sacrificed, even temporarily, or separated from our demand for justice. Today's watchword, for all of us, can only be this: without conceding anything on the plane of justice, never abandoning that of freedom. In particular, the few democratic liberties we still enjoy are not unimportant illusions, and which we cannot allow to be stolen from us without protest. They represent exactly what we have left of the great revolutionary conquests of the last two centuries. They therefore are not, as so many clever demagogues tell us, the negation of true freedom. There is not an ideal freedom that will be given us one day all at once, as we receive our pension at the end of our life. There are freedoms to be conquered, painfully, one by one, and those we still have are steps, certainly not enough, but nevertheless steps on the way to a real liberation. If we agree to suppress them, that does not mean we are moving forward. On the contrary, we retreat, we go backwards and one day we will have to retrace that route, but this new effort will be achieved once again in the sweat and blood of men.

No, choosing freedom today is not, like a Kravchenko, going from being a carpetbagger for the Soviet regime to that of a carpetbagger for the bourgeois regime.<sup>4</sup> For

being a member of an alleged plot to overthrow the Communist regime. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>3</sup> The latest news is that the Laniel government killed seven demonstrators in the Place de la Nation to keep up with the Berlin shootings. That will teach us to demand dialogue. We have it, but it is the dialogue of the dead. Yes, it is who will be the most despicable! [Footnote from the original article not included in the reprint – *Black Flag*]

<sup>4</sup> Viktor Andreevich Kravchenko (1905-1966) was a Ukrainian-born Soviet defector. Originally an enthusiastic member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union who joined the party in 1929, he later became disillusioned and defected to the United States during World War II. He is best

that would be, on the contrary, to choose servitude twice and, a final condemnation, choosing it twice for others. Choosing freedom is not, as we are told, choosing against justice. On the contrary, we choose freedom today at the same level as those who everywhere suffer and struggle, and only there. We chose it at the same time as justice and, in truth, now we can no longer choose one without the other. If someone takes away your bread, he removes your freedom at the same time. But if someone steals your freedom, rest assured, your bread is threatened, for it no longer depends on you and your struggle but on the whim of a master. Poverty increases as freedom recedes in the world, and vice versa. And if this unforgiving century has taught us anything, it is that the economic revolution will be free or it will not be, just as liberation will be economic or it will be nothing. The oppressed not only want to be liberated from their hunger, they also want to be freed from their masters. They know very well that they will be effectively freed of hunger only when they hold their masters, all their masters, at bay.

Finally, I should add that separating freedom from justice amounts to separating culture and labour, which is the quintessential social sin. The confusion of the labour movement in Europe stems partly from the fact that it has lost its real home, the one where it regained its strength after all defeats, and which was the faith in freedom. But, likewise, the confusion of European intellectuals arises because the double mystification, bourgeois and pseudo-revolutionary, separated them from their sole source of authenticity, the work and suffering of all, cutting them off from their sole natural allies, the workers. As for me, I have only ever recognised two aristocracies, that of labour and that of the intelligence, and I know now that it is crazy and criminal to want to subject one to the other, I know that between them they make but one nobility, that their truth and above all their effectiveness lie in union, that separated they will allow themselves to be diminished one by one by the forces of tyranny and barbarism, but that, on the other hand, united they will rule the world. This is why any undertaking which aims to disengage and separate them is an undertaken directed against man and his highest hopes. Therefore the first deed of any dictatorial endeavour is to simultaneously subjugate labour and culture. It is necessary, in fact, to gag them both otherwise, the tyrants are well aware, sooner or later one will speak up for the other. This is how, in my opinion, there are today two ways for an intellectual to betray and, in both cases, he betrays because he accepts only one thing: this separation between labour and

culture. The first characterises bourgeois intellectuals who accept that their privileges are paid for by the enslavement of the workers. They often say that they defend freedom, but they defend first the privileges that freedom gives them, and them alone.<sup>1</sup> Second characterises intellectuals who believe themselves to be on the left and who, through distrust of freedom, accept that culture, and the freedom it presupposes, should be directed, under the vain pretext of serving future justice. In both cases, whether they are a carpetbagger of injustice or a renegade of freedom, they ratify, they consecrate the separation of intellectual and manual labour which dooms both labour and culture to impotence, they debase at the same time both freedom and justice.

It is true that freedom, when it is made up primarily of privileges, insults labour and separates it from culture. But freedom is not made up primarily of privileges, it is made up above all of duties. And from the moment any of us tries to ensure that the duties of freedom prevail over its privileges, from that moment, freedom unites labour and culture and sets in motion the only force that can effectively serve justice. The principal of our action, the secret of our resistance, can then be expressed simply: anything that humiliates labour humiliates the intellect, and vice versa. And the revolutionary struggle, the age-old striving for liberation is defined first of all as a dual and unceasing rejection of humiliation.

To tell the truth, we have not yet emerged from this humiliation. But the wheel turns, history changes, a time approaches, I am sure, when we will no longer be alone. For me, our meeting today is already a sign. The fact that trade unionists gather together and group around our freedoms to defend them, yes, this truly merited everyone rushing from all directions to demonstrate their unity and their hope. The road ahead is long. Yet if war does not come and mixes everything into its hideous confusion, we will have time to finally give a form to the justice and freedom we need. But for this, we must from now on categorically refuse, without anger but implacably, the lies with which we have been forced fed. No, we do not build freedom on concentration camps, nor on the subjugated peoples of the colonies, nor on working-class poverty! No, the doves of peace do not perch on gallows, no, the forces of freedom cannot mix the sons of the victims with the executioners of Madrid and elsewhere! Of this, at least, we will henceforth be sure, as we will be sure that freedom is not a gift that we receive from a State or a leader, but a good that we conquer every day, by the effort of each and the union of all.

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known for writing the book *I Chose Freedom*, published in 1946, about the realities of life in the Soviet Union. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>1</sup> And besides, most of the time they do not even defend freedom whenever there is a risk to do so.



# Lessons for Anarchists About the Ukraine War from Past Revolutions

Wayne Price

The Ukraine-Russia war is shaking the world. Dealing with it, anarchists and other far-left radicals can learn much from contrasting it to previous conflicts. I chose to contrast it to two major wars, the Spanish revolution (because of its importance in anarchist history) and the Vietnam-U.S. war (because I participated in the movement against the war).

Revolutionaries study revolutions. For example, the anarchist Peter Kropotkin wrote a history of the French Revolution. Yet I have seen little discussion of the present-day Ukrainian-Russian war which relates it to past revolutionary wars. (For the purpose of this essay, I am lumping together revolutions, civil wars, and wars of national liberation.)

The Ukrainian conflict is not an internal revolution or civil war – it is a war of national liberation, of an oppressed people against an imperialist invasion. But revolutionary anarchists and other anti-authoritarian radicals need a strategy to deal with it. They need to relate their activities in the war to their goal of an international revolution of the working class and all oppressed, winning a world of freedom, self-determination, and cooperation. This is a matter of general strategy, programme and principles, not of immediate tactics and slogans. Those depend on the specific time and place and only Ukrainians can determine them. Yet general strategies, as

developed in reaction to past revolutions, may be relevant to today's conflicts.

## The Spanish Revolution

Trotskyists focus on the Russian Revolution, Maoists on the Chinese Revolution, and anarchists on the Spanish revolution (1936-1939) – also called the Spanish civil war. Not that anarchists do not look at Russia, China, or other upheavals. But Spain had a revolution in which the anarchists (anarcho-syndicalists) played a major role. They had a relatively large anarchist organisation (the FAI – Iberian Anarchist Federation) which led a major union federation (the CNT – National Confederation of Labour). This held at least a half of the organised working class – the Socialist Party (Marxist reformists) led the union federation of the other half (the UGT –

General Union of Workers). In the most industrialised region in Spain, Catalonia, with its capital of Barcelona, the anarchist-led union predominated. With these advantages, how did the Spanish anarchists do when a revolutionary civil war broke out in 1936?

In 1936, Spain had elected a Popular Front government, replacing the previous very conservative regime. The Popular Front was composed of liberal and moderate pro-capitalist parties, plus the Socialist Party and the Communist

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Party. In left terminology, a “Popular Front” is different from a “United Front.” The *United Front* is an alliance only of working class groupings, such as the Socialists, Communists, and anarchists, in class opposition to the parties of the capitalist class. A *Popular Front* is a cross-class alliance of workers’ parties with parties representing a wing of the capitalist class. By its very nature, it cannot go beyond the limits of capitalism, if it wants to work with a party committed to capitalism. During the civil war, this regime was known as “Republicans” (they rejected the return of a monarchy) or “Loyalists.”

Despite the moderation of the Popular Front government, the right attempted to overthrow it in July 1936. The core of the right was the military, led by a thoroughly reactionary officer corps (which the Popular Front had not tried to disband). It also included a self-declared fascist movement (the “Falange”), monarchists, and ultra-conservative Catholics. During the war, these were lumped together as “Fascists” or “Rebels.”

The soldiers left their barracks in Spain to seize the cities, while importing a mercenary army which was based in the colony of Morocco. The Popular Front politicians waffled, insisted that nothing was happening, and refused to give arms to the workers. But the workers, rose up, formed committees, seized arms and dynamite, and beat back the soldiers in most of the country. What was to have been a quick coup became a drawn-out and vicious civil war.

The anarchists’ leaders felt that they were in a quandary. The Republican state had essentially collapsed. The army, most of the police, and much of the government officials had gone over to the Fascists. So had the businesspeople and agrarian landlords. In their place were the working people, using the existing union structures but also organising a multitude of committees for defence, policing the streets, distributing food, setting up militia forces to go fight the fascists, and taking over factories, farms, and businesses to keep them running.

Under these conditions it might have seemed logical for the anarchists (of the CNT union and FAI anarchist association) to “take power” at least in Catalonia. But they did not. (“Taking power”, if we use that phrase, for anarchists does not mean “taking *state* power.” It means the working people overthrow the state and capital and establish alternate, federated, participatory-democratic,

institutions, but not a socially-alienated bureaucratic-military elite machine over the rest of society – that is, not a new state.)

The leading anarchists feared antagonising the non-anarchists, who were half the organised working class. They argued that if their union took over, this would establish a “dictatorship.” Better to have a “democratic” collaboration with pro-capitalist liberals! (This could have been approached by forming broad workers’ and peasants’ councils, in which members of all parties and unions could participate.) They feared losing the support of the Popular Front parties. They feared the reaction from the imperialist democracies (France, the UK, and also the US).

Instead of promoting a revolution from below, the anarchist leadership made alliances with the bourgeois Republican parties. Within a brief time period, they had joined the Popular Front, and entered the government (actually two governments, one at the regional level in Catalonia and the national state regime). Influential militants ended up supporting the capitalist state and serving in various administrative positions. The same was true of the smaller but still significant left-Marxists of the POUM (Party of Marxist Unification). Some of its leaders had previously been influenced by Leon Trotsky, but he denounced them for joining the Popular Front governments and broke with them. (Trotsky 1973) Whatever their subjective goals, the leaders of the CNT-FAI and of the POUM became complicit in the rebuilding of the state.

However, without the revolutionary spirit of the mass of people, and without the flexibility of the revolutionary forces, the war became a standard war. Urban uprisings and guerrilla tactics were ruled out. This gave the advantage to the regular Spanish army on the fascist side. This was especially true since Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were sending arms and soldiers to them, while the “democracies” would not send military aid to the Republic.

Comparing the current Ukrainian war with the Spanish civil war, the Ukrainian anarchists have not made this political mistake. As far as I know, even while supporting the Ukrainian side of the war, they have not voted for or endorsed Zelensky as president, nor his political party or any other party, nor joined the government as politicians or administrators. Nor have any of their left critics accused them of doing this. In fact they

have opposed the government's neo-liberal austerity programme and anti-union policies.

### A Revolutionary Anarchist Programme

While the leadership of the anarchists became more and more drawn into supporting the state, opposition developed among other anarchists, especially in the ranks of the CNT and among women anarchists. One such group was the Friends of Durruti, but by no means the only one. (This is covered extensively in Evans 2020. Also Guillamon 1996.) Diverse opinions were expressed, but overall there appeared a common revolutionary programme, counterposed to that of the anarchist leadership.

This programme included quitting the Popular Front and the capitalist government in all aspects. Expropriation of the capitalists and landlords and "socialisation" of the economy – not

government nationalisation but industrial management by the workers, through their unions and/or workers' councils, coordinating themselves, and peasant self-collectivisation of agriculture. (Both were done, very successfully, in Catalonia and other parts of Spain; see Dolgoff 1974.) Arms for the fighters and militia people at the front, with the armed forces being voluntary and self-organised. "As to the army, we want a revolutionary one led exclusively by workers...." (Balius 1978; p. 37) Arms for the workers and peasants in the rear areas, distributed and organised by popular committees – replacing the police and rear-guard armed forces.

Spreading the popular committees – for defence, policing, industrial production, farming, and decision-making, including all working people, regardless of union or party affiliation. These would centrally coordinate by federating regionally and nationally. The Friends of Durruti Group proposed to replace the state with a "Revolutionary Junta" – meaning a national coordinating council democratically elected by the workers, peasants, and militia fighters. "Unity of the barricades" – alliance of anarchists with all revolutionary forces, including left Marxists: the left of the POUM and the left of the Socialist Party.



The Spanish Trotskyists – not the POUM – supported this programme, but were very small. (See Morrow 1974) This is not to go into the differences of their goals from the anarchists. Today's Trotskyists sometimes condemn anarchism because the leading Spanish anarchists abandoned their programme and joined the capitalist state. This is a valid criticism, but it ignores the fact that many anarchists disagreed with this policy. Also, that the big majority of Marxists – the Socialists, the Communists, the POUM – also joined the capitalist state.

There were other issues. Anarchist women organised for women's open and equal participation in the armed struggle and in all areas of social life. They had to fight against patriarchal and sexist attitudes among many male anarchists. There was the question of national self-

determination for the colony of Morocco. A large part of the Spanish army was composed of Moroccans. Their loyalty to the Fascist army might have been severely shaken if the Spanish Loyalists had promised Morocco independence, or at least, autonomy. Anarchists and Moroccan nationalists proposed this but the Popular Front politicians would not hear of it. Among other factors, such a move would have antagonised the French and British governments, who had their own large colonies in North Africa and the Middle East! (In the end, these governments, and the US, gave little help to the Republic, even though France also had a Popular Front government. The only government which did sell – not give – Spain much armament was the Soviet Union – at a high price, financially and politically.)

How would such a revolutionary programme be achieved, with the civil war raging, in the lull between revolutionary upsurges? Just as some anarchists today do not support either side of the Ukrainian-Russian war, so some revolutionaries did not support either side in the Spanish civil war. This included the Bordiguists (the "Italian Faction" of "ultra-left," authoritarian, and very sectarian Marxists) and some in the Trotskyist milieu who were to the left of Trotsky. These supported neither the Fascists nor the Republicans. The Republic,

they pointed out, was a capitalist state as well as imperialist. Revolutionary socialists did not take sides in wars between capitalist states, they said.

A Bordiguist writes of Spain's civil war, "War between a fascist state and an antifascist state is not a revolutionary class war. The proletariat's intervention on one side is an indication that it has already been defeated....War on the military fronts implied abandonment of the class terrain...[and] defeat for the revolutionary process." (Guillamon 1996; p. 10)

This sounds very similar to arguments being raised now by parts of the left, particularly anarchists, for not supporting the Ukrainians in their war of national defense and self-determination against imperialist Russia. Russia and Ukraine are both capitalist nation states, and Ukraine, if not also imperialist, is getting military aid from US imperialism.

In Spain, at the time, few if any anarchists accepted such arguments. They knew the workers would not understand this "radical" justification for non-participation in the fight against the Fascists. In World War I the main issue had been the imperialist competition for markets, profits, and power. In the Spanish civil war, imperialism was not the main issue. It was the fight to preserve workers' freedoms and rights (even as limited as they were under bourgeois democracy) from fascism. Even more, the possibility of moving from capitalism to anarchist-socialism was infinitely greater if the Fascists were being defeated by the revolutionary struggles of the working class, even if it was, at first, under the rule of the Republican capitalists.

The left-anarchist Friends of Durruti Group laid out their approach this way:

"There must be no collaboration with capitalism whether outside the bourgeois state or from within the government itself. As producers our place is in the unions, reinforcing the only bodies that ought to survive a revolution by the workers. *Class struggle is no obstacle to workers continuing at present to fight on the battlefields and working in the war industries....*

"We are opposed to collaboration with bourgeois groups. We do not believe the class approach can be abandoned. Revolutionary workers must not shoulder

official posts, nor establish themselves in ministries. For as long as the war lasts, *collaboration is permissible – on the battlefield, in the trenches, on the parapets and in productive labor in the rearward....*" (Baluis 1978; pp 35, 38; emphasis added)

A similar approach had been raised by the anarchist Errico Malatesta, a comrade of Bakunin and Kropotkin. He had wanted Italian anarchists to participate in the anti-monarchist movement. He proposed to ally with the left wing of the movement which was in favour of a popular revolution to overthrow the archaic Italian king. Malatesta was prepared to form a coalition with radical republicans, who only wanted to create a parliamentary democracy. He was willing to work with social democrats (Marxists) who sought to replace the king with an elected parliament, in which they hoped to gradually move toward state socialism. In the course of a popular revolution, he hoped that the anarchists would be able to take it further than their allies originally wanted.

"By taking part in the [anti-monarchist] insurrection...and playing as large a part as we can, we would earn the sympathy of the risen people and would be in a position to push things as far as possible....We must cooperate with the republicans, the democratic socialists, and any other anti-monarchist party to bring down the monarchy; but we must do so as anarchists, in the interests of anarchy, without disbanding our forces or mixing them in with others' forces and *without making any commitment beyond cooperation on military action,*" (Malatesta 2019; pp. 161-2; emphasis added)

That is, revolutionary anarchists could cooperate on military action, but not on political programmes – beyond the negative agreement of being against the monarchy. Italian anarchists attempted to use this approach when fighting the rise of Mussolini's Fascism, but the Socialists and Communists would not cooperate against the Fascists. (See Price 2021.)

In Spain, there was a second flair up of working class struggle in May 1937. There was a conflict between the CNT workers, who controlled the central telephone building in Barcelona, and the police, directed by the Communist Party (now completely Stalinist). The police attacked the

telephone centre, in an effort to take it away from the workers. They were driven off and the city's workers rose up and took over the streets. A true revolution could have been consummated there, with the workers taking over a major region and appealing to the workers and peasants throughout Spain. Instead, the leaders of the CNT (and POUM) ordered the workers back to work, insisting on peace and cooperation with the Stalinised police (that is, capitulation to the re-consolidation of the capitalist state). After that, the war dragged on for a couple of years until the fascists won, but the possibility of revolution had been defeated.

Unfortunately, while the anarchist left had developed a programme for revolution, it had not organised itself to fight for these policies. It was too tied to its traditional organisations and their leaders. There were elements of an organisation that could have widely raised this programme and organised an alternative to the established Socialists, POUMists, and influential anarchists. But these elements never coalesced into a single strong grouping or even into a united front of revolutionary groupings. (I am not speaking of a "party" in the sense of a centralised organisation which aims to take power for itself, set up its own state, and rule over ["lead"] the people, but for an organisation to fight for a revolutionary programme.) So the programmes of the "reasonable", "practical," anarchists and socialists, of allying with the capitalists and subordinating themselves to the Stalinists, led to disaster. As a world movement, anarchism received a great defeat.

There are justified wars (as evil as war always is), such as the Spanish civil war against fascism or the current Ukrainian war of national self-determination. While a capitalist state still rules, anarchists should not give any support to the government. They should politically criticise it and spread their own propaganda. Meanwhile they should participate in the just struggle, along with the rest of the working class and oppressed. They should work in the industries and serve in the armed forces, and do their best to defeat the enemy militarily. Their aim is to get enough support and agreement from the people so that at some point (during or after the war) the people will make a revolution. They will overthrow the state, expropriate the rich, and replace capitalism with a self-managed, free, and cooperative society.

How this general strategy is carried out, of course, depends on the concrete situation of the country and the world, the time and place. In Ukraine today, anarchists are a small political tendency, but almost all support the war against the invasion. None have given political support to the Zelinsky government. Some engage in non-military activities, such as working in hospitals or feeding people. Others form anarchist and anti-fascist groups that become part of the Territorial Defence network. Others join the regular armed forces wherever they can. This does not stop them from being anarchists.

### **The Vietnam-U.S. War**

The Vietnam-U.S. war (1960–1975) was called the "Vietnam War" in the U.S. and the "American War" in Vietnam. Whether it was a revolution has been argued about. (But then, people are still arguing whether 1776 in the U.S. was a "revolution" or a "war for independence.") Yet old ruling classes (semi-feudal landlords and royalty, French businesspeople, military officers, and U.S. officials) were thrown out and a new one took power. This was a state-capitalist Communist bureaucracy, not, alas, the peasants and workers of Vietnam. During the period of the war, a great many on the left had illusions that some sort of socialist people's revolution was going on. They were wrong. (For an account by a Vietnamese socialist of the brutal, treacherous, and tyrannical history of Ho's Communists, see Van 2010.)

My comments here focus on aspects of the U.S. anti-war movement. (In Vietnam itself, Trotskyists and other dissidents such as anarchists, had been ruthlessly eliminated by the Communists.) For those radicals who saw through the "socialist" and "democratic" veil covering the Vietnamese Stalinists, it was seen as a war for self-determination, unification, and independence, whatever we thought of Ho Chi Minh and his party. For historical reasons, the Communists had won the support of the people as the leaders of their national liberation struggle. The peasants and workers of Vietnam should be able to decide their own future, not the U.S. army nor the U.S.'s bought-and-paid-for puppets.

To an extent, the Vietnam-U.S. War was a mirror image of the Ukraine-Russia War. The imperialist power was the U.S.A., with Russia supporting the national rebellion. After the Vietnamese had kicked out the French imperialists, the U.S. moved in. The country had been divided into two, against the will

of the people, with the Stalinists taking the North. The U.S. state supported local politicians and military figures, subsidising these puppets, until it became clear that they could not hold South Vietnam against North Vietnam and their own people. Rather than giving it up as a bad job, the U.S. doubled down, pouring soldiers and money into South Vietnam. At its height there were 500 thousand U.S. soldiers there.

Supporters of the U.S. war effort, tried to make it look like the war in the South was not an indigenous rebellion against a reactionary ruling class and foreign occupation. They claimed that the Southern resistance (the National Liberation Front or NLF – called “Viet Cong” by the U.S.



forces) were mere puppets of the Northern government. And that the government of North Vietnam was a mere puppet of either Maoist China or the Soviet Union (which were fiercely antagonistic to each other at the time).

In truth, the NLF was politically controlled by the Northern state (contrary to many leftists who had illusions in its independence). Yet it was supported by nationalist sentiment and a genuine popular hatred of the invaders. Russia gave military aid to the North, which Mao let them send through China. This aid, while far less than the U.S. sent to its agents, was extremely important to keep the North in the war. However, to see the North as a puppet of other countries was delusional. (North Vietnam very carefully did not take sides in the Russian/Chinese polemics against each other.)

After decades of struggle against the French and the U.S., the Vietnamese won their war. They won independence and unification. On a world scale, this was a great setback for U.S. imperialism. For years, U.S. leaders bemoaned the “Vietnam syndrome” – the reluctance of the U.S. population to support more foreign wars. This victory was won at a great cost of so many dead, so much destroyed, so much land and forest poisoned. The country was now taken over by a Communist Party

dictatorship and a state-capitalist economy. Thousands fled, by land and sea. However, there was no widespread massacre, as did happen in neighbouring Kampuchea (Cambodia) under ultra-Stalinist Pol Pot. There were wars between Vietnam and its “comradely” neighbours in China and Kampuchea. Today the rulers of Vietnam encourage U.S. capitalists to invest in their country, using their cheap labour and lack of independent

unions as selling points.

This is not an overview of the Vietnam-U.S. war nor of the U.S. anti-war movement, which played a part in the defeat of the U.S. As a young man, I participated in the U.S. anti-war movement, as an anarchist-pacifist and then an unorthodox

Trotskyist (eventually I evolved into a revolutionary anarchist-socialist). I observed the war very intently. Personally I put a lot of effort to keep from being drafted into the army. (For an overview of the war and the anti-war movement, see Neale 2003.)

### **Lessons of the Vietnam-U.S. War for Supporters of Ukraine**

The U.S. anti-war movement had various divisions. On the right were liberal Democrats and moderate pacifists, mostly supported by pro-Moscow Communists. Their slogan was “Negotiations Now!” They called on the U.S. government to negotiate with the North Vietnamese and the NLF. The right-wing was for relying on the Democrats, which was a limited approach given that the war had been initiated and expanded by Democratic presidents and politicians.

On the left were radical pacifists and various Trotskyists (there were a few anarchists and libertarian Marxists). Maoists went back and forth. The left wing opposed the slogan of “Negotiations.” What was there to negotiate? they asked. The slogan implied that both sides had legitimate interests to be discussed. But the U.S. had invaded Vietnam and it should immediately leave. Of course the war would end with talks, but

that was beside the point; it was important to take a clear political and moral stance against the U.S. being in the war. Their slogans were “Bring the Troops Home Now!” “Immediate Withdrawal,” or simply “Out Now!” Over time, this view came to predominate in the movement. (There were other controversies, such as whether the movement should only deal with the war or should raise other issues, such as racism. I will not go into that here.)

The relevance of this debate to the Ukraine-Russia war is obvious. Many peace-loving, “anti-war,” people have called for “negotiations” to end the war – for the U.S. state to pressure the Ukrainians to negotiate with Putin. But the point is the same. What, in principle, is there to negotiate about? The Russians started the war by invading their neighbour. They have no legitimate interests in the internal affairs of Ukraine.

The Russians should withdraw. Advocating anything less is to accept that Russia has good reasons to be in Ukraine, and to be implicitly on its side of the war. Of course there will be talks, but the central issue remains: the Russian military must leave Ukraine, all of Ukraine, every square inch. “Out Now!”

Another related issue is that of national self-determination versus support for the government. In the Vietnam-U.S. war, many on the left became fanatical supporters of the Stalinist leadership of the national struggle. But we unorthodox and dissident Trotskyists, libertarian Marxists, and anarchists knew better. We were not surprised when Vietnam became a repressive one-party dictatorship and (mixed) state-capitalist economy after the war. We had predicted it. Those of us who supported the Vietnamese side had not been supporters of the North Vietnamese state nor the leadership of the NLF. We had been in solidarity with the Vietnamese people, mainly its peasants and workers. We supported their right to determine their own future, their independence, their economic and political system, whatever we thought of it.

No one has illusions that Ukraine is a “socialist” country. It has a capitalist economy (dominated by

“oligarchs”) and a bourgeois-democratic representative government. The government is notoriously corrupt. There is a nationalist, neo-Nazi, movement in the country, although it has limited political power. These facts are used by some to justify non-support for the Ukrainian side, treating it as just as bad as the Russian imperialist aggressors.

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However, the issue is not whether to support Zelinsky’s government, nor even the Ukrainian state. Revolutionary anarchists do not. It is whether we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Aside from the state or the “oligarchs,” they have their own interests in not being invaded, occupied, bombed, driven from their homes, their children taken away and sent to Russia, their language suppressed, their people tortured, raped, and murdered, and their national resources looted. At present they

support capitalism and the state. Maybe that will change over time. Ukrainian anarchists and socialists are working for that. That is the peoples’ decision, not the decision of the U.S. left or foreign anarchists, anymore than it should be the decision of the Russian army or the Wagner mercenaries. It is a matter of national self-determination.

Another related issue is that of inter-imperialist conflict. U.S. apologists argued that the rebellion in South Vietnam was part of a spread of world Communism. It was supposedly masterminded by the Kremlin or maybe by Mao. They denied that the Vietnamese could be their own agents. Everything was reduced to Cold War platitudes.

The Russians and Chinese did provide important aid to North Vietnam (not much to the NLF in the South). Ho Chi Minh and his closest comrades had been disciplined supporters of Stalin for decades, following every twist and turn of international Communist politics. Yet he had his own national interests, which were not simply the same as Russia’s. And the Vietnamese people had been fighting for their national freedom *for generations*. They supported Ho and the Communists only because they believed that they were leading a fight for independence. While the rivalry between the

U.S. state and Russia (and China) was a significant backdrop to the war, it was not the main issue. That was the struggle for Vietnam's self-determination.

The same issue has come up in the Ukraine-Russia war. When Ukraine first showed that it could resist the Russian invasion, the Western imperialists decided to give it military and other aid, short of sending in troops (which the Ukrainians did not ask for). By now there is massive arms shipments, satellite and computer information, and troop training going from the U.S. and NATO to the Ukrainians.

Many on the left denounce this as essentially a war between imperialists, being a "proxy war" for the U.S. They focus on events leading up to the war, such as the expansion of NATO up to Russia's borders. They point out (correctly) that the U.S. is the strongest imperialist power on earth, in its wealth and its military power (even if it is in decline). Given the record of the U.S. (such as in Vietnam, not to speak of Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Central America, Haiti, Cuba, Africa, and so on), the Western imperialists are not acting out of concern for democracy, freedom, and the rights of oppressed nations. They act on their interest in keeping the U.S. dominant in the world, beating back the Russians and making points to the Chinese rulers. Therefore many conclude that leftists should support any power that challenges the U.S., even if it is a rival imperialism or an oppressive dictatorship (this is "campism").

While it is important to look at the inter-imperialist "background" of the war, it is also important to focus on the immediate "foreground." This is the Russian imperialist invasion of a neighbouring country (a capitalist but non-imperialist poor nation). Russia is not fighting a proxy war but is engaging in direct aggression. Nor are the Ukrainians fighting a proxy war. It is they who are spilling their blood, fighting directly against the invaders of their country. Whatever the U.S. is paying in armaments, the Ukrainians are paying with their lives. Whatever the motives of the U.S.

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and its NATO allies, and even whatever is the motivation of the Ukrainian state, the people have their own interest in driving out the occupiers and mass murderers. That they take arms from the Western governments means little – they need arms and where else can they get them? The Spanish Republic bought arms from Stalinist Russia and tried to get arms from France and the U.S. While libertarian radicals opposed the North Vietnamese state for its Stalinist authoritarianism, no one condemned it for taking arms from Russia.

This analysis would change under different circumstances. This would become mainly a war between imperialist sides if, for example, the U.S. were to send its army into Ukraine to fight the Russians, or if missiles were exchanged, back and forth, between Russia and the NATO countries. Then both sides should be opposed because the main issue would be the warfare between imperialist powers. But this has not happened.

It is not unknown, in a world divided by competing imperialisms, that one empire would give aid to the rebelling colonies of another. In World War II, the Nazis gave support to Arabs against their Western colonisers, and the Japanese posed as champions of Asians and Africans against British and French imperialists – while the U.S. and the Allies

became all for the self-determination of occupied European and other countries.

In the Cold War, the Soviet Union gave support, even money, to national opponents of Western imperialism. This was not only to Communist movements and regimes such as in Vietnam or Cuba, but also to non-Communist nationalists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Meanwhile the U.S. gave at least verbal support to the "captive nations" in Eastern Europe, against their Russian masters. So it is hardly surprising that the U.S. should give support to Ukraine as a way to kick Russia in the teeth, or to Taiwan to push back at the Chinese state. This says nothing about whether to support the self-determination of the Ukrainians or Taiwanese. The question is what do *they* want.



## Conclusion

It may be objected that the Ukraine-Russia war is very different from either of my two examples. The position of anarchists in Ukraine, and their supporters around the world, is very different from that of the Spanish anarchists of the 'thirties, or of anti-imperialist militants in the movement against the war in Vietnam. All of which is true.

But some important lessons may be learned by revolutionary anarchists. One is not to participate in capitalist states, parties, or administrations, or support such forces (including states and

parties which claim to be "socialist" or "communist" but are really state-capitalist). Instead, we struggle for a non-state radically-democratic federation of workers' and popular councils and assemblies.

So long as the people cannot overthrow the state and capitalism, anarchists should participate in the military struggle against fascists or imperialist invaders. Joining the military effort, production in workplaces, and civil mobilisation, anarchists simultaneously engage in a political struggle against the dominant regime. It is not necessary to give "critical support", "political support", or any other kind of support to governments to be in solidarity with the people of a country fighting for independence, democratic self-determination, and (relative) national freedom.

Imperialist support for a rebelling people does not settle the nature of the conflict. There was British and French influence on the Loyalist side of the

Spanish civil war and a degree of Russian support, but that did not determine the nature of the conflict. Russia and China gave aid to the Vietnamese forces, but that did not override the nature of the war as one for self-determination. Nor does U.S. aid to Ukraine deny that the war is essentially and mainly a war of defence and self-determination for the Ukrainian people.



These are some of the lessons we can all learn from studying past revolutions and wars.

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# Anarchism and Social Movements in Brazil (1903-2013)

Felipe Corrêa, Rafael Viana and Kauan Willian

*Ever since anarchism has been anarchism, it has preached nothing but the direct action of the masses against the bourgeoisie, by association, by the collaboration of the syndicates, by strikes, by sabotage, by every imaginable process.*

José Oiticica, 1923

## Introduction

We are very grateful for this opportunity to give continuity to the effort we have undertaken in the sense of recuperating the history of anarchism in Brazil, especially when this is done with a focus on social movements. Something similar to what happens in other countries occurs in Brazil: despite the historical relevance of anarchism and its fundamental role in the social and popular struggles of workers, it continues – even though there are valuable efforts to the contrary – to be ignored, defamed and mistreated, both in historiography and in other fields of knowledge and politics. Enemies, adversaries and even people with an affinity with anarchism have contributed to this.<sup>1</sup>

When we speak of *anarchism and social movements in Brazil*, we understand, in the first place, that anarchism is an ideology, a political doctrine, a kind of libertarian and revolutionary socialism which appeared in Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which was consolidated between the end of

the 1860s and the beginning of the 1880s on different continents. The core of its ideological and doctrinal foundations are found in three aspects: 1) a radical critique of capitalism, of the State and of all forms of domination; 2) the uncompromising defence of a self-organising project, which implies the generalised

socialisation of property, political power and knowledge; 3) a class strategy, in which workers and the oppressed in general convert their capacity for achievement into a social force, through a confrontation marked by coherence between means and ends, promote a social revolution and build a society of full equality and freedom.<sup>2</sup>

We also understand, secondly, that terms such as “anarchist movement”<sup>3</sup> or “anarchist social movement”<sup>4</sup> – even if they have been used by quite respectable researchers, and also by militants from the anarchist ranks who often recognise themselves as part of a common movement – are not the most adequate, especially when referring to

broad contexts. This is because, even with the great conceptual plurality in the literature dealing with popular movements and revolutionary syndicalism – or what we might call, in a more generalised way, *social movements* – when we conceptualise the theme we



**José Oiticica (1882-1957)**

revolutionary syndicalism for the left and workers' movements in the 21st century." *Institute for Anarchist Theory and History*, 2019. p. 14-15

<sup>4</sup> Bookhin, Murray. "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: an unbridgeable gulf." In *Anarchism, Critique and Self-Criticism* (São Paulo: Hedra, 2011). p.118.

<sup>1</sup> Corrêa, Felipe; Silva, Rafael. "Anarchism, Theory and History". In Corrêa, Felipe; Silva, Rafael; Silva, Alessandro, eds. *Theory and History of Anarchism* (Curitiba: Prismas, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Corrêa, Felipe. *Bandeira Negra: rediscutindo o anarquismo* (Curitiba: Prismas, 2015). p. 115-202

<sup>3</sup> Van der Walt, Lucien. "Back to the Future: the revival and relevance of anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and

usually take into account people in constant relations, more or less durable and sustained articulations in time and space, as well as more or less organised collective actions of the oppressed against the oppressors.<sup>1</sup>

And it is not possible to say that the anarchists have acted, globally, in their 150 years of existence, as a movement. This cannot even be affirmed when it comes to a national reality, as in the case of Brazil, especially when long periods are taken into account. It is true that, at various moments, anarchism converted itself into broad and massive social movements, in particular when it built revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism. In the Brazilian case, there seems to be no doubt that this happened mainly during the first decades of the 20th century, when most anarchists invested in the construction of revolutionary syndicalism, the hegemonic form of social movement of workers at that time.

In any case, we do not consider it appropriate to refer to anarchism as an anarchist movement or anarchist social movement. It seems more accurate to say that, in different contexts, anarchism – through anarchists – articulated and organised itself in order to create and strengthen social movements, sometimes taking the lead and constituting the hegemonic political force, and other times participating as a minority political force or as opposition in these movements. Therefore, we think it is more appropriate to emphasise that anarchists have historically invested in the construction of different social movements, which were linked to different agendas and involved other political forces.

This is exactly what we intend to portray – in a very brief and concise manner, it is true, thanks to the restricted space at our disposal – in the following pages. In them we will discuss anarchism and social movements in Brazil, through a broad approach, which seeks to apprehend the major aspects that have marked the 110-year long period between 1903 and 2013.

The choice of this temporal focus is justified, on the one hand, because it takes as its initial mark the year 1903 – when, from this perspective of social movements, anarchism starts to have a concrete existence in Brazil, through revolutionary syndicalism – and proceeds to the most commonly studied period, between 1900 and 1930. On the other hand, this text also addresses the later, much less studied period – in which anarchism, despite having lost a lot of strength, was far from disappearing from the political and social scene – and

extends until very recently, in the year 2013, when a new conjuncture is inaugurated in Brazil.

We undertake this discussion by dividing the text into five parts, at the same time temporal and thematic. The first two – one about revolutionary syndicalism and the other about educational and cultural initiatives – deal with the *golden period of anarchism* in the country, the First Republic, when the anarchists, in a context of republican development, rapid industrialisation and great immigration, were hegemonic in the union movement and in the educational-cultural movement of the working class. The third part discusses anarchist work in education, culture and unionism during the Vargas Era and Re-democratisation. This is a *period of crisis of revolutionary syndicalism and anarchism* which, in a moment of economic development and between periods of dictatorship (1937-1945) and political openness (1946-1964), anarchists, even if under reflux, continued to develop activities more or less linked to the camp of social movements.

The fourth part deals with the times of military dictatorship, the *period of greatest crisis and least activity (semi-clandestine) of the anarchists*, who suffered with the repression, authoritarianism and nationalism of the military, but kept the flame of their ideals burning, resuming their activities to the extent that the reactionary storm lost strength. The fifth discusses the reopening of the New Republic, a *period of resurgence and national re-articulation of anarchism*, which has strengthened mainly since the 1990s in a context marked by neoliberalism. Since then, some social movements have been created by anarchists and several of them have counted on their participation, majority or minority, depending on the moment.

In these 110 years, the contribution of anarchism to the camp of social movements is significant, both in the field of practice and theory. Anarchists have sought to build what can be called a “counterpower” and a “revolutionary counterculture”<sup>2</sup>, by means of union, educational-cultural and other movements. And with this, they developed, in consonance with other localities, a theoretical accumulation of how these movements should be carried out to promote a socialist and libertarian revolution.

In this field, the achievements of the anarchists in Brazil were remarkable: they were directly involved in the creation of the first “unions of resistance”; they built, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a powerful and revolutionary union and educational-cultural movement, rising to become its hegemonic political force. In those

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<sup>1</sup> For example: McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 1996; Antunes, 2003; Corrêa, 2011; Van der Walt, 2019a, 2019b.

<sup>2</sup> Van der Walt, “Back to the Future”, p.15.

years, they even led revolutionary insurrections and general strikes. Throughout the years, they published countless newspapers, books and a huge amount of information and propaganda material; they founded and became decisively involved with popular schools and universities, where they developed projects of formal and political education. They created and participated, as a majority or minority force, depending on the context, not only in union and educational-cultural movements, but also in student, community, homeless, landless, unemployed, counter-cultural and other movements. They built cultural centres, *ateneums* and, among workers and young people, promoted initiatives linked to theatre, libraries and leisure in general. They became involved in more and less widespread strikes, protests and street demonstrations.

In very general lines and without great homogeneity, this was the tactical tool used to promote the anarchist strategy in social movements. Referring to historical anarchist principles, anarchists sought to reinforce the independence and autonomy of movements in relation to the institutions of capital and the State, as well as to combat their bureaucratisation; they emphasised the need for combative movements, supported by direct action and by protagonism at the base; they promoted processes of direct democracy, self-management and federalism for decision-making; they confronted reformism and tried to reconcile resistance struggles or struggles for immediate gains with revolutionary positions.

### **Revolutionary Syndicalism in the First Republic (1903-1930)**

The conformation of anarchism in Brazil took place between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a result of distinct experiences of struggle and resistance by the oppressed, which included strikes, popular uprisings, agricultural/experimental colonies,

artistic/cultural productions. Its history involves not only European immigrants – in particular Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese, who had a marked presence in Brazil<sup>1</sup> – but is also intertwined with the struggles of black workers that took place before the abolition of slavery, amidst the founding of resistance societies, mutual aid associations and charitable societies.<sup>2</sup>

This process occurred in deep connection with the emergence of the Brazilian revolutionary syndicalist movement. In general, it can be affirmed that in Brazil, since the end of the 19th century, the anarchists contributed decisively to promoting this form of syndicalism, although it should be noted that, in its concrete expression during the First Republic, the strategy of revolutionary syndicalism cannot be considered the exclusive work of the anarchists. In terms of organisational experience, and with the focus on social movements, the reference of this

initial moment was the foundation in 1903, in Rio de Janeiro, of the *Federação das Associações de Classe* (Federation of Class Associations), inspired – thanks to epistolary and face-to-face contacts abroad, as well as the immigration of workers – by the syndicalism of the *French Confédération Générale du Travail* (General Confederation of Labour – CGT).

As a sequence of this process – and shaping what would be the great landmark of the emergence of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism in Brazil – the First Workers Congress took place in April 1906, in the *Centro Galego*, also in Rio de Janeiro. This congress received 43 delegates from 28 associations from various parts of the country, including not only Rio de Janeiro, but also São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul and Alagoas. Initially convened by reformist workers' sectors, this congress had a massive presence of anarchists, such that their theses concerning revolutionary syndicalism became hegemonic.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Godoy, Clayton. "I Senza Patria": padrões de difusão transnacional do movimento anarquista e sua recepção em São Paulo". In: Santos, Kauan; SILVA, Rafael, eds. *História do Anarquismo e do Sindicalismo de Intenção Revolucionária no Brasil: Novas Perspectivas* (Curitiba: Prismas, 2018). p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Mattos, Marcelo. "Experiências Comuns: escravizados e livres no processo de formação da classe trabalhadora no Brasil". In *Associação Nacional de História - ANPUH, XXIV Simpósio Nacional de História*, 2007. p. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Samis, Alexandre. "Pavilhão negro sobre pátria oliva". In *COLOMBO, Eduardo, ed. História do Movimento Operário Revolucionário* (São Paulo: Imaginário, 2004). p. 134-135;

Among its various deliberations, the congress advised ‘the proletariat to organise itself into societies of economic resistance [...], without abandoning the defence, by direct action, of the rudimentary political rights needed by economic organisations’, and also, ‘to put outside the union the special political struggle of a party and the rivalries which would result from the adoption, by the resistance association, of a political or religious doctrine, or of an electoral programme’; it established as an organisational principle the ‘federative method.’<sup>1</sup>

It also decided to advocate for a Brazilian Workers Confederation (Confederação Operária Brasileira – COB) – which would be founded in 1908, and would come to gather, in the following years, more than 50 articulated unions, especially in the “Workers Federation of Rio de Janeiro (Federação Operária do Rio de Janeiro – FORJ), in the Workers Federation of São Paulo (Federação Operária de São Paulo – FOSP) and in the Workers Federation of Rio Grande do Sul (Federação Operária do Rio Grande do Sul – FORGS)”, which conformed the “main bases of support of the confederation, but also in the Bahia Socialist Federation (Federação Socialista Baiana), in the Santos Federation, among others”.<sup>2</sup>

The influences of the anarchists on the syndicalist movement can be seen in the positions of *A Voz do Trabalhador* (*The Worker’s Voice*), the newspaper of the COB:

What we desire, and will achieve, cost what it may – is the emancipation of the workers from capitalist tyranny and exploitation, by transforming the present economic regime of wages and bosses into a regime which will

permit the development of producer-consumer organisations, whose initial cell is in the present syndicalist of resistance to the bosses. As a practical means, as a method of struggle to achieve such *denderatum*, it will adopt and use *revolutionary syndicalism*.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the foundations of the anarchist conception of syndicalism are summarised in these positions and in the resolutions of the first congress that have been quoted: opposition to capitalism, the defence of class struggle, direct action by workers’ unions, the political

and religious independence of these unions, and immediate demands that could point to a revolutionary rupture.

It was through this strategy, revolutionary syndicalism, that the rise of the workers’ movement in Brazil occurred between 1905 and 1908, with an increase in mobilisations and organisational work and with the outbreak of strikes in Santos (1905 and 1908), of the railwaymen of the Paulista Company (1906), of the shoemakers

in Rio de Janeiro (1906) and of the workers of São Paulo for the eight hour day (1907). Between 1909 and mid-1912, the movement experienced an ebb, with little organisational and mobilisation work. From mid-1912 to mid-1913, there was a resumption of the movement, with a strike in São Paulo, in May 1912, and with the holding, in September 1913, in Rio de Janeiro, of the Second Workers Congress, which again confirmed the anarchist hegemony in the syndicalism movement and reinforced the theses of revolutionary syndicalism.<sup>4</sup>

Until 1916, the Brazilian labour movement faced another ebb, thanks to the economic conjuncture and to the effects of the First World War, despite the



Oliveira, Tiago. “Anarquismo e Revolução”: militância anarquista e a estratégia do sindicalismo revolucionário no Brasil durante a Primeira República”. In Santos, Kauan; SILVA, Rafael. (orgs.) *História do Anarquismo e do Sindicalismo de Intenção Revolucionária no Brasil: novas perspectivas* (Curitiba: Prismas, 2018). p. 215; Antunes, Ricardo. *O que é sindicalismo* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2003).p. 41.

<sup>1</sup> COB (Confederação Operária Brasileira). “Resoluções do Primeiro Congresso Operário do Brasil. In RODRIGUES, Edgar. *Socialism and Syndicalism in Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> Toledo, Edilene. “Para a União do Proletariado Brasileiro’: a Confederação Operária Brasileira, o sindicalismo e a defesa da autonomia dos trabalhadores no Brasil da Primeira República”. In *Perseu: história, memória e política*, 10:7, p.11-31, 2013..p.14.

<sup>3</sup> “A Voz do Trabalhador”. In *The Voice of the Worker*. Rio de Janeiro, July 1, 1908. Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth, Campinas- São Paulo. p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Addor, Carlos. *A Insurreição Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Achiamé, 2002).p. 85-86.

emergence in this context of organisations such as the Federação Operária de Alagoas, in 1913, and the Federação de Resistência dos Trabalhadores Pernambucanos, in 1914. From 1917 to 1920 was the period of greatest mobilisation of the working class in the First Republic, with episodes like the general strike in São Paulo (1917) – which involved 70 thousand workers –, the general strike in Rio de Janeiro (1917) the general strike in Curitiba (1917) the strike of the workers of the Companhia Cantareira and Viação Fluminense (1918) and the Anarchist Insurrection (1918), which add to a huge number of strikes, demonstrations and massive protests, advance in unionisation, growth of the workers' press and the increase in the belief that a radical social transformation was possible. In 1919, the mobilisation of the Union of Workers in Civil Construction (União dos Operários em Construção Civil – UOCC) and the conquest of the eight hour day for the whole category deserves to be highlighted; in 1920 the birth of the Mineira Workers' Federation and the holding of the Third Workers' Congress were relevant. Between 1917 and 1922, there were numerous protests in Pernambuco, Bahia and Rio Grande do Sul. In many cases, the workers' demands were won: eight-hour working days, equalisation of wages between men and women, the end of child labour among others.<sup>1</sup>

The 1920s and 1930s would mark a crisis of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism; at least four factors contributed to it.

First, the repression, operated by deportation, supported by the laws of expulsion of immigrants, by arbitrary arrests and even by sending militants to a forced labour camp in Clevelândia, in Oiapoque. Second, the growing state interference in unionism, through organs such as the Confederação Sindicalista Cooperativista do Brasil, and also the complete harnessing of the unions to the State, imposed between 1930 and 1932 by the Vargas government. Third, by the creation of the Brazilian

Communist Party in 1922, with a strong presence of former anarchists, and that started to challenge more decisively influence within the union movement with the anarchists, defending demands such as the party and state linkage of the syndicates. Finally, the difficulty in articulating a political camp proper of the anarchists, on a more or less national level.<sup>2</sup>

### Education and Popular Culture in the First Republic (1903-1930)

Together with revolutionary syndicalism, and in great measure as its complement, there developed in the Brazil of the First Republic a true educational-cultural movement, which found support in periodicals, books, popular universities, schools, cultural centres, *ateneums*, theatre groups, libraries, workers' parties and festivals. Such tools were common for the diffusion of the anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist ideology in the country, and contributed both to the literacy and formal education of workers, many illiterate, and to instructing them politically and creating a libertarian political culture.<sup>3</sup>

Even before anarchist influenced syndicalism, there was a set of measures in this educational-cultural field that deserve to be highlighted. On the one hand, the resolution of the Socialist Congress of 1894 to officially commemorate, from then on, the First of May in Brazil.<sup>4</sup> On the other, and in a much more decisive way, the publication of newspapers. The pioneers were: *Gli Schiavi Bianchi* (1892), *L'Asino Umano* (1893) and *L'Avvenire* (1894), published by Italian immigrants. In Rio de Janeiro, the first anarchist periodicals were *O Despertar* (1898) and *O Protesto* (1899).<sup>5</sup>

From 1903 to the end of the 1920s, a huge range of periodicals was published. Among the most important were: *O Amigo do Povo* (founded in 1902 in São Paulo), *La Battaglia* (founded in 1904 in São Paulo), *A Luta* (founded in 1906 in Rio Grande do Sul), *A Voz do Trabalhador* (founded in 1908 in Rio de Janeiro), *A*

<sup>1</sup> Addor, Carlos, *A Insurreição Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro*, p.91-114; Toledo, Edilene; Biondi, Luigi. "Constructing Syndicalism and Anarchism Globally: the transnational making of the syndicalist movement in São Paulo, Brazil 1895-1935." In: Hirsh, Steven; Van der walt, Lucien, eds. *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870- 1940: the praxis of national liberation, internationalism and social revolution*. (Leiden: Brill, 2014).p.363-393.

<sup>2</sup> SANTOS, Kauan. "A disseminação do Anarquismo e suas estratégias políticas e sindicais entre os trabalhadores em São Paulo - Brasil (1890- 1920)." In Camarero, Hernán; Mangiantini, Martín, eds. *El Movimiento Obrero y las Izquierdas en América Latina: experiencias de lucha, inserción y organización* (vol. 1) (Raleigh: A Contracorriente, 2018). p.89-92; Oliveira, Tiago, "Anarquismo e Revolução",

p.231-239; Romani, Carlo. Romani, Carlo. "*Clevelândia, Oiapoque - Aqui começa o Brasil!*" *Trânsitos e confinamentos com a Guiana Francesa (1900 -1927)*. Campinas: UNICAMP (doctorate in History), 2003. p.133-204.

<sup>3</sup> See Castro, Rogério. *Nem Prêmio, Nem Castigo! Educação, Anarquismo e Sindicalismo em São Paulo (1909-1919)* (Curitiba: Prismas, 2017). p.17-42.

<sup>4</sup> Lopes, Milton. "Anarquismo e Primeiro de Maio no Brasil". In Corrêa, Felipe; Silva, Rafael; Silva, Alessandro, eds. *Teoria e História do Anarquismo*. (Curitiba: Prismas: 2015). p.219.

<sup>5</sup> Batalha, Claudio. *O Movimento Operário na Primeira República*. (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2000). p.23; Santos, Kauan. "A disseminação do anarquismo", p.175.

*Plebe* (founded in 1917 in São Paulo), *A Hora Social* (founded in 1919 in Pernambuco). Such editorial production involved a complex network of editors, authors and readers, generally formed by self-taught workers, who wrote, translated, produced and distributed content with the intention of internalising and spreading ideas, as well as propagating political and social strategies.<sup>1</sup>

Still in the camp of editorial production, another relevant aspect was the publication, at the beginning of

the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of markedly doctrinal works of anarchism: translated books by Élisée Reclus, Errico Malatesta, Jean Grave, Saverio Merlino, Peter Kropotkin, Carlo Cafiero and, less frequently, of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michael Bakunin.

Another type of production united literature with ideological aims. A

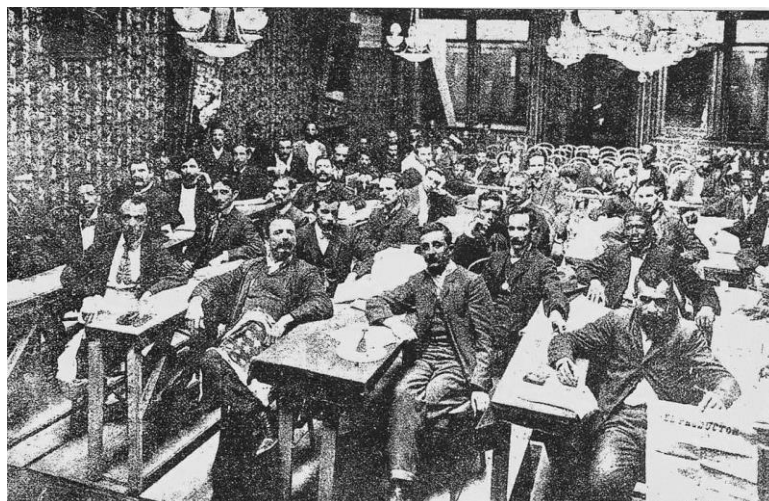
milestone of this experience was the 1903 book *O Ideólogo* (*The Ideologist*), written by the anarchist doctor Fábio Luz, which inaugurated the genre of the social novel in the country. Between 1903 and 1925, Fábio Luz, Avelino Fóscolo, Manuel Curvello de Mendonça and Domingos Ribeiro Filho – the main references, in this style, of the libertarian literary universe – published 25 novels, short stories and novellas.<sup>2</sup>

The First Workers Congress, of 1906, at the same time, contributed to the development of educational and cultural initiatives, forwarding the creation of popular universities and lay schools, which should be linked to the workers associations.<sup>3</sup> The first workers' school that emerged from anarchist influence was the Escola União Operária, in Rio Grande do Sul, in 1895. But, after the congress, the movement of founding schools spread throughout the country: the Eliseu Reclus School<sup>4</sup>, in Porto Alegre; the Germinal School, in Ceará; the

Workers Union School, in Franca; the Workers League School, in Sorocaba; the May 1<sup>st</sup> Workers School, in Rio de Janeiro; the Modern School, in Petrópolis; the Modern School No. 1, in 1912, and the Modern School No. 2, in 1913, both in São Paulo. Such schools functioned linked to the labour and revolutionary movement until 1919, when they had problems, among other things, with repression.<sup>5</sup>

Another aspect to be mentioned was the anarchist pedagogical action that took place in the culture centres

and *ateneums*, whose aim was to “complement the education of the workers”, “create a bond with the workers” and “increase the number of militants sympathetic to libertarian thought”. Courses on typing, languages, accounting, as well as parties, conferences, choirs and poetry recitations were also held in these



**Delegates of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brazilian Workers' Congress held in April 1906 in Rio de Janeiro**

spaces. Some of these initiatives aimed to raise funds to support the unions or even anarchist initiatives. There were also solidarity actions for militants who might be ill or in support of international magazines and initiatives.

In relation to workers' leisure, we can highlight two important experiences: *workers' parties* and *festivals*. These activities, which mixed playfulness with propagandistic objectives, took place in workers' halls or in the open air, and generally counted on the presentation of theatrical groups formed by the workers themselves. The workers' theatre of this period had as formats, in general, the melodrama and the play, and were linked to unions or workers' centres. The plays were also staged with the purpose of raising funds for some periodical or simply entertaining the workers, spreading the anarchist and syndicalist political perspective.<sup>6</sup> The period of greatest vigour of these festivals was the 1920s, standing out in the participation

<sup>1</sup> Toledo and Biondi, “Constructing Syndicalism and Anarchism Globally”, p.375, 388, 441.

<sup>2</sup> Luizetto, Flávio. “O Recurso da Ficção: um capítulo da história do anarquismo no Brasil”. In: Prado, Antonio, eds.. *Libertários no Brasil: memórias, lutas, cultura*. (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986.). p.134-135, 142.

<sup>3</sup> Machado, Antonio. *Forjas da Liberdade: Educação Operária, Anarquismo e Sindicalismo Revolucionário na*

*Niterói da Primeira República*. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ (Masters in History), 2017. p.53-56.

<sup>4</sup> Being the Portuguese for Élisée Reclus (*Black Flag*)

<sup>5</sup> Castro, Rogério. “*Nem Prêmio, Nem Castigo!*”, p.175-181.

<sup>6</sup> See Hipólido, Eduardo. *O Teatro Anarquista Como Prática Social do Movimento Libertário (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro from 1901 to 1922)*: São Paulo: PUC (Masters in History), 2012.

of the Grupo Arte e Instrução, the Grupo de Teatro Social, the Grupo Dramático Germinal among others. Such groups had orchestras (generally rented) and a troupe of actors, were constituted by workers and trade unionists, many of them anarchists, and usually staged plays translated from abroad.<sup>1</sup>

The aforementioned crisis of the 1920s and 1930s which affected revolutionary syndicalism, and consequently anarchism, also affected these educational and cultural instruments.

### **Education, Culture and Syndicalism in the Vargas Era and Re-Democratisation (1930-1964)**

This crisis ended up supporting the affirmation of some authors – as, for example, John Dulles<sup>2</sup> – that the 1930s would have marked the end of revolutionary syndicalism in Brazil, and even of the anarchist influence in the labour movement. However, this observation is not correct. And even the diagnosis that, “without spaces for insertion [...] the libertarians start to organise themselves in groups of culture and preservation of memory”, is quite questionable.<sup>3</sup>

Although in a context of crisis and ebb, the 1930s saw the presence and influence of anarchists in the syndicates, something confirmed by the agents of repression themselves and by the actions of organisations like the Federação Operária de São Paulo (FOSP), which, in those years, still had hundreds of affiliates. Moreover, important periodicals such as *A Plebe*, *O Trabalhador* and *A Lanterna* continued to be published and, among other things, demonstrated the lively interest of the anarchists in the social movements.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the experiences of the subsequent decades still attest that syndicalism, even under strong crisis and reflux, continued to be a space sought by the anarchists, with some modest cases of presence and insertion having occurred.<sup>5</sup>

After the critical period of the dictatorship of the Estado Novo, between 1937 and 1945 – in which the anarchists had to operate almost clandestinely, thanks to the enormous repression – militant activities were resumed. With re-democratisation, they began to republish their press; in São Paulo, the newspapers *A Plebe* (1947-

1960, edited by Edgar Leuenroth) and *O Libertário*, which replaced it in the 1960s, stand out; in Rio de Janeiro, *Remodelações* (1945-1947, edited by the Ceará Moacir Caminha), *Ação Direta* (1946-1959, edited by José Oiticica) and *O Archote*.

Two objectives for that moment were pointed out in the pages of the anarchist periodicals. First, to undertake efforts for the formation of an anarchist political organisation of national scope – a task they understood to have been left aside in the past. In that context of the Cold War and of the alignment of the Dutra government with the USA, the anarchists sought to present a distinct way forward, beyond the polarisation between real “socialism” and capitalism. Second, to resume work in the unions; for this, it was necessary to devise adequate strategies to deal with the two adversaries that had hegemony over the Brazilian syndicalism movement: the pure-and-simple trade unionists (i.e. labourites etc.) and the communists.<sup>6</sup>

Taking advantage of a wave of union mobilisations between 1945 and 1946, which placed the workers’ base and the labour leaderships in growing conflict, the anarchists began to concentrate on the formation of union opposition groups. The first initiative was the formation, in São Paulo, of the Union of Proletarian Syndicalists, which was short-lived. In the Light workers’ category, in Rio de Janeiro, the anarchists formed, with other workers, a Group of Union Orientation of the Light Workers, which edited a specific newspaper for the questions of the sector, *UNIR*. This newspaper, according to the reports of the militants themselves in the pages of *Ação Direta*, had been “spreading in that transport company the principles of revolutionary unionism and direct action, in face of the demagogues of the political parties and of the Ministry of Labour.”

Massive union strike waves broke out in the mid-1950s; in São Paulo, they involved 300,000 workers in 1953, and 400,000 in 1957. Taking advantage of this flow of mobilisation, the anarchists formed, together with the independent socialists, in 1953 in São Paulo, the Syndicalist Orientation Movement (Movimento de Orientação Sindical –MOS), which proposed to “fight

<sup>1</sup> Ramos, Renato. “Arte e Consciência: os festivais operários no Rio de Janeiro”. *EMECE*, 4: 13. Rio de Janeiro: NPMC, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Dulles, John. *Anarchists and Communists in Brazil (1900-1935)*. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1977). p.159-169.

<sup>3</sup> Samis, Alexandre. “Pavilhão Negro sobre Pátria Oliva”, p.181.

<sup>4</sup> Silva, Rodrigo. “Anarquistas e Sindicalistas em São Paulo: repressão política e resistência nos anos 1930.” In: SANTOS, Kauan.; SILVA, Rafael, eds. *História do Anarquismo e do*

*Sindicalismo de Intenção Revolucionária no Brasil: Novas Perspectivas*. (Curitiba: Prismas, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> See SILVA, Rafael. *Elementos Inflamáveis: organização anarquista e militância no Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo (1945-1964)* (Curitiba: Prismas, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> SILVA, Rafael. “Sindicalismo Revolucionário e militância anarquista no Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo (1945-1964).” In SANTOS, Kauan.; SILVA, Rafael, eds. *História do Anarquismo e do Sindicalismo de Intenção Revolucionária no Brasil: Novas Perspectivas*. (Curitiba: Prismas, 2018). p.301-303.



for the complete autonomy and freedom of Workers' unions" and which contested a slate in the graphics sector, in 1957.<sup>1</sup>

The post-1945 period also allowed the development of educational and cultural initiatives. In São Paulo, the Centro de Cultura Social (CCS) – which had been founded in 1933 and closed by repression in 1937 – reopened in mid-1945, linking itself to attempts to reorganise anarchist union action and holding conferences, lectures and theatrical performances. It promoted literary soirees, edited books, organised artistic exhibitions and courses, helping “the foundation of centres with the same purpose in the suburbs of S. Paulo and in other cities”.<sup>2</sup> In Rio de Janeiro, a similar space was founded in 1958 and remained functioning until 1968: the Centro de Estudos Professor José Oiticica (CEPJO), who, in the same way, organised courses, lectures and debating activities; he also helped found, in 1961, an anarchist publishing house: Mundo Livre.

The re-democratisation was characterised by a slow resumption of anarchist activities. In the labour movement, sometimes in alliance with other sectors of the left, the anarchists broke the inactivity of the dictatorial period of the Vargas Era, although they encountered difficulties in disputes with corporatism, the PCB (Communist Party of Brazil) and the PTB (Brazilian Labour Party). In the educational and cultural field, there was a great limitation of militants and financial resources, which was explained, as in a vicious circle, by the difficulty of guaranteeing a more massive presence and influence in the social movements. However, this resumption was hindered by the military coup of 1964, which placed militancy in a state of uncertainty and, a little further on, under strong repression.

### **Education, Culture, Student Movement and Syndicalism in the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985)**

If, before 1964, anarchism was weakened, it was trying to restore its social bases and to grow in a period of

polarisations and doubts, with the coup and the beginning of the military dictatorship, things became even more complicated. The anarchists then decided to operate with caution, prioritising their spaces of education and culture, more discreet in the face of repression. “We were living through a dictatorship strong enough to repress social and political movements, but tactically moderate enough to allow the defeated left in politics to appear to triumph in culture.”<sup>3</sup> Outstanding initiatives in this field were: the anarchist publishing house Germinal, from Rio de Janeiro, and the newspaper *Dealbar*, from São Paulo – which had 17 issues published, between 1965 and 1968 and, through an innovative language, addressed issues such as culture, racism, health, psychology and the cold war.

Before AI-5 (Ato Institucional Número Cinco: Institutional Act Number Five), CCS, in São Paulo, and CEPJO, in Rio de Janeiro, were kept in operation, bringing together and developing young people interested in anarchism. Later, at the end of the 1960s, with the great increase of repression and the closing of these centres by the dictatorship, these young people – like Milton Lopes, from Rio de Janeiro, at the time a student – took place in the homes of militants like doctor Ideal Peres and his companion Esther Redes. There they were received, studied and oriented by older anarchists.<sup>4</sup>

Many of these young people were students, who enjoyed the great expansion of higher education that had occurred in previous decades.<sup>5</sup> Something that had direct impact on the strengthening and the disputes of the student movement. Together with the action of old anarchist militants, the publication of the libertarian newspaper *O Protesto* caused, in December 1967, the Libertarian Student Movement (MEL) to be founded, gathering some dozens of militants from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul. The movement was founded with the intention of “fixing a position and fighting back”, as well as “having an active presence in class and ideological struggles, marking out directions

<sup>1</sup> *Idem.* p.311-314.

<sup>2</sup> CCS (Centre for Social Culture). “Centro de Cultura Social. 1945 Statutes, DEOPS-SP file, num. 5 - Anarchism. p.2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Napolitano, Marcos. *História do Regime Militar do Brasil*. (São Paulo: Context, 2014). p.97-98.

<sup>4</sup> Silva, Rafael. *Um anarquismo latino-americano: um estudo comparativo e transnacional das experiências da Argentina, Brasil e Uruguai (1959-1985)*. Seropédica: UFRRJ (doctorate in History), 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Toledo and Biondi. “Constructing Syndicalism and Anarchism Globally”, p.97.

more in accordance with federalist principles, which should govern the life of every class organisation”.<sup>1</sup> It also intended to intervene in the National Union of Students and build another political, student and libertarian reference.

But repression, which deepened and was refined over time, prevented further fruits from being reaped from these initiatives. After the assassination of the student Edson Luis, in Rio de Janeiro, and the promulgation of AI-5, the MEL as well as CCS and CEPJO were harshly persecuted. Members of MEL and of CEPJO – which had its headquarters invaded, in October 1969, by agents of the Air Force, resulting in 18 detained and prosecuted – were arrested and tortured, among whom was Ideal Peres, who spent one month in detention. Between 1972 and 1977, thanks to this complicated context, anarchists were only able to meet in small groups and sustain an almost clandestine existence; it was certainly, in organisational terms, the worst moment for anarchism in Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

This situation only changed in 1977, when the dictatorship was losing strength, with the publication of the anarchist periodical *O Inimigo do Rei*, in Bahia. Student and union militants participated in the editorial group, not only from Bahia, but also from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Paraíba and Pará; contributing, not without internal conflicts and doctrinal divergences, to the reorganisation of anarchism, and discussed, among other subjects and under the strong influence of counterculture, themes such as revolutionary unionism, anarcho- syndicalism, the student movement, and also relating to gender, sexuality and political theory. The newspaper ran until 1982 and, after a long break, resumed between 1987 and 1988.

In this same period occurred the first attempts at a resumption of anarchist work in the unions. They

occurred after a strong strike wave in Brazil, which involved more than 40,000 workers, and questioned the bureaucratised union structure, which already marked the so-called new unionism. In São Paulo, the Coletivo Libertário de Oposição Sindical (COLOPS) was created, which was close to the ideas of the Oposição Operária Metalúrgica. COLOPS was organised during the First National Meeting of Workers in Opposition to the Trade Union Structure (ENTOES), which brought together in September of 1980, in Niterói, trade union oppositions from 16 states of the country. The Coletivo Libertário do Funcionalismo also functioned in São Paulo, which, after making a critical balance of the

struggles of the functionalism in the 1980s, expressed in the banking and education sectors.<sup>3</sup>

### **Resistance Against Neoliberalism, Popular Movements and Syndicalism in the New Republic (1985-2013)**

The context of the reopening, the establishment of the New Republic and the rise of neoliberalism in Brazil saw the presence of numerous social movements. In this context, especially from the 1990s onwards, anarchists not only fostered the creation of some of these movements, but also integrated into others, seeking to promote their

principles and strategies.

Among the movements that, in Brazil, had a fundamental role of anarchists in their creation and development is the Global Resistance or “Anti-globalisation” Movement, which was largely articulated in the Global Peoples’ Action (AGP), which became known for the organisation of the “global days of action”. This movement, initially arising in Europe and the United States in the second half of the 1990s, proposed confronting the rise of neoliberalism in the world, whose negative effects on people and the environment were becoming increasingly evident. And, to this end, it aimed to mobilise several countries in these days of global action; it was one of these days, known as N30 – a huge protest against the World Trade

## **the rise of neoliberalism in Brazil saw the presence of numerous social movements... anarchists not only fostered the creation of some of these movements, but also integrated into others, seeking to promote their principles and strategies**

<sup>1</sup> ENEL (National Meeting of Libertarian Students).

“Encontro Nacional de Estudantes Libertários”. In: *O Protesto* num. 3, Rio Grande do Sul, December 1967. Arquivo Edgar Leuroth, São Paulo- Campinas. p.5-6.

<sup>2</sup> See Rodrigues, Edgar. *Anarquismo no Banco dos Réus (1969-1972)*. (Florianópolis: VJR, 1993) and Silva, Rafael. *Um anarquismo latino-americano: um estudo comparativo e transnacional das experiências da Argentina, Brasil e*

*Uruguai (1959-1985)*. Seropédica: UFRRJ (doctorate in History), 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Silva, Rafael. “Ideias, Críticas e Combate: o anarquismo na Ditadura Militar Brasileira (1964-1985).” In Santos, Kauan.; Silva, Rafael, eds. *História do Anarquismo e do Sindicalismo de Intenção Revolucionária no Brasil: Novas Perspectivas*. (Curitiba: Prismas, 2018). p.351-373.

Organisation that took place on November 30, 1999, in Seattle – that made the movement known worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, under the inspiration of this global “movement of movements”, an analogous social movement was formed in Brazil. Its first initiative occurred in Santos, on that same November 30, 1999, in a modest protest called by ecologists, libertarians and anarchists; later, the movement spread to São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza, Rio de Janeiro and other localities. Important in this diffusion was the formation, in São Paulo, in May 2000, of the “coalition of groups and individuals inspired by the AGP”. In Brazil, the movement lasted along these lines until 2003, and had the decisive participation of anarchists.

Although these did not constitute the totality of the movement – there were localities, such as Fortaleza, for example, in which libertarian currents of Marxism played a quite significant role – there seems to be no doubt that the anarchists, in their less or more organised expressions, not only had a decisive participation in the movement, but even had a hegemonic role in defining its trajectory.<sup>2</sup>

Among the most important achievements of the movement are, firstly, the articulation of the global days of action themselves. There were almost a dozen demonstrations between 2000 and 2003, mainly in São Paulo, with an average presence of 2,000 people on the streets, and also a few hundred people in other places like Belo Horizonte and Fortaleza, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Curitiba. People mobilised against the bodies promoting neo-liberalism worldwide (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, the Inter-American Development Bank), against the great agents of world power, such as the G8, and also against the imperialist wars of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was in these demonstrations that *black blocs* appeared for the first time in Brazil.<sup>3</sup>

Besides these actions, also very important was the network of independent communication that was arose, as a result of this movement, in the Centre for Independent Media (CMI) or Indymedia, also with a significant anarchist presence. This initiative was part of the global network Indymedia, founded in 1999 in the

United States and which provided, through a website, the means to publish texts and photos by the demonstrators themselves. In Brazil, between 2001 and 2005, CMI was present in 14 cities and involved 16 others in its activities, conforming, on and off the internet, a national milestone in breaking with the exclusivity of the mainstream press when reporting the facts – something that would become widespread years later with social networks.<sup>4</sup> Also relevant was the network of contacts and the environment provided by this movement, which ended up putting its members in contact with each other and with other libertarian and anarchist currents, enabling a strengthening of other initiatives of the anarchist camp after that.

But there were also other social movements which counted, in this period, on the more or less decisive participation of anarchists.

Militants from organisations linked to the *especificista* current of anarchism played a considerable part in this work. They acted directly or through other groupings, such as the Popular Resistance tendency, in existence since 1999, in the construction of distinct social movements.

Among them, there are homeless movements, such as the one that took place in São Paulo in the early 2000s, with the Anita Garibaldi (Guarulhos) and Carlos Lamarca (Osasco) occupations, which together reached almost 7,000 families; and also the one that took place in Rio de Janeiro around the International Homeless Front, which, between 2004 and 2008, organised a few hundred families from 11 occupations.<sup>5</sup> From the 1990s until 2013, there was participation by anarchists of this current in other homeless movements, in these and other states, such as Rio Grande do Sul, Ceará, Santa Catarina and Minas Gerais.

There is also the National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Material (Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Material Reciclável – MNCR), in which the *especificists* anarchists of Rio Grande do Sul played an outstanding role – the impacts of their political practice were felt nationally. (MNCR, 2008) The anarchists from Rio Grande do Sul contributed to the development of the movement since the mid-1990s and participated in its founding congress, in 2001, which

<sup>1</sup> Corrêa, Felipe. *Bandeira Negra*, p.289-290.

<sup>2</sup> See Vinicius, Leo. *Antes de Junho: rebeldia, poder e fazer da juventude autonomista*. (Florianópolis: Em Debate -UFSC, 2014). p.221-270 and Ryoki, André; Ortellado, Pablo, eds. *Estamos Vencendo: resistência global no Brasil*. (São Paulo: Conrad, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ryoki, André; Ortellado, Pablo, eds. *Estamos Vencendo: resistência global no Brasil*. (São Paulo: Conrad, 2004). p.31-56.

<sup>4</sup> See Rocha, Bruno; Santos, Kauan; Penna, Mariana; Silva, Rafael. “Ou se Vota com os de Cima ou se Luta com os de Baixo’: presença e (re)organização do anarquismo em tempos neoliberais no Brasil (1980-2013).” In SANTOS, Kauan; SILVA, Rafael (orgs) *História do Anarquismo e do Sindicalismo de Intenção Revolucionária no Brasil: novas perspectivas*. (Curitiba: Prismas, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*. p.422.

had 1700 delegates from 18 states of Brazil; such contribution occurred until 2011, reaching its peak in the mid-2000s.<sup>1</sup> A former anarchist leader of the movement reports that, in 2009, it had 730 cooperatives and associations, 400 groups in the process of formalisation and a base of 39,000 collectors, 70% of whom were women. Anarchists from Goiás also played an important role in the movement between 2004 and 2009 and states such as Distrito Federal, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo contributed with some participation.

In the pre-2013 period, the participation of these anarchists in the construction of community struggles and spaces also stands out: of struggles and community spaces, such as the Committees of Resistance in Rio Grande do Sul, in the early 2000s, and the Centre for Social Culture in Rio de Janeiro, founded in 2004 and active to the present day; of feminist collectives such as Mulheres Resistem in Alagoas and Mato Grosso; of university and secondary student movements, in different regions of the country, including the north and northeast – which also stood out in the construction of other movements, mainly in the states of Pará, Bahia, Ceará and Alagoas.

Although a very minority force in most cases, these anarchists have also participated in broader social movements, such as the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST), the Homeless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto – MTST), the Movement of Dam-Threatened People (Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens – MAB) and the Unemployed Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Desempregados – MTD), as well as in different unions and syndicates and INTERSINDICAL in São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso and Alagoas. They composed the national articulation of the Latin American Meeting of Autonomous Popular Organizations (Encontro Latino-Americano de Organizações Populares Autônomas – ELAOPA), which began in 2003 and in 2013 was in its 10th edition.<sup>2</sup>

Another anarchist current, headed by the Anarchist Popular Union (União Popular Anarquista – UNIPA), had decisive participation, throughout the 2000s, when it separated from the Forum of Organised Anarchism

(Fórum do Anarquismo Organizado – FAO), in the foundation of the Class and Combative Student Network (Rede Estudantil Classista e Combativa – RECC) and in the construction of the Forum of Base Oppositions (Fórum de Oposições de Base – FOB) – today the Federation of Revolutionary Syndicalist Organizations of Brazil. To a large extent, this student and union alternative was built through the oppositions of CONLUTE and CONLUTAS, consolidating from 2010.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, anarchists of different currents all over Brazil, with greater or lesser organisation, took part in various other initiatives in the field of social movements: they integrated, in various states, the Free Pass Movement (Movimento Passe Livre – MPL), as well as black and feminist, indigenous and LGBT movements; they built trade union and student movements and oppositions, as well as movements in favelas; they drove cooperative initiatives, occupations, cultural centres and popular education.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> FAG (Anarchist Federation of Rio Grande do Sul). “10 Anos de Socialismo Libertário (1995-2005)”. FAG, 2005. p.22 and MNCR (Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis). “Princípios e Objetivos do MNCR”. *MNCR website*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Rocha, Bruno; Santos, Kauan; Penna, Mariana; Silva, Rafael. “Ou se Vota com os de Cima ou se Luta com os de Baixo”, p.445.

<sup>3</sup> UNIPA (Anarchist Popular Union). “10 ano de Sindicalismo e Luta Estudantil.” In: *Causa do Povo*, 67:1, 2013. p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Rocha, Bruno; Santos, Kauan; Penna, Mariana; Silva, Rafael. “Ou se Vota com os de Cima ou se Luta com os de Baixo”, p.445-447.

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# Brian Biggins

*Glasgow Keelie*, November 2022 (<https://glasgowkeelie.org/>)

An eloquent and erudite communicator, Brian Biggins who has died at the age of 86 was a highly respected Glasgow anarchist, a larger than life character who exercised an intellectually incisive mind and surgical political analysis and judgement.

Brian was born in 1935 in Pollokshaws, an area to which he had a lifelong affinity. Leaving Holyrood School and already a confirmed atheist Brian joined the Govan constituency Labour Party and was employed as a Cooperative Union Organiser where his considerable talent for public speaking and debate was nurtured and developed. Brian was involved with the Left Fraction, the British section of the Trotskyite Fourth International, his experience of National service in mid 1950s Nottingham ironically serving as a formative period for his political development and maturation.

Brian then served his time as a printer/compositor working in McNaughton and Sinclairs and the Albion Street newspaper print shops before opening Biggins the newsagent in Oswald Street which he ran with his then partner until the mid 1980's. Brian thereafter went back to work, until early retirement, in the print room of the Daily Record / Sunday Mail on Anderston Quay where he was a member of SOGAT 82 and delighted at showing visitors the precomputerised "flying paste up".



• BRIAN, left, at an 'Unemployed Diners Club' occupation of the Marriot Hotel 1983

Brian had embraced anarchism by the mid 1970s while retaining an essentially Marxist analysis of social, economic and historical process.

Brian in between working constant nightshifts was energetically involved with the Clydeside Anarchists early to mid 1980s series of public meetings,

street speaking and fund raising for the Miners Strike ensuring that every penny was dutifully delivered to the frontline strikers and their communities. He also played a leading role in the occupation of Price Waterhouse in West Nile St, who were involved in the government charged sequestration of National Union of Mineworkers funds.

Brian was an ebullient character, warm, intelligent, humorous with a generosity of spirit and always the first to provide financial support for projects and people. He was an inveterate reader and autodidact, a Guardian devotee and with musical tastes from Classical to George Melly to Jake Thackray. While his activism decreased with age his belief in the tenets of anarchism and sense of social and economic justice remained undiminished.

Brian was a loyal, honest and reliable friend and comrade always optimistic his glass never half empty or half full but overflowing such was his passion and lust for life, his humanity and decency.

# Parish Notices

ABC Belarus are re-launching their website from March 2023: [abc-belarus.org](http://abc-belarus.org)

Bristol ABC have produced a comprehensive list of Prisoner Solidarity and Prison Abolition groups, and other resources: [bristolabc.org/resources](http://bristolabc.org/resources)

INQUEST offers support for families bereaved by state violence. INQUEST is the only charity providing expertise on state related deaths and their investigation to bereaved people, lawyers, advice and support agencies, the media and parliamentarians. Their specialist casework includes deaths in police and prison custody, immigration detention, mental health settings and deaths involving multi-agency failings or where wider issues of state and corporate accountability are in question. This includes work around the Hillsborough football disaster and the Grenfell Tower fire: [inquest.org.uk](http://inquest.org.uk)

There is now a 'Friends of the IWA' group in the Philippines. Mapagpalayang Kapatiran can be contacted by email: [anarkosindikalismpilipinas@protonmail.com](mailto:anarkosindikalismpilipinas@protonmail.com)

AGENCY promotes contemporary anarchist perspectives and practices through commentary on current events, media relations, and educational campaigns. Acknowledging that there are many different anarchist perspectives and visions,

they distribute a diversity of anarchist positions that adhere to an anti-state, anti-capitalist, and anti-oppression framework: [anarchistagency.com](http://anarchistagency.com)

Worldwide Anarchist Gatherings 2023, a list of anarchist gatherings, festivals, & bookfairs: [anarchistnews.org/content/2023-worldwide-anarchist-gatherings](http://anarchistnews.org/content/2023-worldwide-anarchist-gatherings)

*Zero for Conduct* is, in their words, the rebel education worker soapbox: [educationworker.wordpress.com](http://educationworker.wordpress.com)

Both SolFed and the IWW are organising Education Workers too. See, [solfed.org.uk/solfed/solidarity-federation-education-union](http://solfed.org.uk/solfed/solidarity-federation-education-union) & [iww.org.uk/education](http://iww.org.uk/education)

“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.” - *Arundhati Roy*. Aftermathematics is a contribution to keeping this portal open, to keep asking the questions that we should never stop asking. Why do we live like this and what sort of lives would we rather lead? Who makes the decisions that control our movements? Is there a price on human life? What would happen if we stopped making this world and made others instead?: [aftermathematics.org.uk](http://aftermathematics.org.uk)

## Appeal of 1<sup>st</sup> May 1896

### Fédération des Bourses du travail de France et des colonies

Hitherto voluntarily confined to the role of organisers of the proletariat, the Labour Exchanges [*Bourses du travail*] of France are entering the economic struggle, and on this date of 1<sup>st</sup> May, chosen in recent years by international socialism to express the will of the working class, come to explain what they think and the goal they pursue.

Convinced that institutions have a greater share than men in social ills, since these institutions, by preserving and accumulating the errors of generations, make living men the prisoners of the errors of their predecessors, the Labour Exchanges declare war on all that constitutes, supports, and strengthens the social organism.

Confidant to the sufferings and claims of the proletariat, they know that the worker aspires, not to take the place of the bourgeoisie, to create a “workers” State, but to equalise conditions and to provide each [human] being the satisfaction that its needs require. Also, along with all socialists, they contemplate substituting for private property and its appalling cortege of miseries and iniquities, free life on free land!

To this end, and knowing that the virility of man is proportional to the sum of his well-being, they associate themselves with all possible demands – by improving, however little, the immediate condition of the proletariat – to free it from the demoralising worries

about daily bread and increase, as a result, its contribution to the common work of emancipation.

They demand the reduction of the working day, the fixing of a minimum wage, respect for the right of resistance to employer exploitation, free concession of things indispensable to existence: bread, lodging, education, medicine; they will strive to shield their members from the anxieties of unemployment and the worries of old age by tearing from capital the iniquitous tithe it levies on labour.

But they know that none of this is capable of solving the social problem; that the proletariat would never emerge triumphant from struggles in which it would oppose to the formidable power of money only that endurance gained, alas!, by centuries of hardship and servitude. Therefore they implore workers who have hitherto been isolated to come to them, to add their numbers and energies to them. The day (and it is not far off) when the proletariat will constitute a gigantic association, conscious of its interests and the means of ensuring its triumph, on that day there will be no more capital, no more misery, no more classes, no more hatred. The social revolution will be accomplished.

For the Federation of Labour Exchanges:

Fernand Pelloutier  
Secretary

# Declaration of the Accused Anarchists before the Lyon Criminal Court

*Le Révolté*, 20 January 1883

What Anarchy is, and what anarchists are, we shall explain:

Anarchists, gentlemen, are citizens who, in an age when freedom of opinion is preached everywhere, have believed it to be their duty to call for unlimited freedom.

Yes, gentlemen, across the globe we are a few thousand, a few millions perhaps—for we have no other merit than to say out loud what the multitude thinks quietly—we are a few thousand workers who demand absolute freedom, nothing but freedom, the whole of freedom!

We want freedom, that is to say, we claim for every human being the right and the means to do whatever he pleases and only what he pleases; to satisfy all his needs completely, without any limit other than natural impossibilities and the needs of his neighbours, to be respected equally.

We want freedom, and we believe its existence to be incompatible with the existence of any kind of authority, whatever its origin and form may be, whether it is elected or imposed, monarchist or republican, whether it is inspired by divine right or by popular right, by holy oil or by universal suffrage.

History is there to teach us that all governments are alike and equal. The best are the worst. There is more cynicism in some, more hypocrisy in others! In the end there is always the same behaviour, always the same intolerance. Even the most apparently liberal have in reserve, beneath the dust of legislative files, some nice little law on the International for use against troublesome opponents.

The evil, in other words, in the eyes of anarchists does not lie in one form of government rather than another. It lies in the governmental idea itself; it lies in the principle of authority.

In short, the substitution in human relationships of a free contract which can be revised or cancelled in perpetuity, for administrative and legal tutelage, for imposed discipline; that is our ideal.

Anarchists therefore intend to teach the people to do without government, just as it is beginning to learn to do without God.

It will similarly learn to do without property owners. The worst of tyrants, after all, is not the one who imprisons you, it is the one who starves you; it is not the one who takes you by the collar, it is the one who takes you by the stomach.

There can be no liberty without equality! There is no liberty in a society where capital is monopolised in the hands of a minority which is growing smaller every day, and where nothing is shared equally, not even public education although it is paid for by the contributions of all.

We believe that capital, the common inheritance of humanity since it is the fruit of the cooperation of past and present generations, must be at the disposal of all in such a way that none may be excluded, and that in turn no one may monopolise a part to the detriment of the rest.

In a word, we want equality; real equality, as a corollary or rather as a prior condition of liberty. From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs; that is what we sincerely and strenuously desire. That is what will come about, for no regulation can prevail against claims which are at the same time legitimate and necessary. That is why you want to condemn us to all kinds of hardship.

Scoundrels that we are, we demand bread for everyone, science for everyone, work for everyone, and for everyone independence and justice too!