

ORGANISE!

...for revolutionary anarchism

Where From Here?

- Crisis on the Left
- Crisis in the Anarchist Movement
- The Politics of Malatesta
- Platformism and the "Fontenis" Affair"

PLUS

- The Life of Omar Aziz
- The Zoot Suit Rebellion

82

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Organise!

The magazine of the
Anarchist Federation

Issue 82 - Summer 2014

Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). It is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and to initiate debate on ideas not normally covered in agitational papers.

We aim to produce Organise! twice a year. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first? Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our aims and principles can leave much open to debate.

As always, the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from our readers and spur debate on.

For the next issue of Organise! Please send all contributions to the address on the right.

It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disc. Alternatively, articles can be emailed to the editors directly at
organise@afed.org.uk

What goes in Organise!

Organise! hopes to open up debate in many areas of life. As we have stated before, unless signed by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by a local AF group, articles in Organise! reflect the views of the person who has written the article and nobody else.

If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know.

Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!



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Organise! Issue 82 - Summer 2014

<i>Editorial</i>	1
<i>The Fire Next Time?</i>	2
<i>Crisis on the left, crisis within the British Anarchist movement</i>	7
<i>The Political Thought of Errico Malatesta</i>	12
<i>About Platformism, synthesism and the “Fontenis affair”</i>	28
<i>The Life and Work of Anarchist Omar Oziz</i>	42
<i>To what extent are Nozick’s notions of self-ownership, inviolable liberty and capitalism valid?</i>	47
<i>The Zoot Suit As Rebellion</i>	52
<i>Culture Article: The Anarchist Woodcuts of Alexandre Mairat</i>	55
<i>Review: Decolonizing Anarchism</i>	57
<i>Review: Anarchism in Galicia</i>	59

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In this issue of Organise! we take a cold-blooded look at the scale of attacks that we are facing as a class. The mounting frenzy of attacks is a real class Blitzkrieg, a shock and awe offensive that is stripping away many of the benefits we have fought for and gained over the last century. Not only are our health services and education, pay and conditions and pensions in grave danger but the scale of the housing crisis is reaching frightening proportions. In tandem with this is a frantic campaign in the media against the homeless, claimants, and immigrants in an attempt to find scapegoats and distract us from the real culprits for the state we are in - the boss class.

In anticipation of any fightback, some of the other things we fought for and gained over the last few centuries are under increasing threat. Free speech, free assembly and the right to demonstrate, all of these are under pressure and the police continue to reveal how corrupt and brutal they are. The most recent examples have been their attacks on student demonstrators and their campaign of intimidation against anti-fracking activists. In addition to this we are more and more aware of how far states have gone in a massive surveillance of our phone calls and emails. We are also made more aware of the police infiltration of different political groups, with the aim of provoking, disrupting and gathering information on activists.

One would think that these conditions would have created a mass movement by now in Britain. We look at why this challenge has certainly not been initiated or helped by the traditional left. We know that

opposition will break out at some point, but it won't be the decaying left that has a key role in this. However, we don't gloat over the decline of the left when we see that our own anarchist scene suffers from a profound malaise. We examine these questions in some details and offer some solutions whilst at the same time wanting to provoke a debate within British anarchism.

We look at the ideas of an important anarchist, the Italian, Errico Malatesta, continuing a survey of his thought and practice started in issue 82. Malatesta is an extremely pragmatic thinker and his ideas should once again be re-discovered and appraised and he has much to offer us

unadulterated 110 % proof raw capitalism.

We continue our series of occasional articles on rebel youth cultures with a look at the zootsuiters of the United States who brought down upon themselves a nasty media campaign and orchestrated violence because of their challenging of the norms of American society during World War Two. We also continue our series on anarchist artists and writers with a look at the work of the anarchist wood cut specialist Alexandre Mairat, whose artwork war-time (this time the First World War) gave his support to anti-militarist and anti-capitalist propaganda.

Editorial

What's in the latest Organise!

when we look at how we can build an anarchist movement that is effective and can begin to attract wider support. Malatesta was a fervent supporter of effective anarchist organisation. In an article on Platformism and Synthesism we look at ways anarchists have organised and are organising and the problems that they have faced in the past. How we organise as anarchists remains acutely pressing and this article is an important contribution to that debate.

We also look at the ideas of someone we don't think we should emulate, the fake 'libertarian' Robert Nozick, who under the cover of a discourse about freedom offers us an

Plus our usual reviews of books and pamphlets and you have yet another scintillating issue of Organise! from the Anarchist Federation.



The Fire Next Time?

We look at the increasing stresses and strains within modern British society, and within the worldwide capitalist system as a whole. Will this lead to increasing apathy or to a sudden outbreak of protest, of urban uprisings?

“As nations of the world are thrown into a debt crisis, the likes of which have never been seen before, harsh fiscal ‘austerity’ measures will be undertaken in a flawed attempt to service the debts. The result will be the elimination of the middle class. When the middle class is absorbed into the labour class – the lower class – and lose their social, political, and economic foundations, they will riot, rebel, and revolt.”

From *The Global Economic Crisis: Riots, Rebellion and Revolution*. When Empire Hits Home, Part 3 <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-global->

[economic-crisis-riots-rebellion-and-revolution/18529](http://www.globalresearch.ca/economic-crisis-riots-rebellion-and-revolution/18529)

It is no accident that Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, is attempting to get a measure through the Greater London Authority about the use of water cannon by the Metropolitan Police. This wily politician, who masquerades as a lovable buffoon, is as sharp as many other members of his class, and has their alert class consciousness. He knows the social pressures are mounting continuously with more and more austerity measures piling up, on what seems like a daily basis. Johnson confirmed that he had made this decision based on the summer riots of 2011, which affected several cities in Britain. As the comedian Jeremy Hardy has noted: “He may seem like a lovable buffoon, but you know he wouldn’t hesitate to line you all up against a wall and have you shot”

In fact the current situation could be compared to that of the horrendous torture and execution device called pressing, of loading ever increasing weights on to a prone victim, bringing about their death via crushing.

ATOS Murderers

The number of suicides as a result of the Department of Work and Pensions campaign against the unemployed, in collusion with its unemployed-bashing mercenaries ATOS, is mounting. Those people who through disability or physical and mental illness are on benefits, are under increasing pressure from this brutal agency, which is paid £100 million (!) a year to do the dirty work. One incontinent woman was told by ATOS to wear a nappy. Another woman dying of breast cancer had her benefits cut by £30 a week. When she appealed,

her benefits were reinstated, but she died shortly after. Over half of those who appealed against ATOS decisions were found to be justified, and this increased statistically when they were represented by lawyers or benefits advisers. In retaliation, the Government is planning to withdraw legal aid from appellants. In a coordinated attack on the disabled, the Government announced the closure of 36 Remploy factories, which employed disabled workers. This resulted in compulsory redundancies for 1,700 workers. At the same time, Disability Living Allowance is being cut, which will seriously hinder many disabled people being able to work.

Attack on the Elderly

As a result of cuts to local authority spending over the last four years, at least 250,000 older vulnerable people are being deprived of care over such things as bathing, dressing and eating. The number of older people receiving "Meals on Wheels" dropped by half. Obviously with this came a concomitant cut in the number of care workers. This increased the pressure on family carers and friends, with a resulting increase in hospital entries. As Holly Holder, a co-author of a Nuffield Trust report remarked: "It is highly likely that this is having a negative effect on older people's health and wellbeing and that of their carers, but without

adequate data to assess this impact, the NHS and government are flying blind when it comes to managing demand and planning for the future." Already one thousand-and rising- people have received letters with instructions on how to get back into work, even though some of them have less than six months to live. One notable recent case involved one person being accounted "fit to work" when they had already died!

These cuts in local authority spending also put pressure on the elderly in terms of day centres being closed, as they also impacted on young people with the closure of youth centres.

The Student Crisis

The student crisis is one that will have long term effects. The axing of student grants in 1998 by the Labour Government and the introduction of £1,000 tuition fees was the start on attacks on easy access to higher education. These tuition fees have increased to £9,000 at the present time, with the passing of the Higher Education Act in 2004 by the Labour government of Blair to introduce variable fees. This brought in fees of up to 3,000 a year in the academic year 2007-2008. In 2010 the cap on student fees was set at £9,000, meaning that universities could, and

did, raise their fees to this figure.

In late March of this year it emerged that the Coalition government is now preparing to abolish this cap, thus opening the chance for university administrations to increase their annual tuition fees to up to £16,000 a year. Already this is stopping many people from going to university. It further confirms the move to a two-tier education system. In conjunction with the ending of student grants in 1998, came the abolition of maintenance grants for living expenses starting in the academic year 1999-2000. This forced students to take out large student loans from that date on, trapping many in debt. Those now entering the jobs market are now already in debt to the sum of tens of thousands of pounds. Increasingly, only those able to afford to pay for tuition fees and living costs at the same time will be in the position to snap up lucrative jobs.

Attack on the Homeless

There is also a twin pronged attack on the homeless, through government legislation and through the actions and policies of the local State, that is, local councils. The Coalition government brought in legislation against the squatting of empty residential housing recently, in summer 2012. It is looking towards extending this ban to public and commercial buildings in the coming years. In London, the number of homeless people has risen by 60% over the last two years. In tandem with this and not just involving the homeless, but those still with shelter but in impoverished



conditions, half a million people are now using food banks. As well as attacks on squatting, the Coalition Government introduced cuts to local housing allowances to people in private accommodation administered by local councils. In a staggering display of class arrogance, Philippa Roe, heading up finance at Westminster Council, said that "If larger families have to move out strong transport links will allow children to travel to schools and friends and families to stay in touch". The Conservative controlled Westminster Council has paid a key role in lobbying Ministers to remove the responsibilities of local councils to house the homeless. It attempted to ban soup kitchens in the vicinity of Westminster Cathedral in late 2011 but was forced to make a U-turn after a general outcry. However plans to ban soup kitchens in the area are once again being put on the agenda, together with a campaign against rough sleeping. A leading figure in Westminster Council said: "Soup runs have no place in the 21st century. It is undignified that people are being fed on the streets. They actually encourage people to sleep rough with all the dangers that entails. Our priority is to get people off the streets altogether. We have a range of services that can help do that."

In tandem with this local councils are increasing their attacks on the homeless. In many areas, local councils are fiddling the figures for the number of rough sleepers in their area, deliberately minimising the numbers. In March of this year Newham Council, controlled by Labour, separated an elderly disabled couple who had found themselves homeless. They were put in separate accommodation

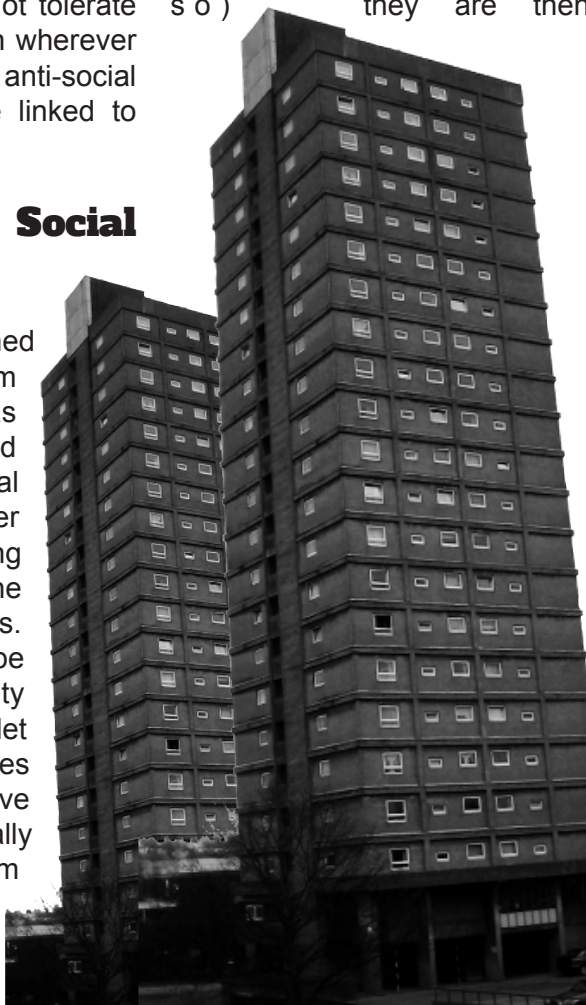
in a move reminiscent of the practice of separating married couples in workhouses during the Victorian period! In another vile move, Newham Council, with the enchanting figure of Sir Robin Wales at its head, served ASBOs on 28 rough sleepers. They worked in alliance with the notorious UK Border Agency. Unmesh Desai was expelled from the Socialist Workers Party in the early 1980s for his advocacy of physical attacks on the far right, known as "squadism". This young radical has become the Labour Party enforcer for Newham, with a post as executive member for crime and anti-social behaviour. He went on record as saying: "Residents do not regard sleeping, drinking, urinating, or taking drugs on the streets and using threatening or violent behaviour as an acceptable way of life. We will not tolerate it, and will take action wherever we are able to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime linked to rough sleeping."

Attack on Social Housing

The Government pushed through the Localism Act in 2012. This was intended to spearhead a harsh attack on social housing, whether either the rapidly dwindling council housing or the housing associations. Tenants will now be robbed of security of tenure. Newly let council properties can be let on five year (occasionally two year) 'fixed term secure tenancies'. Councils can now discharge those

duties to house the homeless by insisting they take fixed term tenancies in council or housing association accommodation or private accommodation, with no security of tenure at all. Before this, homeless families had to be offered the choice of a social housing tenancy, although often following a period in temporary accommodation. Housing Associations can now charge up to 80% market rents on newly let properties.

Labour councils as well as those controlled by the Conservatives, rushed to implement these new rules. The Labour councils of Haringey, Lambeth and Newham brought in the new 5 year tenancies, despite having no legal obligation to do so. Once children of families in this accommodation move out (that is if they can afford to do so) they are then



deemed as under-occupying, meaning their tenancy will not be renewed. They can then be evicted and provided with insecure private housing. In private accommodation there is no security of tenancy, and families can be evicted with only a two-month notice. In addition, in particular problem areas like London, avaricious landlords and land speculator sharks have driven up rents to astronomical levels. The housing benefit cap means many will not be able to afford these rents and are being forced out of inner-city areas.

The £500 housing benefit cap will affect those in housing association property as rents are raised. Even those in employment but on low wages will be penalised. Mark Hoban, Minister of Employment, under the new Universal Credit scheme, is preparing plans for those in work, but who need benefits to top up their income, to be forced to retrain to up their incomes or face benefit cuts.

In conjunction with this attack, there are massive attacks on those claiming unemployment benefits. Very large numbers of jobseekers are being deprived of benefits for arbitrary reasons. It is known that jobcentre advisors have been given targets to deprive the unemployed of their benefits.

Attack on Pensions

The government has now sped up its legislation over the age of retirement with the age of receiving a state pension going up to the age of 66 in 2020. In addition, the pension age of women to be equal with that of men is accelerated, to be completed by 2018. Plans are

also underway to increase the State Pension Age to 67 by 2036 and 68 by 2046. The Government is also looking at applying this rising State Pension age to public service pension schemes! For many, this may well mean that they work until they do, with the idea of a happy retirement a dim and distant possibility.

Meanwhile this Government is continuing to support sweetheart deals where its capitalist friends and supporters, like Vodaphone and Goldman Sachs, can get away without paying taxes to the tune of billions of pounds, and where millionaires like Mick Jagger and Bob Geldof stash their wealth in offshore companies.

The Ecological Crisis

The idea that climate change is not a likelihood has received a thorough soaking lately. Extreme weather conditions, with their effects on agriculture and indeed on housing, are more likely to be a common occurrence. The ecological crisis is increasingly combining with the economic crisis. So around the world, particularly in what has been called the “periphery of the global capitalist system” or the “Global South”, new environmental movements are emerging, involving an increasing working class component, with an increasing input from indigenous peoples in Canada, Latin and Central America, China, Egypt, etc. This has involved campaigns against toxicity and pollution, against the construction of dams and high speed railway lines and tunnels, etc. The need for increased exploitation on a global level has given birth to a “disaster capitalism” like never before. The continuation

of humanity is increasingly at doubt, as is the continuation of many of the “higher” species of animal. Increasingly we may well see –and as cited there are already indications of this– of a convergence of interests involving class and labour with environmental, race and gender issues, bringing to fruition the sort of movement the Anarchist Federation and others have advocated for the past few decades (see our pamphlet *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation*). The need to develop a ‘libertarian front’ of all these movements and groups is built. Thus, revolutionary work consists in part of linking each area of struggle, bringing out all latent anti-capitalist and libertarian tendencies.

In Britain such movements could emerge around the embryonic anti-fracking and anti-nuclear power movement, although it is possible that they could equally develop around other environmental issues. Bear in mind that fracking and nuclear power are now important planks in this government’s policies. The police thugs that were once used against miners are applying their brutal tactics to anti-fracking activists, awakening many to the nature of the police.

Increasing Police Surveillance

More and more people are increasingly becoming witnesses to, and indeed victims of, police methods. From the already mentioned attacks on the anti-fracking activists, via the attacks and kettling of anti-capitalist protestors in anti-G8 and anti-IMF actions, and the anti-fascist mobilisations where many were kettled and

arrested in Tower Hamlets, to the increasing criminalisation of student protest, the most recent example being the recent kettling of students in Birmingham. Black people and Asian people have long been at the receiving end of police brutality and harassment, as have political activists in recent years. In addition to this is the increasing use of CCTV in every sphere of life. The recent revelations by Edward Snowden showed that the US and the British state were colluding in the mass surveillance of phone calls, emails, and internet usage.

The police in Britain were used as a weapon to beat the miners' strike of 1984-5, and they have proceeded to play a more overtly political role, returning to the one of naked intimidation as witnessed in previous decades of struggle. More and more people are witnessing their true nature, and among the conscious active minority of students, this has been a revelation that has had a radicalising effect. At the same time the Government is attacking the jobs, conditions, and pensions of the police, causing certain resentment there, a factor which could play a role if there were mass unrest and mass confrontation.

Coupled with this is the role of much of the media in whipping up attacks: on benefit claimants and the unemployed, on rough sleepers and squatters, and on immigrants. Any future revolutionary movement must, as a priority, look to the development of its own media, its own mass propaganda and means of communication.

The Coming Social Blaze

We can see that a number of factors are coming together, whether over attacks on pensions, on housing, or over increasing criminalisation of dissent. The role of both the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party is being exposed in many graphic ways. And yet there appears at the moment to be no alternative being offered. The Left, or part of it, still clings to the Labour Party, whilst other parts of it attempt to replicate the "good old days" of Old Labour—as if its record was any better than New Labour, and as if these were not two heads of the same beast. They seek to raise the Lazarus of Welfare State Labourism by their impotent incantations—Left Unity, The People's Assemblies, Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, etc.

And yet the anarchist and revolutionary groupings cannot seem to gain much of an audience, and they remain isolated and small. Numbers on demonstrations, pickets, rallies and public meetings are at low levels, whilst those involved in campaigns and local neighbourhood work are similarly low. The number of strikes has fallen to a new low, whilst workplace activism has been similarly affected.

We have indicated that there are many increasing stresses and strains in British society. Many of these stresses and strains can be seen in countries around the world. The magnitude of the crisis affecting capitalism is reaching gigantic proportions at every level. Yet we know that a social quickening must come at

some point. We cannot predict where it will first burst out, we cannot predict how it will spread, but the likelihood is that it will burst forth and surprise us all. Here are some indications of where it could burst forth. We have already indicated anti-fracking and anti-nuclear power movements as potential poles of struggle, another could be over the question of housing. We can see this in the development of various private renters groups that have emerged with their anti-landlord outlook and their occupations of up-market housing. Struggles over the attacks on social housing and over gentrification could be sparks to set off the social bonfire. Equally, the squatting laws themselves have been proved to be full of loopholes, with some recent examples of acquittals of those occupying residential property. The looming intensity of the housing crisis could ignite mass squats and occupations of housing and land. In London the amount of empty housing has increased by 40% over the last year. Kensington and Chelsea ranks highest in the number of empty homes among London boroughs. The centre of London and indeed of many other major cities of the world has been sold to Russian oligarchs and Arab sheikhs in the "buy to leave" phenomenon, where super-rich overseas buyers use prime property as an investment, with no intention of occupying. Whole areas of cities are becoming ghost towns. This phenomenon started with the last financial crash, when Swiss banks and other havens of the rich came under increasing scrutiny. These people moved their off dodgy riches away from the banks to investing in prime property.

Crisis on the left, crisis within the British Anarchist Movement

We look at the accelerating decay of the British traditional left and turn a critical eye on British anarchism.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and then the Soviet Union imploded in 1991, we in what was then the Anarchist Communist Federation (we changed our name to the Anarchist Federation in 1999) predicted the collapse of Communist Parties in the West and a related crisis in what we called the “little brother “ of official Communism, the Trotskyist movement. But the Communist Parties in Portugal and Greece still remain mass parties and still have some reactionary influence in sabotaging the independent struggle of the working class there.

Well, the process took a little bit longer than we at first envisaged and is still in process. Here in Britain in the early 1990s, the Communist Party shattered into old time Stalinist wings (The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and the New Communist Party), whilst the Eurocommunist wing quickly disappeared off the face of the earth, with some of its personnel ending up as advisers of the Labour Party leaders Kinnock and Blair. The CPB still wields some influence via their input into the daily newspaper

the Morning Star, but like the other fragments it is an aging and shrinking organisation with little recruitment from new generations. The Communist Party's influence in the unions, especially within their bureaucracies, has shrunk with the decline of the trade unions themselves,

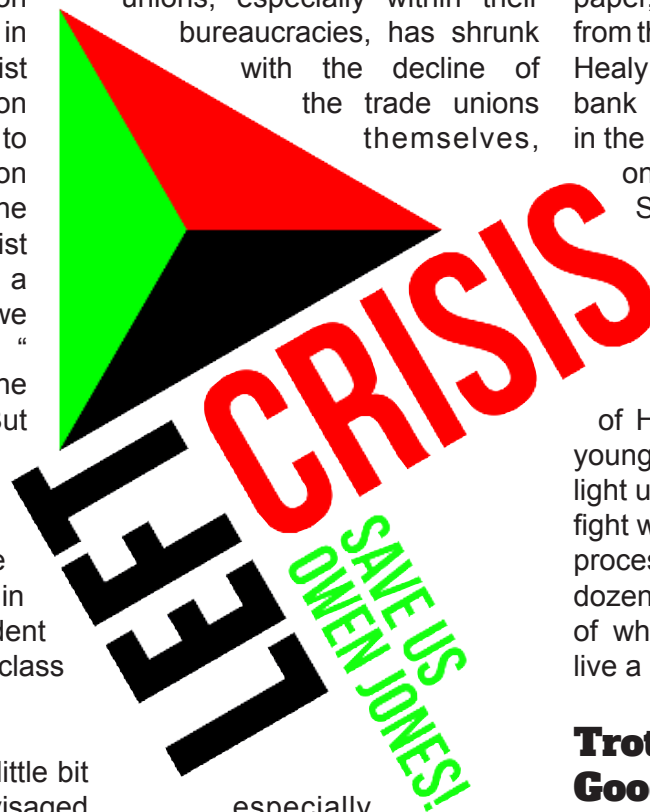
especially with the decimation of heavy industry such as mining and manufacturing.

As to the Trotskyist movement, perhaps we should have taken more note of the crisis that had already happened within a fairly large Trotskyist formation, the Workers Revolutionary Party, in 1985-6. For years its leader Gerry Healy, with the other leading lights within it turning a blind eye, was able to sexually

abuse and rape many of its young female members. At the same time he and the WRP entered into pacts with the regimes in Libya and Syria. In return for support in their daily paper, the WRP received funds from these regimes, a lot of which Healy funnelled into his own bank accounts. He and others in the WRP provided information on leftist opponents to the Syrian regimes, with the result that some of them were captured and died agonising deaths at the hands of Assad's butchers. The whole story of Healy's systematic rape of young WRPs did not come to light until it was used in a faction fight within the leadership. In the process the WRP broke into a dozen different grouplets, many of which are now moribund or live a half-life.

Trot, Trot Trotsky Goodbye!

We had originally thought that British Trotskyism would implode as a result of the collapse of Stalinism and indeed of the whole idea of welfarism, the Welfare State no longer being possible with the new demands of evolving capitalism. Certainly the Trotskyist movement has had a parasitic relationship with the Labour Party, either when organising “entrism” groups within it, or whilst organising outside it



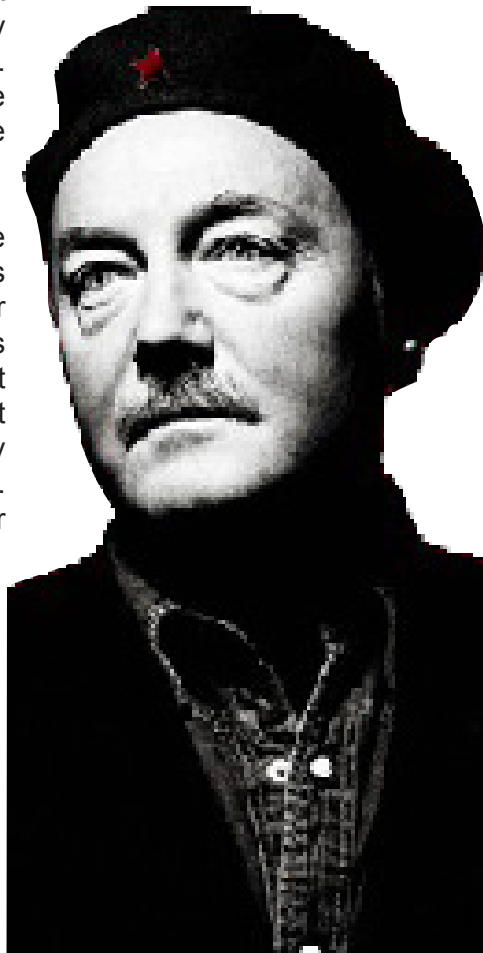
like the Socialist Workers Party, having a position of “critical” support for Labour “Left” MPs, particularly with the phenomenon of Bennism and with “left” trade union bureaucrats. Practically all of these groups with a few exceptions call for a “critical” vote for Labour at the time of elections, and the whole history of Trotskyism in Britain is very much characterised by an orientation towards what they call the “labour movement”, in reality the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

What the WRP crisis should have taught us was that the Leninist concept of organisation, with its hierarchy of cadre leadership, can lead on to a fear of the rank and file membership and a willingness to keep it in the dark, the growth of a self-seeking bureaucratic caste, increasing authoritarianism, and the developing belief that one’s group is the one true party representing the working class. This leads onto the manufacture of a particular atmosphere inside that group, where the leadership bodies maintain a mutual solidarity against the membership, and where abuses by one of this group can either be ignored or covered up. This is not to say that every Trotskyist group has the problems that the WRP, and more recently the SWP, has experienced. Neither does it mean that similar scenarios have not happened within the British anarchist movement. What it means is that the structure of these groups facilitates the cover-up of abuses by a leading member. The attitude of the SWP leaders was to close ranks and deny any abuses. Further to this it is worth bearing in mind the comments of Rebecca

Winter in her *Silent No Longer: Confronting Sexual Violence in The Left* : “The lack of internal democracy within the SWP certainly hindered the efforts of those seeking change within the organisation, but informal social processes influenced by misogynist ideas about sexual violence can be just as destructive to the lives of sexual violence survivors.”

Freefall

The SWP is now in freefall. It constituted the largest group on the Left. It had already had disastrous splits after its experiments in constructing an electoral alliance with the ex-Labour MP George Galloway, Respect, and through this and its work in a front it more or less controlled, the Stop The War Coalition, it went into alliance with reactionary Islamists.



Galloway is an extremely astute operator and he used the SWP for his own objectives, discarding them when they were no longer useful. Someone had to be blamed for the Galloway fiasco and the equally disastrous alliance with Islamist reaction. As a result the SWP leaders Lyndsey German and John Rees were sacrificed and now lead another formation, Counterfire, which shows no signs of growing and appears to be in decline itself. The more recent splits after the sexual abuse show little signs of learning very much, with a continuing liking for getting into bed with Islamists. Meanwhile they harp back to the “IS tradition”, that is the early days when International Socialism (IS) was the precursor of the SWP. The IS is portrayed as having a libertarian outlook, when nothing could have been further from the truth. The only reason it was fairly open in those days- and that is all relative- was because it was so small and had to operate as an apparently open organisation.

The second largest Trotskyist group, the Socialist Party, is also experiencing internal problems. It previously operated as an entryist grouping within the Labour Party, known as the Militant Tendency, and had a fairly large membership. However after it was expelled from Labour in 1991 the majority formed the Socialist Party, losing a lot of the membership it had had whilst in the Labour Party. None of the other much smaller Trotskyist groups in Britain are faring well, with many shrinking or suffering splits themselves. None of these smaller groups appears to be able to recruit and these groups are all shrinking with an aging membership.

There seems to be a hope among anarchists that these splits would mean that some of them would move in a libertarian direction. This hope is based on the development of the expelled members of the Socialist Labour League, the precursor of the WRP, who formed the Solidarity group in 1960 and DID move very decisively in a libertarian socialist direction. However only a few individuals from these splits with the recent SWP crisis seem to be doing this, with the fragments- the International Socialist Network, Revolutionary Socialism for the 21st Century, Revolutionary Socialists- remaining firmly within the Leninist camp (The Commune, a previous split from the small Trotskyist group Alliance for Workers' Liberty, showed some signs of being inspired by the ideas of Solidarity to a certain extent, but its initial promise proved short lived and it now exists only as a one-man internet presence) . Indeed the ISN is now in a process with other ailing Trotskyist groups –Anticapitalist Initiative, Socialist Resistance, and Workers Power- to constitute a larger grouping, whilst at the same time orienting towards the various initiatives to build what in practice is a movement modelled on Bennism, The People's Assemblies, which are supported by both Stalinist and Trotskyist groupings, and Left Unity , which is an attempt to create an Old Labour style machine uniting reformists with Trotskyists.



Stale

The People's Assembly movement involves Labour Party members like Owen Jones- who one might feel has a desire to be a future leader of that Party- and wants to be a group that exerts pressure on the Labour Party from the left in the same way that UKIP pressures the Conservatives from the right. Alongside these staunch supporters of the Old Labour vision are the Counterfire group which hopes to manipulate this movement the way its leading lights controlled The Stop The War Coalition, the dregs of Bennism , left trade union bureaucrats and assorted other Stalinists and Trotskyists. No lessons appear to have been learnt, and the duplication of old and discredited forms of organisation and politics are perpetuated.

As Phil Dickens noted on his blog: "The nature of leftist politics in the UK at present and the monopoly of resources and influence such organisations hold means that this is a necessity in order to stage such a large meeting and get the crowds in. But it also helps to guarantee that this new project will be just as stale and formulaic

as the last one."

[http://libcom.org/blog/extra-cynical-look-peoples-](http://libcom.org/blog/extra-cynical-look-peoples-assembly-13062013)

[assembly-13062013](http://libcom.org/blog/extra-cynical-look-peoples-assembly-13062013)

As to Left Unity and its attempt to create a new party, the stresses and strains between the different factions that make it up are already making it dead in the water. The

Trotskyist groups are already swarming in to what they see as a fertile recruiting ground with more than three different platforms being set up within it. It in all likelihood will go the same way as a previous and similar attempt, the Socialist Alliance, (1992-2005) which imploded for the same reasons. This was a left electoral alliance that was rift by struggles between the SWP, the Socialist Party, and other Trot groups. Eventually the majority of what was left of it was led into the Respect coalition of Galloway by the SWP.

It seems likely that this decline and decay of the traditional left looks like it will continue. Whilst we shed no tears about this, one would think that the vacuum that is being formed could be filled by those who advocate revolutionary libertarian ideas like self-organisation, direct action and anti-electoralism, and that the anarchist and libertarian left would be up to this. Unfortunately this is not the case.

British Anarchism? Oh dear!

It might be fruitful to quote at length from a previous article in *Organise!* from issue 42, spring 1996:

*"The ACF remains a comparatively small organisation. Its desire to create or be the component of a large revolutionary organisation and movement has failed to happen. Many are put off joining a group where a strong commitment and a lot of determination are required. Many libertarian revolutionaries are as yet unconvinced of the need to create a specific libertarian communist organisation. They remain tied to the ideas of local groups, or at best regional federations loosely linked, being adequate for the very difficult tasks of introducing libertarian revolutionary ideas and practices to the mass of the population. They remain unconvinced of the need for a unified strategy and practice, for ideological and tactical unity and collective action as we in the ACF have insisted upon consistently. Some remain mesmerised by the myths of nationalism and national liberation, some by illusions in the unions.As we noted in *Virus 9*, in late 1986-early 1987: "There has been little sharing of experiences among libertarians in various campaigns and struggles. Even on something as basic as a demonstration, libertarians have marched separately and in different parts of the demonstration". This still remains true today, despite several attempts by the ACF over the years to encourage coordinations, and even (still) on basic things like a united contingent on a demo.*

Libertarians remain within their separate local groups and organisations. There is little dialogue and little attempt for united activity, for forums and debates where these are possible.

And yet not since the pre-World War 1 period and the late 60s has there been such a potential for the growth of the libertarian revolutionary movement. The collapse of Stalinism, the changes within social-democracy-including the British variety of Labourism- with the end of welfarism, and the effects of both of these on Trotskyism, have created a space which revolutionary anarchists must fill."

Unfortunately these words remain as true today as they were those 18 years ago. Whilst there has been some growth in both the Anarchist Federation and the Solidarity Federation, there seems little will or desire for collaboration, both between the national organisations, and between national federations and local unaffiliated groups.

An indication of the malaise within this scene- a scene rather than a movement as the last term implies some shared identity, which seems lacking- is the disappearance of hard copy publications like the newspaper *Freedom* and the magazine *Black Flag*. These both disappeared essentially because they lacked a base able to write for them and to distribute and sell them. Other magazines like the magazine of the Solidarity Federation, *Direct Action*, and *Here and Now*, based in Glasgow and Leeds, have also disappeared. They were unconnected to a movement, a network of groups

and individuals, or a national organisation or organisations. Even the problem of a lack of a visible and united presence on demonstrations and actions is one that still plagues British anarchism.

In 1997, the year after these words above were written we saw the collapse of the Class War Federation, though a rump continued on and still produced *Class War* into the 21st century. With its final extinction one would have thought that we had seen the last of the mix of populism, heavy use of stunts, and occasional electoral adventures coupled with an anti-theoretical base. At its outset *Class War* had been a refreshing new venture breaking with the liberalism and pacifism of what passed for an anarchist movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However it soon became a parody of itself and its unwillingness to develop beyond the politics of the stunt doomed it. Now however, just like the way the traditional left continues to repeat its errors over and over again, new attempts by some people with their origins in *Class War* are reappearing. A loose and adhoc attempt to run CW candidates in the next election is under way, with stickers already appearing, where a few revolutionary demands are covered up by a host of reformist and populist slogans. Like the traditional left, the old ex-*Class War* seems to have learnt no new lessons.

What passes for British anarchism seems at the moment unable to develop as a result of the space created by the decline of the traditional left and seems to be in crisis itself. Various conferences which somehow sought to unite the different

anarchist groups and develop a revolutionary practice- Mayday 1998, the Anarchist Movement Conference of 2009, the ALARM Conference of 2012- all proved to be damp squibs and failed as organisers. Some local attempts to organise- the Whitechapel Anarchist Group, the ALARM London-wide network, also collapsed. Meanwhile the Haringey Solidarity Group, which has done sterling local work over many decades has, we must speak truthfully, failed to develop its idea of a network of local London community groups, influenced by libertarian ideas. Apart from the HSG, few local neighbourhood/borough groups have developed and the network, Radical London, only flickers on.

What then can we do? If we are serious anarchists we must look at how we can grow our influence and numbers. As already cited there has been some useful local work in neighbourhoods and several interesting attempts to set up Solidarity Networks. There has been some work around workplace issues and strikes, and some valuable work around housing, evictions, Workfare, and the Bedroom Tax. This work is not enough, it needs to be multiplied. We need to develop a serious class struggle anarchist practice and theory. We need to move away from amateurism and lack of seriousness. We have to develop a willingness and practice of coordinated activity wherever we can, and that includes coordinated blocs on demonstrations. We must turn away from the outlook of organisational patriotism and look for practical unity wherever possible. We have to reject populism, electoralism and anti-organisationalism.

At a time when the intensity of the ruling class attack on our living standards, on our wages and conditions, on free speech and assembly, are increasing at a frightening pace, British anarchism must heed the wake-up call. Either it undergoes a renaissance, with the possible emergence of grass roots struggle (see the separate article in this issue The Fire Next Time?) and relates to that struggle, or it consigns itself to continued irrelevance.



The Political Thought of Errico Malatesta

Felipe Corrêa

This text is divided into four main parts for the presentation of Malatesta's political thought: a.) a brief description of the author's life, the political environment in which he found himself and his main interlocutors; b.) a theoretical-epistemological discussion, which differentiates science from doctrine/ideology and, therefore, the methods of analysis and social theories of anarchism. A notion that will be applied to the discussion of Malatestan thought itself; c.) theoretical-methodological elements for social analysis; d.) conception of anarchism and strategic positions. "Errico Malatesta remains alive and integrally present in our spirits and memories"—Luigi Fabbri

Introduction

To deal with the political thought of Errico Malatesta is not a simple task and is something that must be carried out with necessary caution. It is relevant to bear in mind three fundamental questions that run throughout any more careful analysis of his work: 1.) He was an anarchist for more than 60 years of his life; 2.) His complete works are not available, not even in Italian; 3.) He never was, nor intended to be, a great theorist; he was essentially a propagandist and organiser.

This means that general readings, like that which it is

intended to realise here, should take into account that there is no uniformity regarding his positions in those 60 years, some of which vary significantly. They must also take into account that, as an important part of his work is not known, one cannot point to exceedingly definitive conclusions.

Finally, they should take into account that although the larger part of his works are composed from texts for the exposure and dissemination of anarchism, and that, although the author does not have the breadth of other libertarian thinkers, he makes relevant contributions, which will be taken up briefly.

Background

Luigi Fabbri, in a biography about Malatesta, emphasises a few of his characteristics as an anarchist, showing his militant fullness:

"His active life as an anarchist was a monolith of humanity: the unity of thought and action, a balance between sentiments and reason, coherence between preaching and doing, the connection of unyielding energy for struggle with human kindness, the fusion of an attractive sweetness with the most rigid strength of character, agreement between the most complete fidelity to his banners and a mental swiftness that escaped all dogmatism.... He was a complete anarchist."

This quality of reconciling fundamental characteristics for anarchist militancy also involved, again according to Fabbri, the permanent quest for reconciliation between ends and means and for the establishment of healthy relationships with the oppressed masses.

"Use of the necessary means for victory remained, in what he said and did, in constant relation to the libertarian ends at which it is proposed to arrive, the excitement and fury of the moment never caused him to lose sight of future needs, passion and common sense, destruction and creation, always harmonised in his words and in his example; this harmony, so indispensable to fertilising results, impossible to be dictated from above, he carried out among the people, mingling with them, without worrying that this could cause his personal work to disappear in the vast and wavy ocean of the anonymous masses."

Such characteristics were demonstrated in the broad context of Malatesta's militancy, both in historic and geographic terms. They were noted in his relations with different interlocutors, anarchist or not, and in his involvement in the most diverse debates. A significant part of his political thought was formulated amid these dialogues and debates, against a background of notable

episodes.

As in the entire trajectory of anarchism, a common sense insisted in relating anarchism to disorder, to confusion and chaos, and the ideological and doctrinal disputes, especially with the Social Democratic and Bolshevik derivations of Marxism, ended up reinforcing, by effort of these political adversaries and without any historic foundation, visions that anarchism would be petty-bourgeois, liberal, idealist, individualist, spontaneist, against organisation and essentially attached to the peasants and artisans of the “backward world” in decline.

In socialism in general, fruit of the debate of the previous generation, there was a period of widespread acceptance regarding methods of analysis and social theories of evolutionist (teleological) theories, of determinisms of economic and/or structural order, of positions derived from positivism and from scientism. These conceptions, combatted by Malatesta, emphasised among other things that society would move necessarily towards socialism, that the structure of society (mainly of economic base) would determine its political and cultural aspects, and that the social sciences should be modelled on natural sciences. The author also fought positions that sought to merge socialism and science through the concepts of “scientific socialism” and even of “scientific anarchism”.

Among the debates that permeated the anarchist camp some can be highlighted. Firstly, the most relevant historic debates between anarchists about organisation, reforms and

violence: the necessity or not for the organisation of anarchists and, in such a case, the best way to organise; the possibility of struggles for reforms leading to a revolutionary process; the role of violence in the revolutionary process. The context of the 1880s and 1890s in Europe, marked by the period after the Paris Commune and much repression, contributed to the insurrectionist positions of so-called “propaganda by the deed”, predominant on the continent in this period and corroborated by the resolutions of the 1881 Congress, which led to the short-lived Black International.

As much as Malatesta has defended, for the most part of his life, organisational dualism, the struggle for reforms as the way to revolution and violence in support of the organised workers’ movement – three positions that, according to Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt (2009), characterise “mass anarchism” from an historical perspective – there was a period, particularly in the two decades mentioned, in which he was influenced by classical positions of “insurrectionist anarchism”, especially when investing in insurrections without a significant popular base, such as that of Benevento, in 1887, and by believing that violence detached from organised workers’ movements could serve as a catalyst for mobilisation. Still, the author fought, throughout his life, against anarchist anti-organisationism – which was strong in Italy, among other reasons due to the positions of Luigi Galleani – and the “bourgeois influences on anarchism”, in Fabbri’s terms, which stemmed from the liberal individualism with which some anarchists flirted, particularly in

Europe and the United States.

The decisive participation of anarchists in revolutionary unionism (revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism) was also accompanied by Malatesta, both in the Americas and in Europe; in the latter case the foundation of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), in France in 1895, ended up constituting a milestone, because it marked the passage from insurrectionist hegemony to mass anarchism in the region. In the majority of cases the anarchists dissolved themselves into the union organisations; in many cases they advocated “union neutrality”, in the case of revolutionary syndicalism; in others, such as in the Argentine Regional Workers’ Federation (FORA), from 1905, and in the National Confederation of Labour (CNT), from 1919, they advocated anarcho-syndicalism, programmatically linking the unions to anarchism and making this their official doctrine.

In both cases, however, this model of unionism showed itself to be class-struggle oriented, combative, autonomous/independent of the enemy classes and institutions, democratic (with rank and file, self-managed and federated organisation) and revolutionary. Malatesta positioned himself on the relationship between anarchism and unionism in different circumstances, such as in the Amsterdam Anarchist Congress, in 1907, when he polemicalised with Pierre Monatte. In the context of the Second International (1889-1916) there was, besides the expulsion of the anarchists early on in the process, a strengthening of

electoral/parliamentary and reformist socialism, which took shape in social democracy and in "possibilism", as well as the loss of important anarchists from the first period to this camp, as were the cases of Andrea Costa, Paul Brousse and Benoit Malon. The gap between the Second and Third Internationals was marked, throughout the socialist camp, by the conflicts between those that took sides in the First World War and those that opposed the war, and this was no different among the anarchists. A group restricted to 16 anarchists – among which, however, were to be found renowned militants such as Kropotkin and Jean Grave – ended up supporting the allies, thus distancing themselves from the vast majority of anarchists, who remained opposed to the war, as was the case of Malatesta. The Third International (1919-1943) was marked by the global strengthening of Bolshevism, after the Russian Revolution, and the Soviet Bloc itself which, progressively, demonstrated that state "socialism" was nothing more than the dictatorship of a party over the oppressed classes through the machinery of the state. From 1921, this situation became clear to anarchists around the world due to the denunciations of repression and suppression of all socialist and revolutionary currents from countries of the bloc which refused to submit to the dictates of the Communist Party. Malatesta has a significant production critical of the socialists and communists and a few writings about the support of this group of anarchists for the Allies in the war.

Towards the end of his life, the author also witnessed the rise of fascism in Italy and the re-

emergence of the problem of nationalism, with which he had lived in some measure on the occasion of the movements of Garibaldi and Mazzini. He also polemicalised with Nestor Makhno and Piotr Arshinov, authors of "The Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists", about the best way of conceiving the specific organisation of anarchists.

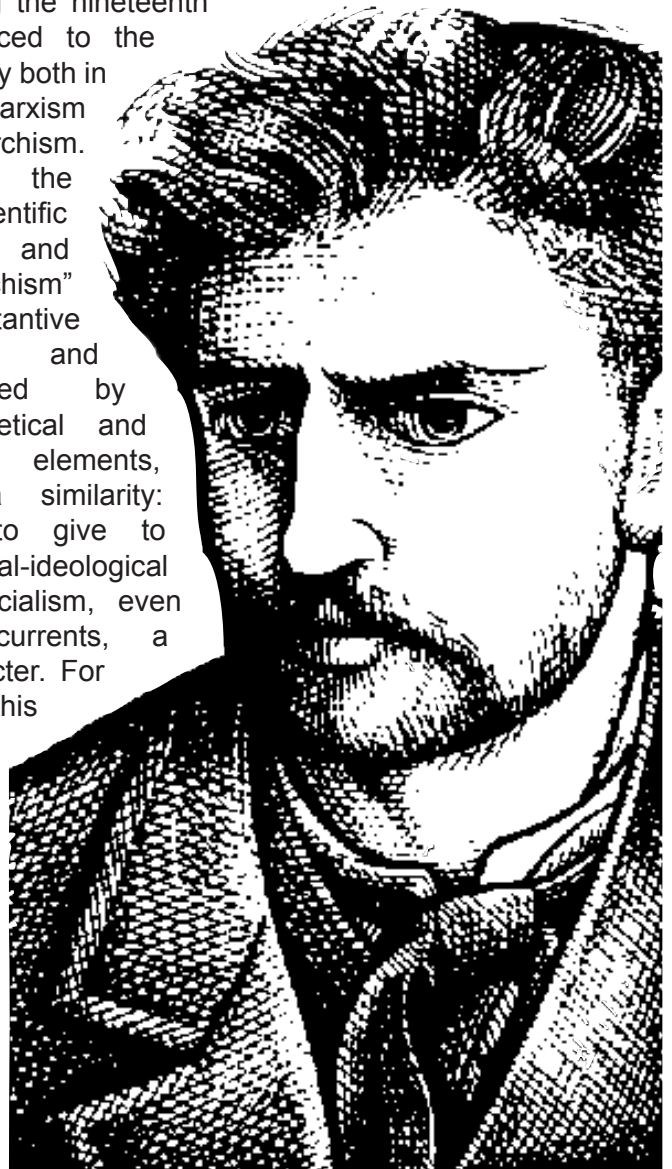
Science and doctrine/ ideology

To differentiate these categories Malatesta's departure point is the notion of scientific socialism/anarchism" that, having emerged during the nineteenth century, advanced to the twentieth century both in the camps of Marxism and anarchism. Although the concepts of "scientific socialism" and "scientific anarchism" have substantive differences and are supported by different theoretical and methodological elements, they have a similarity: they intend to give to the political-ideological doctrine of socialism, even if different currents, a scientific character. For Malatesta, this socialism-science link is mistaken:

" T h e
scientism (I
am not saying
science) that
prevailed in
the second
half of the
nineteenth
c e n t u r y

produced the tendency to consider as scientific truths, that is, natural laws and, therefore, necessary and fatal, that which was only a concept, corresponding to the diverse interests and diverse aspirations each one had of justice, progress etc., from which was born 'scientific socialism' and, also, 'scientific anarchism' which, even while professed by our great representatives, always seemed to me baroque conceptions that confused things and concepts that are different by their very nature."

The ideas of scientific socialism and scientific anarchism present,



according to him, a confusion of categories that are distinct and cannot be treated as if they were one. In a lot of cases, Malatesta argues, scientific notion, fused to socialism/anarchism, would only be “the scientific coating with which some like to cover their wishes and desires”; use of the adjective “scientific” would constitute, in most cases, nothing more than a basis for attempts at self-legitimation.

Based on this critique, the author argues for the need to define and distinguish two fundamental categories that, although related, cannot be reduced to one alone.

“Science is the compilation and systematisation of what is known and what is believed to be known; it states the fact and tries to discover its law, that is, the conditions under which the fact occurs and is necessarily repeated. ... The task of science is to discover and formulate the conditions under which the fact necessarily produces and repeats itself: that is, it is to say what is and what must necessarily be.

Anarchism is, by contrast, a human aspiration which is not based on any real or supposedly real natural necessity, but that could be implemented following human will. Taking advantage of the means that science provides man in the struggle against nature and against contrasting wills; one can take advantage of the progresses of philosophical thought when they serve to teach men to reason better and to more accurately distinguish real from fantasy; but you may not confuse it, without falling into absurdity, either with science or any philosophical system.”

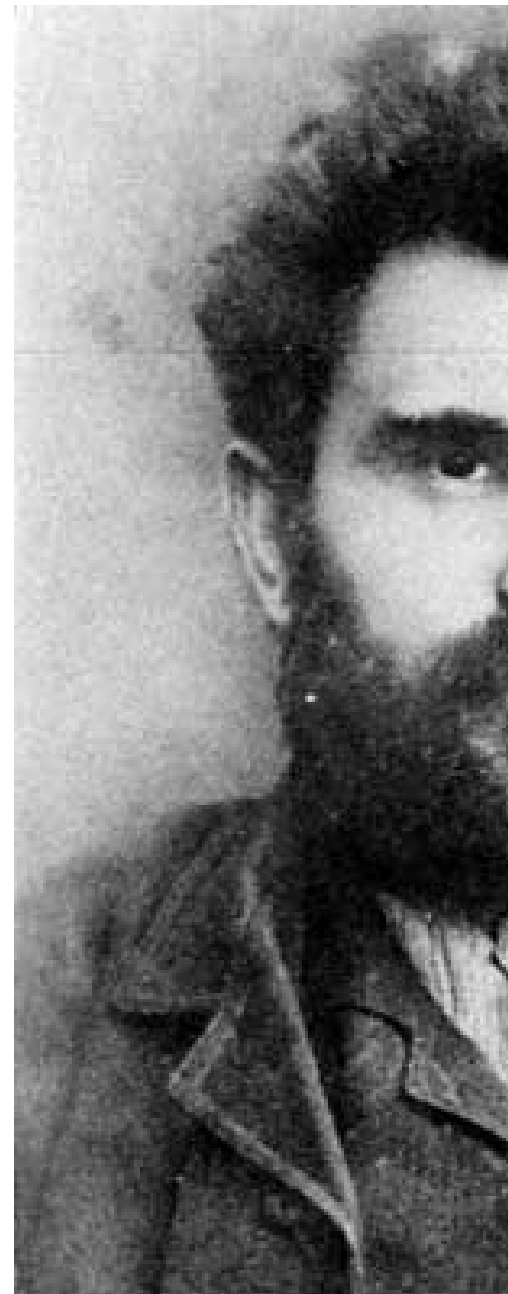
When reflecting on anarchism

Malatesta, in fact, addresses an element that is part of something larger and can be defined by the categories of doctrine and/or ideology, addressed here by means of a synthesis category: doctrine/ideology. Therefore, when discussing science and anarchism Malatesta differentiates the categories of science and doctrine/ideology more broadly. The Malatestan conception of science implies a notion that its objective is in the past and in the present; that which was and/or is. It is based on phenomena involving natural and social life, from a theoretic and/or historic point of view, structural and/or contextual, and paves the way for an expression of these phenomena. The ability to generalise, that is, to explain a phenomenon or a group of phenomena is one of its central aspects. Science never has the future as an objective; it can, at most, make predictions about that which, based on the analysis of that which was and that which is, necessarily will be as a result of this interpretation of the past and present.

Differently, doctrine/ideology provides a framework based on a set of values and on an ethical notion that provides tools for the analysis of the past and present reality, structural and contextual, but which also allows one to judge this reality; offering elements in order to think, starting from what was and what is, about what should be. That is, doctrine/ideology offers an evaluative basis which allows one to judge and direct political positions, ideas and actions in the direction of maintaining or modifying the status quo in a normative sense.

Malatesta considers anarchism a doctrine/ideology that, based

on human aspirations, affirms what society should be, an ethical-evaluative position of a becoming that is beyond the scientific camp. Capitalism and state must be destroyed, giving rise to a society without classes, exploitation or domination not because, through a scientific



analysis of the current system of domination it can be seen that this is the natural order of evolution of society towards a known end, but because, according to ethical values and notions and from a normative position, it is considered that

society could be better and more just than it currently is and that human action, even within structural limits, should be used to propel a revolutionary transformation of that society.

This objective, which could be called “final”, does not arise



from a necessary prediction of that which necessarily must be, nor does it constitute the real need of a normal consequence of the development of the current system of domination; it is about a desired possibility, of something that is considered

better and more just than that which is given.

The author’s conceptual distinction between the categories of science and doctrine/ideology could support criticisms that he would advocate a separation between theory and practice—the neutrality of science and/or the scientist – among other criticisms that are often addressed to thinkers contrary to the link between science and doctrine/ideology. Malatesta was a man much more dedicated to political practice than to theoretical-scientific production. He started and participated in anarchist organisations, mass movements, insurrections and initiatives that involved oral and written propaganda. Arrested several times, he spent almost 10 years of his life in prison.

It cannot be said that, by defending this distinction between the categories of science and doctrine/ideology, Malatesta was promoting any kind of “separation between theory and practice”; his positions were developed precisely in order to provide a better understanding of reality in order, from there, to conceive the best ways to intervene, promoting the advancement of the anarchist programme toward the goals established by it.

It should also be added that the author did not support the neutrality of science or any position that allows it to approach positivism.

Malatesta has a clear idea of the relationship between science and doctrine/ideology and demonstrates it in his reflections on the scientific knowledge of social reality and anarchism. For him, methods of analysis

and social theories belong to the scientific camp: they seek to support a knowledge of reality as it is; starting from these considerations, anarchism establishes its final objectives, which the author called “anarchy”, proposing how reality should be and devising strategies and tactics in order to transform society in this direction.

In short, it can be said that the theoretic-conceptual distinction proposed by Malatesta is made, in fact, to enhance anarchist political practice; such is the manner found by him to reconcile theory and practice.

This distinction will now be applied to the exposure of the author’s own political thought; then his basic notions of social theory for the analysis of society will be presented and then his conception of anarchism and his strategic positions.

Social theory

Knowing the prevailing scientific positions of his time and articulating a part of them with his own original elaborations, Malatesta ended up developing a relatively innovative and effective tool for social analysis that seems, even today, to offer possibilities. Malatesta sees the process of socialisation, the relationship between individuals and society, through an indissoluble connection between one another: “The human individual is not a being independent from society, but its product.” The individual, in this way, can only be conceived within and as a part of society; not only suffering its effects, but participating

actively in its conformation. For Malatesta, "there is a reciprocal action between man and the social environment. Men make society what it is, just like society makes men what they are." It is, therefore, about a relationship of interdependence between individual and society in which the parties rely on each other and whose trajectories are directly intertwined. Human action in society involves the individual and society and, at the same time, connects each and every one.

It is considered that social reality can be divided analytically into three spheres: economic, political/juridical/military and cultural/ideological. The way that Malatesta understands the relationship between these three spheres can be interpreted in the key of the Theory of the Interdependency of Spheres, which contends that the social is a totality constituted from the result of the interdependent relationship between these three spheres. This interdependence can be seen in Malatestan work both in critical-destructive and propositional-constructive terms, demonstrating consistency between strategy and social analysis.

By analysing the society of his time, the author criticised domination in the three spheres. The different types of domination – exploitation, political-bureaucratic domination, coercion and cultural alienation – embody a generalised domination, of systemic character, each reinforcing the other. This interdependent conformation constitutes a system of domination in which the different parts are dynamically related. If domination is articulated and reinforced

in this way, emancipatory projects, the author argues, should also be carried out in an interdependent manner: "moral emancipation, political emancipation and economic emancipation are inseparable".

By not establishing in advance a mandatory and necessary determination between the three spheres, Malatesta relativises other socialists' positions which argue, albeit in differentiated bases and levels, a determination, even if in the last instance, of the economic sphere in relation to others. For the author, in the social dynamic the economy certainly has the ability to influence the other spheres and, in many cases, it does influence them. However, one cannot consider this process in a determinist or mechanic way in the infra- and superstructure key; the other spheres also have – and at the same time – the ability to influence the economy and, also, in many cases, they do influence it. For Malatesta, the social constitutes an interdependent totality and should be evaluated as such. It is about sustaining a multi-causality that can only be understood in its entirety and according to the notion of interdependence, without the a priori adoption of mono-causal frames of reference.

If on one hand Malatesta breaks definitively with the idealism that sought to explain society according to teleological and/or metaphysical bases, he also beaks, somehow, with the classical distinction of nineteenth century socialists between materialism and "idealism"; proposing, as stated, a reconciliation between the totality of the three spheres and recognising, together with the

relevance of facts in relation to ideas, the importance of ideas in relation to facts. In criticising extreme positions that prioritise, in advance, the influence and determinism of one sphere in relation to others, Malatesta emphasises:

"A few years ago, everyone was a 'materialist'. In the name of a 'science' that, definitively, made dogmas out of the general principles extracted from very incomplete positive knowledge, they made the pretension of explaining all of human psychology and the whole troubled history of mankind by simple basic material needs. ... Today, the fashion has changed. Today, everyone is an 'idealist': everyone... treats man as if he were a pure spirit for whom to eat, to dress, to satisfy their physiological needs were negligible things."

Besides calling into question the scientific generalisations elaborated on restricted bases, Malatesta criticises reductionist explanations; both those that deduce all material needs as well as those that ignore them completely. On the contrary, one should take into account the inextricable relationship between the three spheres, between facts and ideas, and the determinations in different directions, according to different contexts, embodying totalities of systemic character. These systems, although they can be modified or transformed, have this character by permanently and dynamically relating their parts and by what happens in each one of their parts impacting the whole. Thus, society constitutes a system and the spheres its parts. For Malatesta, society is characterised by the different

conflicts that give it structure; social reality always corresponds to a determined position of the forces that are at play. He considers that “the present society is the result of the secular struggles that men waged among themselves”; these struggles, these conflicts, are the most defining traits in shaping society. Therefore, Malatesta positions differ enormously from those that tend to minimise the role of conflicts in society and don't explain social change and transformation adequately.

However, for the author these conflicts, which exist permanently in any society, are not always necessarily class conflicts.

“Conflicts of interests and passions exist and will always exist since, even if you were to manage to eliminate those in existence to the point of reaching an automatic agreement between men, other conflicts would present themselves to each new idea that might germinate in a human brain.”

These social conflicts – which may involve classes, groups and individuals – are promoted by dynamic social forces which are constantly in motion, in relation, in contrast. For Malatesta, “history will move, as always, according to the resultant of forces”; that is, history is the history of social conflicts, of the relationships between the different social forces at play. It should be stressed that social force, in this sense, goes beyond the notion of brute force, coercion and violence and includes elements from the three spheres.

It is, therefore, the dynamic conflicts between various social

forces that shape a given reality; from a historic perspective, it is these conflicts that establish power relations that shape dominant, hierarchical, and subservient relations between classes, groups, and individuals. Those who have the capacity to mobilise the greatest social force in these conflicts are able to impose themselves on others; it is an ongoing battle.

Understanding society as this dynamic and conflictive group of different social forces implies, for Malatesta, the abandonment of evolutionism and teleologism – both widely supported in the nineteenth century among socialists in general: “There is no natural law that compels evolution in a progressive instead of regressive direction: in nature there are progresses and regresses.” The correlation of forces in society is permanently dynamic and, following normative evaluations, can be considered as progress or regress. This idea also supports the position already stated that capitalism and the state do not destroy themselves and that socialism is not a historic necessity generated, automatically and necessarily, by the contradictions of the state/capitalist system itself.

His position on the interdependence of spheres also seems to guide his conception of the relationship between social structure and human action/agency. Malatesta opposes mechanistic and structuralist approaches, which do not allow room for human will and according to which:

“Will – creative power whose nature and origin we cannot understand...– which contributes a little or a lot to the determination

of the conduct of individuals and of society does not exist, it is no more than an illusion. Everything that was, is and will be, from the course of the stars to the birth and decadence of a civilisation, from the scent of a rose to a mother's smile, from an earthquake to Newton's thought, from a tyrant's cruelty to the kindness of a saint, everything should, must, and will succeed by fatal sequence of mechanical nature, which does not leave any possibility of variation.”

In these approaches, human action would be completely determined by social structure; the fate of a society would be established beforehand and any voluntary action would be nothing more than an illusion in accordance with the example of Spinoza cited by Malatesta in the case of the stone that “on falling, would be aware of its fall and would believe it was falling because it wanted to fall”.

Differently, for the author human will and action have significant potential in the shaping of society: “history is made by men”, he affirms. And the basis of human action is will; “it is necessary to admit a creative force, independent of the physical world and of mechanic laws and this force is called will”. A fundamental element of the cultural/ideological sphere, will drives human action and can inform processes of social change and transformation. It can be, and generally is, influenced by the hegemonic positions (economic, political etc.) present, but is not completely determined by them; there is room for consciousness and for action towards change and social transformation.

Such positions caused

Malatesta to be accused several times of being a complete voluntarist, an “idealist” in the sense of defending a transformation based on a change in consciousness. However, these positions seem misleading. While still recognising the relevance of the cultural/ideological sphere in general, both in processes of domination and of emancipation, and although he defends that, in this processes, will constitutes a central element, Malatesta recognises its limits: “surely this will is not omnipotent, seeing as though it is conditioned”. A process of transformation does not depend solely on will, but on the established structural limits, not only in the cultural/ideological and political/judicial/military spheres but, principally, in the economic sphere: “Every anarchist, every socialist understands the economic fatalities that limit man today, and every good observer sees that individual rebellion is impotent against the force predominant in the social environment”. However, he notes that “it is equally certain that, without the rebellion of the individual – which associates with other rebellions to resist the environment and try to transform it – this environment would never change”. Human action, therefore, would explain in large part social changes and transformations.

Malatesta’s positions propose a reconciliation between human action and social structure and support both his social analysis and his revolutionary strategies. Applying these ideas to the analysis of modern capitalist and statist society the author notes that the fundamental aspect of this society is the domination in the three spheres.

In the economic sphere, Malatesta points out the exploitation embodied by salaried labour: “The oppression that today weighs most directly on the workers ... is economic oppression”, that is, “the exploitation that bosses and traders exert over labour, thanks to the hoarding of all the great means of production and exchange”.

In the political/judicial/military sphere, Malatesta notes the political-bureaucratic domination and the coercion caused by the state and which take away from the people “the management of their own affairs, the direction of their own conduct, the care of their own security” entrusting them to “a few individuals that, by usurpation or delegation, find themselves vested with the right to make laws about everything and for everyone, to coerce the people to conform to this, making use of the force of everyone for this purpose”.

In the cultural/ideological sphere he criticises the cultural alienation shaped by religion, by education and by sentiments like patriotism, which reinforce and legitimise dominant interests. Besides the economic and political oppression, he emphasises, it is possible to “oppress men acting on their intelligence and their feelings, which constitutes religious or academic power”; “the government and dominant classes make use of patriotic sentiment ... in order to make their power better accepted by the people and to drag the people off to colonial wars and initiatives undertaken for their own benefit”.

As previously pointed out, these different types of domination are related, mutually influencing and

supporting each other, supporting the system of domination in question through the interdependence of their spheres.

In this society, characterised by conflicts and dynamic forces at play, social classes, although they do not explain everything,



are very relevant. For Malatesta, it cannot be considered, a priori, that in all the social conflicts that constitute a society social classes necessarily constitute the most important category, or even the most appropriate for the explanations; however, in many cases they are. That is,

it is, for him, about considering social conflicts the most relevant aspects of society and emphasizing that, in many cases, social classes constitute agents of the first order in these conflicts, even though class conflicts should not be treated in a reductionist way with the



expectation that, from them, it is possible to deduce all the explanations of other conflicts.

One should nevertheless point out that, in agreement with the notion of interdependency of spheres, social classes, from a Malatestan perspective,

do not constitute an exclusively economic category:

“Via a complicated network of struggles of all kinds, invasions, wars, rebellions, repressions, concessions made and revoked, association of the vanquished, united to defend themselves, and of the winners, to attack, the current state of society was reached in which a few men hold the earth and all social wealth hereditarily, while the great mass, deprived of everything, is frustrated and oppressed by a handful of owners. On this depends the state of misery in which the workers are generally to be found, and all the evils that arise: ignorance, crime, prostitution, physical wasting, moral abjection, premature death. Hence the creation of a special class (government) that, provided the material means of repression, has as its mission to legalise and defend the owners against the demands of the proletariat. It serves, then, as the force that has to arrogate to itself privileges and to submit, if it can do so, to its own supremacy the propertied class. From this follows the formation of another special class (the clergy), which through a series of fables concerning the will of God, future life, etc. seeks to lead the oppressed to docilely support the oppressor, the government, the interests of the owners, and their own.”

In this way the criteria used for the establishment of social classes include ownership of the means of production and economic exploitation, but are not limited to them; ownership of the means of administration, of coercion, of control and of knowledge and, thus, political-bureaucratic domination, cultural

alienation and coercion are also fundamental criteria. That is why he places among the dominant classes not only the owners (bourgeoisie) but also the government and clergy.

Among the dominated classes he includes not only waged workers from urban industries, but also workers from other sectors of the cities, rural workers, peasants and the poor in general. These two groups of oppressors and oppressed, dominant classes and dominated classes, oppressor classes and oppressed classes, propel the permanent class struggle in society. The class struggle constitutes, according to the positions previously put forward, one of the most relevant characteristics of contemporary societies even though, as also pointed out, it is not possible to reduce all social conflicts to conflicts between classes.

For Malatesta “the totality of individuals who inhabit a territory is divided into different classes that have opposing interest and sentiments and whose antagonism grows as the consciousness of the injustice of which they are victims develops within the submitted classes.” Among the ample groups of dominant classes and dominated classes, which encompass the whole group of concrete social classes in each context, there is constant antagonism and the more class consciousness develops, the more this conflict is evident. Class consciousness is, for Malatesta a fundamental element of the class struggle; it potentiates transformative processes: “the struggle becomes a class struggle”, he says, “when a superior morality, an ideal of justice and a greater understanding of

the advantages that solidarity can provide to each individual causes all those who find themselves in a similar position to fraternise". Thus, the cultural/ideological elements are added to the economic and political, giving way to the class struggle that unfolds in the three spheres.

The processes of change and transformation, in the Malatestan perspective, depend on the social forces that these groups are able to apply to the conflicts, both for changes – in the case of the conquest of reforms – as well as for transformations – in the case of the social revolution – which reaches the socialisation of the three social spheres.

Anarchism and strategy

For Malatesta, anarchism is a historical doctrine/ideology and not a philosophy or science. Accordingly, he sustains that state and capitalist domination, unfolding in the three spheres, provided a context that allowed the emergence of anarchism – not automatically, but with the action of a considerable section of the oppressed – as part of the socialist movement; supporting the need for the transformation of injustice, exploitation, inequality, coercion, alienation and authoritarianism into a just, egalitarian and libertarian system that he called "anarchy". Thus, anarchism arises in a specific context, when the oppressed classes establish relationships of solidarity with each other, sustaining that injustices are social, not natural or divine, that it is possible to modify them through human action and that the positions

of other socialist currents are insufficient or mistaken.

"Anarchism, in its origins, aspirations and its methods of struggle is not necessarily linked to any philosophical system. Anarchism was born of the moral revolt against social injustice. When men appeared who felt stifled by the social environment in which they were forced to live, who felt the pain of others as if it were their own, and when these men were convinced that a large part of human suffering is not an inevitable consequence of inexorable natural or supernatural laws but, on the contrary, are derived from social realities dependent on human will, and that they can be eliminated by human effort, the way then opened that would lead to anarchism."

As much as anarchists have used, from a historical perspective, different theoretical-methodological tools for understanding reality, one could say that anarchism afforded to a sector of the oppressed classes a framework for judging capitalist and statist society, particularly during the nineteenth century, for the establishment of revolutionary, socialist and libertarian objectives, and for the conception of strategies and tactics capable of impelling a social transformation in this direction. It is in this way that one can understand Malatesta's statement (2009a: 4) that, "anarchism is the method to achieve anarchy through freedom", that is, it is a doctrine/ideology that offers workers the possibility of reaching a different future society, based on self-management and federalism, through a consistent method.

Anarchism, therefore, is a type of socialism; there is therefore a partial link between one and the other: "Socialism and anarchism are not opposite or equivalent terms, but terms strictly linked to one another, as is the end with its necessary means, and as is the substance with the form in which it is embodied." Anarchism, thus understood, is essentially social and has no ties to the individualism that, according to the author, has bourgeois roots, thus, affirming the idea of individual freedom promotes bourgeois mobility; in many cases, encouraging individuals from the oppressed camp to become new rulers. According to the author, the individualists "do not recoil at the idea of being, in turn, oppressors; they are individuals who feel trapped in the current society and come to despise and hate any kind of society". Acknowledging it to be "absurd to want to live outside the human collectivity, they seek to submit all men, the whole of society to their own will and to the satisfaction of their passions"; "they want 'to live their life'; they ridicule the revolution and any future aspiration: they want to enjoy their life 'here and now', at any price and at the expense of whoever it may be; they would sacrifice the whole of humanity for a single hour of 'intense life'". For him, these individualists "are rebels, but not anarchists. They have the mentality and sentiment of the frustrated bourgeois and, when they can, they effectively transform themselves into bourgeois and no less dangerous." Thus, anarchism has nothing to do with individualism, but is the libertarian current of socialism.

This Malatestan anarchist socialism, in strategic and doctrinal/ideological terms,

can be characterised by three axes: critique of capitalist and statist society, establishment of revolutionary and socialist objectives, promotion of a coherent strategy to replace the society of domination with freedom and equality.

The critique of capitalist and statist society was addressed when the author critically presented domination in the three spheres – exploitation, political-bureaucratic domination, coercion, cultural alienation – and emphasised the fundamental role of class domination. As noted, in this authoritarian and unequal society, dominant classes and dominated classes are protagonists of the class struggle to the detriment of the latter. In relation to this critique, Malatesta emphasises:

“We are enemies of capitalism which, relying on police and military protection, forces workers to let themselves be exploited by the owners of the means of production, and even to remain idle, or to suffer from hunger when the bosses have no interest in exploiting them. Therefore we are enemies of the state which is the coercive, that is, violent organisation of society.”

Such a society implies a systemic violence of class character against the workers, who are violated daily; the capitalist/statist system promotes a “perpetual violence that maintains the slavery of the great mass of men”. Through the anarchist frame of reference one can consider this society horrible and unjust for the majority of people and that it could be better, as long as transformed through a social revolution that would

modify its very foundations. This implies “radically abolishing the domination and exploitation of man by man”. As the author argues, only anarchism offers adequate objectives and strategies for this transformation.

The revolutionary and socialist objectives of anarchism, as Malatesta conceives them, are achieved when there is a transformation of the deepest foundations of society; it is a process driven by the masses that establishes, through violence, economic and political socialisation; puts an end to capitalism, the state, social classes and creates a new society of self-managed, federalist, egalitarian and libertarian structures and establishes new social relations. This involves “modifying the way of living in society”, “establishing relations of love and solidarity between men”, “achieving the fullness of material, moral and intellectual development, not for an individual, nor for the members of a given class or party but for all human beings”. For a social revolution to occur it is necessary to overthrow “though violence, the institutions that keep them [the masses] in slavery”; for the author: “we need the cooperation of the masses to build a material force sufficient to achieve our specific objective, which is the radical change of the social organism thanks to the direct action of the masses”. This revolution, therefore, is not the work of a party, but the masses; to carry it out the masses must self-organise independently and autonomously of institutions and individuals that promote other objectives. Their force accumulates in the struggles and emancipatory projects of the three social spheres: union strikes, cooperatives, community

demands, armed insurrections, written and oral propaganda, educational projects etc. By means of a radicalisation of these struggles and through an increase in the strength of the oppressed the workers can defeat their enemies and promote the “expropriation of the owners of land and capital, for the benefit of all and abolition of government”. For Malatesta “the very act of revolution” must carry out “the expropriation and socialisation of all existing wealth in order to proceed, without wasting time, to the organisation of distribution, the reorganisation of production according to the needs and desires of the various regions, the various communes and the various groups”. The owners of the means of production must be expropriated and the property must be socialised, collectively managed according to the populations’ needs.

“We wanted that the workers of the land ... would follow and intensify their work on their own account, establishing direct relations with the workers in industry and transport for the exchange of their products; that the industrial workers ... would take possession of the factories and would continue and intensify work on their own account and that of the collectivity, thus transforming all factories ... into producers of things that are urgent to meet the needs of the public; that the railway workers would continue conducting the trains, but in service of the community; that committees of volunteers or people elected by the population would take possession, under direct control of the masses, of all available facilities to accommodate in the best way possible at the time the most needy; that other

committees, always under the direct control of the masses, could provide the supply and distribution of consumer goods.”

Discussing the best way to resolve the question of the distribution of the products of labour, Malatesta does not strictly adopt collectivism or communism, but proposes a compromise: “Probably ... all modes of sharing of products will be tested together ... and will be interwoven and combined in various ways, until practice teaches which is the best way or which are the best ways.” This means permitting a remuneration according to the work done (collectivism) in some circumstances – perhaps in the early stages of the process of socialisation or in relation to products in short supply – and a remuneration according to need (communism) when socialism is well established or with an abundance of production. However, the principle that one should not compromise “is that everyone has [access to] the instruments of production in order to be able to work without submitting to capitalist exploitation, big or small”. A similar position is adopted in relation to the collectivisation of properties in the country; since there is no private property and exploitation, peasants must be able to choose whether to work collectively or under the management of their own families on small holdings. “Forced communism”, the author says, “would be the most odious tyranny that a human mind could conceive”. This process of socialisation, as pointed out, not only promotes a transformation of economic, but also political bases. Malatesta predicts that it will be necessary, “during the insurrection itself,”

to oppose “the constitution of any government, of any authoritarian centre” and, thus, put an end to the apparatus of political domination, the state. Decisions must be shared, made and executed by those concerned, who would coordinate themselves in self-managed bodies and would link up geographically in a federalist manner, with control from the base. This, he says, will be:

“the work of volunteers, of various kinds of committees, of local, inter-communal, regional and national congresses that would provide the coordination of social life, taking the necessary decisions, advising and carrying out what they think will be useful but without having any right or means to impose their will by force and trusting, in order to find support, only in the services provided and in the needs of the situation as recognised by those concerned.”

To replace statist capitalism with self-managed/federalist socialism a coherent strategy is needed because, as noted, these objectives do not result from the current society; “anarchy” needs to be achieved by the action of men and women. General Malatestan strategy relies on the permanent search for the accumulation of popular power and in the consistency between means and ends.

Anarchists, according to Malatesta, must “work to awaken in the oppressed the living desire for radical social transformation and persuade them that, by uniting, they have the necessary strength to win”. The social force of the oppressed classes has the potential to confront and defeat the enemy forces but, to do so, it must address the three spheres. The author continues,

affirming: “we must propagate our ideal and prepare the moral and material forces needed to defeat the enemy forces and organise the new society”. This new society can only be built with victory over the dominant classes. However, anarchists don’t believe that to achieve this strength and this victory anything goes; their principles, which establish ethical limits on the process, demand that, among other things, the ends determine the means, that is, a coherence between each other.

This question stands out in anarchism in general, and in Malatesta in particular. For him, as for theorists of strategy, tactics are subordinate to strategy and this to the objective, that is, the means are subordinate to the ends: “the end one wishes to reach established, by will or by need, life’s great problem consists of finding the means which, according to the circumstances, leads most safely and most economically to the established end”. Thus, tactics and strategies should seek the approximation of the objective in the most effective way possible. The author argues in this sense: “the ends and the means are intimately linked, without a doubt, even though to each end corresponds, preferably, such a means, instead of to another; so too, every means tends to realise what is natural to it, including outside of the will of those who employ this means, and against it. That is, for him, libertarian and egalitarian ends must be grounded in libertarian and egalitarian means. Domination – even if embodied in new forms of exploitation and oppression – is not an adequate way for the social revolution and libertarian socialism, even if those who use it don’t agree with this.

The Malatestan criticism of the strategy of seizing the state for the establishment of a new anti-capitalist and anti-statist society, defended by reformist socialists and revolutionary communists, relies on this notion. For the author, the state is a dominating institution; in addition to supporting and promoting capitalism, political-bureaucratic domination (monopoly of decisions) and coercion (physical violence) are key components thereof. Even if you were to nationalise the means of production, the existence of a minority in command of the state (bureaucracy) would imply a new dominant class. The Soviet case, even in the 1920s, contributed to the affirmation of this notion in Malatesta.

It was based on this argument that the author criticised socialist strategies of seizing the state, both through elections – in the reformist model, the majority in the Second International – and through revolution – in the revolutionary model, the majority in the Third International. Malatesta affirms: “We are firmly opposed to any participation in electoral struggles and to all collaboration with the dominant class; we want to deepen the chasm that separates the proletariat from the bosses and make the class struggle increasingly acute.” The political dispute of the workers, as he conceives it, should take place outside of the – essentially oppressive – institutions of the state and deepen the class struggle, favouring the spaces built by the oppressed themselves. To act in the state would be, for him, to play in the enemy camp. Malatesta sees in the programme and strategy of parliamentary socialists “the

germ of a new oppression”. “If they were to one day triumph”, he argues, “the principle of government that they retain would destroy the principle of social equality and would open up a new era of class struggles.” This argument could in the same way be used with the revolutionary communists, whose notion of “dictatorship of the proletariat”, still according to Malatesta, masks the fact that a “dictatorship ... in the name of the ‘proletariat’ puts all the power and the whole life of the workers in the hands of creatures from a so-called communist party, who will keep themselves in power and will end up reconstructing capitalism for their own benefit”.

From the perspective of the need for consistency between means and ends, the seizure of the state is a strategic inconsistency since, by means of domination, it seeks to promote freedom and equality; this path, taken in a reformist or revolutionary way, from a strategic point of view can only point to the strengthening of domination.

A coherent strategy for reaching the objectives mentioned must be based on the protagonism of the masses; the revolutionary subjects – which are also not given a priori, like a structural determination – need to be built in the processes of the struggle of the oppressed classes, among workers in the cities and the country, peasants and the poor in general. As the revolution must be the work of the masses that make up this broad group of oppressed subjects, anarchists must “get close to them, accept them as they are and, as part of the masses, make them go as far as possible.” Anarchism, as the author points out, proposes to propel class struggle processes

of social transformation that guarantee the protagonism of the masses; this does not mean, therefore, that anarchists should emancipate the workers: “We do not want to emancipate the people”, he affirms, “we want the people to emancipate themselves”.

In one of the most important debates among anarchists, on the question of organisation, Malatesta positions himself in favour of organisation dualism. That is, he recognises the need for the simultaneous organisation of anarchists, as workers, in their mass popular movements, and as anarchists, in their specific anarchist political organisations. Besides “organisation in general, as a principle and condition of social life, today and in the future society”, Malatesta points out this need: “the organisation of popular forces” and the “organisation of the anarchist party”.

The author opposed anti-organisationism, a position that although historically a minority among anarchists had its importance. For him, organisation not only underlies the foundations of society but lies behind the very bodies capable of catalysing social force in order to drive a revolutionary process.

“Now we repeat: without organisation, free or imposed, there can be no society; without conscious and desired organisation, there can be neither liberty nor guarantee that the interests of those living in society be respected. And whoever does not organise themselves, whoever does not seek the cooperation of others and does not offer theirs, under conditions of reciprocity and

solidarity, puts themselves necessarily in a state of inferiority and remains an unconscious gear in the social mechanism that others drive in their own way, and to their own advantage.”

Malatesta maintains that organisation is not only not contrary to anarchism but is a basic foundation for the accumulation of social force; without it, changing society becomes an impossible task: “To remain isolated means condemning oneself to weakness, wasting one’s energy on small ineffectual acts, quickly losing faith in the objective and falling into complete inaction.” It is relevant, therefore, taking as a basis this organisational principle, to devise the best way of linking up with others in order to multiply individual forces and be able to carry out a collective process of radical change in society.

To do so, Malatesta emphasises: “Favouring popular organisations of all types is the logical consequence of our fundamental ideas and, thus, should be an integral part of our programme.” As noted, it is these popular mass organisations that must be the protagonists of the social revolution; however, anarchist are not only workers, but anarchist workers. As Malatesta pointed out: “we distinguish ourselves from the mass and are party men”. Anarchists have objectives in relation to the masses: “We want to act upon them, impel them on the path we believe to be best; but as our objective is to liberate and not to dominate, we want to habituate them to free initiative and free action.” The anarchists’ instrument for influencing the masses – without the establishment of any hierarchy

or domination in relation to them, promoting libertarian and egalitarian means, and seeking with them complementary relationship – is the “anarchist party.”

As defined by Malatesta the anarchist party is an “association with a defined objective and with the necessary ways and means to achieve this objective”. Its objective is to associate anarchists, publicly or secretly, to promote the anarchist programme among the masses, and to potentialise its force in this process. The anarchist party unites members around certain criteria, among which is to be found grassroots construction – that is, the processes of decision-making are shared from the bottom up, self-managed and federalist – and revolutionary discipline: “revolutionary discipline is consistency with the accepted ideas, loyalty to commitments assumed, it is to feel obliged to share the work and the risks with comrades of the struggle.” Another important criteria for union is a certain unity of positions among members; association, therefore, is not based solely on the fact that a person claims to be anarchist, but in the concrete affinity of programmatic positions, in the real agreement of positions: “We would like to be able to be, all of us, in agreement and to unite in a single powerful column all the forces of anarchism. But we don’t believe in the soundness of organisations made by the force of compromises and restrictions, where there is no real agreement and sympathy”. Union, therefore, must take place on a solid foundation: “It is better to be disunited than poorly united”.

Among the functions of

the anarchist party are activities of propaganda and education. Malatesta states in relation to propaganda: “We carry out propaganda to raise the moral level of the masses and to induce them to conquer their emancipation for themselves”; on education, he emphasises: “it is, in short, about educating for freedom, to raise consciousness of one’s own strength and the capacity of men that are accustomed to obedience and passivity”. It should be noted, however, that these activities should be carried out in an organised, permanent and strategic way: “The terrain is excessively ungrateful for seeds sown in the wind to be able to germinate and establish roots. Constant work is necessary, patient and coordinated, adapted to the different circumstances.” It should form part of a programme and contribute to its advance.

Still, propaganda and education are not enough: “We would be wrong to think that propaganda is enough to elevate [men] to the level of intellectual and moral development necessary for the realisation of our ideal”; besides this, the “educationists” proposal, following the author’s term, also presents this insufficiency since when they “propagate education”, “defend free thought, positive science”, “found popular universities and modern schools”, they do not manage to transform society since, as seen, this cannot be done solely by means of a change in consciousness. It is necessary, according to what the author says, together with this propaganda and educational work, to invest in organisational and grassroots work:

“It is necessary, therefore, in normal times to perform

extensive and patient preparatory work and popular organisation and not to fall into the illusion of the revolution in the short term, feasible only by the initiative of a few, without sufficient participation of the masses. To this work, provided it can be carried out in an adverse environment, there is, among other things, propaganda, agitation and the organisation of the masses, which should never be ignored." It is important to note that, for the author, it is not about idolising the masses or following them at any cost. Even the workers' movement and unionism, although they have potential for the anarchist project, present risks which must be duly considered.

Malatesta points out that, acting in the "organisations founded to defend their interests, workers acquire consciousness of the oppression in which they find themselves and of the antagonism that separates them from their bosses, begin to aspire to a better life, getting used to collective struggle and solidarity". The oppressed classes, through their participation in the workers' movement and through unionism, elevate their class consciousness and get accustomed to struggles of class character and may even gain significant improvements in their day-to-day life.

Still, popular organisations, particularly unions, "have a certain propensity to turn the means into ends and to consider the parts as if they were the whole", or, they tend to consider isolated struggles for conquests and even the improvement of capitalism as ends in themselves and not as possible paths for a general emancipation. Reformism and corporatism are constant risks that threaten

workers' organisations in general and the unions in particular. Such risks do not mean that anarchists should abandon them; it is necessary, therefore, to reach a middle ground: participating in these movements – creating and strengthening them – and promoting, as anarchists, certain criteria and programmatic elements that counteract this tendency and promote anarchist objectives. The author states: "I lamented, in the past, that comrades isolated themselves from the labour movement. I lament today that, falling at the extreme opposite, many among us let themselves be swallowed by the movement". If, on the one hand, the withdrawal of anarchists in relation to the popular movements seems an error, to dissolve oneself in these movements also doesn't seem right. "Within the unions", he continues, "it is necessary for us to remain anarchists"; for him, "organisation of the working class, the strike, direct action, boycott, sabotage, and armed insurrection itself are only means; anarchy is the end". One should, thus, consider that popular movements and their actions do not constitute the ends of anarchism, but possible means for anarchists to promote their objectives. Creating and strengthening mass movements, according to Malatesta, should support a set of positions.

Among them is the idea that popular movements cannot be programmatically linked to any doctrine/ideology, even anarchism. It can be said that, in his strategy for the level of the masses, Malatesta advocates positions that are closer to "revolutionary unionism" than "anarcho-syndicalism". For this reason, he criticises cases of anarcho-syndicalist

organisations such as the Spanish CNT and Argentine FORA that end up, through their resolutions, adopting anarchism as their official doctrine/ideology: "There are a lot of comrades that would like to unify the labour movement and the anarchist movement because, in so doing, it would be possible to give the labour organisations a clearly anarchist programme, as happens in Spain and Argentina." Such a position is inadequate,



according to the author, because this syndicalism-anarchism bond splits the organisation of the oppressed classes and weakens the popular movement. Corroborating this thesis, Malatesta emphasises: "I am not demanding anarchist unions, which would immediately result in the emergence of social-democratic, republican, monarchist and many other unions and would end up launching, more than ever, the working class against itself." Popular organisations should, therefore, be based on association around concrete demands of struggle, independent of the doctrinal and ideological, or even religious, positions of those that comprise them.

Besides the need for this unity in the struggles of the oppressed classes the author recommends other positions that should be supported by anarchists in the movements in which they participate:

"Anarchists in the unions should struggle such that they remain open to all workers, whatever their opinion and party may be, with the only condition of forging solidarity in the struggle against the bosses; they should oppose the corporatist spirit and any pretension to monopoly of the organisation and work. They should prevent the unions from serving as an instrument of politics for electoral ends or for other authoritarian parties and practice and promote direct action, decentralisation, autonomy, free initiative; they should strive such that those organised learn to participate directly in the life of the organisation and not to create the need for leaders and

permanent functionaries."

In these statements he is pointing to the need to overcome the sectionalism/corporatism of struggles; of acting independently and autonomously in relation to the dominant classes, the state, party-political and electoral interests; of promoting political practice outside of the state end even against it; of building the movement from the grassroots with the egalitarian and horizontal participation of its members, embodying self-managed forms of struggle. Malatesta argues the combativeness of these movements, in the struggle for reforms and for the revolution, to be fundamental.

Even defending the need for short-term struggles, for reforms, Malatesta does not cease to be a revolutionary. He considers to be necessary, for anarchist objectives to be reached, the conquest of reforms and the pedagogy of these struggles. He affirms, in defence of combative struggles for reforms: "We will take or conquer eventual reforms in the same spirit as that which forces the enemy off the terrain he occupies bit by bit, to advance increasingly more." For him, "a small improvement, snatched with the appropriate force, is worth more for its moral effect and, more broadly, even for its material effects, than a large reform given by the government or the capitalists with cunning ends, or even pure and simply as benevolence." That is, reforms, being snatched from the bosses and governments, can contribute, depending on the way in which they were obtained, to the strengthening of the revolutionary project of the oppressed classes. However,

struggles for reforms do not necessarily lead to revolutionary struggles; anarchists must carry out their interventions in the direction of strengthening this process. In the case of union struggle, Malatesta recommends: "The role of the anarchists is to awaken the unions to this ideal, gradually orienting them to the social revolution, even if, in so doing, they run the risk of undermining the immediate benefits' that seem to please them so much."

Translation: Jonathan Payn (Slightly abridged by Organise! editors)

About Platformism, synthesism and the “Fontenis affair”

René Berthier



**Cercle d'études libertaires—
Gaston-Leval**

The “Cercle d'études libertaires - Gaston-Leval” is a group of reflection constituted in the tradition of the Libertarian Sociological Center founded by Gaston Leval in 1956. Most of its members are militants of the Fédération anarchiste, but the opinions which are expressed represent only the personal views of their authors, as is the case in the following text. There is a website attached to the CEL, monde-nouveau.net

In a few months will take place an international meeting in Saint-Imier, Switzerland, to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the founding of the anti-authoritarian International. This initiative was originally taken

by the Federation anarchiste (France), the Fédération libertaire des Montagnes and the Organisation socialiste libertaire (Switzerland), soon followed by many others. The FA and the OSL belong to the two historical “tendencies” of anarchism: synthesism and platformism. Many organizations in Anglo-Saxon and Latin American countries declare themselves to be Platformists, that is to say they adhere to Arshinov's platform.

It is true that the Federation anarchiste does not declare itself platformist but advocates the “Anarchist Synthesis”. But it is not as a “synthesist” organization that we call for the gathering, together with other groups: it is as anarchists, as federalists. In 1872, the problem does not arise in terms of “platformism” or “synthesism”, so there is no need to transpose in the 2012 gathering problems that did not arise in 1872. As to say if “platformist” organizations will answer the call, some have already announced that they would come. I think it would be an insult to our “platformist” comrades to think they do not understand the value of such a meeting, which will enable many people to meet, to exchange ideas and... addresses. Not being platformists doesn't prevent us from meeting

comrades who claim this option. Especially in the context that is defined for the meeting of 2012. The militants of the Anarchist Federation are enthusiastic about this project and many are and will be mobilized. The debate “Synthesism vs Platformism” is far from being at the center of their preoccupations. Their concern is the success of the initiative.

However, among the elder comrades, there is not so much a reluctance as a rejection concerning platformism. Unfortunately, this rejection is largely the consequence of the merging of (or confusion between) two questions: platformism itself and the “Fontenis affair”, the latter having in some way “over-determined” the former.

- Concerning platformism: this debate started in France in 1926 and in fact quite quickly ended, the matter was quite quickly settled... and forgotten. There were short-lived attempts to create “platformist” groups. But the question of platformism was a political debate on political options with which one may or may not agree.

- The “Fontenis affair” appeared 30 years later, in the mid 50s, it is a dramatic event strictly limited to the

history of the French post-war anarchist movement, in which “platformism” has in fact nothing to do.

The “Fontenis affair” in some way revived the rejection of platformism the French anarchist movement had shown in the 20s and 30s, but this rejection is linked to extremely precise historical circumstances, and to facts that took place a long time ago in France and nowhere else. Therefore, in order to understand this rejection, it is necessary to take these circumstances into account, much more than the substance of the program developed by Arshinov and Makhno, known as “Arshinov’s platform”. Arshinov’s platform itself is linked to a very precise context, and for all I know, Libertarian communist organizations in France today no longer refer to it very strictly : they also consider it outdated.

I think the younger militants of the FA don’t much care about all that. Local groups of both organizations – FA and AL – work together on practical issues. If however a certain distance is maintained, it is absolutely not due to theoretical disagreements (although they exist) but to behavioral questions. An American anarchist group explains their viewpoint concerning “platformist” behavior with a typically Anglo-Saxon understatement: “While their organizational seriousness and commitment to mass struggle are exemplary, an influence of certain forms and practice (not necessarily politics) reminiscent of Trotskyist groups is apparent.” (“Our Anarchism”, First of May Anarchist Alliance.) The important passage in this sentence are the words between

brackets [1].

I think these American comrades have very clearly seen that the problem was not the Platform itself but the “forms and practices” of platformist organizations – of some of them at least. So the problem is much less Arshinov’s platform itself, than the activity of a group of militants led by Georges Fontenis in the 50’s. In the process, Arshinov’s platform was sort of hijacked.

I insist on the fact that the political debate on platformism must be clearly distinguished from considerations about Fontenis.

A methodological statement

Concerning Fontenis I think it is necessary first to make a methodological statement.

Everybody is aware that “water has flowed under the bridges”, as we say in French, and that it is about time to see what we have in common rather than what divides us. So the question is:

- a) Should we simply forget about the dispute, never mention the harm it has provoked and act as if everything was fine; or
- b) Should we first establish the facts, show the extent of the trauma, and then overcome it.

I think things must be said. If you want things to move positively, you must openly express contentious issues. You cannot build the future on frustrations and on things that are constantly untold. I believe it is necessary

to establish facts. Only after, can you move forward. And I insist on the fact that all this is strictly linked to the French context: it certainly means absolutely nothing to an anarchist from America – North, Center or South – or elsewhere.

The corollary of all this is the necessity for both sides to make a critical analysis of the events. A militant of the Anarchist Federation recently wrote in *Le Monde libertaire*:

“One might be seduced by the thesis of a mythologized Georges Fontenis, a sort of scapegoat for the failures and the divisions of the anarchist movement, the alibi for some of his followers who rejected on him alone a somewhat cumbersome balance-sheet. For if Fontenis certainly held the lead in this, nothing would have been possible without the blind obedience on the part of his accomplices or the disturbing passivity and carelessness of the militants of an organization claiming anti-authoritarianism [2].”

An older militant, who had been a witness of the events, wrote much earlier:

“For thirty years, there has been a myth in our community. This myth is about the ‘Fontenis affair’. A myth based on one man whose presence among us was relatively short, six or eight years at most, and who exercised authority only for half of that time. For activists who succeeded each other, Fontenis was the ‘bad guy’, the ‘werewolf’ of the fable, ‘the ugly one’ of the tragedy, ‘the Antichrist’ who not only frightened one generation,

[1] Now that the Saint-Imier gathering is over, I can mention one very typical case

but also the following generations who had not known him but who recalls him whenever an ideological dispute shakes our movement. The character does not deserve such an 'honor', nor such consistency in this 'classical' role all human groups invent to get rid of the weight of their 'sins' and blame 'Satan' for their errors. I find ridiculous this use of 'the Fontenis case' by a number of our comrades to explain or justify disagreements. (...) And if to exorcise the devil you just need to talk about him, as the good fathers say, then let us talk about the Fontenis case [3]!"

Another author, who for a long time had been a member of the Fédération anarchiste before he started an academic career, writes that « in spite of the

expectations of its initiators, the debate platform/synthesis not only did not contribute to the achievement of the unity of the movement, but increased even more the confusionism within the ranks of the libertarians and finally hampered the necessary work of revision of the traditional anarchist positions made indeed

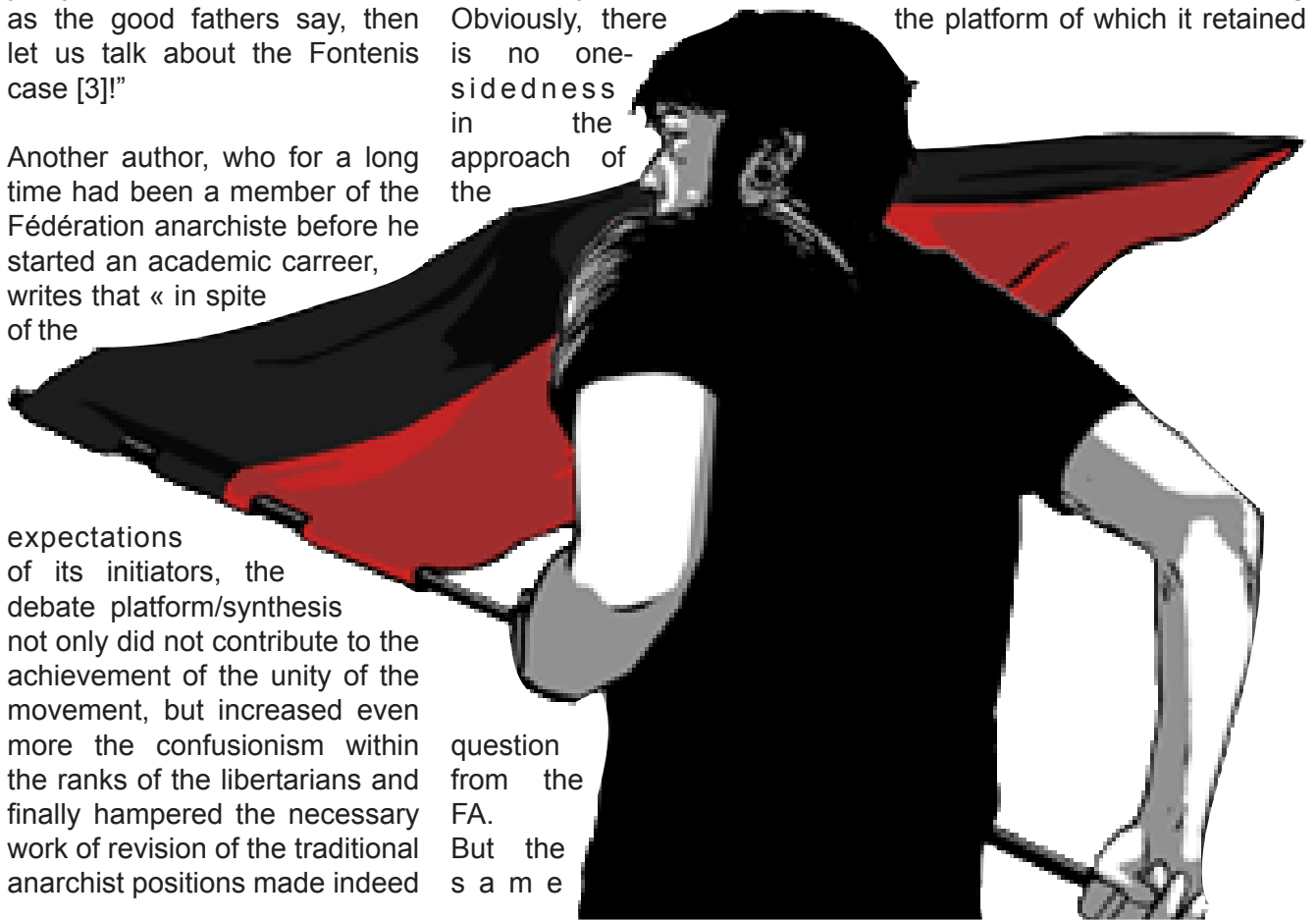
necessary by the situation ». The author adds that because it was forgotten that what was at stake was only two options among others, the debate froze still, provoking a crack leading to a very serious crisis in the French anarchist movement, a « crisis that never really has been overcome even today, of which the most striking example is the organizational and ideological confusionism of the present-day Anarchist Federation, a sort of hybrid monster, half platformist and half synthesist » [4].

Obviously, there is no one-sidedness in the approach of the

question from the FA. But the same

thing can be said about Alternative libertaire:

"In France the debate died down only in the 90s. René Berthier or Gaetano Manfredonia proposed de-passionate approaches of the question. The very synthesist Federation anarchiste (FA) has in fact taken its distances with Sébastien Faure's catechism. The Union des travailleurs communistes libertaires (UTCL), created in 1976, had on its side quickly evolved towards transcending the platform of which it retained



[2] of "platformist" behavior that particularly irritates the militants of the Federation anarchiste. I discovered on Wikipedia an article on a Swiss group, the Organisation socialiste des montagnes, which claims to be the main organizer of the International gathering of Saint-Imier. It is a pity they haven't mentioned the Federation anarchiste, which is, with the Saint-Imier anarchist group, the initiator of the project, the main financial contributor and the pillar, in terms of militants, of the project. (24-08-2012) For the English translation: http://monde-nouveau.net/IMG/pdf/Parcours_Fontenis_traduc_anglaise.pdf

[3] Ibid

[4] Gaetano Manfredonia, « Le débat plate-forme ou synthèse », Itinéraire n° 13, Voline, 1995. Let us note that Manfredonia, who definitely knows what he is writing about, considers the Fédération anarchiste as "half platformist, half synthesist".

[5] Guillaume Davranche : « 1927 : Avec la Plate-forme, l'anarchisme tente la rénovation. » <http://www.alternativelibertaire.org/spip.php?article1596>.

the spirit more than the letter. Alternative libertaire remains in this continuity [5].”

Fontenis’ “coup d’État”

Georges Fontenis was a member of the FA who, with friends of his, organized a fraction, a conspiracy inside the Federation Anarchiste, a “coup d’Etat” in order to take control of it and to take control of its paper, Le Libertaire. Once they achieved their project, they excluded at first all those who did not agree with them and then part of the members of their own fraction – an attitude quite consistent with ultra-sectarian and paranoid groups. Characteristic also of such ultra-sectarian groups is the quantity of contemptuous expressions used to qualify their anarchist opponents.

This happened in the early 50’s [6]. The problem is that Arshinov’s platform and the “Fontenis affair” were so to speak merged in the opinion of many of the French anarchists of the time. Wrongly, in my opinion, because Fontenis made some choices which would certainly not have been approved by Arshinov and Makhno.

I have particularly in mind

Fontenis’ alliance with an authentic Stalinist called Andre Marty, former head of

he was a revolutionary but because he was an ultra-stalinist. In



the International Brigades in Spain, appointed by Stalin, known for his crimes during the civil war, and nicknamed the “Butcher of Albacete” because he ordered assassinations of members of the International Brigades which took place in that Spanish city [7]. Marty was also known in Spain for the murder of many anarchists and POUM militants.

Strangely, in 1955, Le Libertaire, which Fontenis and his friends controlled, widely opened its columns to Marty. I suppose many anarchists outside France, who don’t bother about details, don’t know that André Marty had been expelled from the Communist party not because

1945, he had been Number 3 in the French Communist party. Marty was not a victim of Stalinism. The Libertarian Communist Federation, successor to the Federation Anarchiste, passed unanimously a resolution declaring that the electoral battle was a form of class struggle and that taking part in elections became an option [8]. In the elections of January 1956, Fontenis appeared with André Marty at his side. The “Alliance” between Fontenis and Marty was a catastrophic failure: in terms of votes, of course, but also because the organization was ruined. I can say without much risk that Makhno and Arshinov would not have approved this kind of drift...

[6] The Fédération anarchiste was changed into the Fédération communiste libertaire in 1953. The FCL collapsed in 1956.

[7] We can observe today attempts made by nostalgic crypto-post-Stalinists to rehabilitate André Marty, presented as a victim of ill-intended right-wing authors. Unfortunately some anarchists fall into this manipulation, including Fontenis groupies. If Marty was not that bad a guy, Fontenis was right to make an alliance with him.

[8] An analysis « from inside » can be found in a text written by Christian Lagant, militant of the Kronstadt Group of the FCL. The Kronstadt group had published in 1954 a Memorandum [http://www.fondation-besnard.org/IMG/pdf/Memorandum_du_groupe_Kronstadt.pdf] criticizing the activity of Fontenis and his fraction (OPB). Lagant left the FCL at its May 1955 congress and published in 1956 an article analyzing the electoral strategy of the FCL. (« La FCL et les élections du 2 janvier 1956 » Noir et Rouge, n° 9) [see : <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article389>]. It has been said and written that the opposition between Fontenis and Lagant was founded on personal, not political motives. Reading the “Memorandum du groupe Kronstadt” and Lagant’s article proves the contrary, for the arguments which are developed are definitely political. Besides, I knew Lagant, we were in the same CGT union, and that fellow was unanimously considered as having an extreme moral rectitude, I would even say he was pathologically honest. He suicided in 1978.

By 1956 Moscow had begun its destalinization policy. Marty was much too strongly marked as a Stalinist. So what do we have ? Fontenis and his followers make friends with an hyper-Stalinist ex-cacique of the Komintern, expelled 4 years earlier from the Communist Party, a murderer of anarchists, POUM militants and International Brigade volunteers. The alliance of Fontenis with Marty has nothing to do with a tactical alliance with a revolutionary militant (or group) [9], it simply is a totally irrational choice: Fontenis thought he could manipulate Marty and attract communist party militants.

Fontenis had methodically organized a fraction whose objective was to take control of the Federation Anarchiste. Founded in 1950, this fraction was acting within the FA and was called OPB (Organisation Pensée-Bataille, that is "Thought & Battle Organization"). This organization aimed very openly at fighting the "synthesist" orientation of the Anarchist Federation of the time.

I think that activists who claim to be libertarian communists and oppose synthesism have every right to express themselves, to develop their theses, and to try and create an organization that matches their approach of anarchism. What Fontenis can be blamed for is not expressing his views, nor creating an anarchist communist organization according to

his own views, but to have destroyed from within an existing organization. Nobody says the Anarchist Federation was perfect, but at least it had been existing. Besides, after a few years of undercover preparation, Fontenis' taking control of the FA lasted hardly three years, and when it ended he had excluded almost everyone, including most of his own friends, and Le Libertaire had lost practically all its readers. After the disastrous affair of the election, Fontenis left a void behind him. A desert. Fontenis was not a visionary militant who anticipated the perfect model of anarchist organization, who had a prophetic glimpse of the future anarchist program; he was a megalomaniac manipulator who destroyed the only existing anarchist organization, built nothing at its place and left a desert behind him. Such an attitude is not honorable. The destruction of the Federation Anarchiste is not a claim to fame to the credit of Fontenis and his friends.

It took years afterwards to rebuild the Federation Anarchiste.

But I insist on the fact that libertarian communism can in no way be equated to Fontenis, that libertarian communism as a theory and practice, as a legitimate section of the libertarian movement, is in no way impaired by the actions of a man whose misdeeds have in fact lasted only three years.

A mythical

construction

Fontenis could very well have said: I do not agree with the FA, I shall build something else, and those who agree with me can follow me. I am sure that some of the militants of the FA would have followed him. The fate of libertarian communism in France would probably have been totally changed. For if the Fontenis episode has greatly undermined the Fédération Anarchiste, the latter recovered anyway, after a time. The Fontenis episode, however, has also severely undermined the future of libertarian communism itself – in France I mean. Whatever may say those who, in France, paint him with glowing colors and show him as a model, he has been a disaster for libertarian communism as a whole.

Today, the main representative organization of libertarian communism in France is the result of a scission in the FA dating from 1970, and then from an exclusion from this split. This organization today has a monthly paper and has only very recently purchased local premises in Paris. In other words, we can say that for over 40 years, libertarian communism has barely made any progress in France. Do I have to say that there is nothing to be cheerful about this situation ?

There has been a mythical construction around the three or four catastrophic years during which Fontenis had seized the

[9] It is of course impossible to know for certain what Makhno would have thought of Fontenis' "alliance" with the Stalinist André Marty, but the following information might give a idea: He wrote in 1932 in a Russian anarchist paper in the US: "In my mind, the FAI and the CNT must have (...) groups of initiative in each village and each town, and they must not fear to take control of the revolutionary, strategic, organisational and theoretical direction of the worker's movement. It is obvious that they will have to avoid uniting with political parties in general, and with the bolchevik-communists in particular, for I suppose that their Spanish equivalents will be the good imitators of their masters." (Quoted by Alexandre Skirda, *Les cosaques de la liberté*, p. 330, éd. JC Lattès.)

power, corresponding to a more or less conscious desire to have a hero; but Fontenis certainly is not the Bakunin of the 20th century. No doubt that thousands of miles away and 60 years later, the myth may seem attractive, but if we make an assessment, what do we have? A small group of men took control of an organization, turned it away from the principles on which it was based, made an alliance with one of its worst enemies, cleaned it out of its members, ruined it financially and drove the readership of its publication to practically nothing, and then walked away, leaving those who remained to sweep the debris. Because that's what happened.

There was on anarchistblackcat a revealing, if not interesting, exchange of views (in English) between what seemed to be a young Spanish-speaking militant and a French anarcho-syndicalist "old-timer". It all started because the young man qualified as "shit" an extremely moderate and totally non-polemic article on Fontenis (translated to English) originally published in *Le Monde Libertaire* [10]. Three interesting facts can be noted concerning this exchange of views:

1. The obvious cult of personality developed around Fontenis. I quote the young Spanish-speaking fellow:

"Fontenis fought all his life for giving consistence to the revolutionary movement along libertarian lines, fighting not against "ideas" (as the Joyeux group did), but against the Nazism, Francoism, French imperialism. He never hesitate

in make alliance with other fighters against the oppression, or searching a risky way for achieving the goals of the social revolution, thinking that better make mistaking doing that being in the correct making nothing, but for some "anarchos" that is an aberration. They prefer the edition of cultural papers, many propaganda that only read themselves and talking talking about non-senses. They are very happy: they are never going to "treason". Yes, they will never do any social change. But that is of no importance, of course."

In a rudimentary way, this opinion reflects quite well the platformist opinion concerning the Anarchist Federation.

2. The image of the Anarchist Federation conveyed by some Fontenis groupies. I quote the French "Old-timer":

"Another thing that amazes me is the image certain anarchists have of the French Anarchist Federation. If we listen to them (or read them), the FA is a bunch of hazy sycophants languidly discussing about the sex of angels, airing ideas with no connection with reality, publishing 'cultural papers' intended to no one else but ourselves, and 'talking, talking, talking about non-senses', passively watching through the window the real world going by: nazism, francoism, French imperialism, the exploited, the oppressed, the unemployed and the homeless reduced to simple 'ideas'. And, of course, taking 'inorganicity as a

virtue', which is probably how C. names the FA's alleged refusal of organization.

The "old-timer" concludes recalling that "these vaporous anarchists who are opposed to organization have achieved quite some things", such as a weekly paper, a radio, a big bookshop in Paris, and others in different towns, a publishing house, etc.: "So I would like C. to tell me how on earth such inconsistent people can do all this – not mentioning organizing an international gathering in 2012."

3. The third fact which is revealed is that the personality cult is largely based on ignorance. "C.", the young fellow, says:

« Georges Fontenis has the qualities of a genuine social revolutionary. He was devoted since he was young to build revolutionary movement, thinking about its REAL problems in its time and moment (Libertarian Communist Manifesto, for example, was written for the FA of the 50s). "Non conforme" to the communist libertarian movement and the revolutionary left at the beginning of the XXI Century) and strengthening links between who fight. Its legacy will perdure. »

"C." obviously doesn't know that by the time he had written *Non conforme* (2002), George Fontenis had become a serious burden for *Alternative libertaire*, the organization of which he was a "historical" militant. Two prominent leaders of *Alternative*

[10] « Parcours d'un aventuriste du mouvement libertaire », *Le Monde libertaire* n° 1604, 16-22 septembre 2010.

(<http://www.monde-libertaire.fr/portraits/13723-georges-fontenis-parcours-dun-aventuriste-du-mouvement-libertaire-1/2>)

English version : « Journey of an adventurist of the Libertarian movement », <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article371>

libertaire wrote about this book:

“Alas, if Georges Fontenis always has a concern for ‘breaking taboos’ he does not do it in Non conforme with much relevance. The exercise turns out into a search for an iconoclastic posture which most often misses its target, when it does not altogether go astray. The purpose is confused and ambiguous on certain social issues. Ultimately, Georges Fontenis wants to ask non conform questions but the ambivalent writing of his answers might lead readers to conclusions too conform to... the dominant ideology.” (Alternative libertaire, décembre 2002.)

This statement, written in AL’s magazine, drove Fontenis furious.

At least, as far as they are concerned, the militants of Alternative Libertaire don’t lull in the cult of personality...

If you push aside all the caricatured (and sometimes childish) aspects of the “Fontenis affair” – secret organization, Leninist-type fraction, incredible over-estimation of his own capacities, threats to assassinate “traitors”, etc. – we can, 60 years later, take into account that one of the motivations behind Fontenis’ attempt in the 50s was the observation of the divisions and of the inefficiency of the Fédération anarchiste.

The “Fontenis affair” no longer determines the attitudes of both parties with regard one another, and it is a very good thing. The “Fontenis affair” is history. But history is something that must be taken into consideration under the condition it does not paralyze positive action. The anarchists from other countries are not concerned with this debate and they certainly don’t understand it.

“Organizational and strategic obsession”

For the intermediate generation of activists of the FA, such as mine – those who started their activity in the late 60s and in the early 70’s – it was not so much Fontenis himself the problem as the libertarian communist groups who claimed more or less his legacy. They were characterized by a high degree of sectarianism and dogmatism. In addition, Daniel Guerin had developed his theses about “libertarian Marxism”, and libertarian communist activists, who wanted at all costs to bring “rigor” and “cohesion” to the anarchist doctrine, believed that they would find a remedy for the deficiencies they perceived in the anarchist doctrine by aping Marxist language, especially Trotskyite. This attitude, I think, merely revealed the specific deficiency of these activists concerning their own libertarian authors[11].

But efficiency and cohesion are

relative notions. All depends what your aims are. Constantly insisting on “rigor”, “efficiency”, etc. doesn’t necessarily make you more rigorous or efficient. For we have seen too many groups claiming “coherence”, “rigor” and “cohesion” but never growing beyond a membership of 50 or 60 and splitting or excluding in the name of “coherence”, “rigor” and “cohesion”, but with the words “working class” never off their lips.

A good illustration of what many French anarchists consider as “organizational and strategic obsession” can be found on the website of a US anarchist group, Miami Autonomy & Solidarity. When I speak of “organizational and strategic obsession”, I don’t mean I am against organization and strategy, I mean that the level of reflection and theorization on these questions must correspond to the level of membership: what can we do with the forces we have? Once given the objectives, and they can be very ambitious – for example creating an anarchist mass organization – I don’t see the point, if we are 50, to discuss endlessly about world revolution strategy. The question should rather be: “How can we reach a membership of 100?”

Miami Autonomy & Solidarity published a text written by Scott Nappalos which seems to me characteristic of this tendency, “Towards Theory of Political Organization for Our

[11] This imitation of Trotskyism by the French libertarian communists used to make it virtually impossible to distinguish them from Trotskyites. They constantly tried to commit themselves with the Trotskyites through alliances, joint communiqués, joint events, etc. In short, a lot of visible signs that showed their proximity to the Trotskyites... and their distance from the anarchist movement.

A comrade in my union was, in the late 70s, was a member of the political bureau of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire, the major trotskyite organisation. At that time Alternative Libertaire did not yet exist, it had another name, UTCL (Union des travailleurs communistes libertaires). I asked my friend his opinion about our anarcho-communist comrades. He answered that they were nothing but a tendency within the Ligue communiste.

Time” (Part I). It deals with the necessity of “regroupment”: the author is convinced that “in this time, we are witnessing a broad convergence on practices and concepts in organizations which began at different starting points and with different traditions”: but he observes “strong unevenness within organizations, and internally most organizations have people moving in different directions”. The solution lies in a “substantial transformation of existing orientations and forces”:

“Inevitably this would require conflict, splits, and rupture of existing organizations into distinct tendencies that at present battle only internally. This is actually to be welcomed, as it would clarify our directions, and alleviate some of the periodic internal paralysis.” (underlined by me.)

“This is a risk, but it is a necessary risk”, says Nappalos; and naturally all this is done in the name of the proletariat: “In such a time, organizational and ideological loyalties should be re-assessed in favor of the interests of the proletariat and the movement as a whole.” I am perfectly aware that the opinions found in blogs and on websites do not necessarily express the level of thought of a political movement as a whole, but “Towards Theory of Political

Organization for Our Time” is a long elaborate text in three parts, not just the spontaneous expression of a blogger.

In the name of rigor, cohesion, unity of thought, the author welcomes conflicts, splits and rupture: this is what we, in France, have experienced with Georges Fontenis in the 50s; but it is most of all the illustration of the permanent temptation existing among those militants who want to be better royalists than the king, as we say in France, and

who



**DON'T
MOAN,
ORGANISE**

over-interpret platformism and transform it into a caricature – precisely what Fontenis has done.

The paradox is that when you stick to the letter of the strategic considerations of some anarchist militants, you have the impression that they are talking about an organization of thousands and thousands of members. It is the impression I had reading Nappalos. His text reminds me of these

two German revolutionary organizations (AAUD and AAUD-E) who decided to merge in 1931 (a bit late...) to form the KAU [12]. When you read the discourse, the accounts that were made of this apparently considerable event by the council communists themselves, you have the impression that the fate of the world proletariat was at stake, that the colossal forces of the planetary revolution were uniting to beat those of the world reaction. In fact the first organization had 343 members and the second 57. It seems that some anarchists have inherited from council communism an overestimation of the importance of discourses. There is something comic (or pathetic) about advocating splits in microscopic organizations because of disagreements on the strategy of world revolution.

Obviously, Nappalos' viewpoint does not produce unanimity, for a blogger – significantly calling himself “Syndicalist” – replies:

“Most respectfully comrade, having gone through enough ‘conflict, splits, and rupture’ over the past near 37 years, I sadly do not really find this to be healthy: ‘conflict, splits, and rupture of existing organizations into distinct tendencies that at present battle only internally. This is actually to be welcomed, as it would clarify our directions, and alleviate some of the periodic internal paralysis.’ (...)

“The willingness to want to engage in those sorts of struggles, to split organizations and create

[12] Respectively : Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands, Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands-Einheitsorganisation, Kommunistische Arbeiter-Union.

bad taste in folks mouths is not, in my opinion, 'worth it'. It stands a greater chance of not creating the 'possibly creating a higher form of organization than we have seen in decades in North America.' Whatever that higher form of organization may be.

"Folks should come together or go apart based on commonalities. And folks should come together or separate in a comradely way when those commonalities are no longer there. 'Conflict, splits, and rupture' are not a way to build and have long lasting results well beyond the moment of political separation."

I must say I feel much sympathy for this comrade. And I would like to remind that there never has been an important anarchist movement when there wasn't first an anarchist mass organization. This raises the (apparently unsolved) problem of the relationship between anarchist organization and class organization, which seems at the center of the preoccupations of American – North and South – anarchists.

Nappalos vs synthesisism

In the 2nd part of his text, Nappalos deals with « synthesisism ». There is much truth in what he says : it is not a theory. But what Volin meant by synthesisism was not at all the same thing as what Sébastien Faure made of it. As much as Makhno and Arshinov, Volin

was aware of the flaws of the anarchist movement of the time and wanted to change it. Volin, Makhno and Arshinov shared the same initial idea: the necessity to unify the anarchist movement which was divided and inefficient. The difference was in the method to reach unity. The "platformists" considered that anarcho-communism was the only anarchist movement, individualism being a bourgeois ideology [13] and anarcho-syndicalism not being a doctrine but a simple method of action.

Volin considered that unity could be reached through an effort of theoretical clarification implying a collective reflection between all the currents of the movement. Volin's approach does not correspond to what is meant today by "synthesism". He didn't want the different branches of anarchism to live side by side indefinitely, he thought that after a debate they would merge into something different and superior – which is precisely the meaning of a "synthesis". In Volin's synthesis, there was something dynamic, things were to evolve. On the contrary, when Sébastien Faure published "La Synthèse anarchiste" in 1928, he developed a very static point of view, advocating the simple cohabitation of the different currents of anarchism without any debate nor clarification. It is this version of "synthesism" which has prevailed, but strictly speaking it is not a synthesis. Sébastien Faure's version of synthesism is a patch stuck on the inner tube of a tyre.

Nappalos is also right when he says that "no one calls himself or herself a synthesist". I never heard anybody calling himself a synthesist. But whatever truth there may be in what Nappalos says, the major mistake he makes is to give too much credit to discourses without observing the facts. In the FA there are differences of opinions but they practically never are the consequences of certain comrades being anarcho-communists and others being anarcho-syndicalists or individualists. Our congresses are not places where you see permanent clashes between anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists or individualists, leading to paralysis, they are places where militants are most of the times in fairly polite opposition concerning practical matters, sometimes in extremely vigorous opposition. These differences of opinions exist because people simply don't always agree with each other. Obviously Nappalos sees the French Anarchist Federation as an organization allowing "for varying contradictory tendencies to all exist in the same organization without any fundamental unity". But besides the fact that in the FA there are no individualists (I never met any, at least) [14] but anarchist-communists and anarcho-syndicalists, or militants who are neither, or both – that is, simply anarchists with no hyphen –, when I observe facts I see that these tendencies are not contradictory: on the contrary

[13] A point of view Bakunin shared.

[14] I must modify this opinion for I very recently realized there is at least one individualist, a comrade I've known for years, who does a very good militant job in the Federation anarchiste. We never had the opportunity to discuss the matter. Maybe I'll have to reconsider my point of view on the question. (24-08-2012)

[15] For a critical analysis of platformism and synthesism, see René Berthier, "Leçons d'octobre": <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article304>

they practice an extremely efficient COLLABORATION. At the risk of seeming insistent, we are the ones who have a weekly paper, a radio, etc.

There is something definitely paternalistic in Nappalos' attitude who considers synthesism as limited to "lower case 'a' anarchists" (whatever that means), developing "organizational patriotism" (it is well known that platformist organizations never develop "organizational patriotism"). Even more, "synthesist" organizations limit their activity to unessential questions such as "sub-culture", "activist networks", "protest politics", "anti-globalization and anti-war movements", where they have a "productive role to play" – thank you.

Nappalos sticks to concepts 90 years old and is convinced that the alledged "synthetic" organizations today have not evolved; that reality has had no effect on them; that the practices of these organizations strictly stick to his 90 year-old representation of synthesism [15].

The debate on platformism

The debate on platformism is a debate on theory, on organization, on tactics and strategy. But it is also a debate on the context (political, economic, sociological) in which it might be most valid. That also means that before forming an authorized opinion we, Western European militants, and more precisely French militants, have a great lot to learn concerning the situation in Central or South

America, for instance, or even Northern America.

It must be noted that whatever we militants of the Federation anarchiste think about the Platform, it is mostly the same thing as what Alternative libertaire thinks! The conclusion is that the viewpoint our both organizations have on this issue is probably determined by the identical contexts. And we must not exclude the possibility that in other contexts, platformism might be the solution. I can hardly imagine, for instance, anarcho-syndicalism developing in places where there is no, or practically no, working class, practically no industry, etc.

It is significant that when a Nefac interviewer asked Alternative Libertaire, a French "platformist" organization, why there were so few references to Platformism in their literature, the answer was that the Platform is part of their ideological references but they don't make a fuss about it because the text, written in 1926, is obsolete and not adapted to the present-day situation in France. The only thing the interviewed member of AL retains from the Platform seems to be the necessity to organize:

"Arshinov's Platform and 'platformism' are indeed a part of our 'ideological baggage'. But we're not attached to them in a dogmatic way. We think that part of the text, written in the 1920's, is now obsolete and is not adapted to the political realities we live with in France today. That is why we rarely make references to 'The Platform' or to platformism. We identify with

the spirit of platformism, and say so, but we don't identify with every word written in the original platform! We are still convinced of the importance of anarchists being organised, and to also have a clear political and strategic line. To that effect, yes, we are platformists [16]."

Obsolescence of the Platform – at least in France – and necessity to organize are two things with which we have been agreeing for a long time. I don't even understand why anarchists have to constantly repeat that it is necessary to organize. To me an unorganized anarchist is a contradiction.

The debate on Platformism took place in France in the mid 20s. Unless I am mistaken, I think the "platform" was "discovered" in England in the early 70s and in the Americas in the 90s. So there is a clear anteriority in France. Most French and Italian anarchists, including libertarian communists, – I'm thinking of Malatesta – strongly opposed the platform which was misunderstood and raised somewhat hysterical reactions. Arshinov clearly said that the "platform" was a project, and could be discussed. It is most unfortunate that the anarchist movement of the time did not take advantage of this opening.

Once again, we must consider the context of the late 20's. I think the condemnation by Makhno and Arshinov of the flaws of the anarchist movement of the time was largely correct. About the time the Kronstadt uprising was suppressed and when the Makhnovist movement

[16] <http://fdca.it/fdcaen/international/al.html>

[17] See <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article140> for an analysis of this conference.

was crushed, a French anarchist individualist, Andre Lorulot, made a conference on “Our enemy, the woman”, in which he claimed that women were frivolous and prevented their men from being activists [17]. The minutes of the time say that attendance at this conference was so important that there were people outside the room. An old comrade told me that during this conference, May Piqueray, a well known anarchist and feminist activist, bestowed the lecturer a vigorous slap. There was also in the anarchist movement people who opposed the reduction of working hours because that would have diverted the workers from the revolution...

These aspects of the French anarchist movement of the 20s might have shocked Makhno and Arshinov, but the movement could absolutely not be reduced to that.

Conceptions that are 90 years old

Arshinov's platform was written in 1926, and Sébastien Faure's theory of synthesist anarchism was written in 1928 in response to the platform. We can't, the international anarchist movement can't stick today to the debate in these terms, because we are talking about conceptions that are 90 years old : perhaps should we consider the possibility of reconsidering the terms of the debate... I think that neither side can refer to ideas and forms of organization 90 years old without considering adaptations. I think that in fact, in the meantime, the two schools of thought have come closer.

In retrospect – and after 90 years you can serenely look

backwards – what first motivated Makhno and Arshinov was that they realized the inability of the French anarchist movement to take decisions. I must add that this was absolutely not the case in Spain, for instance. So it's not a congenital matter to anarchism. The Spanish CNT had a million members in 1930 and to reach this point instances had necessarily existed in the organization in which the guidelines were discussed and voted and decisions taken. These instances did not exist in the French anarchist movement (and Italian, I think: Malatesta said that a general assembly was simply a meeting where the different points of view were expressed). Remember that the 1907 anarchist international conference which took place in Amsterdam reached to absolutely no decision.

But these instances did exist in the Unione Syndacale Italiana, an active anarcho-syndicalist organization crushed by Mussolini.

So if the Arshinov platform brings something new to the French anarchist movement (and Italian), it brings absolutely nothing new to the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement – and the anarcho-syndicalist movement in general, including French. In fact, if you read the statutes of the CGT-SR, a French anarcho-syndicalist organization created in 1926, the same year as Arshinov's platform, you find a set of federal structures in which members discuss and vote on policy decisions. The statutes of the CGT-SR are at least as “authoritarian”, if not more, as what you read in Arshinov's platform... It is significant that in 1926, Arshinov's platform created in

the French anarchist movement an outburst of protestations while the Statutes of the CGT-SR – more “authoritarian” in my view – left everybody silent.

So we can say that the diagnosis made by Makhno and Arshinov was right. But Arshinov's platform brought nothing really new as compared with what already existed at the time. If no-one objected to the “authoritarianism” of the statutes of the CGT-SR, but did so for Arshinov's platform (written the same year) it is, in my opinion, simply because Arshinov's platform was addressed (very naively, I would say) to the anarchists, while the statutes of the CGT-SR concerned the anarcho-syndicalists – which suggests that there was then a deep gap between the anarchist movement and the French working class. And here we touch another point stressed by Makhno and Arshinov: the relative lack of involvement of the French anarchist movement of the time in the working class. Right or wrong, this is in any case how Makhno and Arshinov seem to have perceived things. This probably explains that what was denied by the anarchist movement was accepted by the anarcho-syndicalist movement: because it was not the same people who were involved.

Unfortunately, Makhno didn't understand anything about revolutionary syndicalism, about anarcho-syndicalism. He should have turned to them. In the 20s, the working class anarchist movement was in the syndicalist movement. Makhno and Arshinov unfortunately didn't realize it. They were looking for an alternative to bolshevism and didn't understand that anarcho-syndicalism was that

alternative [18].

Two main things must be noted concerning the “Anarchist Synthesis”.

1. As it was conceived in 1928 by Sebastien Faure – distorting the idea of “synthesis” originally developed by Volin – a “synthesist” organization must include what Faure pointed out as the three schools of anarchism: the individualist, anarchist-communist, and syndicalist schools – all of them supposed to work together in harmony. In fact, the individualist school has so to speak disappeared today. I’ve personally never met any since the late 70s [19]. So what practically remains is an organization in which anarchist-communists and anarcho-syndicalists work together. In fact, this distinction strictly doesn’t matter any more. I never heard a comrade ask another comrade: “are you a libertarian communist or an anarcho-syndicalist?” The distinctions are gradually receding in the FA itself.

2. The tradition was that decisions were to be taken unanimously. I don’t know where this tradition comes from, but it’s like that. This system was not established because it was supposed to be “anarchist”, for I know for sure it

did not exist before the “Fontenis affair”. I think it was established after, as a guarantee against a new Fontenis. This system still is valid today, theoretically if not in practice. Practically, it means that a decision might be taken if it is sufficiently vague, and of such a nature as to create a general agreement. But when you come to something practical, decision-making can be difficult or impossible because it inevitably creates all sorts of disagreements. Theoretically, one person opposing a decision can paralyze all decision-making.

Decision-making

Is the principle of unanimous decision-making a utopian vision? Can everyone really be united in a symbiotic, almost-mystical union? The question is certainly interesting from a psychoanalytical point of view. However, the arguments in favor of this system are not totally without consistency. This practice implies that the different viewpoints in presence be seriously debated and that their supporters take the time to argue for their opinions, thus avoiding a brutal vote where 51% win over 49%. To us, this type of decision appertains to the parliamentary system. Secondly, it requires

that the different points of view make concessions so that an agreement can be reached on the broadest consensus.

Today, unanimous decision-making has been subjected to a serious relativisation in the Federation Anarchiste. After a thorough discussion, the oppositions content themselves with what we call a “friendly abstention”, that is, they do not oppose the decision, but the groups opposed to the decision are not required to apply it. But even in that case, the non-application of decisions concern very few people because, as I said, a thorough debate has previously reached to a large consensus. So in this system, you never have 51% against 49% – which to me is a form of violence – but a very small number of persons disagreeing with everybody else.

I would add one essential thing. I have been a union militant in the labor movement for several decades, and proceeding to the “classical” majority vote in order to make a decision does not shock me more than that. However, my experience in the trade union movement and in the anarchist movement leads me to one conclusion: the majority vote is a system that is ideally suited to deal with

[18] I recently read a lot of platformist documents published by North and South American groups. In many of these texts anarcho-syndicalism seems to be seen as a sort of radical version of unionism, but the essence of anarcho-syndicalism is missing, that is, the convergence of vertical (industrial) and horizontal (geographical) structures and activity. During its anarcho-syndicalist period, the French CGT (created in 1895), was precisely the fusion of the federation of unions and of the federation of “Bourses du Travail” (local structures grouping the unions on a geographical level – [Workers centers?]).

Anarcho-syndicalism is precisely defined by the fact that it dedicates a great part of its activity to non-work-place problems: housing, schools, transports, culture, etc. Same thing with the Spanish CNT (created 1911): when the Spanish comrades created unions in a new place, they also created a “unión local”, a library, sometimes a school, etc. All this activity was strictly linked with the general activity of the CNT. Ignoring (deliberately or not) this “horizontal” activity of anarcho-syndicalism makes it naturally easy to criticize the absence of... horizontal activity. Practically, a really functioning anarcho-syndicalist organization – that is having a real “horizontal” activity –, would not only enter into competition with political parties, but also with “specific” anarchist organizations...

[19] The only individualist anarchist I met, in the 70s, was a member of my CGT union, he paid his membership fees, came to the general assemblies, etc. and was not a member of the Fédération anarchiste!

current, ordinary, “everyday” issues. The unanimous vote, with the restriction of “friendly abstention”, is ideal when it comes to discussing matters of principle.

For instance if a majority of members of the Federation Anarchiste decided to put up candidates for parliamentary elections, I suppose there would be at least one vote against it on behalf of anarchist principles. If this principle had prevailed in Fontenis’ time, anarchists would not have stood for election next to a Stalinist assassin.

Moreover, those who are skeptical and surprised by the unanimous vote system don’t need to make all a fuss about it, because it has a natural limit. This system can operate in an assembly of 50 or 100 individuals representing an organization of 400 members, for instance. But when the Fédération anarchiste reaches 100 000 members, I think it will be time to imagine another system...

The question in that case is to avoid clinging obstinately to a decision-making system that prevents the organization from growing.

The refusal to implement a decision with which one disagrees does not lead to inefficiency, and it is entirely consistent with libertarian federalism. I perfectly remember an interview of a member of Alternative libertaire where the autonomy of their local groups was acknowledged [20], so I assume they function the same way as we do. This is far away from the strict application of

platformism...

It is in the State system of logic, of which Leninism is the most extreme form, that we see that. If you read Proudhon or Bakunin, you’ll see that any structure adhering to a federal organization has the right to secede. Here, in this case, it is not secession but a simple disagreement, which is, by definition, not necessarily definitive.

We must keep in mind that the members of the organization have a minimum of sense of responsibility. It is a matter of confidence. Individuals or groups who disagree are not enemies. In an anarchist organization, we are still supposed to have a comprehensive and convergent general outlook. Otherwise, it is no use staying in the organization. This type of practice is quite at odds with what people are used to... but it does not mean that we are necessarily wrong. I think this system prevents the constitution of fractions within the FA, and reduces the risk of splitting. Fractions in an organization are as many mini-“political parties” who seek for a majority: it is the introduction of parliamentary system in the organization. With our system, I am convinced that in the long run, everyone wins.

It is in the Leninist system that the minority is obliged to implement decisions with which they disagree. It’s pretty perverse, I think. Our system, in my opinion, has more efficiency. You rarely correctly apply a decision with which you disagree, especially when it is forced upon you. It’s not a question of “authority” or “anti-authority”, it is a simple,

plain question of common sense. But it is certain that if people are constantly disagreeing on everything, all the time, they had better go somewhere else...

Such a thing did happen in the FA. About ten years ago, some groups have left, on matters of substantive disagreement – which is legitimate. But it never appeared as a split, with the devastating psychological effects that it implies. They simply de-federated themselves and formed groups that remained relatively marginal and local. Recently the possibility to negotiate their return was considered by the FA, and in this perspective was also contemplated the possibility to reconsider synthesism. The question was raised within the FA but it finally was dropped because in fact these groups are either collapsing or shifting to Council Marxism.

I think the reducing distance between “classical” anarchism and platformism in France comes from the fact that decision-making in the FA has become clearer and more responsive.

The inability of the anarchist movement to take decisions was undoubtedly one of the reasons that motivated Makhno’s and Arshinov’s approach. Obviously, the other reason that motivated them, 90 years ago, was that the libertarian movement of the time had appeared to them, with some exceptions, as a conglomeration of wacky anarcho-individualists, anarcho-vegetarians, anarcho-nudists, anarcho-this and anarcho-that. Right or wrong, they also regarded a great part of the anarchist movement as a

[20] “We respect the autonomy of all local AL groups”, says the Alternative Libertaire militant interviewed by the Nefac (above mentioned).

bunch petty bourgeois, and they openly said they did not want to have anything to do with them. If instead of coming to France they had landed in Spain, there would never have been an “Arshinov platform”. In Spain, it was not necessary... The Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement would simply have absorbed them.

St. Imier: a great opportunity for debate

The meeting in St. Imier will provide a great opportunity for debate. There is nothing like a direct conversation to exchange views. Personal relationships that might develop are extremely important. There is no doubt that convergences could be considered, but we are skeptical about pompous and sententious initiatives, with great initial statements, press conferences and great closing statements. Practical and pragmatic initiatives, modest steps of which we can see the effects seem more realistic. We are suspicious of this form of artificial cohesion that seems to make things look square and monolithic while inside it cracks everywhere. It is essential that each group or organization keep its autonomy, which does not exclude a maximum of coordination. The circumstances to which the various libertarian organizations are confronted are extremely varied, much more, perhaps, than we can imagine. An international organization should first help explain this diversity.

I think it is about time the libertarian movement organized on an international level. I

remain convinced that the “platformism” referred to by many groups outside of France is something which has been reviewed by local contexts, that it is not something dogmatic. The reference to the platform corresponds to the legitimate need to take distances from the most extravagant forms of anarchism, and probably in the first place from individualism and the refusal to organize.

It is of course no coincidence that the international gathering of St. Imier will take place at

movement in one particular country does not develop or recedes because of a permanent internal crisis, for instance, we can collectively wonder why and consider solutions.

Still, we all agree, however, on the fact that the working class, the working population as a whole, must organize autonomously in order to build a society without exploitation and oppression. It is time to imagine an organization that is not based on outdated dogmatic conceptions but on an uninhibited and open federalism.



February-March 2012

the same time as the congress of the International of anarchist federations. The coincidence of dates is intended to highlight the need for an international organization. The St. Imier gathering will give a great opportunity to discuss these questions. The French FA does not intend to interfere in the way the Canadian or Brazilian libertarians are organized, for example. We don't care whether they are “platformists” or “synthesists”. The diversity of contexts justifies the diversity of approaches. But we ask the same understanding from others. However, if the anarchist

The Life and Work of Anarchist Omar Oziz



We include this blog piece, which originally appeared on Tahrir-ICN August 2013, about the anarchist Omar Aziz, from whose works and actions, in conditions, which appear much bleaker than our own, we can take inspiration.

Omar Aziz (fondly known by friends as Abu Kamel) was born in Damascus. He returned to Syria from exile in Saudi Arabia

and the United States in the early days of the Syrian revolution. An intellectual, economist, anarchist, husband, and father, at the age of 63, he committed himself to the revolutionary struggle. He worked together with local activists to collect humanitarian aid and distribute it to suburbs of Damascus that were under attack by the regime. Through his writing and activity he promoted local

self-governance, horizontal organisation, cooperation, solidarity, and mutual aid as the means by which people could emancipate themselves from the tyranny of the state. Together with comrades, Aziz founded the first local committee in Barzeh, Damascus. The example spread across Syria and with it some of the most promising and lasting examples of non-hierarchical self-organisation to have emerged from the countries of the Arab Spring.

In her tribute to Omar Aziz, Budour Hassan says, he “did not wear a Vendetta mask, nor did he form black blocs. He was not obsessed with giving interviews to the press ...[Yet] at a time when most anti-imperialists were wailing over the collapse of the Syrian state and the “hijacking” of a revolution they never supported in the first place, Aziz and his comrades were tirelessly striving for unconditional freedom from all forms of despotism and state hegemony.”[1] Aziz was encouraged by the revolutionary wave gripping the country and believed that “ongoing demonstrations were able to break the dominance of absolute power”. [2] But he saw a lack of synergy between revolutionary activity and people’s daily lives.

[1] Budour Hassan, ‘Omar Aziz: Rest in Power’, 20 February 2013, <http://budourhassan.wordpress.com/2013/02/20/omar-aziz/>

[2] Omar Aziz, ‘A discussion paper on Local Councils,’ (in Arabic) http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=143690742461532 English translated summarised paper <http://tahriricn.wordpress.com/2013/09/22/syria-translated-a-discussion-paper-on-local-councils-in-syria-by-the-martyr-and-anarchist-comrade-omar-aziz/>

For Aziz, it didn't make sense to participate in demonstrations demanding the overthrow of the regime whilst still living within strict hierarchical and authoritarian structures imposed by the state. He described such division as Syria being subject to the overlapping of two times, "the time of power" which "still manages the life activities", and "the time of Revolution" belonging to the activists working to overthrow the regime.[3] Aziz believed that for the continuity and victory of the revolution, revolutionary activity needed to permeate all aspects of people's lives. He advocated for radical changes to social organisation and relationships in order to challenge the foundations of a system based on domination and oppression.

Aziz saw positive examples all around him. He was encouraged by the multiple initiatives springing up throughout the country, including voluntary provision of emergency medical and legal support, turning houses into field hospitals, and arranging food baskets for distribution. He saw in such acts "the spirit of the Syrian people's resistance to the brutality of the system, the systematic killing and destruction of community". [4] Omar's vision was to spread these practices, and he believed the way to achieve this was through the establishment of local councils. In the eighth month of the Syrian revolution, when wide-spread protests against the regime were still largely peaceful, Omar Aziz produced a discussion paper on Local Councils in Syria where he set out his vision.

In Aziz's view the Local Council

was the forum by which people drawn from diverse cultures and different social strata could work together to achieve three primary goals; to manage their lives independently of the institutions and organs of the state; to provide the space to enable the collective collaboration of individuals; and activate the social revolution at the local, regional, and national level.

In his paper Aziz lists what he thinks the core concerns of the local councils should be:

1. The promotion of human and civil solidarity through improving living conditions, especially through provision of safe housing to the displaced; providing assistance, both psychological and material, to the families of the wounded or detainees; providing medical and food support; ensuring the continuity of educational services; and supporting and coordinating media activities. Aziz notes that such acts should be voluntary and should not be a substitute for family or kin support networks. He believed it would take time for people to feel comfortable outside of the provision of state services and adjust their social behaviour to be more cooperative. Aziz believed the council's role should be kept to a minimum allowing for the development of unique community initiatives.

2. The promotion of cooperation, including building local community initiatives and actions and promoting innovation and invention, which Aziz saw as being stifled by half a century of tyranny. The local council would be the forum through which people could

discuss the problems they face in life and their daily conditions. The local council would support collaboration and allow people to devise appropriate solutions to the problems they faced, including on issues relating to infrastructure, social harmony, and trade, as well as issues that required solutions external to the local community. Aziz also saw a key role as being the defence of territory in rural and urban areas that had been subject to expropriation and acquisition by the state. He rejected the urban expropriation of land and marginalisation and displacement of rural communities, which he saw as a method used by the regime to enforce its policy of domination and social exclusion. Aziz believed it necessary to ensure access to land which can satisfy the necessities of life for all and called for a rediscovery of the commons. He was realistic but optimistic. He noted that "it is clear that such acts apply to safe locations or areas quasi-'liberated' from power. But it is possible to assess the situation of each area and determine what can be achieved." Aziz advocated for horizontal linkages to be made between councils, to create linkages and interdependence between different geographic regions.

3. The relationship with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the interrelation between protection and defence of the community and the continuity of the revolution. Aziz believed that it was essential to coordinate between the popular civil and popular armed resistance. He saw the role of the FSA as to ensure the security and defence of the community particularly

[3] Ibid

during demonstrations, support securing lines of communications between regions, and provide protection for the movement of people and logistical supplies. The role of the council would be to provide food and housing for all members of the FSA and coordinate with the FSA on security for the community and the defence strategy for the region.

4. The composition of local councils and organisational structure. Aziz saw a number of challenges facing the formation of multiple local councils. The first was the regime, which repeatedly stormed cities and towns in order to paralyze the movement, isolate the people in enclaves, and prevent cooperation. Aziz argued that to respond to such onslaughts by the state, mechanisms of resistance needed to remain flexible and innovative. Councils would have to scale up or down according to need and adapt to power relations on the ground. He believed this flexibility was essential for the community's desire for freedom to be realised. He also saw the challenge in encouraging people to practice a way of life and social relationships which were new and unfamiliar. Also service provision needed to be maintained and it was necessary to find a way to get an independent source of power in the face of cuts, as well as supporting the development of economic and social activities. For this reason, he believed local council members should include social workers and people with expertise in various social, organisational, and technical fields, who have both the respect of the people and a potential

and desire to work voluntarily. For Aziz the organisational structure of the local council is a process that begins with the minimum required and should evolve depending on the level of the transformation achieved by the revolution, the balance of power within a given area, and relationship with neighbouring areas. He encouraged local council's to share knowledge, learn from the experience of other councils, and coordinate regionally.

5 . The role of the National Council is to give legitimacy to the initiative and gain the acceptance of

activists. It should seek funding in order to carry out necessary work and cover expenses which it may not be possible to be cover at the regional level. The National Council would facilitate coordination between regions in order to find common ground and foster closer interdependence. [5]

Omar Aziz's work has had a huge impact on revolutionary organisation in Syria. Whilst the mainstream political opposition failed to achieve anything of note in the past two years, the grassroots opposition movement, in the face of violent repression, has remained dynamic and innovative and has embodied the anarchist spirit.

The core of the grassroots opposition is the youth, mainly from the poor and middle-classes, in which women

and diverse religious and ethnic groups play active roles. Many of these activists remain non-affiliated to traditional political ideologies but are motivated by concerns for freedom, dignity,



[4] Ibid

[5] Ibid

and basic human rights. Their primary objective has remained the overthrow of the regime, rather than developing grand proposals for a future Syria.

The main form of revolutionary organisation has been through the development of the *tansiqiyat*; hundreds of local committees established in neighbourhoods and towns across the country. Here, revolutionary activists engage in multiple activities, from documenting and reporting on violations carried out by the regime (and increasingly elements of the opposition), to organising protests and civil disobedience campaigns (such as strikes and refusing to pay utility bills), and collecting and providing aid and humanitarian supplies to areas under bombardment or siege. There is no one model, but they often operate as horizontally organised, leaderless groups, made up of all segments of the society. They have been the foundation of the revolutionary movement, creating solidarity amongst the people, a sense of community, and collective action. Some local committees have elected representatives such as in Kafranbel Idlib, where a committee of elected representatives have made their own constitution. Youth activists from Kafranbel keep the popular protest movement alive and have gained worldwide fame for their use of colourful and satirical banners at weekly protests. They also engage in civil activities such as providing psychosocial support for children and forums for adults to discuss issues such as civil disobedience and

peaceful resistance.

At the city and district levels, revolutionary councils or *majlis thawar* have been established. They are often the primary civil administrative structure in areas liberated from the state, as well as some areas that remain under state control.[6] These ensure the provision of basic services, coordinate the activities of local committees, and coordinate with the popular armed resistance. Undoubtedly, as state provision of services has disappeared from some areas, and the humanitarian situation has deteriorated, they have played an increasingly vital role. There is no one model for the Local Councils, but they mainly follow some form of representative democratic model. Some have established different administrative departments to take over functions previously held by the state. Some have been more successful and inclusive than others which have struggled to displace the bureaucracy of the old regime or have been plagued by infighting. [7]

Whilst the main basis of activity is very much at the local level, there are a number of different umbrella groups which have emerged to coordinate and network on the regional and national level. These include the Local Coordination Committees (LCC), National Action Committees (NAC), the Federation of the Coordination Committees of the Syrian Revolution (FCC) and the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC). None represent the

totality of local committees/councils and they have different organisational structures and differing levels of engagement or non-engagement with the formal political opposition. Visit http://www.alharak.org/nonviolence_map/en/ for an interactive map which shows the coordinating committees and councils, as well as the flourishing of many other civil initiatives and campaigns in a country where such activity was previously brutally repressed.

A major threat facing these diverse initiatives has not only been the persecution of activists by the regime, lack of resources, the onslaught of the state's attack of civilian areas, and increasingly deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions. Some local councils have been hijacked by reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces. For example, in Al Raqqa non-local rebel groups with salafi/takfiri leanings took much of the power away from the local council. As they have tried to impose an Islamic vision which is alien to almost everyone, the people of Raqqa have been holding continuous protests against them. In June 2013 people demonstrated against arrests of family members by Jabhat Al Nusra. The women are shouting "shame on you! You betrayed us in the name of Islam". Throughout August 2013 the people of Al Raqqa have been protesting almost daily against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), demanding the release of hundreds of detainees, abductees, and missing persons. Likewise in Aleppo, revolutionaries

[6] For a report on Local Councils see in Gayath Naisse 'Self organization in the Syrian people's revolution': <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3025>

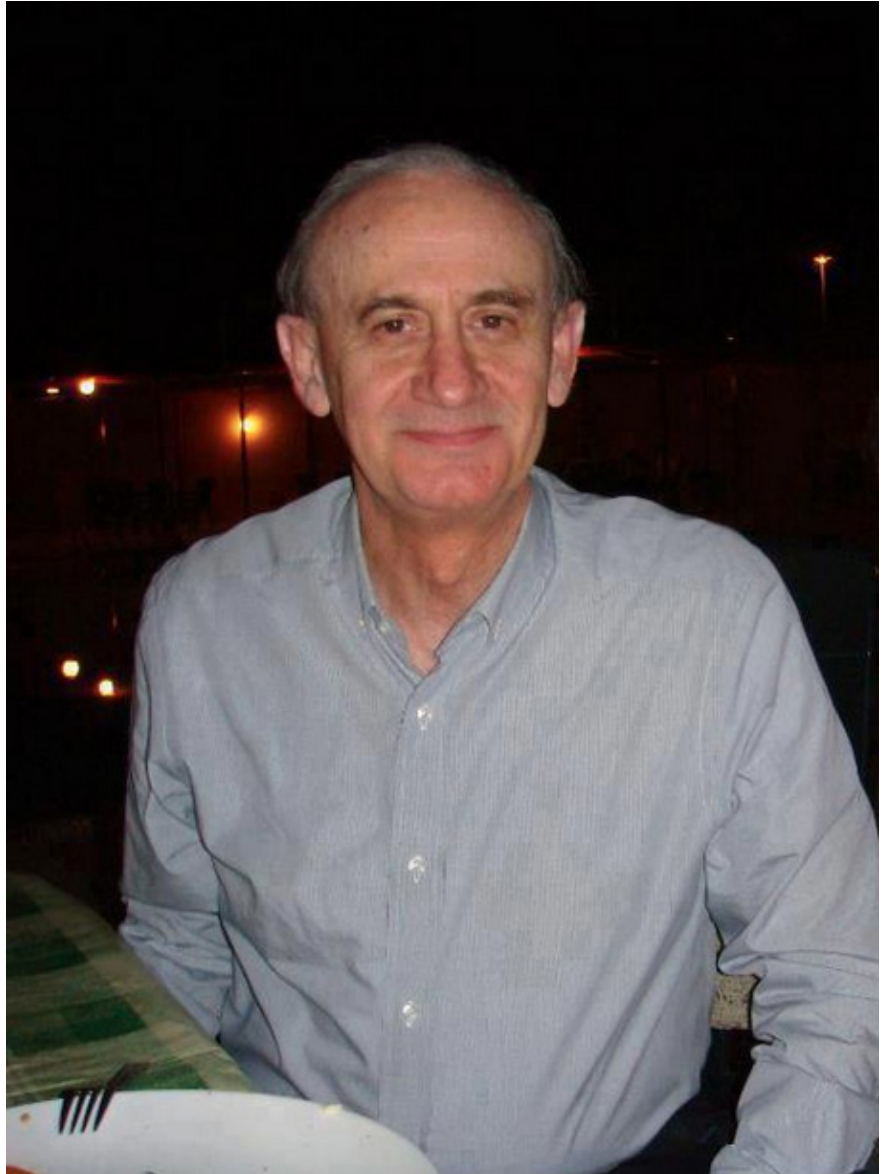
[7] Ibid

launched the ‘enough is enough’ campaign, calling for an end to rebel abuses, and for accountability. A demonstration in June 2013 was held in front of Sharia Court in Aleppo after the killing of a child for allegedly insulting the prophet Mohammad. The people called for the murderers to be brought to justice saying “The Sharia Committee has become the Air Force Intelligence!” (the most brutal security branch of Assad regime). In Idlib people have also been protesting against a Sharia Committee which has been established.

Omar Aziz did not live to see the often seemingly insurmountable challenges that would beset Syria’s revolutionaries, or the successes and failures of experiments in local self-organisation. On 20 November 2012, he was arrested from his home by the mukhabarat (much feared intelligence service). Shortly before his arrest he said “We are no less than the Paris Commune workers: they resisted for 70 days and we are still going on for a year and a half.”[8] Aziz was held in an intelligence detention cell of 4 by 4 meters, which was shared with 85 other people. This likely contributed to the deterioration of his already weak health. He was later transferred to Adra prison where he died from heart complications in February 2013, a day before his 64th birthday.

Omar Aziz’s name may never be widely known, but he deserves recognition as a leading contemporary figure in the development of anarchist thought and practice. The experiments in grass roots revolutionary organisation that

he inspired provide insight and lessons in anarchist organising for future revolutions across the globe.



[8] Via @Darth Nader <https://twitter.com/DarthNader/status/304015567231266816>

To what extent are Nozick's notions of self-ownership, inviolable liberty and capitalism valid?

Robert Nozick's interpretation of libertarianism, as a form of society guided by the invisible hand outwith the influence of the state, has generated criticism from many areas of the political spectrum. In order to avoid getting embedded in abstraction, attempts to directly address the structure of his interpretation of libertarianism must focus on testing the internal degree of theoretical cohesion, in regards to his perception of what values constitute the term libertarianism, and the external compatibility of this definition within his minarchic-capitalist outlook. Such a task will hereby be undertaken in a two-part investigation into Nozick's philosophical thought; firstly that of critically examining the extent of rapport between self-ownership and inviolable liberty, in regards to libertarianism, and secondly the condition of these in regards to free-exchange

capitalism.

To facilitate this exercise, Nozick's libertarian thought will be summarised and referred to into three key aspects:

- a) the jurisdiction of self-ownership is the sanctuary of liberty, and that there are "things no person or group may do to them[1]" without resulting in their violation
- b) the state is not a moral agent, and that only the 'minimal state, limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, and so on, is justified[2]' and not in violation of personal liberty
- c) property ownership is an extension of self-ownership, and that only voluntary exchange – i.e. without the interference of government – can preserve liberty

In regards to etymology, the

use of the term libertarianism is disputed. Historically, libertarianism has been associated with left-anarchism as described by Joseph Dejacque, expressed to be the 'abolition of government in all its guises...abolition of personal property, ownership of the soil...and of anything that is an instrument of labour, production or consumption[3]'. What he proposed to replace capitalism and the state was 'collective property, one and indivisible, held in common[4]'. The emergence of right-libertarian etymology as a self-identifying school of thought, on the other hand, has been reflected upon by right-libertarian Murray Rothbard in his statement that the term was 'captured...from the enemy[5]'. The distinction between the two has been articulated in the reflection that 'libertarianism...had long been simply a polite word for left-

[1] Nozick, Robert, 'Anarchy, State and Utopia', Basic Books 1974, p. ix

[2] Ibid

[3] Graham, Robert, 'Anarchism. A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Volume One: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE to 1939)', Black Rose Books 2006, p. 60

[4] Ibid, pg. 61

[5] Murray N., Rothbard, 'The Betrayal of the American Right', Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007, p. 83

wing anarchists...for anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken in over... since we were proponents of individual liberty and therefore of the individual's right to his property[6]'. Libertarianism is therefore a contested term in regards to property in particular[7], so for the purposes of this essay libertarianism will allude to Nozick's right-libertarian interpretation, unless otherwise specified.

The premise for Nozick's interpretation of libertarianism lies in a two-part claim that human rights are inviolable and that human beings are ends in themselves and thusly self-owners (a). What is implied by his argument is given that human beings are self-owners and have inviolable rights, it only follows that they ought to have complete jurisdiction over their own activity, save cases where it infringes upon the liberty of others, and that any violations of this private sphere are a violation of liberty *de facto*[8]. Self-ownership and inviolable rights to liberty are thusly considered equitable by Nozick and advocates of his school of thought, wherein the right to liberty transpires from a right to self-ownership[9]. This, if respected, ought to guarantee the sanctity of liberty. It is this first point that ought to be held to scrutiny first of all.

So as to test the compatibility between inviolable rights and self-ownership, it is helpful and constructive to specify that the latter value in a libertarian context must be comprehensive – in other words, that 'there is no part of the self and its capacities that are unownable[10]'. To suggest otherwise would imply that there were parts of ourselves that could be intruded upon or owned that would not as a result violate our liberty and self-ownership, a notion which would be incompatible with this particular form of libertarianism. Dr Colin Bird, Associate Professor of Politics and Director of the Program in Political Philosophy, Policy and Law in the University of Virginia, remarked on an interesting discrepancy between self-ownership and inviolable rights which deserves deliberation in regards to the minarchical state as a public agent. Nozick's claim that liberty disrupts patterned and end-state theories, leading to their resulting need to continuously violate liberty to maintain themselves, comes under considerable scrutiny in regards to the public agent as a protector of self-ownership and inviolable rights. Bird, to raise this issue, asks 'in the absence of any further normative considerations, does the inviolability of self-ownership rights automatically follow? Just how far does the fact of universal comprehensive self-ownership automatically constrain a public

agent's view of what it might mean to act legitimately on behalf of a community of...self-owners?[11]'. The answer to the first question of compatibility, shared as a common destination with the first part of this text, is largely answerable by the conclusions of the second.

It can be said of the public agent, the minimal state, that it ought to be aware that individual self-owners are comprehensive and their rights are inviolable. This point already raises a problem for the public agent, for according to Nozick's theory that it must exist to protect the sanctity of these two core libertarian values, it is at some point brought to a compromise that libertarians of the proprietarian tradition could find to be significantly alarming. What if, for example, the public agent knows that a minor violation – say the confiscation of a gun – would prevent a more significant violation, a mass murder perhaps? As murder counts as a violation of liberty and property, following injury or death, the public agent is forced to violate one liberty in the name of another, implying that violations by the public agent are more legitimate than violations by non-public agents. This begs the question of whether or not it would then be illegitimate for the public agent to recognize a 'trade-off of a relatively harmless violation for the prevention of a very harmful

[6] Ibid

[7] Avineri, Shlomo; de-Shalit, Avner, 'Communitarianism and Individualism', Oxford University Press 1992, p. 137

[8] Rothbard, M. 'Power and Market', Institute of Human Studies 1970, p. 76

[9] Wolff, Jonathan, 'Robert Nozick. Property, Justice and the Minimal State', Polity Press 1991, p.4

[10] Bird, Collin. 'The Myth of Liberal Individualism', Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 143

[11] Ibid, pg. 148

one[12]'. At this point, we have reached a stage where violation and the distribution of violation is decided by a central authority in a universal manner so as to protect a community of self-owners in a utilitarian manner, as the avocation of non-violation seems not to be equitable to its prevention in itself. A pattern of systematic and utilitarian suppression thusly re-emerges, in such a manner that the public agent decides that it should, directly or indirectly, 'coerce citizens into respecting the self-ownership rights of others[13]'. The libertarian interpretation of Nozick is therefore forced either to negate the minimal state, self-ownership or inviolable liberty in order to avoid this paradox, for under the current paradigm some violations are passively necessitated once all outwith its theoretically limited jurisdiction are regarded as a 'community of self-owners[14]' – a reality and compromise readily admitted to by libertarian theorist Lomasky[15]'.

Following the first signs of internal contradiction in statement (a) in regards to self-ownership being compatible with inviolable rights, the next logical step is to consider whether Nozick's argument that 'the

state...[is] justified...only in so far as it protects people against force[16]' (b) can resolve this problem. In regards to the internal coherence of the statement that minarchy can preserve the conditions of (a), this position has been called up upon from within the self-prescribed anti-authoritarian right in the form of anarcho-capitalist Gerard Cassey's accusation that, 'states are criminal organizations...not just the obviously totalitarian or repressive ones[17]', describing the very existence of a state as 'a monopoly of allegedly legitimate force over the inhabitants of a determinate territory financed by a compulsory levy imposed on those inhabitants[18]'. On this line of thought, he accuses Nozick of being a minarchist and not a libertarian on the grounds that he is willing to accept a non-voluntary state that enforces non-violence, and that self-ownership is incompatible with even the most limited form of minarchy. This perspective reflects on the state's potential to coerce as being an *ispo facto* violation of liberty, and holds Nozick's second statement that the only legitimate state in regards to libertarianism is a minimal one to account. The link between Nozick's support of a minimal state and the contradiction to be

found within his support of it as a libertarian – again, testing each of his statements in isolation for coherence – can be revealed from an existential reflection on authoritarianism and coercion. If we are to cogitate on the origin of libertarianism as a negation of oppression, exploitation and coercion, then it must follow that the presence of a body capable of exercising these features be called to scrutiny.

As demonstrated in the deliberations above upon the public agent as a violator, it becomes apparent that this source of authority is already taking a moral stance[19] – albeit of its own interpretation – as to how to best protect the community of self-owners through a series of continuous trade-offs between violations of various scales and their prevention or punishment. Following the exercise of validity and negation, proposal (b) can be tested for external cohesion in regards to the consequential negative externality its existence has on (a) by considering the counter-proposal that 'what will happen to the threatened individual, should he not comply...[is also that] which renders him unfree when the threat is made', provided

[12] Ibid, p. 151

[13] Ibid, p. 149

[14] Ibid, p. 152

[15] Lomasky, L, 'Persons, Rights and the Moral Community', Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 151

[16] Wolff, Jonathan, 'Robert Nozick. Property, Justice and the Minimal State', Polity Press 1991, p. 30

[17] Casey, Gerard, (2013) 'Libertarian Anarchy: Against the State', Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. An Electronic Journal', available at (<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/40697-libertarian-anarchy-against-the-state/>), [accessed: 03/10/13]

[18] Ibid

[19] a prospect which is antagonistic to right and individualist libertarians as found in Nozick's statement (b)

the implementation of the threat[20]. This line of thought was extensively articulated by professor emeritus Michael Taylor, who defined coercion by the inclusion of the threat of it. In this case, political power, and thus oppression and coercion, are defined by the ability to make the deviation from an individual's primary choice of action to a secondary one a rational choice in the face of punishment[21]. The argument that such a presence protects liberty as Nozick and advocates of his school of thought envision it has already been repealed by the incompatibility between self-ownership and inviolable liberty, as the state ends up in its own end-state form, permanently enforcing the protection of liberty. Yet the contradiction of a minarchy with libertarian values extends in regards to the notion of self-ownership, as the threat of punishment in itself provides an external limitation to the private sphere of liberty, where a moral abstention from violating others' liberty does not suffice in this respect. The possession of the ability to, directly through enforcement or indirectly through the ability to enforce, affect individual's actions in such a manner becomes the embodiment of the oppression

libertarians theoretically struggle to abolish[22]. Taylor points to the fact that any 'rational individual would prefer not to be the recipient of a threat, and after a threat had been made, he would prefer to be back in the pre-threat situation[23]', and that it follows that only the absence of coercion— active or potential – can articulate a libertarian society. In this case, the existence of a public agent or minimal state de facto infringes upon the jurisdiction of self-ownership, as part of one's actions or disposition towards them is restricted through the monopolised right to punish them by the public agent[24]. The surrendering of self-ownership in the name of self-ownership thus, according to this line of argument, becomes an inevitable result of Nozick's second clause. We are therefore left with the consequences of statement (b) having an externally contradictory effect to the validity of (a), negating the possibility of inviolable rights and self-ownership.

If Nozick's first statement is threatened by an internal contradiction between self-ownership and inviolable rights, and his second statement negates the validity of the

first regardless of whether the former argument can stand in isolation, deductive logic points to Nozick's third clause (c) – that if humans are self-owners, they are also owners of their income, property and labour – as a final point of scrutiny in regards to this particular validity-exercise. In regards to this statement, Nozick argues that statement (a) is validated and protected through his interpretation of justice, materialized by the entitlement theory. If it is to be the case that justice in acquisition be defined by non-violation[25]', this claim appears to be refuted by his own rejection of the unjust accumulation of property and wealth through inheritance, that leads to 'continuing inequalities of wealth and position...[making] the resulting inequalities seem unfair[26]'. This would be an internal contradiction in statement (c), resolvable only by the possible interference of the state[27]. In regards to justice in transfer, Nozick's additional belief that 'seizing the results of someone's labour is equivalent to seizing hours from him...making them a part-time owner of you[28]' would seem to excerpt an external contradiction on clause (a), as surplus value would assume the same violation as imposed tax in regards to the

[20] Taylor, Michael, 'Community, Anarchy and Liberty', Cambridge University Press 1985, p. 144

[21] Ibid, p. 11

[22] Ibid, p.11

[23] Ibid, p. 146

[24] Norman, Richard, 'Free and Equal. A Philosophical Examination of Political Values', Oxford University Press 1987, p. 36

[25] Barry, Norman P., 'On Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism', Macmillan Press 1989, p. 151

[26] Nozick, Robert, 'The Examined Life. Philosophical Meditations', Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 30

[27] Ibid

[28] Nozick, Robert, 'Anarchy, State and Utopia', Basic Books, 1974, p. 172

labour-capital relationship, given that the tax-related months per year of unpaid labour would be equated to the unfavourable ratio of labour hours and wage value. In this sense, alienation would completely negate the Nozickian claim that self-ownership encompassed ownership of one's own labour, product, and property[29]. The externalities of the principle of rectification of justice upon claims (a) and (b), finally, would be those of the re-emerging end-state and violator of liberty mentioned previously.

Having tested and examined each of Nozick's three statements in separation and in relation to one another, the following observations can be made. In regards to his first clause, the implied equitability of inviolable rights and self-ownership is subject to internal contradiction, insofar that if self-ownership were to be considered and inviolable right, it would have to be enforced, thus giving rise to a contradiction in the context of libertarianism and its proprietarian tradition. In regards to the second statement

on the existence of a minimal state, this clause causes the active demise of statement (a) given the state, regardless of how minimal in form, becomes existential violation of ownership and liberty, given the arising need of a moral trade-off of utilitarian violations. It exceeds the so-called jurisdiction of its minimalistic purpose, becoming yet another end-state of systematic violation in the name of the self-owned community. Finally, in reference to the third claim that self-ownership is to encompass ownership of labour, property, and product, the justice in acquisition fails to persevere when faced with inheritable tradition, surplus-value exploitation and alienation, and a regression towards the state to yet again act as a moderating, distributive benefactor of justice and wealth, creating both an internal contradiction in values as well as a violation of all that is represented by the terms self-ownership and inviolable rights.



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The Zoot Suit As Rebellion

“A killer-diller coat with a drape-shape, reat-pleats and shoulders padded like a lunatic’s cell”. Detroit Red aka Malcolm X

“These youths refused to accept the racialized norms of segregated America. With their flashy ensembles, distinct slang, extra cash (generated by a booming war economy), and rebellious attitude, pachucos and pachucas participated in a spectacular subculture and threatened the social order by visibly occupying public spaces.” Catherine Ramirez, Woman in a Zoot Suit

In previous issues of Organise! we have focussed on various youth movements that developed in the 20th century and in one way or other were expressions of dissent and disquiet with the present system. We have taken looks at the Edelweiss Pirates, the Zazous of France, and the Schlurfs of Austria. In this issue we look at the zoot-suiters, a style and movement that developed among black and Hispanic Americans.

The zoot suit appears to have developed around 1935 in nightclubs in the black area of Harlem, New York, at Sammy’s Follies and the Savoy Ballroom. Zoot suits exaggerated the smart 1930s look, and were worn by young blacks as an expression of personality, in a world where social recognition, and a limited

one at that, could only be gained through being a musician, boxer, and in a few instances, as a writer.

The future Malcolm X was fifteen in 1940 when he bought his first zoot suit. In the Autobiography of Malcolm X he describes this outfit: “I was measured, and the young salesman picked off a rack a zoot suit that was just wild: sky-blue pants thirty inches in the knee and angle narrowed down to twelve inches at the bottom, and a long coat that pinched my waist and flared out below my knees. As a gift, the salesman said, the store would give me a narrow leather belt with my initial ‘L’ on it. Then he said I ought to also buy a hat, and I did – blue, with a feather in the four-inch brim. Then the store gave me another present: a long, thick-lined, gold plated chain that swung down lower than my coat hem. I was sold forever on credit. ... I took three of those twenty-five cent sepia-toned, while-you wait pictures of myself, posed the way ‘hipsters’ wearing their zoots would ‘cool it’ – hat angled, knees drawn close together, feet wide apart, both index fingers jabbed toward the floor. The long coat and swinging chain and the Punjab pants were much more dramatic if you stood that way.’

The determination to have a smart appearance despite poverty, as a sign of pride and self-respect, has a long tradition in the working class. Musicians, whether in blues or jazz, made a

big effort to be smartly turned out. Musicians, among them Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, always dressed in immaculate suits and were called “The Gentlemen of Harlem”.

The zoot suit took this notion of gentility and immaculate clothing three steps further, upping the ante with jackets with huge shoulders and trousers pegged down to the ankles.

As the black author Ralph Ellison in his magnificent novel *The Invisible Man* wrote: “What about these three boys, coming now along the platform, tall and slender, walking with swinging shoulders in their well-pressed, too-hot-for-summer suits, their collars high and tight about their necks, their identical hats of black cheap felt set upon the crowns of their heads with a severe formality above their conked hair? It was as though I’d never seen their like before: walking slowly, their shoulders swaying, their legs swinging from their hips in trousers that ballooned upward from cuffs fitting snug about their ankles; their coats long and hip-tight with shoulders far too broad to be those of natural western men.”

So the zoot suit was more than an exaggerated gentility, more than a fashion statement. As Stuart Cosgrove notes in *The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare*: “These youths were not simply grotesque dandies parading the city’s secret underworld, they were ‘the stewards of

something uncomfortable', a spectacular reminder that the social order had failed to contain their energy and difference.... The zoot suit was a refusal; a subcultural gesture that refused to concede to the manners of subservience". It was a symbol of pride of ethnicity.

The zoot suit fashion began spreading from the black urban areas to the Mexican-American youths –the pachucos – of Los Angeles and other towns on the West Coast, who further popularised the look. The Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz wrote in his *The Labyrinth of Solitude* that: "The pachucos are youths, for the most part of Mexican origin, who form gangs in southern U.S. cities. They can be identified by their language and behaviour, as well as by the clothing they affect. They are instinctive rebels, and North American racism has vented its wrath on them more than once." The pachucos were second-generation working class immigrants. They were alienated by the racism around them, whether at school, in work, or on the welfare line. Rather than hiding their disgust with society, they adopted a swaggering and proud posture. Like black zoot-suiters they paraded their hostility and difference. It should be remembered that both pachucos and pachucas held down several jobs at a time, and had to save for many weeks to acquire their expensive and immaculate apparel.

In addition, the style spread to Filipino-American youth. In the 1940s, they were banned from white dance halls in California and began to frequent dance halls with a black and Hispanic clientele, some of them picking up the zoot suit style, as did some

Japanese-American youths.

The wearing of the zoot suit became more and more difficult with the outbreak of war and the introduction of wool rationing by the War Production Board in March 1942, with a 26% cut in the use of fabrics. This turned the sporting of zoot suits into illicit acts. However they continued to be made by underground tailors. Zoot-suiters became seen more and more as anti-patriotic.

The war mobilised over four million civilians into the US armed forces. At the same time five million women entered the wartime labour force. This caused big changes in family life, with the erosion of parental control. There was a marked increase in juvenile delinquency. Because of parents being on active military service or in war work and with an increase in night work because of the demands of the war, many young people were able to stay out late on street corners, or in bars and cafes.

The Zoot Suit Riots

The wearing of the zoot suit was now in very marked and polarised opposition to servicemen in uniform. Zoot suit wearers were seen as both delinquents and as thumbing the nose at rationing.

In early June 1943 servicemen on shore leave in Los Angeles began to attack pachuco zoot-suiters in the street. As a result, sixty zoot suiters, rather than their attackers, were arrested by the police. The police began to patrol the streets, whilst rumours circulated of servicemen forming vigilante groups. More and more zoot-suiters were attacked and stripped of their outfits. Some drunken sailors ran riot through a cinema, dragged two pachuco zooters on stage, where their suits were stripped from them and urinated on. The confiscated suits were burnt on bonfires. In addition, in a move that reflected what happened with Hitler Youth attacks on Schlurfs and Vichy youth organisation attacks on Zazous, zoot suiters had their



ducktail hairstyles shorn by rampaging, soldiers, sailors, and marines.

In the second week of June, Pachuco youths retaliated by slashing a sailor, whilst a policeman was run over when he tried to flag down a car-full of zoot-suiters. Pachucos stoned a train load of sailors, fights broke out daily in San Bernardino, and vigilantes assembled in San Diego and began to look for zoot-suiters. Meanwhile a young Mexican was stabbed by Marines.

The riots accelerated with a police special officer gunning down a zoot-suiter in Azusa. Pachuco youths were arrested for rioting in the Lincoln Heights district of LA. Now black zoot-suiters became involved, wrecking a train in Watts. Three zoot suit "gang leaders" received widespread coverage in the press after their arrests. Two were Mexican, whilst the other was black. Their arrests confirmed the popular view that most zoot-suiters were black or Mexican, that they were of conscription age but were avoiding it or had been exempted on medical grounds. What was conveniently forgotten was coverage of white zoot-suiters, of servicemen being arrested for rioting, and the refusal of Mexican-American servicemen to take part in vigilante raids.

The riots spread beyond California to Arizona and Texas. Now media coverage began to concentrate on gangs of

women zoot-suiters, like the Slick Chicks and the Black Widows. The appearance of the female zoot-suiters was linked to the breakdown of family normality: "... There are many indications that the war years saw a remarkable increase in the numbers of young women who were taken into social care or referred to penal institutions, as a result of the specific social problems they had to encounter" (Cosgrove). The Slick Chicks and Black Widows wore black drape jackets, fishnet stockings, and tight skirts, with heavy make-up, dark lipstick, and black eyeliner, with pompadour hairstyles. Some adopted the full zoot suit outfit, challenging heterosexual norms of dressing. Cosgrove again: "The Black Widows clearly existed outside the orthodoxies of wartime society: playing no part in the industrial war effort, and openly challenging conventional notions of feminine beauty and sexuality".

Whilst the disorder died down in Los Angeles in the second week of June, it now spread to Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia. Within three weeks, Detroit experienced the worst race riot in its history. These were not "zoot suit riots" as such, but nevertheless they were preceded by attacks on wearers of zoot suits, that is, black youths.

The press had from the start instigated and fuelled hostility against wearers of the zoot suit and against Pachuco culture.

During the disorder, their daily and false reports further fanned the flames. However, other parts of the establishment were worried. State senators were concerned about relations with Mexico. Senator Downey said that there could be "grave consequences" with the souring of relations between the USA and Mexico, hindering the supply of Mexican labour to help grow crops in California. The Mexican embassy did then raise the matter with the State department. These US administrators were not concerned with the appalling abuse and discrimination against the Mexican-American population, they were concerned the effect the riots would have on the economy.

The press now began to deny the racial component of the disorder. As the black writer Chester Himes protested: "Zoot Riots are Race Riots" (Himes wrote a great series of novels set in Harlem, with characters like Gravedigger Jones and Coffin Ed, which should be read!) The response of the authorities was a crackdown on bootleg tailors, additional detention centres, a youth forestry camp for youth under the age of 16, as well as an increase in military and shore police, some increase in neighbourhood recreation facilities, etc. As Cosgrove notes: "The outcome of the zoot-suit riots was an inadequate, highly localised, and relatively ineffective body of short-term public policies that provided no guidelines for the more serious riots in Detroit and Harlem later

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in the same summer.”

The zoot suit riots had an important effect on a generation of youth that was socially disadvantaged. They happened whilst the USA was at war and they broke with the official orthodoxy that America was united and was a champion of freedom. They, and the riots

in Detroit that followed, were signs of the unrest that was to come in the 1960s, when new movements emerged and once again riots broke out. As Himes said, the racial factor was important, but as important was the development of youth cultures that were beginning to reject the norms of capitalist

society, inequality, racism, and, with the pachucas, sexism and “normal” sexuality. They with the contemporary youth movements in Austria, France, and Germany, were to be heralds of new and combative youth cultures that were to emerge in the post-war years.

Culture Article:

The Anarchist Woodcuts of Alexandre Mairet (1880-1947)

We also continue our series on anarchist artists and writers with a look at the work of the anarchist wood cut specialist Alexandre Mairet, who gave his support to anti-militarist and anti-capitalist propaganda with his artwork produced during World War One

Alexandre Mairet was born in 1880, in La Tour-de-Peilz, in the canton of Vaud (Switzerland). He was the only son of Louis Auguste Mairet and Marie Louise née Prélat. He spent most of his very early childhood being raised by a peasant family in St. Légier. At the age of five he rejoined his mother in Geneva. From 1896 to 1899 he studied at the School of Fine and Industrial Arts in Geneva. From 1901 he worked in the studio of the Maurice xylographer (wood engraver) Maurice Baud. From 1903 to 1907, he made numerous trips to Arnex near Orbe (Vaud) and the Dent de Lys (canton of Fribourg). Sharing the life of shepherds, he then

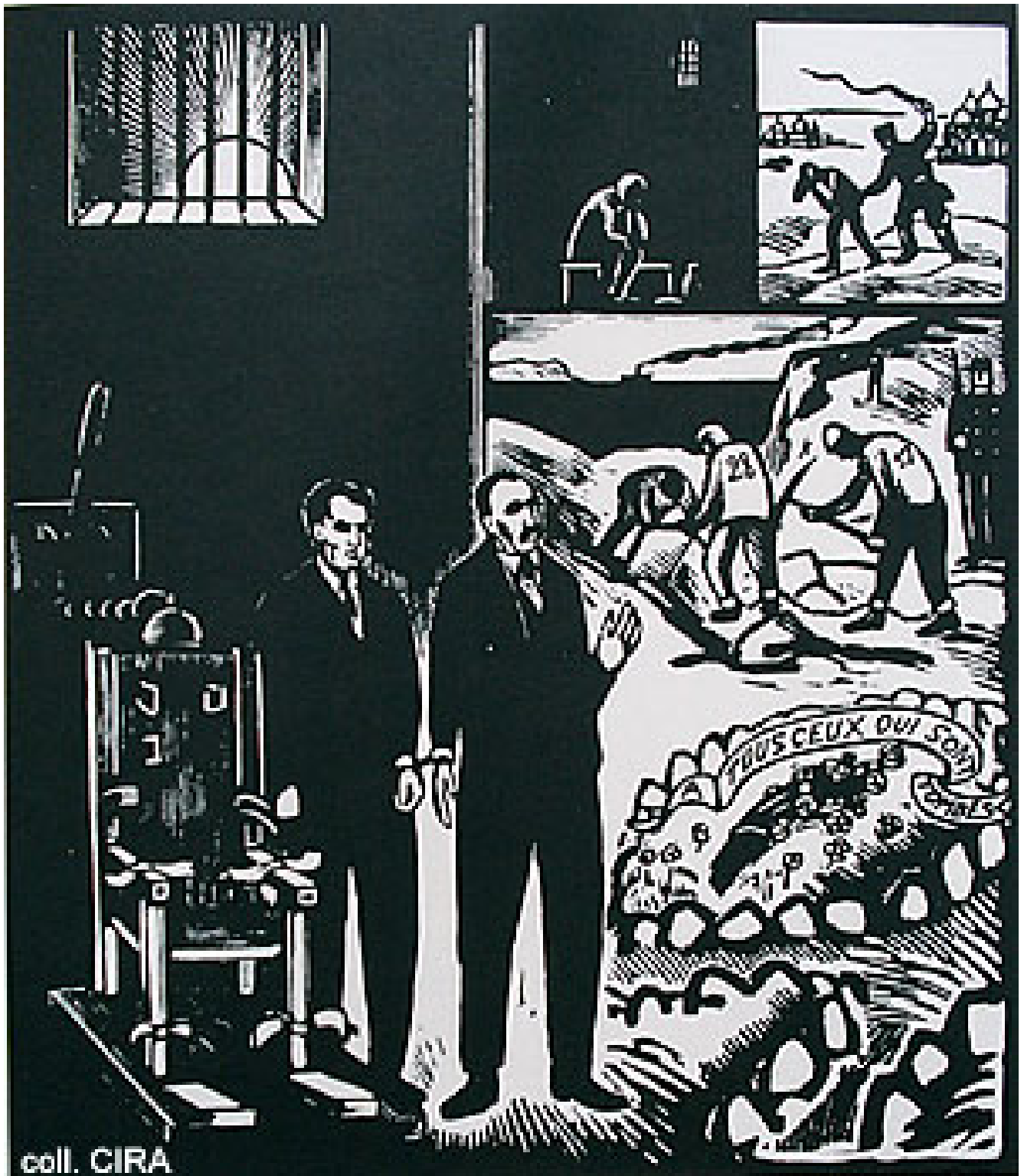
Painted mostly watercolours. To live, he sold paintings that were more in demand than the wood engravings, which were beginning to be pushed aside by photography. From 1908 to 1910, he travelled to Italy (Florence, Rome), Greece, and Egypt. In 1920, he visited Paris and did some painting there. He also organised an exhibition by Swiss artists in Turin.

He came across the writings of Tolstoy and in 1905 wrote him a letter of appreciation. He treasured the reply he received from the Russian writer all of his life.

During the First World War, he gravitated towards the anti-war circles animated by the French writer Romain Rolland, now in exile in Geneva. These circles published several periodicals. Some were illustrated by the Belgian woodcut specialist Frans Masereel (1889-1972). Masereel, on whom we hope to have an article in a future copy of Organise!, was a Belgian

anarchist who had refused conscription and had fled to Switzerland, where he stayed from 1915 until 1921. The two artists met, and Masereel's work had a profound influence on Mairet's own works.

In 1916, Alexander Mairet contributed to the anti-war magazine pacifist Carmel. He then, probably through Masereel, came in contact with the Swiss anarchist circles around Louis (Luigi) Bertoni and Lucien Tronchet. From 1918 to 1930 he illustrated their fortnightly bilingual (French and Italian) newspaper. Bertoni (1872-1947) a typographer, was the founder in 1900 of this publication, Il Risveglio Anarchico /Le Réveil Anarchiste in Geneva. The newspaper had become Le Réveil Anarchiste Communiste in 1913 and from 1 May 1926, Le Réveil Anarchiste. Alexander Mairet created more than forty woodcuts for it. Some of these woodcuts were arranged as short cartoons and they were hard hitting attacks on unemployment,



coll. CIRA

capitalism, religion, and law. Other woodcuts illustrated workers' resistance, scenes from demonstrations and the barricades. Mairet also provided illustrations on the theme of the trial and execution of the Italian-American anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. Between 1917 and 1922 he also contributed to The

New International, journal of the French speaking Swiss Socialist Youth, and then the Vanguard, organ of the Swiss Communist Party.

In 1919, he obtained a position in art history at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Geneva, where he remained until 1946. In 1922,

he was one of the founders of the Association of Painters, Sculptors, and Art Designers of the canton of Geneva, on which he served as secretary. He was much appreciated by other artists because of his warm, loyal, and supportive character, and he never sought titles or honours.

Review:

Decolonizing Anarchism: An antiauthoritarian history of India's liberation struggle

Maia Ramnath. AK Press/Institute of Anarchist Studies. 294 pages £12.00

I tried to like this book but in the end I couldn't.

little or no knowledge of.

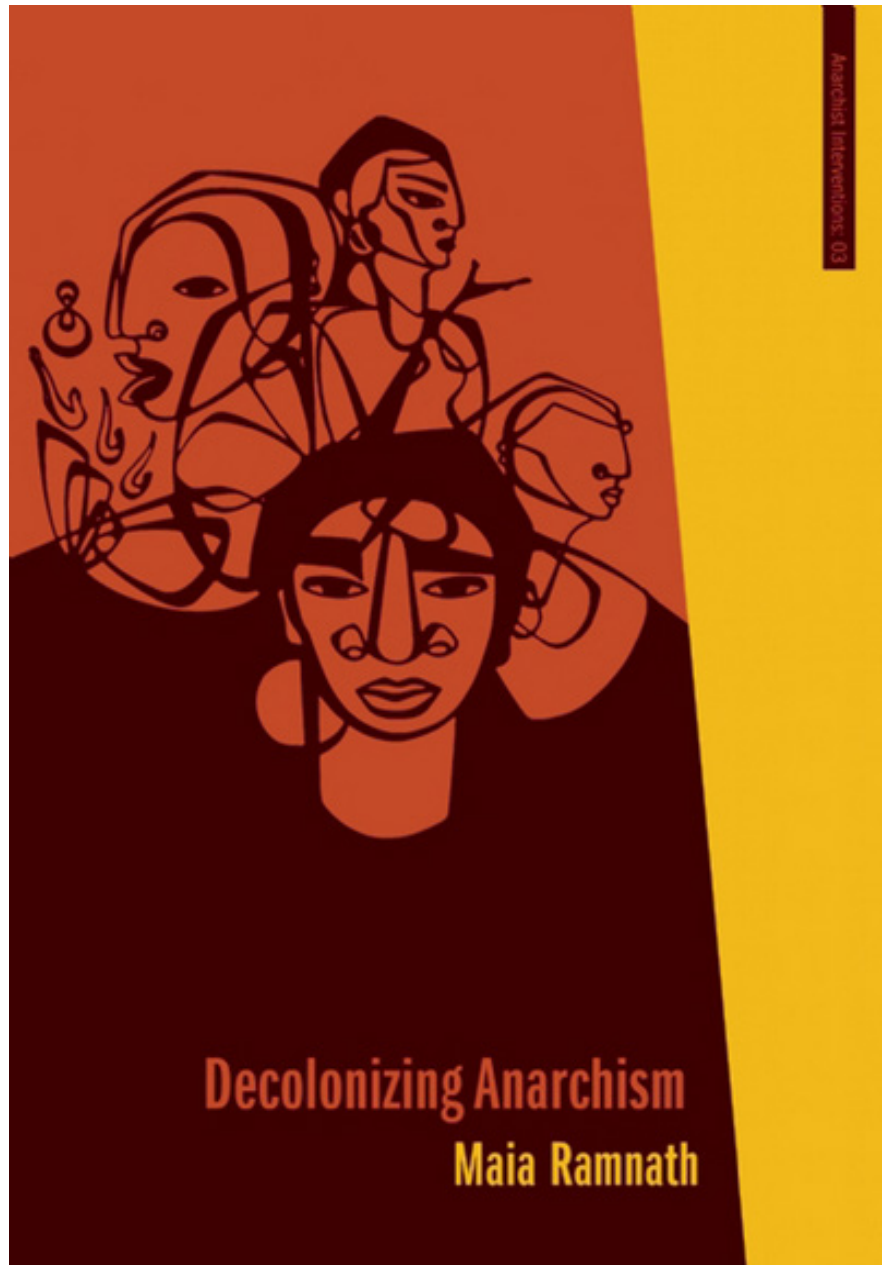
problems here. All of the thinkers described came from upper castes, and the caste system

However there are some

Maia Ramnath makes it clear from the start that she is not looking towards describing what she calls big-A anarchism in South Asia. "The big A covers a specific part of the Western Left tradition dating from key ideological debates in the mid-nineteenth century and factional rivalries in the International Working men's Association. ...the big A opposed not only capitalism but also the centralized state along with all other systems of concentrated power and hierarchy." She states that the motivation for the book was to bring an anarchist approach to anti-colonialism, and an anti-colonial approach to anarchism.

Therefore what she describes are ideas and actions inspired by what she calls little-a anarchism: "towards more dispersed and less concentrated powers; less top-down hierarchy and more self-determination through bottom-up participation" and so forth.

The book is useful for descriptions of social movements and thinkers who opposed the British Raj and sought for emancipation from it, with many figures I had



in India, intertwined with a class system, is very important in acting as a force against equality. Again, all of the thinkers described are male. She herself admits that “the narrative is dominated by male upper-caste voices”. Another problem is her alternative use of the term “Western anarchism” to describe what she otherwise calls the big-A anarchism. Now, whilst it is clear that the present day anarchist movement originated in Western Europe exactly as is described, it managed to spread to Asia, not least to China, Japan, and Korea, where there were quite considerable movements. Anarchists in these places related to local conditions and social problems through an anarchist lens, adapting the key ideas and analysis of anarchism to their own specific circumstances, just as happened with anarchist movements in Latin America.

A specific “big A” anarchist, or rather one who was moving throughout his life towards such a stance was J.P.T. Acharya, and he is given some pages in this book. But as Milan Rai notes in a review of the book for Peace News “A more accurate title would be: ‘Random portraits of some Indian nationalists and radicals who were called “anarchists” by their enemies, and of other Indian nationalists and radicals who called themselves “anarchists”.’ And indeed Ramnath includes the life and ideas of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who whilst he read and dabbled with anarchist ideas in his youth, went on to found the far right Hindu supremacist party Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha (All-Indian Hindu Assembly). Ramnath signally fails to mention Savarkar’s later poisonous career, only touching on the

early libertarian influences in his life.

At the same time the Dravidian activist E.V. Ramasamy- usually known as Periyar- is excluded from this book. Now, Periyar’s politics are problematic but then so are the politics of the majority of those included in this book. But Periyar was a consistent critic of Brahmin domination, especially when his fears about its continuation in the post-Raj Indian state came true. He was also a champion of women’s rights, and his last speech before his death enunciated an increasingly anti-State position. Yet no mention of him in the book. Similarly the various women’s movements that have developed in the sub-continent in response to oppression are not dealt with. Neither is the social organisation of various tribal groups, which bear some consideration. Brian Morris has dealt with the south Indian forest foragers, the Malaipantaram, and their egalitarian and collectivist forms of organisation for example, but there is no mention of such forms of organisation in this book. Similarly a serious study of the various land occupation movements has been omitted.

Ramnath states emphatically that for her, decolonialisation should not be linked to the construction of new nation states and nationalism, and she repeats this several times. However in the fake interview at the end of her book where she poses questions to herself, she answers the questions about how as an anarchist she is seen as supporting national liberation movements by saying “I don’t support demands for statehood, per se.... It’s not the task of an ally to decide what the best alternative is...anarchist allies

of anticolonial struggles have to recognise that the people in question must decide for themselves”. To the following question: “Isn’t that a naïve cop-out, knowing that they plan to create a state?” she fudges the issue by replying: “well, the facts remains that they’re forced to operate within a world of states”. But then aren’t we all, and wouldn’t anarchists on the ground in countries where such a process is happening not raise their voices against such a development.

As I said at the start of this review, I really did try to engage with this book in a positive way. In the end, whilst there is much of interest here, the book is inadequate in both its analysis and its omissions.

Review:

Anarchism in Galicia: Organisation, Resistance and Women in the Underground

Essays by Eliseo Fernandez, Anton Briallos and Carmen Blanco. Edited and translated by Paul Sharkey. Kate Sharpley Library. 58 pages.

This little pamphlet tells the story of the development of anarchism in the northern region of Galicia in Spain in late 19th century up to its repression under the Franco terror.

Fernandez's essay deals with the construction of both the specific anarchist organisation, the Federacion Anarquista Iberica, and the mass anarcho-syndicalist union, the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo. In Galicia, some of the local anarchist groups were reluctant to join a peninsular organisation, as in La Coruna. The problem of anarchist groups not affiliating to the FAI was an ongoing problem. The six-day strike in 1933, which in some areas of Galicia developed into a near-insurrection and ended with several hundred people imprisoned, hit the FAI hard. There were also problems of countering moderate tendencies within the CNT itself. By July 1935 the FAI could count on groups in a dozen towns. The army revolt that broke out in 1936 resulted in fierce opposition in libertarian strongholds like La Coruna, El Ferrol, Verin and Tuy for several days, but by late July Galicia was very much under the Francoist boot. Mass executions

now began although the FAI in El Ferrol managed to go underground with only a handful of their militants murdered. These were two escapes to France in spring and summer 1939 by way of the sea. In Vigo, after fierce resistance, hundreds were shot, including dozens of anarchists.

Several pages give potted biographies of many of the anarchist workers involved in the movement.

The final section deals with the resistance of anarchist women in developing a system of safe houses with the repression. Six thousand women belonged to the CNT in Galicia, and between 2,000 to 2,500 of these in La Coruna, they accounted for 15%-20% of the Galician CNT's membership. Some of these belonged to the FAI, some to the Libertarian Youth (FIJL), some to the FAI's Vanguardia Feminina, and some to the libertarian women's group Mulleres



Libres. With the Francoist terror, a minority continued the resistance. Among those who were murdered because of their continued resistance were Maria Otero Gonzalez, who acted as a resistance runner; Alicia Dorado, who harboured other anarchists; Pilar Fernandez Seijas, another harbourer of other anarchists; and Maria Josefa Becerra Laino. Many other women suffered long prison sentences or years in exile. As Carmen Blanco ends her article: "May these free women, their safe-houses, and the free world within remain in our hearts".

Aims & Principles

1 The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2 Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3 We believe that fighting systems of oppression that divide the working class, such as racism and sexism, is essential to class struggle. Anarchist-Communism cannot be achieved while these inequalities still exist. In order to be effective in our various struggles against oppression, both within society and within the working class, we at times need to organise independently as people who are oppressed according to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability. We do this as working class people, as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for us. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4 We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5 As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6 It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without their use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7 Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be

accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8 Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9 As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

10 We oppose organised religion and cults and hold to a materialist analysis of capitalist society. We, the working class, can change society through our own efforts. Worshipping an unprovable spiritual realm, or believing in a religious unity between classes, mystifies or suppresses such self-emancipation / liberation. We reject any notion that people can be liberated through some kind of supernatural force. We work towards a society where religion is no longer relevant.