

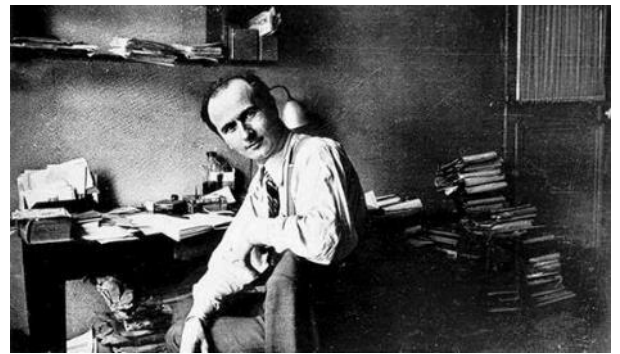
Black Flag

Anarchist Review



The Birth of Revolutionary Anarchism

Camilo Berneri on Marxism



The founding of the International Workers' Association



And much more...

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Editorial

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the 1872 St. Imier Congress of the International Workers' Association which saw the creation of revolutionary anarchism as a specific tendency. To mark this event, we present a summary of events leading up to the conference by Robert Graham plus a selection of the key documents of the federalist wing of the International which shows the actual politics of the libertarians in a clear light. With that in mind, we include a lengthy critique of a book by a Marxist academic seeking, but failing, to do justice to the Association 150 years on.

We then move onto the 100th anniversary of the founding of the syndicalist International Workers' Association, a body still going strong today and uniting syndicalist unions and groups across the globe. We include its first Information Bulletin as it remains an excellent introduction to the ideas of revolutionary syndicalism.

Next, we move onto veteran Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta who was a member of the First International and saw the birth of the Third International and the syndicalist IWA. Ninety years after his death, we reprint an article on his attempts to fight cholera in Naples as well as a selection of articles by one of the greatest thinkers and activists the anarchist movement has ever seen. Wayne Price uses Malatesta's writings on war and self-determination as inspiration for what anarchists should do as regards Russia's imperialism in Ukraine.

Finally, we include texts by another Italian anarchist, Camillo Berneri who was assassinated by the Stalinists during the May Days in 1937. These texts are a taster for the first English-language collection of his texts due to be published by Freedom Press later this year, a collection we hope will show his importance for modern-day anarchists.

Our next issue, due out on the 11th of November, will be a Kropotkin special to mark his birth in 1842.

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

The Birth of Revolutionary Anarchism

Robert Graham

The September 1872 St. Imier Congress of federalist and anti-authoritarian sections and federations of the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), otherwise known as the "First International," marks a watershed moment in the history of socialism and anarchism.

Just over a week earlier, at the Hague Congress of the International (September 2–7, 1872), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had engineered the expulsion of Michael Bakunin and James Guillaume from the International on trumped up grounds, and then had the General Council of the International transferred from London to New York, despite the General Council having been granted increased powers to ensure ideological uniformity. The Hague Congress had also passed a resolution mandating the formation of national political parties for the purpose of achieving political power.

While Marx and Engels' allies at the Hague Congress, notably the French Blanquists (followers of Auguste Blanqui, a radical French socialist who advocated revolutionary dictatorship), had supported the expulsions of Bakunin and Guillaume, they were taken by surprise when Marx and Engels succeeded in transferring the executive power of the International, the General Council, to New York, and had quit the International in disgust. The New York based "International" quickly became an irrelevant rump.

Much to the surprise and consternation of Marx and Engels, far from neutralising the federalist and anarchist elements of the International through the expulsion of Bakunin and Guillaume and the transfer of the General Council to New York, these actions helped solidify support for a reconstituted International that embraced federalist principles and rejected centralised power.

The opponents of the Marxist controlled International were united in their opposition to the concentration of power in the General Council, regardless of whether the Council sat in London or New York. They also shared a commitment to directly democratic federalist forms of organisation.

A majority of the International's sections and federations did not support the resolutions of the Hague Congress. Barely a week after the Hague Congress, several of them held their own congress in St. Imier, Switzerland, where they reconstituted the International independent of the shell organisation now controlled by Marx and Engels through the General Council.

The opponents of the Marxist controlled International were united in their opposition to the concentration of power in the General Council, regardless of whether the Council sat in London or New York. They also shared a commitment to directly democratic federalist forms of organisation. Some were completely opposed to the formation of working class political parties to achieve state

power, while others were opposed to making that a mandatory policy regardless of the views of the membership and local circumstances. The reconstituted anti-authoritarian wing of the International was to have anarchist, syndicalist and, for a time, reformist elements.

The St. Imier Congress began on September 15, 1872, just eight days after the Hague Congress. It was attended by delegates from Spain, France, Italy

and Switzerland, including Guillaume and Adhémar Schwitzguébel from Switzerland; Carlo Cafiero, Errico Malatesta, Giuseppe Fanelli, and Andrea Costa from Italy; Rafael Farga-Pellicer and Tomás González Morago from Spain; and the French refugees, Charles Alerini, Gustave Lefrançais, and Jean-Louis Pindy.¹ Bakunin, although living in Switzerland, attended as an Italian delegate.

A “regional” congress of the Swiss Jura Federation was held in conjunction with the “international” congress, with many of the same delegates, plus members of the Slav Section, such as Zamfir Arbore (who went under the name of Zemphiry Ralli) and other French speaking delegates, including Charles Beslay, an old friend of Proudhon’s who went into exile in Switzerland after the brutal suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871.²

Virtually all of the participants were either anarchists or revolutionary socialist federalists, and many of them went on to play important roles in the development of anarchist and revolutionary socialist movements in Europe.

The assembled delegates adopted a federalist structure for a reconstituted International (or the “anti-authoritarian International”), with full autonomy for the sections, declaring that “nobody has the right to deprive autonomous federations and sections of their incontrovertible right to decide for themselves and to follow whatever line of political conduct they deem best.” For them, “the aspirations of the proletariat can have no purpose other than the establishment of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation, founded upon the labour and equality of all and absolutely independent of all political government.” Consequently, turning the Hague Congress resolution regarding the formation of political parties for the purpose of achieving political power on its head, they proclaimed that “the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat.”³

¹ Jacques Freymond *et al.*, eds., *La première internationale: recueil de documents* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962), Vol. 3: 3.

² Freymond, Vol. 3: 37.

³ Robert Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas: From Anarchy to Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005): 98-99.

⁴ Graham, 2005: 100.

With respect to organised resistance to capitalism, the delegates to the St. Imier Congress affirmed their position that the organisation of labour, through trade unions and other working class forms of organisation, “integrates the proletariat into a community of interests, trains it in collective living and prepares it for the supreme struggle,” through which “the privilege and authority” maintained and represented by the State will be replaced by “the free and spontaneous organisation of labour.”⁴

While the anti-authoritarian Internationalists entertained no illusions regarding the efficacy of strikes in ameliorating the condition of the workers, they regarded “the strike as a precious weapon in the struggle.” They embraced strikes “as a product of the antagonism between labour and capital, the necessary consequence of which is to make workers more and more alive to the gulf that exists between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat,” bolstering their organisations and preparing them “for the great and final revolutionary contest which, destroying all privilege and all class difference, will bestow upon the worker a right to the enjoyment of the gross product of his labours.”⁵

Here we have the subsequent program of anarcho-syndicalism: the organisation of workers into trade unions and similar bodies, based on class struggle, through which the workers will become conscious of their class power, ultimately resulting in the destruction of capitalism and the state, to be replaced by the free federation of the workers based on the organisations they created themselves during their struggle for liberation.

The resolutions from the St. Imier Congress received statements of support from the Italian, Spanish, Jura, Belgian and some of the English speaking American federations of the International, with most of the French sections also approving them.⁶ In Holland, three out of the four Dutch branches sided with the Jura Federation and the St. Imier Congress.⁷ The English Federation, resentful of Marx’s attempts to keep it under his control, rejected “the decisions of the Hague Congress and the so-called General Council of New York.”⁸

While the long-time English member of the

⁵ Graham, 2005: 100.

⁶ James Guillaume, *L’Internationale, documents et souvenirs (1864-1878)* (Paris: Stock, 1910), Vol. 3: 37-47.

⁷ Henryk Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992): 138.

⁸ Guillaume, Vol. 3: 51.

International, John Hales, did not support revolution, he advised the Jura Federation that he agreed with them on “the principle of Federalism.”¹ At a congress of the Belgian Federation in December 1872, the delegates there also repudiated the Hague Congress and the General Council, supporting instead the “defenders of pure revolutionary ideas, Anarchists, enemies of all authoritarian centralisation and indomitable partisans of autonomy.”²

However, there was a tension in the resolutions adopted at the St. Imier Congress. On the one hand, one resolution asserted the “incontrovertible right” of the International’s autonomous federations and sections “to decide for themselves and to follow whatever line of political conduct they deem best.” On the other hand, another resolution asserted that “the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat.”

The resolution regarding the autonomy of the federations and sections in all matters, including political action, was meant to maintain the International as a pluralist federation where each member group was free to follow their own political approach, so that both advocates of participation in electoral activity and proponents of revolutionary change could co-exist.

However, the call for the destruction of all political power expressed an anarchist position. The two resolutions could only be reconciled if the destruction of political power was not necessarily the “first duty of the proletariat,” but could also be regarded as a more distant goal to be achieved gradually, along with “the free and spontaneous organisation of labour.”

The tension between these two resolutions continued to exist within the reconstituted International for several years. James Guillaume

supported political pluralism within the International and sought to convince some of the sections and federations that had gone along with Marx, such as the Social Democrats in Germany, to rejoin the anti-authoritarian International, and to keep the English Internationalists who had rejected Marx’s centralist approach, such as Hales, within the reconstituted International.

Although the German Social Democrats never officially joined the reconstituted International, two German delegates attended the 1874 Brussels Congress. English delegates attended both the September 1873 Geneva Congress and the September 1874 Brussels Congress, where there

was an important debate regarding political strategy, including whether there was any positive role for the state.

The Geneva Congress in September 1873 was the first full congress of the reconstituted International.³ It was attended by delegates from England, France, Spain, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Switzerland. The English delegates, John Hales and Johann Georg Eccarius (Marx’s former lieutenant), had been members of the original International. They were interested in reviving the International as an association of workers’ organisations, and in disavowing the Marxist controlled General Council and International that had been transferred by Marx and

Engels to New York. They had not become anarchists, as Hales made clear by declaring anarchism “tantamount to individualism... the foundation of the extant form of society, the form we desire to overthrow.” Accordingly, from his perspective, anarchism was “incompatible with collectivism” (a term which at the time was synonymous with socialism).⁴

The resolution regarding the autonomy of the federations and sections in all matters, including political action, was meant to maintain the International as a pluralist federation where each member group was free to follow their own political approach

¹ H. Collins and C. Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International* (London: Macmillan, 1965): 270.

² Katz: 138.

³ George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: Meridian, 1962): 291-292.

⁴ Woodcock: 249.

The Spanish delegate, José Garcia Viñas, responded that anarchy did not mean disorder, as the bourgeois claimed, but the negation of political authority and the organisation of a new economic order. Paul Brousse, a French refugee who had recently joined the Jura Federation in Switzerland, agreed, arguing that anarchy meant the abolition of the governmental regime and its replacement by a collectivist economic organisation based on contracts between the communes, the workers and the collective organisations of the workers, a position that can be traced back to Proudhon.¹

Most of the delegates to the Congress were anti-authoritarian federalists, and the majority of them were clearly anarchist in orientation, including “Farga-Pellicer from Spain, Pindy and Brousse from France, Costa from Italy, and Guillaume and Schwitzgubel from Switzerland.”² Also within the anarchist camp were Garcia Viñas from Spain, who was close to Brousse, Charles Alerini, a French refugee now based in Barcelona associated with Bakunin, Nicholas Zhukovsky, the Russian expatriate who remained close to Bakunin, François Dumartheray (1842-1931), another French refugee who had joined the Jura Federation, Jules Montels (1843-1916), a former provincial delegate of the Commune who was responsible for distributing propaganda in France on behalf of the exiled group, the Section of Revolutionary Socialist Propaganda and Action, and two of the Belgian delegates, Laurent Verrycken and Victor Dave.³

The American Federal Council sent a report to the Congress, in which it indicated its support for the anti-authoritarian International. The Americans were in favour of freedom of initiative for the members, sections, branches and federations of the International, and agreed with limiting any general council to purely administrative functions. They felt that it should be up to each group to determine their own tactics and strategies for revolutionary transformation. They concluded their address with “Long live the social revolution! Long live the International.”

At the 1873 Geneva Congress, it was ultimately agreed to adopt a form of organisation based on that followed by the Jura Federation, with a federal bureau to be established that “would be concerned

only with collecting statistics and maintaining international correspondence.” As a further safeguard against the federal bureau coming to exercise authority over the various sections and branches, it was to “be shifted each year to the country where the next International Congress would be held.”⁴

The delegates continued the practice of voting in accordance with the mandates that had been given to them by their respective federations. Because the International was now a federation of autonomous groups, each national federation was given one vote and the statutes were amended to explicitly provide that questions of principle could not be decided by a vote. It was up to each federation to determine its own policies and to implement those decisions of the congress that it accepted.⁵

Eccarius also attended the next Congress in Brussels in September 1874 as the English delegate. He and the two German delegates remained in favour of a workers' state and participation in conventional politics, such as parliamentary elections.

The most significant debate at the Brussels Congress was the one over public services. César De Paepe, on behalf of the Belgians, argued that if public services were turned over to the workers' associations, or “companies,” the people would simply “have the grim pleasure of substituting a worker aristocracy for a bourgeois aristocracy” since the worker companies, “enjoying a natural or artificial monopoly... would dominate the whole economy.” Neither could all public services be undertaken by local communes, since “the most important of them,” such as railways, highways, river and water management, and communications, “are by their very nature fated to operate over a territory larger than that of the Commune.” Such intercommunal public services would therefore have to be run by delegates appointed by the federated communes. De Paepe claimed that the “regional or national Federation of communes” would constitute a “non-authoritarian State... charged with educating the young and centralising the great joint undertakings.”

However, De Paepe took his argument one step further, suggesting that “the reconstitution of society upon the foundation of the industrial group,

¹ Freymond, Vol. 4: 56-57.

² Woodcock: 248.

³ David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism: A Study of the Political Activities of Paul Brousse, 1870-90* (Toronto:

University of Toronto Press, 1971): 28-29 & 49-50; and Freymond, Vol. 4: 6-7.

⁴ Woodcock: 249.

⁵ Freymond, Vol. 4: 81-85.

the organisation of the state from below upwards, instead of being the starting point and the signal of the revolution, might not prove to be its more or less remote result... We are led to enquire whether, before the groupings of the workers by industry is sufficiently advanced, circumstances may not compel the proletariat of the large towns to establish a collective dictatorship over the rest of the population, and this for a sufficiently long period to sweep away whatever obstacles there may be to the emancipation of the working class. Should this happen, it seems obvious that one of the first things which such a collective dictatorship would have to do would be to lay hands on all the public services."

De Paepe's position was opposed by several delegates, including at least one of the Belgians, Laurent Verrycken. He spoke against any workers' state, arguing that public services should be organised by "the free Commune and the free Federation of communes," with the execution of the services being undertaken by the workers who provided them under the supervision of the general association of workers within the Commune, and by the Communes in a regional federation of Communes. Farga Pellicer ("Gomez"), on behalf of the Spanish Federation, said that "for a long time they had generally pronounced themselves in favour of anarchy, such that they would be opposed to any reorganisation of public services that would lead to the reconstitution of the state." For him, a "federation of communes" should not be referred to as a "state," because the latter word represented "the political idea, authoritarian and governmental," as De Paepe's comments regarding the need for a "collective dictatorship" revealed.

The most vocal opponent of De Paepe's proposal was Schwitzguébel from the Jura Federation. He argued that the social revolution would be accomplished by the workers themselves "assuming direct control of the instruments of labour;" thus, "right from the first acts of the Revolution, the practical assertion of the principle of autonomy and federation... becomes the basis of all social combination," with "all State institutions," the means by "which the bourgeoisie sustains its privileges," foundering in the "revolutionary storm." With "the various trades bodies" being "masters of the situation," having "banded together freely for revolutionary action,

the workers will stick to such free association when it comes to organisation of production, exchange, commerce, training and education, health, and security."

On the issue of political action, the Belgian delegates to the Brussels Congress continued to advocate working outside of the existing political system, albeit partly because they did not yet have universal suffrage in Belgium. Nevertheless, they claimed they did not expect anything from the suffrage or from parliament, and that they would continue to organise the workers into the trades bodies and federations through which the working class would bring about the social revolution, revealing that, as a group, the Belgian Federation did not yet share De Paepe's doubts that the free federation of the producers would not be the means, but only the result, of a revolution.

The French delegate indicated that the French Internationalists remained anti-political, seeking to unite the workers "through incessant propaganda," not to conquer power, but "to achieve the negation of all political government," organising themselves for "the true social revolution."

The Congress ultimately declared that it was up to each federation and each democratic socialist party to determine for themselves what kind of political approach they should follow. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that as of September 1874, the majority of the anti-authoritarian International continued to embrace an anarchist or revolutionary syndicalist position. At the end of the 1874 Brussels Congress, the delegates issued a manifesto confirming their commitment to collectivism, workers' autonomy, federalism and social revolution; in a word, nothing less than the original goal of the International itself: "the emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves."

By the time of the October 1876 Bern Congress, the English had ceased participating in the anti-authoritarian International. The debate over the "public service" state continued, with De Paepe now openly advocating that the workers "seize and use the powers of the State" in order to create a socialist society.¹ Most of the delegates rejected De Paepe's position, including Guillaume and Malatesta.²

Malatesta argued for "the complete abolition of the state in all its possible manifestations."³ While

¹ Stafford: 72.

² Guillaume, Vol. 4: 104.

³ Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009): 114.

Guillaume and some of the other veteran anti-authoritarians liked to avoid the “anarchist” label, Malatesta declared that “Anarchy, the struggle against all authority ... always remains the banner around which the whole of revolutionary Italy rallies.”¹ Both Malatesta and Guillaume made clear that in rejecting the state, even in a “transitional” role, they were not advocating the abolition of public services, as De Paepe implied, but their reorganisation by the workers themselves.²

In September 1877, the anti-authoritarian International held a congress in Verviers, Belgium, which was to be its last. Guillaume and Peter Kropotkin, now a member of the Jura Federation, attended from Switzerland. The French refugees, Paul Brousse and Jules Montels, also attended. In addition, there were Garcia Viñas and Morago from Spain. Otto Rinke and Emil Werner, both anarchists, “represented sections in both Switzerland and Germany, while there was a strong delegation from the Verviers region, the last stronghold of anarchism in Belgium.”³ Costa represented Greek and Egyptian socialists who were unable to attend, as well as the Italian Federation.⁴

De Paepe did not attend the Congress, as he was preparing for his rapprochement with social democracy and parliamentary politics at the World Socialist Congress that was about to begin in Ghent. In anticipation of the Ghent Congress, the delegates to the Verviers Congress passed several resolutions emphasising the limited bases for cooperation between the now predominantly anarchist oriented anti-authoritarian International

and the social democrats. For the Verviers delegates, collective property, which they defined as “the taking of possession of social capital by the workers’ groups” rather than by the State, was an immediate necessity, not a “far-off ideal.”⁵

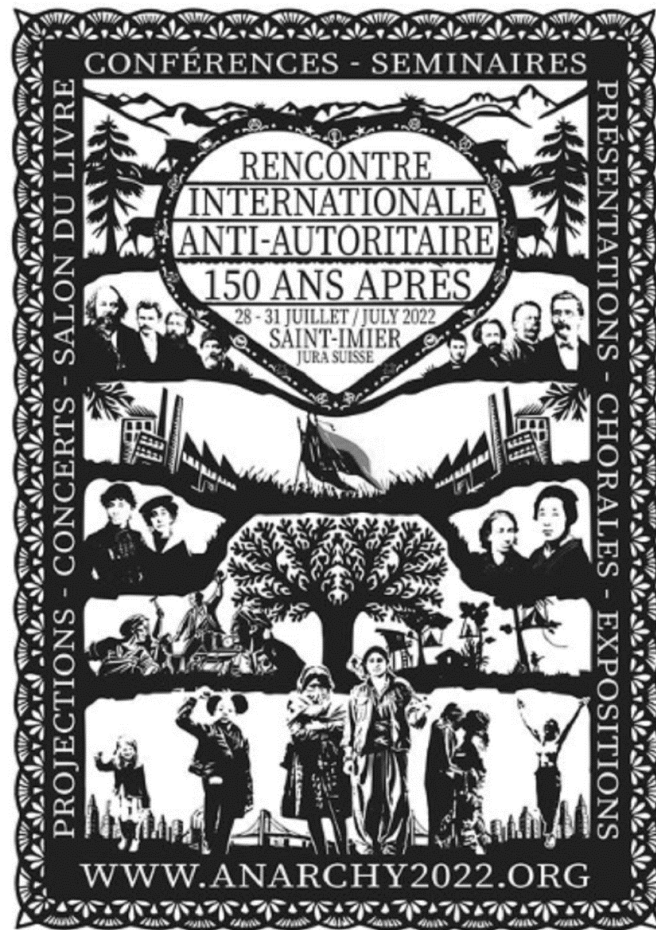
On the issue of political action, the delegates indicated that class antagonism could not be resolved by government or some other political power, but only “by the unified efforts of all the exploited against their exploiters.” They vowed to

combat all political parties, regardless of “whether or not they call themselves socialists,” because they did not see electoral activity as leading to the abolition of capitalism and the state. While the majority of the delegates therefore supported anti-parliamentary socialism, none of the policies endorsed at the congresses of the reconstituted International were binding on the International’s member groups, who remained free to adopt or reject them.

With respect to trade union organisation, the delegates confirmed their view that unions that limit their demands to improving working

conditions, reducing the working day and increasing wages, “will never bring about the emancipation of the proletariat.” Trade unions, to be revolutionary, must adopt, “as their principal goal, the abolition of the wage system” and “the taking of possession of the instruments of labour by expropriating them” from the capitalists.⁶

Unsurprisingly, despite Guillaume’s hopes for reconciliation between the social democratic and revolutionary anarchist wings of the socialist



¹ Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 37-38.

² Guillaume, Vol. 4: 104.

³ Guillaume, Vol. 4: 258; Cahm: 308, fn. 41; Stafford: 94-95.

⁴ Guillaume, Vol. 4: 258.

⁵ Guillaume, Vol. 4: 263.

⁶ Guillaume, Vol. 4: 264.

movement, no such reconciliation was reached at the Ghent Congress, or at any subsequent international socialist congresses, with the so-called “Second International” finally barring anarchist membership altogether at its 1896 international congress in London.¹

Despite the formal position taken at the St. Imier Congress regarding the freedom of each member group of the reconstituted International to determine its own political path, reaffirmed at the 1873 Geneva Congress, because the majority of the delegates to the anti-authoritarian International’s congresses, and its most active members, were either anarchists or revolutionary socialists opposed to participation in electoral politics, it was not surprising that eventually those in favour of parliamentary activity would find other forums in which to participate, rather than continuing to debate the issue with people who were not committed to an electoral strategy.

Only a minority of member groups in the reconstituted International ever supported or came to support a strategy oriented toward achieving political power – the English delegates, a few of the German delegates who did not officially represent any group, and then a group of Belgians, with the Belgian Federation being split on the issue. Other than the debate on the “public service state,” which again only a minority of delegates supported, most of the discussions at the reconstituted International’s congresses focused on tactics and strategies for abolishing the state and capitalism through various forms of direct action, in order to achieve “the free and spontaneous organisation of labour” that the St. Imier Congress had reaffirmed as the International’s ultimate goal.

For example, there were ongoing debates within the reconstituted International regarding the role and efficacy of strikes and the use of the general strike as a means for overthrowing the existing order. Any kind of strike activity had the potential to harm the electoral prospects of socialist political parties, an issue that had arisen in the Swiss Romande Federation prior to the split in the original International. Once the focus becomes trying to elect as many socialist or workers’ candidates as possible to political office in order to eventually form a government, the trade unions and other workers’ organisations are then pressured to tailor their tactics to enhance the prospects of the political parties’ electoral success. Both the

immediate and long term interests of the workers become subordinate to the interests of the political parties.

After socialist parties were established in western Europe in the 1880s, and workers began to see how their interests were being given short shrift, there was a resurgence in autonomous revolutionary trade union activity, leading to the creation of revolutionary syndicalist movements in the 1890s. Some of the syndicalist organisations, such as the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), adopted an “apolitical” stance, similar to the official stance of the reconstituted International. The CGT was independent of the political parties but members were free to support political parties and to participate in electoral activities, just not in the name of the CGT. Independence from the political parties was an essential tenet of the original CGT, so that it could pursue its strategy of revolutionary trade union organisation and direct action unimpeded by the demands and interests of the political parties.

It is not fair to hold the anarchists and anti-parliamentary revolutionary socialists in the reconstituted International responsible for the exit of the groups that had decided to focus on electoral activity. The majority of the Belgian Internationalists would have changed their strategy from supporting an international federation of autonomous workers’ organisations to supporting the Belgian Socialist party regardless of the refusal of the anarchist and revolutionary socialist members of the reconstituted International to agree with such an approach.

The majority of those who chose to remain active in the reconstituted International based on the resolutions adopted at the St. Imier Congress believed above all that the International should not only remain independent of the socialist political parties, but that the International should continue to pursue its goal of achieving “the free and spontaneous organisation of labour” through the workers’ own autonomous organisations, free of political interference and control. For those who chose instead to throw their lot in with the political parties, there really wasn’t much reason for them to remain involved in such an organisation, even though there was no formal bar to their continued membership and participation. It was simply time for them to part ways.

¹ Woodcock: 263-264.

Reports, Resolutions and Discussions of the International

Report of the Brussels Section

Brussels Congress, 6-13 September 1868

Le Livre bleu de l'Internationale, rapports et documents officiels lus aux Congrès de Lausanne, Bruxelles et Bade par le Conseil général de Londres et par les délégués de toutes les sections de l'Internationale (Paris, 1871)

We must first declare that in our eyes the strike is not a solution, even partial, for the great problem of the extinction of poverty, but we believe that it is an instrument of struggle whose use will definitely lead towards the solution of this problem. This is why we believe we must respond to exclusive co-operators who see no serious movement amongst workers other than consumer, credit and producer societies and who in particular regard the strike as useless, or even as disastrous to the interests of the workers. We believe that it is necessary here to distinguish between types of strikes, both from the point of view of the organisation of the strike and from the point of view of the goal it pursues; but before coming to that, we want to answer two objections that have been made against strikes in general.

And we first find the objection of Adam Smith, an objection so often repeated both by economists and by socialists.

The former, in fact, made use of this objection to turn workers away from any struggle with the bosses and to induce the workers to submit to the inflexibility of economic laws; the latter have used it as a weapon against the present social order, in which they claim that the proletariat absolutely cannot break any of the links of his long chain.

Here is this objection: "In all such disputes," says Adam Smith, "the masters can hold out much longer. A landlord, a farmer, a master manufacturer, or merchant, though they did not employ a single workman, could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they have already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist

a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year without employment. In the long-run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate."¹

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Those who today repeat these words of the father of political economy seem to have not noticed the immense economic evolution which has been accomplished since the time when Adam Smith wrote; the economic state in which Adam Smith lived is no longer completely identical to the one in which we live. On the one hand, the individual, isolated struggle of the wage-worker against the capitalist has been replaced by the collective struggle of workers' associations. On the other hand, in a large number of industries, the employer, the boss, the master manufacturer, has been replaced by the association of capitalists, either in the form of the public limited company or in another form, and this elimination of the [individual] employer is even one of the most marked and most remarkable tendencies of the

economic period that we are going through at the moment.

Now, from the first point of view, if it is true that an isolated worker, left to himself, can rarely go a week without working and even more rarely a month, this is no longer the same when we consider a workers' association that has consulted well in advance and that can count not only on its own funds but also on the aid of other workers' associations. From the second point of view, if it is true that up to a certain point that in Smith's time an owner, a farmer, a master manufacturer, could generally remain a year or two

¹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book I, Chapter VIII: Of the Wages of Labour. (*Black Flag*)

without making his workers toil, it is no longer the case when we consider a limited company, the capital of which would swiftly withdraw if it ceased for some time to produce absolutely no interest; and moreover, even for the employer or for the capitalist who finds himself at the head of an industry, we can say that what Adam Smith says is not accurate, this boss or this capitalist not only having to live off the funds that he might have in his possession, but also having to meet his commitments both vis-à-vis his creditors and suppliers of raw materials and vis-à-vis his customers. Also, see how the facts increasingly show a striking contradiction to Smith's observations, in the proportion as the interests of an industrial establishment become more closely linked to the interests of others, and as the alliance and agreement amongst workers becomes more widespread. If we can still cite a good number of strikes where the bosses triumphed over the workers' demands, it is by the thousands that we can cite those where the workers ended up triumphing over the opposition of the bosses.

Certain opponents of the strike, who are most often theoretical and non-practical men, have made another general objection against the strike. They deplore the time lost by striking workers; that is, they say, stopping production as if there were a lack of products! They also add that when the worker remains inactive for eight or fifteen days, he does not consume less. This language is quite simply ridiculous, when we think that there are men in society who have not, during their entire existence, produced anything whatsoever, that is to say not a quarter of an hour of work. Have they, these opponents, even thought for a moment about the number of hours producers work each day? Thus we can, with the certainty of not being contradicted, say that most workers do not work one day a day, but a day and a half. Let us mention the miners, who go down into the pit at 5 o'clock in the morning and do not come out until 10 o'clock in the evening. If the observation of these men were justified, we would be led to reproach the worker for the time he loses when illness keeps him bed, when he still consumes but does not produce.

But we would like to know if the work which has not been done does not remain to be done? Opponents of the strike could respond to this remark, if they were given the opportunity to prove that the producers are not sometimes forced to be idle against their will. Are they unaware that, in almost all professions, there are what are called dead seasons? And, apart from these dead seasons, do we not regularly have idleness due simply to overproduction, to a congestion of unsold products? But when the observations of our opponents are well-founded, that should not prevent workers from going on strike, for the very simple reason that it is better to go down a bad path than to fall into a precipice.

Indeed, assuming that there is a strike because the bosses want to reduce wages or increase the hours of

work, or because the workers want to increase wages or decrease the hours, the producer loses his time and his money but does he not regain both when the strike succeeds? If he only gets a reduction of one hour of work, does that not give him at least 300 hours a year? One fact is constant, that the trades which have no enduring organisation for a strike, no resistance societies, are in a deplorable state, while in those where this exists, the workers are not only happier from the point of view of earnings but also less harshly treated.

We said that it was necessary to distinguish between types of strike, both from the point of view of the organisation of the strike and from the point of view of the goal it pursues.

From the first point of view, that of the organisation required by the strike, it seems obvious to us that any strike that is poorly planned and badly led means that resources have not been calculated well, or that the timing was not favourable, and has very little chance of succeeding; now any strike that does not succeed is an immense disaster for the worker, because it is a loss of funds, because of the costs it necessitates and the idleness it causes, because it discourages all subsequent attempts, because in the end it belittles the man and deprives the workers of something of his pride and dignity. But it is precisely for this reason that we believe that the strike must cease to be a haphazard war, strife for the workers, but must be well organised, properly considered in advance and prepared for a long time.

From the second point of view, that is to say with respect to the particular goal which the strike may propose to attain, we find there is still a matter to be distinguished. Indeed, the purpose of a strike may be: either a demand for wages, or the refusal to accept a reduction in wages, or a demand for a reduction in working hours, or the refusal to accept an increase in working hours, or the abolition of workplace regulations prejudicial to the dignity of the workers, or the improvement of health and safety conditions in certain workshops or certain mines, or the refusal to work with defective tools or with raw materials of poor quality, the use of which may constitute a loss for the worker, or the intention of opposing the violation of contracts made with employers (as happened a year ago with the cotton dyers' strike in Amiens), or the plan to thwart the machinations of the heads of industry against the very existence of the Workers' Associations (as happened with the last strike of the Parisian bronzers and the strike of the fabric printers of Roubaix), or even opposition against the introduction of too many apprentices into the workshops.

When the aim of the strike is a wage increase, we know all the objections. There are usually two objections to these sorts of strikes. Here is the first:

Ricardo, McCulloch and many other economists claim that the wage rate is invariably fixed by the price of necessities. The higher the cost of subsistence, the higher the wages; the cheaper the food, the lower the wages.

Such is the inflexible law which, according to these economists, governs the rate of wages, and the demands and efforts of the workers can do nothing against the fatality of this law.

“Let bread drop by 5 centimes per kilogramme, with the current constitution of industry,” say M. Michel Chevalier, “it will not take six months for wages to have undergone a roughly equivalent reduction.” And it is not only economists who have affirmed the existence of this inevitable law, most socialist writers – Vidal, Pecqueur, both De Potters, Colins, etc. – also recognise it, not, it is true, by regarding it as an eternal law (this would be incomprehensible amongst socialists), but as an inevitable consequence of the present social order. “Today,” says Vidal, “the minimum subsistence is the normal wage of wages. Wages inevitably gravitate towards this minimum, like a liquid towards its level: it is the law.”

This would perhaps be the time to say a word about the alleged inflexibility of economic laws; but we will speak of this later in connection with another objection. Be that as it may, many economists – Adam Smith, Stuart Mill, Dunoyer, Carey, Bastiat, Baudrillard, etc. – deny the so-called law of McCulloch and Ricardo, and they seem to us to be perfectly correct. We are not suggesting that the cost of subsistence has absolutely no influence on the rate of wages, but we maintain that this influence is sometimes in the relation expressed by McCulloch’s law, sometimes it is found to be in a diametrically inverse relation. Let us explain: When the cost of subsistence increases, there is usually a slowing down in the activity of a host of industries, because the money of consumers then goes above all to objects of first necessity, and it may then be that the worker, by asking for an increase in wages, because this wage is no longer in relation to the price of subsistence, will obtain the increase requested, it may also be that the slowing down of industry, the lack of orders precisely means that the bosses can do without a good part of their workers. By contrast, when the cost of subsistence falls, industry resumes, and then certainly the desire to lower wages may exist amongst the employers, but the demand for labour rising, the worker is better able than ever to increase his wages, which is precisely the opposite of McCulloch’s law. And this is what indeed happens; but, of course, when the workers reach an agreement, they unite, for if they were to wait for the wage increase from the free play of economic laws, they might wait a long time.

Moreover, a simple glance at the facts suffices to demonstrate that the dependence of the phenomenon of

the rate of wages on the cost of subsistence is not very close.

An example: The wages of labour have hardly changed in the last ten or twenty years in a host of occupations, while in others wages have fallen steadily. The cost of subsistence generally varies from one year to another, even from one month to another, and taking subsequent years, we can even say that the cost of subsistence is constantly increasing.

Another example: In many industries there is a difference between summer wages and winter wages; as business often picks up around the summer in these industries, wages are higher in summer; and yet because of the greater expenses of heat, light, clothing, and food in winter than in summer, the wages should be higher. From all this, we can conclude that McCulloch’s law is false, and that it does not deserve the name of an economic law, since not only is it not the generalisation of a constant fact, but that it is not even a simple tendency, is not even a limiting law.

So popular common-sense has never taken it into account.

Now here is the second objection: The price of any product, it is said, is made up of two things: on the one hand, of the wages of the workers; on the other hand, deductions from capital (that is to say, interest, dividends, bosses’ income, middlemen’s profit, etc.). Now, with one of the two components of the product increasing, the [price of the] product itself increases, and consequently when wages rise, the price of the articles of consumption rises; then, the other factor of the product soon rises in its turn, because the strike, by raising wages, has caused the price of consumer goods to rise, this increase in price brings as a backlash an increase in the price of rents, leases and capital, and this rise in rents, leases and interest leads in turn to a new increase in the cost of products, since the income of capital, as stated above, forms with the remuneration granted to labour, the price of any product. Thus, it is said, the gap between the value of wages and the price of consumer goods is no less great after a strike than before. Finally it is concluded that the strike for wage increases is useless, to say the least, even when it succeeds.

Certainly, we are far from concealing from ourselves the gravity of this objection; we even recognise its correctness for a large number of cases; but the conclusions drawn from it seem to us too absolute.

We will not dispute this sort of economic law, by virtue of which it is claimed that when one element of a product increases, the total price of the product tends to increase. But we will observe that this law is, like other economic laws, only a *tendential* law, that is to say one that is stopped in practice by a host of modifying causes. Indeed, each science has its own particular laws, and these laws are all the closer to the absolute as the

science is simpler, as the phenomena to be observed are less complicated.

In mechanics, for example, the scientific laws are almost identified with the very expression of the facts; but in biology, and especially in social science, it is necessary to take into account a mass of variations depending on the surroundings and circumstances. It is the same with the famous law of *supply* and *demand*, which we are far from contesting, but which is nevertheless neutralised by a host of economic facts; the same is true of the law relating to the prices of products which we are currently examining.

If we consider a society where there are only workers without middlemen or capitalists, certainly any increase in the cost of labour would lead to an increase in the price of the product, since labour, in this case, is the sole element of the value. If we consider a society where there would no longer be middlemen between workers and capitalists, where all capital would be represented by stock without interest and dividends, and all work by a labour force paid wages, the economic law that we are examining would no longer express itself so close to an absolute truth as in the preceding case but it would be closer to it than it is today. Indeed, if in this case wages increased in any industry, there would be a marked tendency for the interest and dividends of capital to increase, because without that capital would soon be directed towards industries where the rent of capital is better paid, capital being blind by nature and having no more preference for one industry than for another.

But that is not the case today. Taking the current organisation of society, we say that the fact of the increase in the price of products after a rise in wages is nothing less than a general fact, and we will cite a few examples to support what we are saying:

1st Example: The competition that the boss is forced to maintain does not always allow him to increase his profits in proportion to the increase in wages, and then the increase in the price of products does not take place; the increase in wages is taken in this case from the boss's profits, which decrease by the same amount.

2nd Example: Apart from the profits taken by the bosses, it often occurs that salesmen or even those who only procure the order receive 5, 10, 15, 20 and even 25% on the sale.

After that stipulate, in a clear and frank manner, that the price of a product will have to be increased, because we have increased the daily wage of the worker by a few centimes, as if the wage increase in this case, even without being taken from the boss's profits, could not be taken from a part of the percent of salesmen and other middlemen.

3rd Example: When the increase in wages takes place in an industry which enjoys a monopoly (legal or natural, it matters not), and in which consequently the profits of capital are very high because of the lack of competition, it may be that, notwithstanding the rise in wages, the said profits are still higher in the said industry than in any other; then capital will not go elsewhere, and it is possible that the boss will not raise the product's price; in fear that this increase in the product will lead to a decrease in consumption and consequently sales, in accordance with this economic law:

“When the price of a product rises arithmetically, the consumption of that product tends to decrease in a geometric progression.”

4th Example: When the rise in wages coincides with a reduction in the cost of production, the latter, which without this rise would only have increased the boss's profits, can take place exclusively to the advantage of the workers, if the increase in wages is strictly proportional to the saving obtained, or to the advantage of both the worker and boss, if the saving in costs is greater in the other case, there is no reason for the price of the products to increase.

As for the strike opposing the introduction of apprentices into workshops, that is a very delicate issue. There are professions in which the workers are systematically opposed to taking on apprentices, as they fear seeing these apprentices, who have become workers in their turn, compete with them on the labour market; we understand this fear, but we cannot approve of the measure which it dictated to certain trade-unions

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[corporations]; the children of the people, thus rejected from certain industries, fall back on others, and then one of two things occur: either these industries accept them, and then find themselves one fine day overcrowded with hands; or else they spurn them, and then where will the child learn to work?

If it is just that the worker has a fair wage, that he has the right to live whilst working, the apprentice also has the right to learn to work in order to live.

We do not want monopoly wherever it comes from, and we will protest just as much against workers who want to monopolise work in their hands as against the idlers who have monopolised capital and property in their hands. Our motto is: *Justice above all and for all.*

But if it is right that the child of the people should be able to learn a trade, is it right that he should do so to the detriment of the very same, that is to say of the worker? No, obviously.

Well, this is the crux of the matter. At present, in many occupations, apprentices are like machines, which, by operating exclusively for the benefit of the bosses, are detrimental to the workers; that is to say, the machine eliminates jobs, and apprentices, after having learned under the eyes and by the advice of comrades, do the work at a price lower than that required for experienced workers. This is the evil of which the worker complains.

For us, this question of apprenticeship will only find its definitive solution in the solution of another question which is also on the agenda of this Congress; we speak of integral education, comprising the full and concurrent teaching of the sciences and trades. Apart from mutual education, another solution to this question of apprentices may lie in the generalisation of productive associations, associations where the apprentices, instead of constituting a benefit for the boss as today, work on behalf of the associated workers; just as the machine, which today also constitutes an advantage for the boss, would also work for the associated workers. But in the meantime, could not the resistance societies reach a very current and immediate solution to this question?

Could it not be that the work of the apprentice was counted, by the boss, as having been done by the workers? These, after having paid the apprentice what is due him, would pay the difference to the resistance society. Already, in several professions, a similar method is in use. Let us cite as examples the cigar makers, who each have an apprentice at their own expense, and the tailors, who have a particular expression to describe theirs: they give it the nickname *beef*.

If this system could be adopted, the obvious result would be that the worker, no longer having to fear competition from the apprentice, would devote more time to showing him how to carry out the work, and would very probably end up by making him a more

perfect worker than those who emerge from the current organisation. This would therefore be beneficial for both the worker and the apprentice. To finish this point, we conclude:

- that a strike conducted with a view to systematically opposing any introduction of apprentices is not legitimate;
- that a strike conducted with a view to opposing the introduction of apprentices to do the work of workers at a lower cost can be considered legitimate, but that it is nevertheless then a matter of seeking a grouping which will allow the child of the people to learn his trade without harming the interests of the experienced worker.

As for strikes which aim to lighten the stupefying work of 15 to 16 hours a day and literally killing the workers in his body and his intelligence, and as for those which have as their object the abolition of regulations prejudicial to dignity, or to remind bosses of their commitments, or to oppose the coalition of the masters against the workers' right of association, who would dare to challenge its perfect legitimacy and high morality? In this case, the cessation of work does not seem to us only a right, it is a duty.

We believe we have sufficiently demonstrated that the strike can therefore offer unquestionable advantages. But, in our opinion, strikes must be subject to certain conditions, not only of justice and legitimacy, but also of opportunity and organisation. Hence, for the question of opportunity, it is easy to understand that such and such a season, for example, may be more favourable to the success of the strike than another. As for the question of organisation, we believe that the strike must be conducted by resistance societies.

Without this, while sometimes necessary, strikes will constantly run the risk of going against the interests of the workers and will almost always lead to unrest, which are more vulgarly labelled, with malevolent intention, with the title of riots.

And how could it be otherwise? The law forbade the workers to gather around the establishments where work had ceased, and the workers having been unable to agree beforehand to choose delegates who combined the qualities necessary for an approach to be made with the bosses (that is to say, the decorum, the social skills which does not come from instruction but the education, the insight and the fortitude of character which are the result of knowledge of right and justice), the workers, we say, will gather in front of the establishments or the residence of the boss and will form, whatever we do or say, a tumultuous assembly that the bosses will not want to listen to. From there, persecutions, in a word, repression, which with a sensible organisation of resistance societies we could easily avoid. This is what the coal miners of the Charleroi basin understood; after having conducted so many unorganised strikes and,

consequently, riots, they have just started seriously onto a new path, that is to say, with the creation of resistance societies, and the basin on Charleroi is already covered with these sorts of societies.

The strike, without a resistance society, still offers many inconveniences and great injustices from the point of view of reciprocity and dignity. Indeed, without organisation can there be the certainty of seeing, in the event of a strike by one category of workers who have contributed to supporting a strike of another category, the certainty of seeing, we say, this mutuality established in a fair and equitable manner?

To go on strike without a resistance society is to want to undertake an unequal struggle; the bosses being few in number, favoured by fortune and protected by power, will always easily agree. It is, in a word, war without tactics or ammunition.

However, let there be no mistake about the significance of our words; despite all we have just said against the strike not organised by a resistance society, we maintain that it is just, legitimate and necessary, when agreements are violated by the employer, and that it may then be attempted notwithstanding the chances of failure. Is it not always grand and beautiful to see the slave protest against barbaric and inhuman actions? And what action can be more barbaric and inhuman than that which consists in constantly cutting the ration of those who already live only on deprivation?

In the presence of low wages in certain industries (in the big factories and in the coal mines, for example), in the presence of the great centralisation of capital which means that the capitalists are there in permanent coalition to reduce the workers to the last extremity, in the presence of the enormous capital which these workers would require to operate by themselves vast factories or collieries, and in the absence of any organisation of credit which could facilitate the creation of production association in these industries, we ask, what other weapon than the strike, even without organisation, has been left to these proletarians against the indefinite reduction of the wage? Is it better for them to starve to death at work, without uttering a cry of indignation and without making any effort to rise up?

Well, even if it is proved, as 2 and 2 make 4, that the strike in this case cannot give the workers any improvement, at least it should be accepted as the supreme protest of the disinherited against the vices of our social organisation.

We said at the start of this report that the strike can be useful and necessary; that, consequently, we are

supporters of resistance societies in order to give to strikes resources and a wise and energetic direction.

Yes, despite our desire and the certainty that we cherish of one day seeing the social order completely transformed, that is to say the abolition of the exploitation of man by man, replaced by the equal exchange of products and reciprocity between producers, we maintain that it is necessary to establish resistance societies, as long as there are categories of workers whose complete liberation is currently impossible. Example: miners, whose instrument of work or raw material can hardly be acquired; navvies, who would require

enormous capital to perform their transformations, etc. We again support this necessity, because while founding production associations, it will be take, with the current organisation of credit, some time for each of the different professions to acquire the instruments of labour that could require the use of many arms, and because, during the time required to create the necessary capital, the exploiters could reduce wages in such a way that the worker, instead of being able to save enough for his down payment, would fall into the situation of a man who does not know how to meet his commitments.

The resistance society is again necessary because it inspires a certain fear in the exploiter. The latter, when he is not quite sure of success, will be careful not to violate conventions, knowing that he would lose his authority in the case of the failure of his arbitrary attempt. This remark is so true that it can be applied to the exploited. In fact, workers who are forced to return to work which they initially refused because the wage had been reduced, feel the authority exerted over them by the disdainful exploiter much more when need forces them to return, crestfallen, into this prison, which should be a place of happiness and satisfaction for the

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hard-working man since that is where life, wealth and well-being come from.

The resistance society is of indisputable necessity, as long as the exploitation of man by man remains, as long as the idlers take anything from the work of others. It is necessary not only in view of what we have said, but also because it is only through it that the bosses and the workers will know who they are dealing with in the person of those who come to ask for work. The Association gives each of its members a certificate of morality and honesty. The employer and the worker will know that the Association keeps in its midst only workers free from all taint.

One of the causes of the steady decline of the price of labour, we may also mention, is that unemployed workers go from house to house offering their arms, and thus give the exploiter the idea that there is a greater abundance of unemployed men than there really are. Through association, demands for workers should be made directly to the committees which could still send workers only where the need arises.

Finally, apart from its usefulness for strikes, the placement of workers, etc., the society for maintaining prices is also useful through one of its complementary institutions, namely the insurance fund against unemployment, an essential complement to the resistance fund itself. Indeed, if it is necessary that the association raises funds to provide for the existence of its members in the case of strikes, that is to say, unemployment as a result of a dispute with the bosses, it is at least as useful for it to do the same for unforeseen cases of unemployment due to more or less temporary industrial crises.

If strikes, in order to be successful, need to be made and directed by resistance societies, in turn the resistance societies will be serious only when they are all federated, not only in a trade and in a country, but between countries and between trades; hence the need for an international federation.

It will not be out of place to give a word of explanation here. Thus, it will be easy to understand that a resistance society, although having succeeded in a locality in rallying all the workers of the same profession, will have done nothing stable and salutary unless the boss can find neither in neighbouring localities, neither in the country nor outside, the workers he may need to replace those who have stopped work for a legitimate reason. Already, without speaking of the English trade-unions amongst which federation has existed for a long time, a good number of trades have understood the necessity to federate from one town to another in the same country; let us mention, in Belgium, the typographical associations, which are all federated with the free association of the compositors-typographers of Brussels; let us also mention the carpenters, who have just recently embarked on this path. The same motive which

has pushed the resistance societies of the same trade to come to an agreement amongst themselves will push them to come to an agreement with the other trades. This was understood by the federation of carpenters of Brussels, Antwerp, Pepinster, etc., which is affiliated as a whole to the International, and this has been understood for a long time by the typographical societies of Switzerland, which are also affiliated as a block.

But make no mistake, the bosses still have a way of getting out of trouble, which the federation can easily stand in the way of; this means consists in having made abroad what they have not succeeded in having made in the country. The federated associations, in this case, could refuse to carry out the work, knowing that this can only be a whim which will be of very short duration on the part of the bosses. We say whim, because no one can imagine that a product supplied under these conditions can establish competition in work generally. It is enough for us to look at the costs of all kinds of things that would result from such a system.

Apart from what we have just pointed out, there may be something more serious in this way of working abroad. It is when the exploiters choose places where labour is supplied at excessively low prices. Here again, it will be the federation and the federation alone, which can remedy the evil by ensuring that, sooner or later, work is paid everywhere at almost a uniform price. That is to say, it is a question of arriving at a certain proportionality between the rate of wages in any country and the price of subsistence in that same country.

There are still other reasons which must commit associations to the international federation; to demonstrate the need for it, we will simply limit ourselves to quoting only two facts which the workers would do well to become aware of: when the Parisian bronziers had quit work, because their bosses had demanded that they dissolve their association, the workers only overcome this arrogance with the help of their brothers the English; 20,000 francs left London and forced the French bosses to raise the white flag.

In their turn, the workers of Geneva emerged triumphant from the struggle undertaken against the employers because the workers of France, England, Germany and Italy had come to their aid. As the Association was still in its infancy, things could not be done according to the strict rules of organised solidarity; so the different sections of the International Workers' Association organised a vast subscription, and the Paris office alone procured in a fortnight alone a sum of 10,000 francs, and a single workers' society, that of the typographers, made up 2,000 francs of this amount. This money undoubtedly contributed to the success of the Geneva workers.

These two facts, we believe, will suffice to demonstrate the necessity of international federation.

As for the last proposal, concerning arbitration boards, we have two options in mind. First of all and naturally the one which should consist of members half belonging to the bourgeoisie or exploiting class, half to the workers or the exploited. Since these two classes of men are interested in the dispute, it is necessary for each of them to find its defender or its representative. But let us see up to what point this method presents, for one of the two parties, guarantees of impartiality, without which any judgement could not be rendered according to equity. An arbitration board constituted in this way seems to us to be the counterpart of what are now called industrial tribunals, and we know how judgements are made there. These councils are usually chaired by a boss, who exercises a certain influence over the session, by the eloquence as a speaker and by the position he occupies in society, that is to say by his personal independence.

Note that the influence we have just attributed to the chair, apart from that which the chair gives him, exists for all the other members of his class; no one, we are sure, will deny the prestige exercised over a large part of our brothers, always at the mercy of those who possess the instruments of work and capital, by the qualities which we have attributed to the chair.

One of the most powerful methods of these gentlemen first of all consists, when they meet with workers, in inviting them to a kind of banquet, where the consumption of wine is allowed; the worker being unable with his meagre wage to afford this luxury, the bill will be paid by the capitalist, as you would well think. What we are pointing out here is nothing compared to what remains to be said about the dependence of the workers on the bosses; these being closely linked, for various reasons which it would be superfluous to enumerate, the worker of character could take into account his desire for independence when the need, that is to say lack of work, obliges him to go and solicit from one of them a job of some kind. What would be no less dangerous would be to entrust the judgement to workshop foremen who, apart from honourable exceptions, are too often, as they say vulgarly, *tools of the bosses* [*trotteurs de manches*], seeking to lower the wages of the workers in order to see their salaries increased.

In our opinion, there remains only one type of creation of an arbitration board that we make it our duty to submit to you.

The *Federation*, the Brussels' section of the International Workers' Association, by establishing within its midst a federal council (which cannot fail to be established in each of the sections of said association) has been of undeniable usefulness to us in the idea that we are going to put forward regarding

organisation of the council which is the subject of our study. Indeed, by founding a federal council by means of three delegates from each of the trade unions [*corporations*], as is practised in the *Federation*, it will be easy, in this gathering of men, to find the elements necessary to constitute the arbitration council whose usefulness and necessity we recognise.

If the federal council is and must be in a position to judge the necessity and opportunity for strikes which arise in connection with a pay cut, it can only be the same for a multitude of disputes which may arise either between bosses and workers, or between workers only.

We could dwell here especially on the duties of workers towards apprentices, but that would lead us into too lengthy explanations. Finally, in all cases where the federal council has to step aside to make way for the arbitration council, the members of the federal council could appoint to serve on the arbitration council one member from each of the delegations that make up its council; and when the members forming the arbitration council do not agree on a decision to be taken or on the legitimacy of an act to be taken, they would have the supreme resource of adding three, five or seven of these workers who are called independent, that is to say citizens who are neither bosses nor wage-workers, but workers who are self-employed. The latter, because of their relative independence vis-à-vis the other two, would be considered as third-party arbitrators and would definitely decide the question that could have divided the arbitration board.

Lastly, we shall conclude this subject by saying that if we are such great supporters of societies for maintaining prices, as we say in Belgium, resistance societies, as they say in France, trade unions, as they say in England, it is not only with regard to the necessities of the present, but also with regard to the social order of the future. Let us explain. We do not consider these societies merely a necessary palliative (note that we do not say cure); no, our sights are much higher. From the depths of the chaos of the conflict and misery in which we are agitating, we raise our eyes towards a more harmonic and happier society. Therefore, we see in these resistance societies the embryos of these great workers companies which will one day replace the companies of capitalists having under their orders legions of employees, at least in all industries where collective force is involved and where there is no middle ground between wage-labour and association. Already in the major strikes that have broken out in recent years a new tendency is quite clearly beginning to emerge: the strike must lead to the production society. That has already been said during the strike of the association of joiners and carpenters in Ghent, as during the strike of tailors in Paris. And that will happen, because it is in the logic of ideas and the force of events. It is inevitable that the workers will come to grasp this little line of reasoning: "But while we are on

strike because the bosses refuse to accede to our demands, consumers are still clamouring for the products of our industry; since our inactivity does not come from lack of demand but only from the obstinacy of our bosses, why should we not work directly for the public; the money that our fund spends to maintain inactive workers because of the strike could be spent on the purchase of raw materials and tools.”

Once this idea is understood, it will soon be realised. Only, it is important to note (and this is an important point) that these production associations that will result from the transformation of the societies for maintaining prices, will not be these petty associations like most of those existing currently; these latter, excellent as examples and as education which we wish well, do not seem to us to have any great social future, no role to play in the renewal of society because, composed of only a few individuals, can only succeed, as Dr. Buchner says, in creating, alongside of the bourgeoisie or third-estate, a fourth-estate having beneath it a fifth more miserable than ever. On the contrary, the production associations derived from the unions encompass entire trades, invade large industry and thereby form the NEW CORPORATION;¹ a corporation that bourgeois economists will gladly confuse (we know) with the old guilds, although the latter was organised hierarchically, based on monopoly and privilege, and limited to a certain number of members (just like our current small production associations), while the former will be organised on the basis of equality, founded on mutuality and justice, and open to all.

Here appears to us the real and positive future of the trade unions, because the strike, we admit, is only useful as an interim measure; perpetual strikes would be the perpetuation of wage-labour, and we want the abolition of wage-labour; perpetual strikes would be the fight

without truce nor end between capital and labour, and we want, not precisely what has been called today the *association of labour and capital* (a hybrid combination, under which the capitalist, provider of finance, has an agreement with the workers to eliminate the boss, while still collecting interest and dividends from labour), rather we want the absorption of work by labour; since capital is accumulated labour, which must

have only a simple exchange value equal to the value of the labour it has cost, it cannot be taken into account in the division of the products; product of labour, capital can only be the property of the worker, he cannot be associated with it.

So, this transformation of resistance societies taking place not just in one country but in all, or at least those which are at the head of civilisation; in a word, all these associations of all lands, federated, will intervene initially for the struggle, benefiting from this federation to apply the reciprocal exchange of products at cost price, and international mutual exchange will replace the protectionism and free trade of the bourgeois economists. And this universal organisation of labour

and exchange, of production and circulation, coinciding with an inevitable and necessary transformation in the organisation of land ownership at the same time as with an intellectual transformation, having for a starting point integral education given to all, social regeneration will be carried out in both the material and mental domain. And humanity, henceforth based on science and labour instead of being based on ignorance and the domination of capital as today, marching from progress to progress in all branches of the arts, sciences and industry will peacefully fulfil its destiny.

these production associations that will result from the transformation of the societies for maintaining prices, will ... thereby form the NEW CORPORATION... Here appears to us the real and positive future of the trade unions... we want the abolition of wage-labour

¹ The term “corporative” (*corporatif*) was originally the French word for craft guild and was popular in the nineteenth century French labour movement to refer to the associations which would replace wage-labour. For more discussion, see William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The*

language of labor from the old regime to 1848 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). It should be not confused with capitalist corporations or corporatism but rather considered as a self-managed industrial federation. (*Black Flag*)

Resolution on Collective Ownership

Brussels Congress, 6-13 September 1868

Collective Ownership

Resolutions adopted by the commission:

1. With regard to mines, collieries and railways;

Considering:

That the great instruments of labour are fixed to the ground and occupy a notable part of this soil provided free to humanity by nature;

That these instruments of labour necessarily require the application of machines and collective force;

That the machines and collective force that exist today for the sole advantage of the capitalists must in the future only benefit the workers, and that for this it is necessary that any industry where these two economic forces are indispensable is carried on by groups free from wage-labour;

Congress thinks:

1. That quarries, collieries and other mines, as well as railways, in a normal society, shall be owned by the social collectivity, represented by the State, but by the regenerated State and subject itself to the law of justice;

2. That the quarries, collieries, railways will be contracted out not to capitalists, as today, but to workers companies, on a double contract;

one giving the concession [*investiture*] to the worker company and guaranteeing to society;

- a. the scientific and rational exploitation of the concession,
- b. its services at a price nearest to the cost price,
- c. the right to audit the accounts of the company,
- d. and consequently the impossibility of the reconstitution of monopoly;

the other guaranteeing the natural rights of every member of the worker Association with respect to his colleagues.

2. With regard to agricultural property;

Considering:

That the necessities of production and the application of agronomic knowledge demands farming conducted on a large scale and by groups, requires the introduction of machinery and the organisation of the collective force in agriculture, and that, moreover, economic development itself tends to bring about large-scale farming.

That, therefore, agricultural labour and ownership of the soil should be treated the same way as mining work and ownership of what is under the ground;

That, moreover, productive deposits are the raw material of all products, the original source of all wealth, without being itself the product of labour by any individual;

That the alienation to some of this indispensable raw material renders the whole society a tributary of those to whom it is alienated;

Congress believes that economic evolution will make the turning of arable land into collective property a social necessity, and that this soil will be contracted out to farmers companies like mines to miners companies, railways to workers companies, and with guarantee conditions for society and for the cultivators similar to those required for the mines and for the railways.

3. With respect to canals, roads, paths, telegraphs;

Considering that these lines of communication require an overall management and maintenance which cannot be abandoned to private individuals, as some economists demand, on pain of monopoly.

Congress thinks:

These means of communication must remain the collective property of society.

4. With respect to forests;

Considering that the abandonment of forests to private individuals would lead to the destruction of these forests; That this destruction of certain parts of the country would harm the conservation of resources, and as a result the good quality of the land as well as public hygiene and the life of the citizens;

Congress thinks:

That the forests must remain in the social collectivity.

While this resolution is often referenced as end of mutualist influence in the International, in reality it reflected Proudhon's ideas and written by his followers. This included "collective force" which played a key role in his analysis of both how exploitation occurs in capitalism and what should end it, namely workers' associations. Likewise, the "double contract" echoes Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution* and its discussion of workers' associations and its "double contract" between the members of the co-operative and between it and society. Proudhon also had argued "the land is indispensable to our existence, – consequently a common thing, consequently unsusceptible of appropriation". In short, "under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership" and "handed over to democratically organised workers' associations"

Resolution on War

Brussels Congress, 6-13 September 1868¹

Considering that justice ought to regulate the relationships between natural groups, peoples, and nations, just as much as between individual citizens;

That, although the chief and persistent cause of war is a lack of economic equilibrium, and that therefore *nothing can put an end to war except social reorganisation*, nevertheless an auxiliary cause of war is the arbitrary use of force which results from centralisation and from despotism;

That therefore the peoples can henceforward lessen the frequency of war by opposing those who make war or declare war;

That this right belongs especially to the working classes, who are almost exclusively subject to military service, and that they alone can give it a sanction;

That they have, to this end, a practical, legitimate, and immediately realisable method;

That, in fact, social life cannot be carried on if production be suspended for a certain time; that it will

therefore suffice that the producers should *cease producing* for them to put a stop to the enterprises of the personal and despotic governments;

The Congress of the International Workingmen's Association, assembled at Brussels, records its most emphatic protest against war;

It invites all the sections of the Association, in their respective countries, and also all working-class societies, and all workers' groups or whatever kind, to take the most vigorous action to prevent a *war between the peoples, which today could not be considered anything else than a civil war*, seeing that, since it would be waged between the producers, it would only be a struggle between brothers and citizens;

The Congress urges the workers to cease work should war break out in their respective countries;

The Congress has sufficient confidence in the spirit of solidarity animating the workers of all lands, to hope that their support will not be wanting to this *war of the peoples against war*.²

Resolution on Resistance Societies

Basle Congress, 6-12 September 1869

Compte-rendu du IVe congrès international, tenu à Bale, en Septembre 1869 (Bruxelles : Impr. de D. Brismée, 1869)

The question thus posed seems to us to present two distinct sides, namely:

How should resistance societies be established to prepare for the future and to ensure as far as possible the present; and on the other hand, how the ideas we have on the organisation of labour in the future can help us to establish resistance societies in the present; these two sides of the question complement each other, and strengthen each other.

Now, we conceive of two types of grouping by workers: first a local grouping which allows workers of the same locality to maintain day-today relations; next, a grouping between different localities, regions, countries, etc.

The grouping of different trade unions... forms the commune of the future just as the other type forms the worker representation of the future. Government is replaced by the councils of the assembled trades unions, and by a committee of their respective delegates

First type.

This grouping corresponds to the political relations of present society, which it advantageously replaces: hitherto it has been the type employed by the International Workers' Association.

For resistance societies this state of affairs involves the federation of local societies mutually aiding each other by loans of money, organising meetings for the discussion of social questions, taking actions of collective interest together.

But as industry grows, another grouping becomes necessary alongside the first one.

Workers in all lands feel that their interests are interdependent and that they are crushed one by one; on

¹ G. M. Stekloff, *History of The First International* (London: Martin Lawrence Limited, 1928).

² It should be noted that Marx privately dismissed this resolution: "Belgian nonsense that it was necessary TO STRIKE AGAINST WAR." (*Marx-Engels Collected Works* Vol. 43, 101)

the other hand, the future demands an organisation that leaves the confines of towns and knows no borders, establishing a vast distribution of labour from one end of the world to the other; from this double point of view, resistance societies must organise themselves internationally: each trade union must foster an exchange of correspondence and information within the country and with other nations, that it works to establish new branches where none exist, that it reaches agreement with its fellow workers to act in common and that it even goes so far, when possible, as the solidarity of funds amongst them as the English already practice. This type of grouping becomes an agent of decentralisation, for it is no longer a case of establishing in each country a common centre for all industries, but each will have as a centre the locality where it is most developed; for example, for France, while the coalminers would federate around St-Etienne, the silk-workers would do so around Lyon, as luxury industries in Paris.

Once these two groupings have been formed, labour is organised for the present and the future, by eliminating wage-labour in the following manner. By the uniform reduction in working hours in the same profession, the distribution of work is achieved fairly and the competition between workers is destroyed. This process, as well as the limitation of the number of apprentices, which is the result of free and rational statistics applied to all professions, distributes workers in all industries, prevents accumulation in one and shortages in another and makes the right to work a reality.

The grouping of different trade unions [*corporations*] by town and by country creates another benefit: each trade striking in its turn, and being supported by the others, continues its struggle until it reaches the common level and the equalisation of wages is a precursor to the equivalence of functions.

Moreover, this type of grouping forms the commune of the future just as the other type forms the worker representation of the future. Government is replaced by the councils of the assembled trades unions, and by a committee of their respective delegates, regulating the labour relations that will replace politics.

To conclude and since the grouping by town and country already exists in part, we propose the following resolution:

The Congress is of the opinion that all workers must actively strive to create resistance societies in different trades.

As these societies form, it invites sections, federal groups or central councils to notify societies of the same profession in order to produce the formation of an international association of trades.

These federations will be responsible for gathering all information of interest to their respective industries, managing joint activity, regulating strikes and actively working for their success, until such time as wage-labour is replaced by the federation of free producers.

The Congress also invites the General Council to act as an intermediary for the federation of resistance societies of all lands.

Discussion on Resistance Societies

Basle Congress, 6-12 September 1869

Gabriel Mollin, *Rapport sur le 4e Congrès de l'Association internationale des Travailleurs : tenu à Bâle (Suisse) au mois de septembre 1869* (Paris: Armand le Chevalier, 1870).

Saturday, 11 September

The first item is the discussion of Resistance Societies.

M. Pindy reads the report of the Commission. He says that the purpose of resistance societies is to prepare for the future and secure the present; that the grouping of the resistance societies will form the commune of the future, and that Government will eventually be replaced by councils of trades unions [*corps de métiers*].

M. Pindy quotes the following passage from the report of the Society of Bronze-Smiths of Paris:



Jean Louis Pindy
(1840-1917)

“Resistance Societies have already defined the practical application of the principle of solidarity between workers. It is again to their influence that emancipation must be achieved through the takeover of tools, the abolition of bosses, the organisation of credit and exchange, and the transformation of the social order, by substituting the federation of every individual, of every group, of every industry, for the conflict of interest which the current state offers us.”

He then reads the conclusions of the Commission.

The Commission proposes that the Congress adopt the following conclusions:

“The Congress is of the opinion that all workers must actively strive to create resistance societies in different trades.

“As these societies form, it invites sections, federal groups or central councils to notify societies of the same profession in order to produce the formation of an international association of trades.

“These federations will be responsible for gathering all information of interest to their respective industries, managing joint activity, regulating strikes and actively working for their success, until such time as wage-labour is replaced by the federation of free producers.

“The Congress also invites the General Council to act as an intermediary for the federation of resistance societies of all lands.”

M. Chemalé considers resistance societies as a transitory institution, with the object of fighting against the centralisation of capital, and having no reason to exist when the conditions of labour are different.

M. Caporusso complains about the recent introduction of industrialism in Italy, which has resulted in the increase [in the price] of necessities, without any increase in wages. He protests against the undertaking of work by the State; he refers to the tobacco manufacturers and ship-builders, which are conducted militarily and are still forced to suffer a reduction in their wages. He called the attention of the International Association to the situation of the Italian proletarians.

M. Hins regrets that M. Chemalé had not grasped the role that resistance societies had to play when he said that they would one day disappear. Regardless of wage settlements, they must prepare the future reorganisation. It is by them that it will be done. If we do not occupy ourselves with current politics, we will take care of that of the future; consequently we will develop the government of labour, we will destroy the old politics and parliament. These are the relationships of the workers which must replace the relationships of the State.

H. Flahaut is in favour of a universal federation amongst workers, but he believes that it must aim at claiming not only social rights but also political rights.

He regrets that we have spent too much time on issues that cannot be put into practice whereas we should be dealing with resistance societies.

M. Durand would like us not to deal with generalities, nor with the future, but with the present, with current practice. The purpose of the Association to achieve demands by strikes. So far the associations have done nothing; the most noticeable result is that instead of a single boss, the worker has five or six. He would like to see co-operative societies enter the resistance societies. He added that nevertheless these societies resulted in teaching men to know each other, and that they could in the future have a great political influence.

MM. Tolain, Tartaret, Greulich, Applegarth, Brismé and Gosselin take part in the discussion. All agree on the need for the formation and development of resistance societies.

The hour being late, it was decided to end although a certain number of speakers had their names listed. The conclusions of the Commission were passed unanimously.

Another ex-member of the Paris Commune who was with us was Pindy, a carpenter from the north of France, an adopted child of Paris. He became widely known at Paris, during a strike supported by the International, for his vigour and bright intelligence, and was elected a member of the Commune, which nominated him commander of the Tuileries palace. When the Versailles troops entered Paris, shooting their prisoners by the hundred, three men, at least, were shot in different parts of the town, having been mistaken for Pindy. After the fight, however, he was concealed by a brave girl, a seamstress, who saved him by her calmness when the house was searched by the troops, and who afterward became his wife. Only twelve months later they succeeded in leaving Paris unnoticed, and came to Switzerland. Here Pindy learned assaying, at which he became skilful; spending his days by the side of his red-hot stove, and at night devoting himself passionately to propaganda work, in which he admirably combined the passion of a revolutionist with the good sense and organizing powers characteristic of the Parisian worker.

– Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*

“Regardless of wage settlements, they must prepare the future reorganisation. It is by them that it will be done.”

Articles, Manifestos and Letters

The Present Institutions of the International in Relation to the Future

César De Paepe

L'Internationale : organe des Sections belges de l'Association internationale des travailleurs, February 1869

The *International Workers' Association* bears social regeneration within itself.

There are many who agree that if the Association should realise its programme, it will have indeed established the reign of justice, but who believe that certain current institutions of the International are only temporary and are destined to disappear. We want to show that the International already offers the model of the society to come, and that its various institutions, with appropriate modifications, will form the future social order.

Let us examine the current structure of the association, taking its most complete examples, for a great number of sections have not yet reached a perfect organisation.

The *section* is the model for the commune. There the workers of all trades are gathered without distinction. The matters that concern all workers, whatever their profession, must be dealt with there.

At the head of the section is an *Administrative Committee*, which is charged with carrying out the measures decreed by the section. Instead of commanding like present administrations, it obeys its citizens.

The *Federal Council* is composed of the delegates of different worker groups; to it [are given] issues of relations between different trades, of the organisation of labour. This is a gap in our present governments, which only represent a confused morass of individuals instead of representing groups [united] by interests.

The different societies gathered in the Federal Council are *resistance societies*. These societies belong to the



César De Paepe (1841-1890)

future as well as the present. Grouping around it the workers of the same trade, teaching them their interests, calculating the selling price and cost price for basing their demands on, the resistance society is destined to organise labour in the future, much more than the productive society, which, at the moment, is difficult to extend.¹ When the time comes, when the workers have agreed to demand the liquidation of the present society, which perpetually bankrupts them, nothing will be easier than to transform resistance societies into co-operative workshops.

The *co-operative consumer societies*, which are established in the majority of sections, are destined one day to replace current commerce, full of frauds and traps, they will transform

themselves into communal bazaars, where the various products will be displayed with an accurate indication of the deed of sale [*expéditions*], without any further surcharge than the payment of expenses.

The *mutual assistance and insurance funds* will take a wider development and become universal insurance societies. Illnesses, disabilities, old age, widowhood, all these present sources of poverty will be eliminated. No more charity offices, [no more] public assistance dishonour; no more hospitals where we are admitted by charity. All the care that we receive will have been paid for; there will be no more doctors of the poor.²

Ignorance, another source of poverty, will disappear in the face of the education given by every section. It is not a question of that instruction which even our doctrinaires loudly demand. We want to make men, and one is only a complete man when one is a worker and scholar at the same time; also all the workers gathered

¹ A reference to workers' co-operatives created within capitalism, viewed as a key means of reforming capitalism away by the more orthodox mutualists within the

International and rejected by revolutionary collectivists like Bakunin. (*Black Flag*)

² A reference to doctors who took up work with charitable institutions. (*Black Flag*)

at the Congress of Brussels last September demanded *integral education* which includes science and learning of trades.¹ As this education cannot be provided at present, due to material impediments, the sections compensate as best they can by organising meetings, conferences, founding newspapers, where workers are taught the rights of man, where they learn to claim them, where finally we assemble the materials for the edifice of the future society.

The problem of the *organisation of justice* is already resolved within the International. The *defence funds* fulfil this purpose. They have their current aspect, in this respect, that having examined the case, the Defence Committee decides when a worker complains of an injustice committed by his boss whether it will be upheld in court. But this institution also looks to the future, in that it decides disputes between members by means of a jury chosen by election and renewable at very short notice. In the future, no more pettifoggers, judges, prosecutors, lawyers. The same law for all, and justice based, no longer on this or that, more or less muddled, text about which we quarrel, but on reason and rectitude.

The various sections are connected in their turn in the federation, by regions, then by country. These federations include not only a grouping by sections, but also by trades, as there is for communes. Thus the relations between the different groups will be facilitated, thus labour can be organised, not only within the communes, but within the entire country.

Vast institutions of *credit* will be like the veins and arteries of this organisation. Credit will no longer be what it is today, an instrument of death, for it will be based on equal exchange: it will be *credit at cost-price*.

If the International has not yet been able, in its current state, to establish an institution of this kind, at least it has already discussed its principles and statutes at the Congresses of Lausanne and Brussels. At the latter Congress, *a plan for a bank of exchange* was presented by the Brussels section.

Finally, the relations between different countries are secured by an international General Council. Such will be future diplomacy: no more embassy attachés, no more dashing secretaries of legation², no more diplomats, protocols, wars.

A central office of correspondence, information and statistics is all that is necessary to connect nations united by a fraternal bond.

We now believe that we have shown that the International contains within itself the seeds of all the institutions of the future. In every commune let a section of the International be established, and the new society will be formed and the old will collapse with a breath. Thus, when a wound heals, we see a scab form above while the flesh slowly regrows below. One fine day, the scab falls off, and the flesh appears fresh and ruddy.

We now believe that we have shown that the International contains within itself the seeds of all the institutions of the future

Organisation and General Strike

Michael Bakunin

Égalité, 3 April 1869

Workers, keep your utmost calm. If your sufferings are great, be heroic and know how to bear them still; attentively read what the newspaper *L'Internationale* tells the workers of the Charleroi basin, all of which we too should learn.

Listen, then, to the wise advice our Belgian brothers give us:

“May our Swiss brothers be patient for a while longer! Like us they are obliged to wait until the signal of the social collapse comes from a large country, either England, France, or Germany. In the meantime, let us continue to

gather all the forces of the proletariat, let us help ourselves as much as we can amidst the ills that the present state subjects us to, and above all study the solution of the great economic problems which will arise before us on the day following victory, seek how we can best proceed with the liquidation of the old society and the establishment of the new.”

Be patient, be patient, “the day of justice will come”; in the meantime, close your ranks and strengthen your organisation.

¹ This idea was raised by Proudhon and advocated by Bakunin, the latter publishing a series of articles on it in *L'Égalité* – see “All-Round Education” in *The Basic Bakunin*. (*Black Flag*)

² A legation was a diplomatic representative office of lower rank than an embassy. In the 19th century, most diplomatic missions were legations but this gradually fell from favour as the embassy became the standard form of diplomatic mission. (Editor)

* * *

The news concerning the European labour movement can be summed up in one word: strikes. In Belgium the typographers strike in several cities, the spinners strike in Ghent, the upholsterers strike in Brussels; in England the imminent strike in the manufacturing districts; in Prussia the strike of the zinc miners; in Paris the plasterer-painters strike; in Switzerland the strikes in Basle and Geneva.

As we advance, strikes multiply. What does this mean? That the struggle between labour and capital is more and more on the rise, that economic anarchy becomes deeper every day, and that we are advancing with huge steps toward the inevitable result of this anarchy: Social Revolution. Certainly, the emancipation of the proletariat could be accomplished without shocks, if the bourgeoisie wanted to hold its night of 4th of August, renouncing its privileges, the rights of capital to increase at the expense of labour; but bourgeois egoism and blindness are so ingrained that you must still be an optimist to hope to see the solution of the social problem by a common understanding between the privileged and the disinherited; so instead the new social order will emerge from the very excesses of the current anarchy.

When strikes spread, they gradually connect, they are very close to turning into a general strike... a general strike can only lead to a great cataclysm which would renew society.

When strikes spread, they gradually connect, they are very close to turning into a general strike; and with the ideas of emancipation that now prevail in the proletariat, a general strike can only lead to a great cataclysm which would renew society. We are not yet there, no doubt, but everything leads us there. Only, the people must be ready, it can no longer be distracted by talkers and dreamers, as in 48, and for this it must be strongly and seriously organised.

But don't the strikes follow each other so rapidly that the fear is that the cataclysm will arrive before the proletariat is sufficiently organised? We think not, first because strikes already indicate a certain collective strength, a certain agreement amongst the workers; next, each strike becomes the point of departure for new groups. The necessities of the struggle impel workers to support each other across borders and across trades; the more active the struggle becomes, therefore, the more this federation of proletarians has to expand and strengthen. And then narrow-minded economists accuse this federation of workers, represented by the International [Workers'] Association, of fomenting strikes and creating anarchy! This is quite simply taking effect for cause: it is not the International that creates the war between the exploiter and the exploited, rather it is the necessity of this war that has created the International.

Programme of the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy

17 April 1869

1. The *Alliance* declares itself atheist; it wants the abolition of religions, the substitution of science for faith and human justice for divine justice.
2. It wants above all the definitive and complete abolition of classes and the political, economic, and social equalisation of individuals of both sexes, and in

order to achieve this goal, it first and foremost demands the abolition of the right of inheritance,¹ so that in future enjoyment is equal to the production of each, and that, in conformity with the decision taken at the last workers' Congress in Brussels, the land, the instruments of labour, like all other capital, becoming the collective property of the entire society, can only be used by

¹ This sentence originally read: "It wants above all the political, economic, and social equalisation of classes and individuals of both sexes, commencing with abolition of the right of inheritance". This change was the result of Bakunin sending the Alliance programme to the International's General Council seeking affiliation. Marx responded by noting its "equalisation of classes" clause "literally interpreted" would mean "harmony of capital and labour" as "persistently preached by the bourgeois socialists" for it was "not the logically impossible 'equalisation of classes', but the historically necessary, superseding 'abolition of classes'" which "forms the great aim of the International Working

Men's Association." He added: "Considering, however, the context in which that phrase 'equalisation of classes' occurs, it seems to be a mere slip of the pen, and the General Council feels confident that you will be anxious to remove from your program an expression which offers such a dangerous misunderstanding." (*Marx-Engels Collected Works* 21: 46) The Alliance changed its Programme and successfully affiliated. This did not stop Marx – and subsequent Marxists – from quoting the original sentence (out of context from the rest of the programme) to attack Bakunin as little more than a liberal. (*Black Flag*)

workers, that is to say by agricultural and industrial associations.

3. It wants for all children of both sexes, from birth onwards, equality of the means of development, that is to say, maintenance, education and training at all levels of science, industry and the arts, convinced that this equality, at first only economic and social, will result in bringing ever increasing natural equality of individuals, by eliminating all artificial inequalities, historical products of a social organisation as false as it is iniquitous.

4. Enemy of all despotism, recognising no other political form than the republican form, and completely rejecting any reactionary alliance, it also rejects any political action which does not have as its immediate

and direct aim the triumph of the cause of the workers against capital.

5. It recognises that all existing political and authoritarian states, increasingly reduced to the mere administrative functions of public services in their respective countries, will have to disappear into the universal union of free associations, both agricultural and industrial.

6. As the social question can only find its definitive and real solution on the basis of the international or universal solidarity of the workers of all countries, the *Alliance* rejects any policy based on so-called patriotism and on rivalry between nations.

7. It wants the Universal Association of all local associations through Liberty.

Policy of the International

Michael Bakunin

L'Égalité, August 1869

I

“We have believed until now,” says *La Montagne*, “that political and religious opinions were independent of membership of the International; and, as for us, it is on this terrain that we place ourselves.”

You might believe, at first glance, that Mr. Coullery is right. For, indeed, when accepting a new member into its midst, the International does not ask him whether he is religious or an atheist, whether he belongs to such-and-such political party or if he belongs to none. It simply asks him: Are you a worker, or, if you are not, do you feel the need and do you feel the strength to frankly, fully embrace the cause of the workers, to identify with it to the exclusion of all other causes that may be opposed to it?

Do you realise that the workers, who produce all of the world's wealth, who are the creators of civilisation, and who have conquered all liberties for the bourgeoisie, are today condemned to poverty, ignorance and slavery? Do you understand that the principal cause of all the evils that the worker endures is poverty, and that this poverty, which is the lot of all the workers in the world, is a necessary consequence of the current economic organisation of society, and particularly the subjugation



Michael Bakunin (1814–1876)

of labour, that is to say of the proletariat, under the yoke of capital, that is to say to the bourgeoisie?

Do you understand that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, because it is the necessary consequence of their respective positions? That the prosperity of the bourgeois class is incompatible with the well-being and freedom of the workers, because this exclusive prosperity is and can be founded only upon the exploitation and subjugation of their labour, and that, for the same reason, the prosperity and human dignity of the working masses absolutely requires the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a separate class? That consequently

the war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is inevitable and can only end with the destruction of the latter?

Do you understand that no worker, however intelligent and energetic, can fight alone against the well-organised power of the bourgeoisie, a power principally represented and supported by the organisation of the State, of every State? That in order to become strong you must associate not with the bourgeois, which would be a stupidity or a crime on your part because all the bourgeois as bourgeois are our irreconcilable enemies, nor with treacherous workers who would be cowardly enough to go beg for the smiles and benevolence of the

bourgeois, but with honest and energetic workers who frankly want what you want?

Do you understand that, in view of the formidable coalition of all the privileged classes, all the capitalist proprietors and all the States in the world, an isolated workers' association, local or national, even one belonging to one of the largest countries of Europe, can never triumph, and that to stand up to this coalition and obtain that victory, nothing less than the union of all local and national workers' associations into a single universal association is needed, it needs the great *International Association of the Workers of all countries*?

If you feel, if you understand and if you truly want all this, come to us, whatever your political and religious beliefs. But for us to accept you, you must promise us: 1) to henceforth subordinate your personal interests, even those of your family, as well as your political and religious convictions and expressions, to the supreme interest of our association: the struggle of labour against capital, of the workers against the bourgeoisie on the economic terrain; 2) never compromise with the bourgeoisie for personal gain; 3) to never seek to raise yourself individually, only for yourself, above the working mass, which would immediately make you a bourgeois, an enemy and exploiter of the proletariat; as all the difference between the bourgeois and the worker is this, that the first always seeks his good outside the collectivity, and the second only seeks it and intends to conquer it only in solidarity with all those who work and who are exploited by bourgeois capital; 4) you will always remain faithful to worker solidarity, for the slightest betrayal of that solidarity is considered by the International as the greatest crime and the greatest infamy that a worker can commit. In short, you must frankly, fully accept our general statutes, and you will make a solemn commitment to henceforth abide by them in your actions and your life.

We think that the founders of the International [Workers'] Association acted with a very great wisdom by first eliminating all political and religious questions from the programme of this association. Doubtless, they did not themselves lack either political opinions or very pronounced anti-religious opinions; but they refrained from expressing them in this programme, because their principal aim was above all to unite the working masses of the civilised world in a common action. They necessarily had to seek a common basis, a series of simple principles on which all workers, whatever their political and religious aberrations, are and should be in agreement, provided they are serious workers, that is to say harshly exploited and suffering men.

If they had raised the flag of a political or anti-religious system, far from uniting the workers of Europe they would have divided them still further; because, the ignorance of the workers assisting, the self-serving and utmost corrupting propaganda of priests, governments

and all bourgeois political parties, including the most red, has spread a host of false ideas amongst the working masses, and that these blind masses are unfortunately still too often enthralled by lies, which have no other purpose than to make them voluntarily and stupidly serve, to the detriment of their own interests, those of the privileged classes.

Besides, there still exists too great a difference in the degrees of industrial, political, intellectual and moral development of the working masses in different countries for it to be possible for them to unite today under one and the same political and anti-religious programme. To pose such a programme as that to the International, to make it an absolute condition for entry into that Association, would be to try to organise a sect, not a global association, it would kill the International.

There was yet another reason for eliminating at first, in appearance at least, *and only in appearance*, all political tendencies from the programme of the International.

Up until now, since the beginning of history, there has not yet been a politics of the people, and by this word we mean the lower classes, the *worker rabble* who feed the world with their labour; there was only the politics of the privileged classes; these classes have used the muscular power of the people to depose one another, and to put themselves in the place of others. The people for its part has never sided with one against the others except in the vague hope that at least one of these political revolutions, of which none could have been made without it but none was made for it, would bring some relief to its age-old poverty and slavery. It has always been deceived. Even the great French Revolution betrayed it. It killed the aristocratic nobility and put the bourgeoisie in its place. The people are no longer called slaves or serfs, they are proclaimed freeborn by law, but in fact their slavery and poverty remain the same.

And they will always remain the same as long as the popular masses continue to serve as an instrument for bourgeois politics, whether that politics is called conservative, liberal, progressive, radical, and even when it gives itself the most revolutionary appearance in the world. For every bourgeois politics, whatever its colour and name, can have at bottom only one aim: *the preservation of bourgeois domination, and bourgeois domination is the slavery of the proletariat*.

What then was the International to do? It first had to separate the working masses from all bourgeois politics, it had to eliminate from its programme all bourgeois political programmes. But, at the time of its founding, there was no other politics in the world than that of the Church or the monarchy, or of the aristocracy, or the bourgeoisie; the last, especially that of the radical bourgeoisie, was undeniably more liberal and more humane than the others, but all equally based on the exploitation of the working masses and having in reality

no other aim than to quarrel over the monopolisation of this exploitation. The International therefore had to begin by clearing the ground, and as all politics, from the point of view of the emancipation of labour, was then tainted with reactionary elements, it first had to reject from its midst of all known political system, in order to be able to raise, on these ruins of the bourgeois world, the true politics of the workers, the policy of the International [Workers'] Association.

II

The founders of the International Workers' Association acted with much wisdom by refraining from making political and philosophical principles the basis of this association, and giving it at first as its sole basis the exclusively economic struggle of labour against capital, that they were certain that from the moment that a worker put his foot on this terrain, from the moment that, taking confidence both in his right and in his numerical strength, he engages with his fellow workers in a united struggle against bourgeois exploitation, he will necessarily be brought, by the very force of things and by the development of this struggle, to soon recognise all the political, socialist and philosophical principles of the International, principles that are, after all, nothing but the true exposition of its starting point, of its purpose.

We have outlined these principles in our recent issues.¹ From a political and social point of view, they have as a necessary consequence the abolition of classes, and consequently that of the bourgeoisie, which is the dominant class today; the abolition of all territorial States, that of all political homelands, and, on their downfall, the establishment of the great international federation of all productive groups, national and local. From the philosophical point of view, as they tend to nothing less than the realisation of the human ideal, of human happiness, equality, justice and liberty on earth, that because they tend to render completely useless all the celestial complements and all hopes of a [heavenly] better world, they will likewise result in the abolition of cults and all religious systems.

To begin by declaring these two goals to ignorant workers, crushed by labour every day and demoralised, imprisoned so to speak, knowingly by the perverse

doctrines that governments, in concert with all the privileged castes, priests, nobility, bourgeoisie, dispense to them with both hands, and you will scare them; they may snub you, without suspecting that all these ideas are nothing but the most faithful expression of their own interests, that these goals carry within them the realisation of their most cherished wishes; and that, on the contrary, the religious and political prejudices in whose name they may reject them, are the direct cause of the prolongation of their slavery and their poverty.

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the prejudices of the popular masses and those of the privileged class. The prejudices of the masses, as we have just said, are based only on their ignorance and are entirely contrary to their interests, while those of the bourgeoisie are based precisely on the interests of that class, and are only maintained, against the

dissolving action of bourgeois science itself, thanks to the collective selfishness of the bourgeoisie. The people want, but they do not know; the bourgeoisie know, but they do not want. Which of the two is incurable? The bourgeoisie, without a doubt.

A general rule: You can only convert those who feel the need to be, only those who already carry in their instincts or in the miseries of their position, whether external or internal, all that you want to give them; you will never convert those who do not feel the need of any change, even those who, while desiring to escape from a position which they are disgruntled with, are driven by the nature of their moral, intellectual and social habits to seek it in a world that is not of your ideas.

Convert to socialism, I ask you, a nobleman who covets wealth, a bourgeois who would like to become a noble, or even a worker who strains with all the strength of his soul to become a bourgeois! Convert even a real or imaginary aristocrat of the intellect, a scholar, a half-scholar, a fourth, tenth, or hundredth part of a scholar who, full of scientific ostentation, and often because they have only had the good fortune to have somehow understood, after a fashion, a few books, are full of arrogant contempt for the illiterate masses and imagine that they are called to form between themselves a new dominant, that is to say exploiting, caste.



Bakunin speaking at the Basel Congress 1869

¹ See, for example, "La Montage and Mr. Coullery," *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871* (Buffalo, N.Y.:

Prometheus Books, 1994), Robert M. Cutler (trans. and ed.). (*Black Flag*)

No reasoning or propaganda will ever be able to convert these wretches. There is only one way to convince them: it is the deed, the destruction of the very possibility of privileged circumstances, of all domination and all exploitation; it is the social revolution, which, by sweeping away all that creates inequality in the world, will moralise them by forcing them to seek their happiness in equality and in solidarity.

The situation is different with serious workers. By serious workers we mean those who are really crushed by the weight of work; all those whose position is so precarious and so miserable that none, except in quite extraordinary circumstances, can think of conquering just for *himself*, and only for himself, in the present economic conditions and social environment, a better position; to become in their turn, for example, a boss or a State Councillor. Without doubt, we also include in this category the rare and generous workers who, while having the opportunity to rise individually above the working class, do not want to benefit by this, preferring to suffer for some time still exploitation by the bourgeoisie, in solidarity with their comrades in poverty, than become exploiters in their turn. These do not need to be converted; they are pure socialists.

We speak of the great mass of workers who, exhausted by their daily labour, are ignorant and miserable. These, whatever the political and religious prejudices that they [the ruling class] have tried and even in part succeeded to encourage in their conscience, is *socialist without knowing it*; it is deep in their instinct, and by the very force of their position, more seriously, more truly socialist than all the scientific and bourgeois socialists combined. They are so by all the conditions of their material existence, by all the needs of their being, whereas these others are only so by the needs of their thought; and, in real life, the needs of the being always exert a much stronger power than those of thought, thought being here, as it is everywhere and always, the expression of being, the reflection of its successive developments, but never its principle.

What workers lack is not the reality, the real necessity of socialist aspirations, it is only socialist thought. What every worker demands in the depths of his heart – a fully human existence in the form of material well-

being and intellectual development, based on justice, that is to say on equality and liberty for each and all in labour – this instinctive ideal of each who lives only by their own labour, can obviously not be realised in the present political and social world, which is based on the cynical exploitation of the labour of the working masses. Therefore, every serious worker is necessarily a socialist revolutionary, since his emancipation can only take place by the overthrow of all that now exists.

Either this organisation of injustice, with its whole array of iniquitous laws and privileged institutions, must perish, or the working masses will remain condemned to an eternal slavery.

Here is the socialist thought whose seeds will be found in the instinct of every serious worker. The aim then is to render him fully conscious of what he wants, to nurture in him a thought that corresponds to his instinct, for as soon as the thought of the working masses has risen to the height of their instinct, their will becomes resolute and their power becomes irresistible.

Yet what prevents the speedier development of this salutary thought within the working masses? Their ignorance, without doubt, and to a great extent the political and religious prejudices by which the interested classes are still striving today to obfuscate their conscience and their

natural intelligence. How to dispel this ignorance, how to destroy these harmful prejudices? – By education and propaganda?

These are undoubtedly great and beautiful means. But, in the present state of the working masses, they are insufficient. The isolated worker is too crushed by his work and by his daily worries to have a lot of time to devote to his education. And, besides, who will make this propaganda? Will it be the few sincere socialists, children of the bourgeoisie, who are full of generous intent, no doubt, but who are for one thing far too few in number to give their propaganda all the necessary breadth, and who, moreover, belonging by their position to a different world, do not have all the grasp of the workers' world that is needed and who arouse in them more or less legitimate distrust.

“The emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves,” says the preamble of our general

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[the working class]
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statutes. And it is a thousand times right to say it. It is the principal basis of our great Association. But the workers' world is generally ignorant, it still entirely lacks theory. So there remains to it only a single path, that of *its emancipation through practice*. What can and should that practice be?

There is only one. It is that of the struggle of the workers in solidarity against the bosses. It is *trades unions, organisation and the federation of resistance funds*.

III

If the International at first showed itself indulgent toward the subversive and reactionary ideas, whether in politics or religion, that workers may have when joining it, it was not at all out of indifference for these ideas. It cannot be accused of indifference since it detests them and rejects them with all the strength of its being, every reactionary idea being the overturning of the very principle of the International, as we have already shown in our previous articles.

This indulgence, we repeat again, is inspired by a high wisdom. Knowing full well that every serious worker is a socialist by all the necessities inherent in his miserable position, and that any reactionary ideas he has are only the effect of his ignorance, it counts on the collective experience that he cannot fail to acquire in the midst of the International, and above all on the development of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses, to deliver him [from them].

And indeed, from the moment that a worker, taking faith in the possibility of a future radical transformation of the economic situation, combines with his comrades, begins to struggle seriously for the reduction of his hours of labour and the increase of his wages; from the moment that he begins to take an active interest in this entirely material struggle, we can be certain that he will soon abandon all his heavenly preoccupations, and that becoming accustomed to rely ever more on the collective strength of the workers, he will willingly renounce help from heaven. Socialism takes the place of religion in his mind.

It will be the same with his reactionary politics. It will lose its principal support as the conscience of the worker is freed from religious oppression. On the other hand, the economic struggle, by developing and extending ever wider, will make him increasingly know, in a practical manner and by a collective experience that is necessarily always more instructive and broader than isolated experience, his true enemies, which are the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeoisie, the nobility and the State; this last only existing to safeguard all the privileges of these classes, and inevitably always taking their side against the proletariat.

The worker, thus engaged in the struggle, will inevitably come to understand the irreconcilable antagonism that exists between these henchmen of reaction and his most cherished human interests, and having reached this point he will not fail to recognise himself, and bluntly present himself as, a revolutionary socialist.

It is not so with the bourgeoisie. All their interests are opposed to the economic transformation of society; and if their ideas are also opposed to it, if these ideas are reactionary, or as they are politely called today, moderate; [if] their heart and mind reject this great act of justice and emancipation that we call the social revolution; if they have a horror of real social equality, that is to say of simultaneous political, social and economic equality; if, in the depths of their souls, they want to keep for themselves, for their class or for their children, a single privilege, is only of understanding, as many bourgeois socialists do today; if they do not detest, not only with all the logic of their mind, but also with all the power of their passion, the present order of things, then we can be certain that they will remain all their life reactionaries, enemies of the cause of the workers. We must keep them far from the International.

They must be kept far from it, for they would only enter it to demoralise it and divert it from its path. There is, moreover, an infallible sign by which the workers can recognise whether a bourgeois, who asks to be admitted into their ranks, comes to them frankly, without the shadow of hypocrisy and without the least subversive ulterior motive. That sign is the relationships that he preserves with the bourgeois world.

The antagonism that exists between the world of the worker and the bourgeois world takes on a more and more pronounced character. Every man who thinks seriously and whose feelings and imagination are not altered by the often unconscious influence of self-interested sophisms must understand that today no reconciliation is possible between them. The workers want equality, and the bourgeois want to maintain inequality. Obviously one destroys the other. Also the vast majority of the capitalist and landlord bourgeois, those who have the courage to admit what they want, they likewise express with the same frankness the horror that the current movement of the working class inspires in them. They are enemies as resolute as they are sincere, we know them, and that is good.

But there is another category of bourgeois who have neither the same candour nor the same courage. Enemies of social liquidation, which we call, with all the power of our souls, a great act of justice, as the necessary starting point and indispensable basis of an egalitarian and rational organisation of society, they want, like all other bourgeois, to preserve economic inequality, that eternal source of all the other inequalities; and at the same time they pretend to want, like us, the complete emancipation of the worker and of

work. They uphold against us, with a passion worthy of the most reactionary bourgeois, the very cause of proletariat's slavery, the separation of labour and landed or capitalist property, represented today by two different classes; and they nonetheless pose as the apostles of the deliverance of the working class from the yoke of property and capital!

Are they mistaken or do they deceive? Some are mistaken in good faith, many deceive; the greater number are mistaken and deceive at the same time. They all belong to that category of bourgeois radicals and bourgeois socialists who founded the *League of Peace and Freedom*.

Is this League socialist? At its founding and during the first year of its existence, as we have already had occasion to tell, it rejected socialism with horror. Last year, at its Congress in Berne, it triumphantly rejected the principle of economic equality. Today, feeling itself dying and wishing to live a little longer, and finally understanding that no political existence is henceforth possible without the social question, it calls itself socialist, it has become bourgeois socialist: which means that it wants to solve all social questions on the basis of economic inequality. It wants, it must preserve interest on capital and rent on land, and it professes to emancipate the workers with these. It strives to give a body to nonsense.

Why does it do this? What is it that makes it undertake a work as incongruous as [it is] sterile? It is not difficult to understand.

A great part of the bourgeoisie is tired of the reign of *Caesarism* and *militarism* that it itself established in 1848, for fear of the proletariat. Just recall the June days, precursors of the December days; recall that National Assembly which, after the June days, cursed and insulted, unanimous bar one voice, the illustrious and we can say heroic socialist Proudhon who alone had the courage to hurl the challenge of socialism at this rabid herd of bourgeois conservatives, liberals and radicals.¹ And we must not forget that amongst those insulting Proudhon a number of citizens still living, and today more militant than ever, and who, baptised by the

persecutions of December, have since become martyrs of liberty.

So, there is no doubt that the entire bourgeoisie, including the radical bourgeoisie, was itself the creator of the caesarean and military despotism whose effects it deplors today. After having served them against the proletariat, they now want to be free of it. Nothing is more natural; this regime humiliates and ruins them. But how can they be delivered from it? Formerly, they were brave and powerful, they had the power for conquests. Today they are cowardly and feeble, they are afflicted with the impotence of the old. They recognise only too well their weakness, and sense that they alone can do nothing. So they must have help. This help can only be the proletariat; so they must win over the proletariat.

But how to win them over? By promises of freedom and political equality? These are words that no longer move workers. They have learned at their cost, they

understand by hard experience, that these words mean nothing for them but the maintenance of their economic slavery, often even harder than before. So if you want to touch the hearts of these miserable millions of slaves to labour, speak to them of their economic emancipation. There is no longer a worker who does not know now that this is for him the only serious and real basis for all the other emancipations. So it is necessary to speak to them about economic reforms for society.

Well, said the members of the League for Peace and Freedom, let us speak of it, let us say we are socialists too. Let us promise them some economic and social reforms, on the condition though that they take care to respect the basis of civilisation and bourgeois omnipotence: individual and hereditary property, interest on capital and rent on land. Let us persuade them that under these conditions

alone, which moreover assure us domination and the workers slavery, can the worker be emancipated.

Let us even persuade them that, to realise all these social reforms, we must first make a good political revolution, exclusively political, as red as they please

and identifying *you* with the bourgeois class" – are included in *Property is Theft! (Black Flag)*

This is an infallible sign by which workers can recognise a false socialist, a bourgeois socialist: if, when speaking to them of revolution or, if you like, of social transformation, he tells them that political transformation *must precede* economic transformation

¹ Extracts from this famous speech – in which he proclaimed “When I used those pronouns *you* and *we*, it was self-evident that at that point I was identifying *myself* with the proletariat

from the political point of view, with a great chopping of heads if that becomes necessary, but with the greatest respect for holy property; a wholly Jacobin revolution, in a word, that would make us the masters of the situation; and once masters, we could give the workers... what we can and what we want.

This is an infallible sign by which workers can recognise a false socialist, a bourgeois socialist: if, when speaking to them of revolution or, if you like, of social transformation, he tells them that political transformation *must precede* economic transformation; if he denies that they must both be made at once, or even [denies] that the political revolution must be nothing but the immediate and direct putting into action of the full and entire social liquidation; then [let them] turn their backs on him, for either he is nothing but a fool, or else a hypocritical exploiter.

IV

The International Workers' Association, to remain faithful to its principle and to not deviate from the only path that can lead it to success, must above all guard itself against the influences of two kinds of bourgeois socialists: *the partisans of bourgeois politics, including even bourgeois revolutionaries*, and those of *bourgeois co-operation*, or so-called *practical men*.

Let us first consider the former.¹

Economic emancipation, as we said in our previous issue, is the basis of all other emancipations. We have summarised by those words the entire politics of the International.

Indeed we read in the preamble of our general statutes the following statement:

“That the subjection of labour to capital is the source of all political, moral and material servitude, and that for this reason the emancipation of the workers is the great aim to which every political movement must be subordinated.”

It is well understood that any political movement which does not have as an immediate and direct objective the *definitive and complete* economic emancipation of the workers, and which has not inscribed on its flag, in a very definite and clear manner, the principle of *economic equality*, which means the *full restitution of capital to labour*, or *social liquidation* – that every such political movement is bourgeois, and, as such, must be excluded from the International.

Consequently, the politics of the bourgeois democrats or bourgeois socialists must be ruthlessly excluded, which, by declaring “that political liberty is the *preliminary* condition for economic emancipation,” can only understand by these words nothing but this: political

reforms or revolution must *precede* economic reforms or revolution; the workers must therefore ally themselves with the more or less radical bourgeois to first carry out the former with them, afterwards barring the making of the latter against them.

We protest strongly against this disastrous theory, which could only result in making the workers serve once again as an instrument against themselves and deliver them again to the exploitation of the bourgeoisie.

To conquer political liberty *first* cannot mean anything other than conquering it *first* by itself, leaving, at least for the first days, economic and social relationships as they are, that is to say, [leaving] the landlords and capitalists with their insolent wealth, and the workers with their poverty.

But, they say, once this freedom is won, it will serve the workers as an instrument to later conquer *equality or economic justice*.

Freedom is indeed a magnificent and powerful instrument. The question is whether the workers will really be able to use it, if it will really be in their possession, or if, as it has always been hitherto, their *political freedom* is only a deceptive visage, a fiction.

Could not a worker to whom you would speak of political freedom, in his present economic situation, respond with the refrain of a well-known song:

Do not speak of liberty.

Poverty is slavery!

And, indeed, you would have to be in love with illusions to imagine that a worker, in the economic and social conditions in which he currently finds himself, can take full advantage, make real, serious use of his political liberty. He lacks two things for this: leisure and material resources.

Besides, have we not seen it in France, the day after the revolution of 1848, the most radical revolution that can be desired from a political point of view?

The French workers were certainly neither indifferent nor unintelligent, and, in spite of the widest universal suffrage, they had to let the bourgeois do as they pleased. Why? because they lacked the material means that are necessary for political freedom to become a reality, because they remained the slaves of a labour forced by hunger, while the bourgeois radicals, liberals, and even conservatives, some republicans the day before, others converts the day after, came and went, conspired freely, some thanks to their unearned income or their lucrative bourgeois position, others thanks to the State budget which they have naturally preserved and had even made greater than ever.

¹ Bakunin discussed the second issue in a subsequent article in *L'Égalité* entitled “On Co-operation” which is also

included in *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871*. (Black Flag)

We know what happened: first, the June days; later, as a necessary consequence, the December days.

But, it will be said, workers, becoming wiser by their very experience, will no longer send bourgeois to constituent or legislative assemblies, they will send simple workers. Poor as they are, they will be able to provide the necessary support for their deputies. Do you know what will be the result of this? The worker deputies, transferred into bourgeois surroundings and an atmosphere of entirely bourgeois political ideas, ceasing in fact to be workers by becoming Statesmen, will become bourgeois, and perhaps even more bourgeois than the bourgeois themselves. For men do not make situations, on the contrary it is situations that make men. And we know by experience that *bourgeois workers* are often no less selfish than bourgeois exploiters, nor less dire to the [International Workers'] Association than bourgeois socialists, nor less vain and ridiculous than ennobled bourgeois.¹

No matter what they do and no matter what they may say, as long as the worker remains immersed in his present state, there will be no freedom possible for him, and those who advise him to win political liberties without first touching on the burning questions of socialism, without uttering that phrase that makes the bourgeois turn pale – *social liquidation* – simply tell him: First win this freedom for us, so that later we can use it against you.

But, it will be said, these radical bourgeois are well intentioned and sincere. There are no good intentions and sincerity that stand against the influences of position, and since we have said that even workers who put themselves in this position would inevitably become bourgeois, with even greater reason the bourgeois who remain in that position will remain bourgeois.

If a bourgeois, inspired by a great passion for justice, equality and humanity, wants to work seriously for the

emancipation of the proletariat, he first begins by breaking all the political and social ties, all the relationships of interest as well as spirit, of vanity and heart, with the bourgeoisie. Let him first understand that no reconciliation is possible between the proletariat and that class, which, living only on the exploitation of others, is the natural enemy of the proletariat.

After having turned his back on the bourgeois world for good, let him then line up beneath the flag of the workers, on which are inscribed these words: "Justice, Equality and Freedom for all. Abolition of classes by the economic equalisation of all. Social liquidation." He will be welcome.

As for the bourgeois socialists along with bourgeois workers who will come to talk to us of conciliation between bourgeois politics and the socialism of the workers, we have only one piece of advice to give to the latter: you must turn your backs on them.

Since bourgeois socialists seek to organise today, *with socialism as bait*, a formidable workers' agitation in order to win political freedom, a liberty that, as we have just seen, would benefit only the bourgeoisie; since the working masses, having reached an understanding of

their position, enlightened and guided by the principle of the International, are in fact organising themselves and begin to form a real power, not [just] national but international; not to do the business of the bourgeois, but their own affairs; and since, to realise that ideal of the bourgeois of a complete political freedom with republication institutions still requires a revolution, and since no revolution can triumph except by the power of the people, it is necessary that this power must, ceasing to pull chestnuts from the fire for the gentlemen of the bourgeoisie, henceforth only serve to make the cause of the people triumph, the cause of all those who labour against all those who exploit labour.

The International Workers' Association, faithful to its principle, will never extend its hand to a political

But, it will be said, workers... will no longer send bourgeois to constituent or legislative assemblies, they will send simple workers... Do you know what will be the result of this? The worker deputies, transferred into bourgeois surroundings and an atmosphere of entirely bourgeois political ideas, ceasing in fact to be workers by becoming Statesmen, will become bourgeois, and perhaps even more bourgeois than the bourgeois themselves

¹ This analysis has, of course, been proven correct time and time again (not least, with Marxist Social Democracy). It has been repeated by many libertarian thinkers including Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman (*Socialism: Caught in the*

Political Trap) and Rudolf Rocker (*Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*). Of note is Chapter XIII ("Socialism") of Alexander Berkman's *What Is Communist Anarchism?* (1929). (*Black Flag*)

agitation which did not have as its immediate and direct aim the *complete economic emancipation of the worker*, that is to say the abolition of the bourgeoisie as a class economically separate from the mass of the population, nor to any revolution that, from the first day, from the first hour, will not inscribe *social liquidation* on its flag.

But revolutions are not improvised. They are not made arbitrarily, either by individuals or by even the most powerful associations. Independently of all will and of all conspiracy, they are always brought about by the force of events. They can be foreseen, their approach can sometimes be sensed, but the explosion can never be accelerated.

Convinced of this truth, we pose this question: What is the policy that the International must pursue during this more or less extended period of time that separates us from this terrible social revolution which everyone today anticipates?

Setting aside, as required by its statutes, all local and national politics, it will give workers' agitation in all countries an essentially economic character, with the aim of reducing the hours of labour and increasing wages; the *organisation of the working masses* and the establishment of *resistance funds* as means.

It will propagandise its principles, for these principles are the purest expression of the collective interests of the workers of the whole world, are the soul and constitute all the life force of the Association. It will spread this propaganda widely, without regard for

bourgeois sensitivities, so that every worker, emerging from the intellectual and moral torpor in which they strive to keep him, understands his situation, knows well what he must do and under what conditions he can conquer his human rights.

It will propagandise all the more energetically and sincerely for we often encounter influences, even in the International, which, affecting disdain for these principles, would like to portray them as a useless theory and strive to bring the workers back to the political, economic and religious catechism of the bourgeoisie.

Finally, it will expand and organise itself strongly across the borders of all lands, so that when the revolution, brought about by the force of events, breaks out, it is a real force, knowing what it must do, and hence capable of taking it in its hands and giving it a truly beneficial direction for the people; a serious international organisation of workers' associations of all countries, capable of replacing this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie.¹

We conclude this faithful exposition of the politics of the International by reproducing the final paragraph of the preamble to our general statutes:

“The movement that is taking place amongst the workers of the most industrious countries of Europe, by giving rise to new hopes, gives a solemn warning not to fall back into old errors.”

Manifesto

Parisian Sections of the International Workers' Association

La Marseillaise, 27 January 1870

Twelve thousand workers from Creuzot are on strike. They demand the management of their mutual aid society, the reinstatement in the workshop of their comrades dismissed without reasons and the removal of a works supervisor, the main cause of the conflict.

As always in such cases, the manager requested and obtained the assistance of military force. So as at Lepine, as at Dour, as at Seraing, as at Frameries, as at La Ricamarie, as at Aubin, as at Carmaux, the army faces workers whom its presence troubles and exasperates.

What will the consequences be? Will it be a new massacre of proletarians?

We cannot protest too strongly against the very peculiar claim of those people who, not content with having all the economic forces, still want to have, and actually have, all the social forces (army, police, courts, etc.), for the preservation of their unjust privileges.

Such are the consequences of the selfish and bourgeois doctrine of political economy.

Economists, in fact, disregarding the complexity of social phenomena, and neglecting the intellectual aspect and above all the moral aspect, have reduced social science to purely market considerations. From this resulted *industrialism*. On this slippery slope, the deterioration of social sentiment has already reached a

their representation by trade councils [*Chambres de travail*] not only creates a great Academy where all the workers of the International, uniting practice with theory, can and must study economic science, they even carry the living seeds of the *new social order* that is to replace the bourgeois world. They create not only the ideas but the very facts of the future.” (*Protest of the Alliance*, July 1871)

¹ As Bakunin later put it: “the *serious, final, complete emancipation of the workers is possible only on one condition, and that this condition is the appropriation of capital, that is to say the raw materials and all the instruments of labour, including land, by the workers collectively*. [...] The organisation of trade sections, their federation in the International [Workers’] Association and

point that the industrialists, while advocating unbridled *laissez faire, laissez passer* ignore, in reality, the right of the worker, in the current state, to refuse to cooperate when a job is too oppressive and too poorly paid.

All powerful in the face of an isolated worker, they oppress him in the name of so-called economic liberty, but as soon as they face a collective labour force, they demand repression in the name of order. Does their narrowness of vision make them believe that true order is nothing other than the crushing of the producers and the smothering of all legitimate aspirations?

Moreover, in the presence of this commonplace event, in our state of political oppression and industrial lawlessness, in this state which delivers to misery those who have produced the immense accumulation of capital sufficient to create physical and moral well-being [for all] if a just distribution of products exists, we thought it necessary to raise our voice:

After having once more noted the iniquity of our economic system and its deplorable results, we have to congratulate our Creuzot brothers for their calm demands and the dignity of their attitude.

B. MALON, correspondent of Workers-United (suburbs of Paris), headquarters rue de Nanterre, 24, à Puteaux.

G. MOLLIN, correspondent for France of the Paris Circle of Positivist Proletarians, impasse Saint-Sébastien, 8.

MURAT, Mutualist Circle, authorised by the General Council of the club of the International Association, 200, rue Saint-Maur.

E. VARLIN, secretary-correspondent of the section of the book-binding workers of Paris.

A. COMBAULT, correspondent of the Vaugirard section.

A. HARLÉ, Corresponding Secretary of the Circle of Social Studies.

Letter to Albert Richard

Michael Bakunin

12 March 1870¹

12th March 1870, Geneva

Dear friend and brother,

Circumstances beyond my control prevent me from coming to take part in your great Assembly of 13th March. But I would not want to let it pass without expressing my thoughts and wishes to my brothers in France.

If I could attend that impressive gathering, here is what I would say to the French workers, with all the *barbaric* frankness that characterises the Russian socialist democrats.

Workers, no longer count on anyone but yourselves. Do not demoralise and paralyse your rising power in foolish alliances with bourgeois radicalism. The bourgeoisie no longer has anything to give you. Politically and morally, it is dead, and of all its historical magnificence, it has only preserved a single power, that of a wealth founded on the exploitation of your labour. Formerly, it was great, it was bold, it was powerful in thought and will. It had a world to overturn and a new world to create, the world of modern civilisation.

It overturned the feudal world with the strength of your arms, and it has built its new world on your shoulders. It naturally hopes that you will never cease to serve as caryatids for that world. It wants its preservation, and you

want, you must want its overthrow and destruction. What does it have in common with you?

Will you push naïveté to the point of believing that the bourgeoisie would ever consent to willingly strip itself of that which constitutes its prosperity, its liberty and its very existence, as a class economically separated from the economically enslaved mass of the proletariat? Doubtless not. You know that no dominant class has ever done justice against itself, that it has always been necessary to help it. Was not that famous night of 4th August, for which we have granted too much honour to the French nobility, the inevitable consequence of the general uprising of the peasants who burned the parchments of the nobility, and with those parchments the castles?

You know very well that rather than concede to you the conditions of a serious economic equality, the only conditions you could accept, they will reject it a thousand times under the protection of a parliamentary lie, and if necessary under that of a new military dictatorship.

So then what could you expect from bourgeois republicanism? What would you gain by allying yourself with it? Nothing – and you would lose everything, for you could not ally yourself with it without abandoning the holy cause, the only great cause today: that of the complete emancipation of the proletariat.

¹ <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/letter-from-bakunin-to-albert-richard-march-12-1870/>

It is time for you to proclaim a complete rupture. Your salvation is only at this price.

Does this mean that you should reject all individuals born and raised in the bourgeois class, but who, convinced of the justice of your cause, come to you to serve and to help you triumph? Not at all. Receive them as friends, as equals, as brothers, provided that their will is sincere and that they have given you both theoretical and practical guarantees of the sincerity of their convictions. In theory, they should proclaim loudly and without any hesitation all the principles, conditions and consequences of a serious social and economic equality for all individuals. In practice, they must have firmly and permanently severed their relationship of interest, feeling and vanity with the bourgeois world, which is condemned to die.

You bear within you today all the elements of the power that must renew the world. But the elements of power are still not power.

To constitute a real force, they must be organised; and in order for that organisation to be consistent in its basis and purpose, it must receive within it no foreign elements. So you must keep away from everything that belongs to civilisation, to the legal, political and social organisation of the bourgeoisie. Even when bourgeois politics is red as blood and burning like hot iron, if it does not accept as its direct and immediate aim the destruction of legal property and the political State – the two forts on which all bourgeois domination rests – its triumph could only be fatal to the cause of the proletariat.

Moreover, the bourgeoisie, which has come to the last degree of intellectual and moral impotence, is today incapable of making a revolution by itself. The people alone want it, and have the power to do it. So what is desired by this advance party of the bourgeoisie, represented by the liberals or exclusively political

democrats? It wants to seize the direction of the popular movement to once again turn it to its advantage – or as they say themselves, to save the bases of what they call civilisation, the very foundations of bourgeois domination.

Do the workers want to play the roles of dupes one more time? No. But in order not to be dupes what should they do? Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The

Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: It is the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of resistance funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally.

basis of that organisation is entirely given: It is the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of resistance funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally. The creation of chambers of labour [*chambres de travail*] as in Belgium.

And when the hour of the revolution sounds, the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society, including all legal relations. Anarchy, that it to say the true, the open popular revolution: legal and political anarchy, and economic organisation, from top to bottom and from the circumference to the centre, of the triumphant world of the workers.

And in order to save the revolution, to lead it to a good end, even in the midst of that anarchy, the action of a collective, invisible dictatorship, not invested with any power, but [with something] that much more effective and powerful – the natural action of all energetic and sincere socialist revolutionaries, spread over the surface of the

country, of all countries, but powerfully united by a common thought and will.¹

That, my dear friend, is, in my opinion, the only programme which by its bold application will lead not to new deceptions, but to the final triumph of the proletariat.

M. Bakunin

¹ Bakunin here uses the unfortunate term “invisible dictatorship.” As can be seen from the context in which it is used here (and elsewhere), he did not mean that militants would seize power over the masses but rather used it to describe the

influence of anarchist militants within mass movements, arguing their ideas to win others over to them. For more discussion, see section J.3.7 of *An Anarchist FAQ* volume 2. (*Black Flag*)

Circular to all the Federations of the International Workers' Association

Jura Federation

12 November 1871

The undersigned delegates, representing a group of Sections of the International which has just constituted itself under the name of the Jura Federation, address themselves by the present circular to all the Federations of the International Workers' Association and ask them to join together to demand the prompt convening of a general Congress.

We will explain in a few words what are the reasons which make us demand this measure, absolutely necessary to prevent our great Association from being dragged, without its knowledge, down a disastrous slope, at the end of which it would find dissolution.

When the International Workers' Association was created, a General Council was established which, according to the statutes, was to serve as the central correspondence office between Sections, but to which absolutely no authority was delegated, which would have been contrary to the very essence of the International, which is only one immense protest against authority.

The powers of the General Council are clearly defined by the following articles of the General Statutes and the General Regulations:

“General Statutes

“Article 3 – There is established a General Council consisting of workers representing the different nations forming part of the International Association. It will take from its members, according to the needs of the Association, officers, such as president, general secretary, treasurer and correspondence secretaries for the different countries.

“Every year, the assembled Congress will indicate the seat of the General Council, nominate its members, giving it the right to appoint additional members, and choose the place of the next assembly.

“At the time fixed for the Congress, and without the need for a special invitation, delegates will assemble by right at the designated time and place. The General Council may, in case of emergencies, change the location of the Congress, without however changing the date.

“Article 4. At each annual Congress, the General Council will publish a report of its activities for the year. In case of emergency, it may convene the Congress before the appointed term.

“Article 5. The General Council shall establish relations with the various workers associations, so that the workers of every country are constantly aware of the movement of their class in the other countries; that an inquiry into the social state [of the different countries] is made at the same time and in the same spirit; that the questions of general interest proposed by a Society for discussion be examined by all, and that when a practical idea or an international problem calls for the action of the Association, it may act in a uniform manner. Whenever it seems necessary, the General Council shall take the initiative of submitting proposals to local or national societies.

“It will publish a bulletin to facilitate its communications with the correspondence offices [of local and national societies].”

“Regulations

“First Article – The General Council is obliged to execute the resolutions of the Congress.

“To this end, it collects all the documents sent to it by the correspondence offices of the different countries, and those which it can obtain by other means. It is charged with organising the Congress and bringing its agenda to the attention of all the Sections, through the corresponding offices of the different countries.

“Article 2 – The General Council will publish, as many and as often as its means permit, a bulletin embracing everything that may interest the International Association: the supply and demand for labour in different localities; co-operative societies; the condition of the labouring classes in every country, etc.”

The General Council was seated in London for its first year for several reasons: it was from a meeting held in London that the initial idea of the International had arisen; London offered more security than the other cities of Europe in respect to individual rights.

In the subsequent Congresses of the International, at Lausanne (1867) and Brussels (1868), the [location of the] General Council was confirmed in London. As for its composition, all those who attended the general Congresses knew how it happened: the lists submitted to the Congress were voted upon in trust, and most of them had names completely unknown to the delegates.

Trust went so far that the General Council was allowed to appoint whomsoever it pleased; and by this provision of the statutes, the appointment of the General Council by Congress became illusory. Indeed, the Council could, afterwards, appoint any personnel who would completely modify the majority and tendencies.

At the Basel Congress, blind trust reached a sort of voluntary abdication into the hands of the General Council. By means of *administrative resolutions*, the spirit and letter of the General Statutes, in which the autonomy of each Section, of each group of Sections was so clearly proclaimed, was violated without really noticing it. Judge for yourselves:

*“Basel
Administrative
Resolutions*

“Resolution VI – The General Council has the right to suspend a Section of the International until the next Congress.

“Resolution VII – When disputes arise between societies or branches of a national group, or between groups of different nationalities, the General Council will have the right to decide upon the dispute, subject to appeal to the next Congress which will decide definitively.”

It placed into the hands of the General Council a dangerous power, and it was wrong not to have predicted the result.

If there is one undeniable fact, attested to a thousand times by experience, it is the corrupting effect produced by authority on those into whose hands it is deposited. It

is absolutely impossible for a man who has power over his fellows to remain moral.

The General Council could not escape this inevitable law. Composed of the same men always re-elected for five consecutive years and provided with a very great power over Sections by the Basel resolutions, it ended

up seeing itself as the rightful ruler of the International. The mandate of a member of the General Council has become, in the hands of some personalities, a personal property, and London appeared to them the immovable capital of our Association. Little by little, these men, who are only our agents – and most of them are not even our regular agents, not having been elected by a Congress – these men, we say, accustomed to march at our head and to speak in our name, have been led by the natural course of events and by very force of this situation to desire that their particular programme, their personal doctrine, should prevail in the International. Having become, in their own eyes, a sort of government, it was natural that their own particular ideas should appear to them as the official theory having sole legitimate place in the Association; while divergent views expressed by other groups appeared to them no longer the legitimate expression of an opinion equal in rights to

theirs, but as a real heresy. So was gradually formed an orthodoxy with headquarters in London, whose representatives were members of the General Council; and soon the correspondents of the Council for each country gave themselves the mission not to serve as neutral and disinterested intermediaries between the various Federations, but to become apostles for the orthodox doctrine, to seek propagators for it, and to serve sectarian interests to the detriment of the general interests of the Association.

What would result from all this? The General Council naturally encountered opposition to the new way in which it acted. Irresistible logic compelled it to seek to break this opposition. And now conflicts begin, and

The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International will give itself. We must therefore take care to ensure that this organisation is close as possible to our ideal. How could an egalitarian and free society emerge from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible. The International, embryo of the future human society, must from now on be the faithful reflection of our principles of federation and liberty

with them personal intimacies and the manoeuvres of cliques. The General Council becomes a hotbed of intrigue; opponents are reviled, slandered; finally, war, open war, breaks out within our Association.

Since the Congress of Basel in 1869, the General Congress of the Association has not met, the General Council has been left to itself for the last two years. The Franco-Prussian war was the reason there was no Congress in 1870; in 1871, this Congress was replaced by a secret Conference convened by the General Council without the Statutes in any way authorising it to act in this manner. This secret Conference, which certainly did not provide a comprehensive representation of the International since many Sections, ours in particular, had not been invited there; this Conference, the majority of which had been skewed in advanced by the fact that the General Council had arrogated to itself the right to seat six delegates appointed by itself with a deliberative vote; this Conference, which absolutely could not consider itself to be vested with the rights of a Congress, has nevertheless adopted resolutions which seriously undermine the General Statutes, and which tend to make the International, [currently] a free federation of autonomous Sections, a hierarchical and authoritarian organisation of disciplined Sections, placed entirely under the control of a General Council which may, as its discretion, refuse their admission or suspend their activity. And to crown the edifice, a decision of this Conference is that the General Council will itself fix the date and place of the next Congress *or the Conference which will replace it*; so that we are threatened with the suppression of General Congresses, these great public foundations of the International, and their replacement, at the pleasure of the General Council, by secret Conferences similar to that which has just been held in London.

In the face of this situation, what do we have to do?

We do not impugn the intentions of the General Council. The individuals who compose it have found themselves the victims of an inevitable necessity: they wanted, in good faith and for the triumph of their particular doctrine, to introduce into the International the principle of authority; Circumstances appeared to favour this tendency, and it appears to us quite natural that this school, whose ideal is *the conquest of political power by the working class*, should have believed that the International, as a result of recent events, had to change its original organisation and transform itself into a hierarchical organisation, directed and governed by a Committee.

But if we have explained these tendencies and events, we feel no less obliged to fight them in the name of that

Social Revolution we are pursuing and whose program is: "Emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves," outside of any directing authority, even if that authority was elected and consented to by the workers [themselves].

We demand in the International the upholding of this principle of the autonomy of the Sections which has hitherto been the basis of our Association; we demand that the General Council, whose functions have been distorted by the administrative resolutions of the Basel Congress, return to its normal role, which is that of a mere correspondence and statistics bureau; – and that unity that they would like to establish through centralisation and dictatorship, we want to achieve through the free federation of autonomous groups.

The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International will give itself. We must therefore take care to ensure that this organisation is close as possible to our ideal. How could an egalitarian and free society emerge from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible. The International, embryo of the future human society, must from now on be the faithful reflection of our principles of federation and liberty, and reject from its midst any principle tending towards authority, towards dictatorship.

We conclude with the call for a general Congress of the Association in the near future.

Long live the International Workers Association!

Sonvillier, 12 November 1871

Delegates to the Congress of the Jura Federation:

Henri DEVENOGES, Léon SCHWITZGUÉBEL, delegates of the central Section of the district of Courtelary; – Fritz TSCHUJ, Justin GUERBER, delegates of the Social Studies Circle of Sonvilier; – Christian HOFER, delegate of the Section of Moutier-Grandval; – Frédéric GRAISIER, Auguste SPICHIGER, delegates of the central Section of Le Locle; – Nicolas JOUKOVSKY, Jules GUESDE, delegates of the Section for propaganda and revolutionary socialist action of Geneva; – Charles CHOPARD, Alfred JEANRENAUD, delegates of the Section of the engravers and steel cutters of the district of Courtelary; – Numa BRANDT, delegate of the Section of propaganda of La Chaux-de-Fonds; – James GUILLAUME, A. DUPUIS, delegates of the central Section of Neuchâtel; – A. SCHEUNER, Louis CARTIER, delegates of the Circle of social studies of Saint Imier.

If there is one undeniable fact, attested to a thousand times by experience, it is the corrupting effect produced by authority on those into whose hands it is deposited.

The Revolutionary Movement in Italy

Michael Bakunin

Liberty: A Journal of anarchist communism, May 1896

In the February number of *La Societe Nouvelle* (Brussels) there appeared a long unedited letter written by Bakounine, to an Italian friend, in March, 1872, shortly after the death of Mazzini. In this letter Bakounine speaks at length of the work done by Mazzini, of the ideals which he sought to realise, but which necessarily were never reached, and for reasons that he (Bakounine) gives. It is, however, in that portion of the letter wherein Bakounine describes the position of the revolutionary movement in Italy – its difficulties, its dangers, and its prospects – that much interest is concentrated, and the extracts appearing below have such an up-to-date character that it is not difficult to imagine the letter as having been but very recently written.

In my opinion, one of the greatest cares of those who are at the head of the revolutionary Socialist movement in Italy today should be to find and fix, as far as it is possible, at least the principal lines of the plan, and especially of the programme, of the coming revolution. Without ever losing sight of the ideal, that must guide you as the polar star once guided mariners – and by that word “ideal” I mean justice, liberty, the most complete social and economic liberty, universal human solidarity and fraternity – in order to form a possible and practical programme, you must necessarily take into consideration the different condition of each of your provinces, as well as the habits and tastes of certain classes of your society. But not of all; because if you wished to content all classes you would necessarily arrive at zero, the interests of the governmental and superior classes being too opposed to those of the inferior strata to make a conciliation possible. I think, therefore, that all classes who are directly or indirectly interested in the upholding of the present state must be sacrificed without pity: thus the aristocracy, the upper financial, commercial, and industrial bourgeoisie, the large „owners of land and capital, and in great part the lower bourgeoisie, whose children today serve as officers in the army and as functionaries in the bureaucracy. This lower bourgeoisie in Italy, as in other countries, is a stupid and cowardly class – the prop of all corruption, of all iniquity, of all despotism.

There are in Italy four social strata which you must take into consideration; particularly the two principle strata – the town and country proletariat, the industrial and



agricultural workers. It is they who must give the principal character, the true tendency, to the coming revolution. Need I tell you that both classes are necessarily, eminently, instinctively Socialist? Your town workers daily give you fresh proofs that it is so. The eagerness with which they enrol themselves under the International banner, wherever a few individuals of goodwill eatable of hoisting it are to be found, is an undeniable proof of it. If we had to reckon only with the town proletariat, whose ideal defined above is already the aim of a very explicit and marked tendency, we could go very far. The passion that animates it is absolute equality and justice. They

want all men to work equally under the same economic and social conditions; the world to become a world of workers, with no more gentlemen, no more chances for anyone to fatten on the work of others. They claim for every worker the enjoyment of the whole produce of his labour. Mazzini in his last writings recognised the right of this claim, which is inscribed at the head of the International programme. But do you understand what this claim signifies? Nothing less than the appropriation of all capital by workers' associations, carried into effect by one means or another. For as long as capital is private property monopolized in the hands of individuals, and, as a consequence, workers' associations are deprived of capital, nothing can hinder capitalists from taking for their own benefit a share, and always the largest share, of what the workers have produced.

The political ideal contained in the aspirations of the town proletariat, seems to me at present divided into two tendencies, somewhat opposed and contradictory. On the one hand, even the least educated town worker, separated by the nature of his trade from that local spirit which the culture of the., land imprints, easily understands the universal solidarity of workers of all countries, and sooner finds his home in his particular trade than in the land on which he was born. The town worker is more or less cosmopolitan. On the other hand, under the influence no doubt of bourgeois doctrines, to which he has so long been subjected, he is not very much opposed to a centralised state. English and German workers dream today. of a centralised state, provided that state be a popular one. The workers' state, in my opinion, is a Utopia; every centralised state and government necessarily implying an aristocracy and an exploitation, were it only that of the governing class. Let us never forget that state means domination, and that human nature is such that all government becomes exploitation.

On the other hand, the rural masses are naturally federalist. The peasant is passionately attached to the land, and heartily detests town domination, and any outside government that imposes its thought and will on him. The revolution growing in England and Germany has the distinct characteristics of a town revolution, tending to a new mastership of the towns over the country. In England, the danger that will result from it to the revolution will not be so great, for in truth, if we except Ireland, a peasant class does not exist, all rural workers being wage-earners, paid by the day like town workers. It is otherwise in Germany, where the mass of peasants is immense, and where there are many peasant proprietors. Through the fault of the bourgeois, who have thrice suppressed the spontaneous rising of German peasants, that immense mass is now a serious opponent, of abstract Socialism.

You must not make the same mistake as Germans, and you must not be content with town Socialism. You cannot set aside the spirit and the natural and powerful aspirations of your country proletariat, your twenty million peasants. You must not condemn your revolution to a certain defeat. I think you have a

revolutionary element far more real and powerful in your country than in your towns. There is more thought, and more revolutionary consciousness, in the town proletariat, but there is more natural power in the country. Your country folk are by nature revolutionary, in spite of priests, whose influence is only skin deep. . . Fully emancipate the people and you will see all religious superstitions and celestial intoxications fall of themselves. It is not freethought propaganda, it is the

Social Revolution which will kill religion in the people.

Your peasants are necessarily Socialist, and for revolutionary purposes they find themselves in an excellent position—that is to say, in a detestable economic position. Imagine that in all the provinces of Italy the cry were raised, “War to the castles, Peace to the cottages!” Do you believe many peasants in Italy would remain quiet? Thus the ideal of the town proletariat consists in the expropriation of owners of capital, and the transformation of such capital into the collective property of workers' associations. The ideal of the country proletariat is complete local liberty, and the taking possession of all the land by the agricultural workers. These two ideals can be easily reconciled by the principle of free federation of communes and workers' associations, boldly proclaimed a year ago by the Paris Commune. And if there were only these two social strata. the programme of the revolution would soon be drawn up.

**The workers' state...
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exploitation.**

But there are two other strata which you must take into account: firstly, because their condition growing more and more wretched makes them inevitably more revolutionary, and because, both very numerous, exercise a, very powerful influence on the people. In the towns it is “the small bourgeoisie,” and in the country it is “the class of very small landowners.” These two classes have, so to say, no programme; and are both completely at sea. By their traditions and their social vanity they hang on to the privileged. classes. By their instincts, more and more menaced and sacrificed, and by the actual condition of their existence, they are on the contrary more and more carried towards the proletariat. Yet they still preserve some interests that would suffer from a too logical application of socialist principles as revealed already in the aspirations of the masses. To conciliate their interests with these aspirations, without however sacrificing the latter – such is your work today.

The Hague Congress

2–7 September 1872, The Hague, the Netherlands

The Spanish Federal Council to the Belgian Federal Council in Brussels

Valencia, June 19, 1872¹

Comrades,

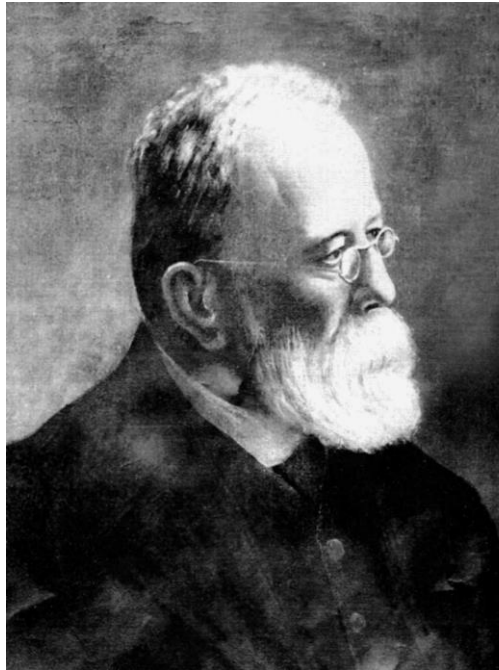
Soon one of the most important acts in the life of our Association will take place, and it is the duty of all good Internationals to prepare to draw from it the most profitable results for our cause. The time is approaching of an International Congress which in the present circumstances is of double importance due both to the attitude adopted by the bourgeoisie and the governments of all countries and to the degree of development and activity attained by the proletariat. On the resolutions that are taken at it will necessarily depend the future of the revolution, and therefore it is essential that they be based on a mature examination inspired by a lofty criterium of justice and free of all passion.

This Council, taking into account the said necessity and the declaration made by the Congress of this Regional Federation that it agrees entirely with the resolutions adopted by the Congress of the Belgian Federation held at Brussels in December 1871, has adopted the following decision which it has sent to the General Council:

“Taking into account Resolution IX of the Congress of Saragossa, the Council has decided to send to the General Council for inclusion in the agenda of the next International Congress the following subject:

“Revision of the General Rules.—Method of practically establishing working-class solidarity between all the Regional Federations.”

But not judging this to be sufficient and considering that for the reform of the General Rules it is essential to unite all the ideas and to point out all the disadvantages



Anselmo Lorenzo (1841-1914)

as well as the necessities that experience has taught us, this Council has decided also to address itself to all the Federal Councils proposing to them a study of all the means for practising solidarity.

For this purpose we submit our ideas to you in advance, hoping that the examination you make of them will result in your agreement and consequently our common action for the organisation of the proletariat.

We believe that for the workers to have their own life as a class aspiring after its emancipation and consequently after the destruction of the bases on which the present society reposes, solidarity is absolutely necessary. This belief, which is so widespread at the

present, is the principal support of the International, but unfortunately, despite this belief being so widespread, solidarity is more a desire than a material fact. This is a grave evil. International propaganda is usually conducted by demonstrating the advantages of solidarity, the workers hasten to join our Association, trusting it, and in many cases practice does not correspond to their hopes, producing bitter disappointments in many. If this state of things persists, if a stop is not put to this evil, the present generation may be overcome by indifference and there will be no means of raising it again.

To correct this evil we consider solidarity as being divided into economic and revolutionary.

By economic solidarity we understand the union of all the workers to struggle by means of resistance to capital.

And by revolutionary solidarity, the union of those same workers to oppose the provocations of the authoritarian powers by means of force.

¹ *The Hague Congress of the First International, September 2-7, 1872: minutes and documents* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976)

Both divisions of solidarity can be based only on Association, but this must be universal and single, that is to say, it must fit and harmonise all the groups of all regions in their development and in their action, affording immediate and effective aid to the collectives in general and to the partial collective which finds itself directly in struggle with the common enemy, whether in the economic or the revolutionary field, provided it finds itself in conditions which have been previously defined.

In order to achieve what we consider as absolutely necessary we believe it is indispensable to reform the General Rules in the sense of harmonising them with the programme in the preamble and to introduce all that practice and experience have taught us.

Basing ourselves on this idea we believe that economic solidarity may be achieved by grouping the workers of the same trade in every locality in a *section*; the sections of the various similar trades in one and the same locality constitute a *local grouping*; all sections of the same locality constitute a *local federation*; all the local groupings form a *Regional Union* of their respective trades, and all the local federations and all the trade unions constitute a *Regional Federation of the International*.

Each section collects all the statistical data concerning labour, which are then collated by the local grouping and by the union and are passed on to the federal council of the region, which undertakes to transmit them to all the regional federations and to all the groups of the same region.

Knowing by means of statistics the true relationships between labour and production, it will be possible to apply resistance scientifically from a general point of view, going beyond the narrow limits of the particular interests of a trade or a locality to consider the interests of all the workers.

The resistance funds of all the sections, formed from the subscriptions of all the workers, will satisfy all the requirements of this scientific resistance without any distinction either of trade or of country.

Revolutionary solidarity can be achieved by grouping the workers in the organisation described above and transforming it into a resistant to all the powers of the respective countries or hastening to provide aid when local or regional groups launch into armed struggle because of provocation on the part of the governments.

Such, in broad outline, is our opinion on the great question exercising the International today and which requires to be resolved with the greatest success because the cause of the revolution is closely bound to it.

Comrades. The moment is solemn, let us be inspired exclusively by the justice of the aspiration we have accepted, making abstraction of all petty ideas, and thus we shall place ourselves in a position to find truth.

Greetings and social liquidation.

By agreement with and on behalf of the Federal Council

The Secretary General *Anselmo Lorenzo*

To the Comrades of the Belgian Federal Council.

Report of the Jura Federation Delegate

James Guillaume

Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne de l'Association internationale des travailleurs, Nos. 17-18, 15 September to 1 October 1872¹

The Congress of the Hague

This Congress began on Sunday, September 1, in the evening with a preliminary meeting at which the delegates, arriving one by one and with great difficulty at the Concordia Hall in Lange Lombard Straat through a generally hostile crowd, were able to note two very unpleasant things: first that the preparations for the Congress had by no means been completed for want of a local organisation which could have seriously undertaken this; for the few Internationals of The Hague, for all their good will, were faced with the material impossibility to prepare everything necessary for the normal holding of the Congress. But the General Council having chosen The Hague, the latter had to comply whether they liked it or not. The second unpleasant thing was the presence of the General

Council almost in full strength; its members alone made up one-third of the Congress, and with the addition of a certain number of more or less serious delegates they constituted a ready-made majority which was bound to make all discussion illusive.

In fact one could note officially at the administrative sitting on Monday, when the checking of the mandates began, the presence of *twenty-two* members of the General Council out of a total of 64 delegates. Of these *twenty-two*, two were delegated purely and simply by the General Council, without a mandate from any section. A certain number of others had complimentary mandates issued by sections to which these gentlemen were and still are completely unknown. These mandates, which arrived blank in London, had then

¹ *The Hague Congress of the First International, September 2-7, 1872: minutes and documents* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976)

been filled in by the General Council itself. We saw this with our own eyes in the case of Citizen Vaillant, who had a mandate from the Section of Chaux-de-Fonds (the Ulysse DuboisElzingre-Coullery Section). This mandate did not contain any instructions, but said simply: "The section delegates to the Congress Citizen... (a blank space for the name) with powers to represent it," and then another hand had inserted the name of Vaillant. Other members of the General Council, such as Ant. Arnaud, who had a mandate from the Carouge Section; Barry, who had a mandate from the Chicago Section (North America); and Cournet, who had a mandate from the Central Committee of Copenhagen, were in the same situation as Vaillant.

[...]

As soon as the Congress opened, the Spaniards introduced a motion aiming at changing the mode of voting. The usage adopted up to now, which gives one vote to each delegate, allows the delegates of a single region, if the geographical conditions permit a large number of them to attend, to form by themselves alone the majority at a Congress. The Spaniards, seconded by the Belgians and the Jurassians, consequently asked that the voting should be not by individuals, but by federations. This so legitimate request was rejected by the majority, who saw themselves lost if the vote was not by individuals. Faced with this decision of the Congress, the Spaniards and the Jurassians declared that they would not take part in any vote, and that they considered the Congress as a mere farce; simultaneously they announced their decision to remain present at the doings of the majority till the end—as simple spectators. Several of the Belgians and the Dutch equally ceased voting in the first days.

[...]

At this first public sitting, after a speech by the chairman Ranvier, who praised the London Conference, the General Council presented a report on the political events in Europe during the three years since the Basle Congress. This report has been published by various newspapers and will probably appear as a pamphlet, so we think we can refrain from giving a summary of it, which would necessarily be incomplete.

After the report had been read out in French, English and German, the Jura Federation delegates, seconded by



James Guillaume (1844-1916)

various other opposition delegates, tabled the following resolution:

“The Congress of the International Working Men’s Association, assembled in The Hague, expresses in the name of the world proletariat its admiration for the heroic champions of the emancipation of labour who fell victims of their devotion and sends fraternal and sympathetic greetings to all those who are at present persecuted by bourgeois reaction in France, Germany, Denmark and the entire world.”

This resolution was not voted on, it was carried by acclamation.

The discussion then began on the first point of the agenda: the powers of the General Council.

Herman, delegated by the sections of Liège (Belgium), himself a member of the General Council, in which he fulfils the function of secretary for Belgium, opened the discussion. Herman belongs to the opposition. The sections which he represents, like all the Belgian sections in general, are of the opinion that the General Council should not be a political centre imposing any doctrine and claiming to direct the Association. It should be formed differently from the way it has been up to now, every country being able to nominate representatives, without the right to appoint any foreign member. The aim pursued by the International is to organise the working-class forces in the struggle against capital with the ultimate objective of abolishing wage-labour and the proletariat. Each country should be free to seek the means of action which suit it best in this struggle. As for Herman, his delegation was explicit: it demanded that the Congress should establish such conditions that the General Council will no longer be in a position to impose any direction on the Association.

Lafargue, Marx’s son-in-law, replied to Herman. He spoke of his Lisbon and Madrid mandates and of the instructions which they contained (instructions written under the dictation of Mr. Lafargue himself). The General Council’s powers had to be maintained; it was through it that the International existed; if it was suppressed, the International would perish. He would say of the General Council what Voltaire said of God: if it did not exist it would have to be invented.

Guillaume, a Jura delegate, expounded the opinion of his federation in a speech the principal points of which we reproduce so that the members of the Jura Federation can judge whether their delegate expressed their opinion faithfully.

Actually, he said, there were two great trends of ideas in the Association. Some considered it as the permanent creation of a central power, of a group of men in possession of a certain social doctrine the application of which was to emancipate labour; they were spreading their doctrine everywhere, preventing all propaganda opposed to it. It was thought that it was owing to this group, which maintained a sort of orthodoxy, and because of it, that the International existed. Others on the contrary believed that the International did not result from the action of any group of men, but from the economic conditions prevailing in each country. The similar situation of the workers in the various countries produced identity of sentiments, aspirations and interests which spontaneously gave birth to the International. The latter was not a conception of one brain, but the necessary result of economic facts.

The members of the Jura Federation had contributed at Basle to placing in the hands of the General Council the powers they were complaining of at present. This they readily admitted. It was because they had been taught by experience and had had to suffer from the General Council's abuse of power that they gradually came to examine whether the extent of those powers was not a danger. They acted as practical people, not as theorists.

The desire expressed about a year earlier by their federation to curtail the powers of the General Council had won the adherence of various federations. In Belgium it had even been suggested to suppress the Council. They did not go so far. But when that proposal came to their knowledge they sought to find out whether, in the actual situation of the International, the existence of the General Council was necessary. They had held discussions and had consulted the other federations: what was the result of that inquiry? The majority of the federations were in favour of preserving not a central authority, but a correspondence and statistics centre. It seemed to them that the federations could enter into relations with each other without that intermediary; nevertheless they adhered to the opinion of the majority on condition that the General Council would be no more than a correspondence and statistics centre.

Those who wished to preserve the General Council with the powers it actually possessed objected that a strong power was needed to uphold our Association. The International pursued a struggle of two kinds: the economic struggle which was expressed by strikes, and the political struggle, which according to countries, was expressed by nominating workers as candidates, or by revolution. Those two struggles were inseparable: they had to be pursued simultaneously, there was no disagreement on that score. But on what grounds would the General Council be necessary to direct them in the one or the other of these struggles? Had it ever organised a strike? No. It had taken no action in those conflicts. When they arose it was only solidarity that

determined them to act. It should be remembered, to speak of Switzerland alone, what protests the Geneva Federation addressed to the newspapers which claimed, at the time of the 1868-69 strikes, that that federation had received an order from London and Paris. As for them, they did not want the International to receive orders from London or from anywhere else.

Neither was the General Council necessary for the political struggle. It had never led the workers to revolution. Those grandiose manifestations were carried out spontaneously, without any need for guidance.

Since that time they had contested the necessity of the General Council. However, they admitted it if its role was reduced to the simple functions of a correspondence and statistics bureau.

[...]

On the Friday the second public sitting was held. At it there was discussion of a motion signed by a certain number of members of the majority to insert in the General Rules Resolution IX of the London Conference formulated as follows:

Article 7a.

In its struggle against the collective power of the propertied classes, the working class cannot act as a class except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to all old parties formed by the propertied classes.

This constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution, and of its ultimate end, the abolition of classes.

The combination of forces which the working class has already effected by its economical struggles ought, at the same time, to serve a lever in the hands of this class in the struggles against the political power of these exploiters.

The lords of land and of capital always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies and for the enslavement of labour; the conquest of political power therefore becomes the great duty of the working class.

The discussion was not a serious one. The two speakers in favour of the motion, Vaillant and Hepner, did not adduce any argument.

[...]

Guillaume was the only delegate of the minority who was allowed to speak. This was a breach of order, since there were fifteen names down before his, but as we understood later, the General Council's plan was to have *Guillaume* expound the theories of the opposition in a public sitting, and then, at the end of the Congress to punish with expulsion the one who had been the

mouthpiece of the minority in order to let the public at large think that the minority had no other advocate than a man who was unworthy to be a member of the International.

Guillaume's reply was very incomplete because, as he had not come to any previous understanding with his colleagues of the minority he could not collect all the material scattered in the hands of various delegates who intended to speak against the motion. Besides, the minority felt repugnance at producing in a public sitting certain letters written by members of the General Council which showed the true meaning of the motion. Guillaume therefore confined himself to a general exposition of the federalist and revolutionary theory, which he opposed to the communist theory expounded in the famous *Communist Manifesto* published by Marx and Engels in 1848. Resolution IX of the London Conference, which it was intended to insert in the General Rules was, according to the minority, only a first step in the direction of that communist programme. Recalling the term *abstentionists* applied to the Belgian, Dutch, Jura, Spanish and Italian Internationals, Guillaume said that this term, introduced into socialist vocabulary by Proudhon, was liable to be equivocally interpreted, and that what the minority at the Congress aimed at was not political indifferentism, but a special kind of politics negating bourgeois politics and which we should call the politics of labour. The distinction between the positive politics of the majority and the negative politics of the minority was, by the way, clearly brought out in the definition of the aims pursued by the one and by the other: the majority wanted *the conquest of political power*, the minority wanted *the destruction of political power*.

[..]

And after all this, on the Saturday evening, at an administrative sitting, a few minutes before the closing of the Congress, Lucain, reporting for the commission read the following memorable report:

Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Alliance Society

the International did not result from the action of any group of men, but from the economic conditions prevailing in each country. The similar situation of the workers in the various countries produced identity of sentiments, aspirations and interests which spontaneously gave birth to the International.

As the Commission of Inquiry has not had time to present you with a complete report, it can only supply you with an evaluation based on the documents communicated to it and on the statements which it has received.

After having heard citizens Engels, Karl Marx, Wroblewski, Dupont, Serrailier and Swarm for the Association,

And citizens Guillaume, Schwitzguébel, Zhukovsky, Morago, Marselau and Farga Pellicer, accused of belonging to the Alliance secret society,

The commission announces:

1. That the secret Alliance founded on the basis of rules completely opposed to those of the International Working Men's Association has existed, but it has not been sufficiently proved to the commission that it still exists.

2. That it has been proved, by draft rules and by letters signed "Bakunin", that this citizen has attempted, perhaps successfully, to found in Europe a society called the Alliance with rules completely at variance, from the social and political point of view, with those of the International Working Men's Association.

3. That Citizen Bakunin has resorted to dishonest dealings with the aim of appropriating the whole or part of another person's property, which constitutes an act of fraud.

Furthermore, in order to avoid fulfilling his obligations, he or his agents have resorted to intimidation.

On these grounds:

the citizen-members of the commission demand that the Congress:

1. Should expel Citizen Bakunin from the International Working Men's Association;
2. should likewise expel citizens Guillaume and Schwitzguébel, being convinced that they still belong to a society called the Alliance;
3. since, during the course of the inquiry, it has been proved to us that citizens Malon, Bousquet—the latter being secretary to the Police Commissioner for Béziers (France)—and Louis Marchand, who has been residing at

Bordeaux, have all been guilty of acts aimed at the disorganisation of the International Working Men's Association, the commission likewise demands their expulsion from the Association.

4. As regards citizens Morago, Farga Pellicer, Marselau, Alerini and Zhukovsky, the commission, bearing in mind their formal statements that they no longer belong to the said *Alliance* society, requests that the Congress should consider them not implicated in the matter.

To ensure their responsibility, the members of the commission request that the documents which have been communicated to them, as also the statements made, should be published by them in the official organ of the Association.

The Hague, September 7, 1872

Chairman *Th. F. Cuno*

(delegate for Stuttgart and Diisseldorf)

Secretary *Lucain*

(delegate for France)

A few short remarks will show at once the stupidity and the infamy of this document:

In it the *Alliance* society is spoken of now as a secret society, now as a public one, so that complete confusion on this score reigns from beginning to end of the report.

It is said, on the one hand, *that the secret Alliance has existed, but that it has not been sufficiently proved that it still exists*, and further *on that Bakunin has attempted, perhaps successfully to found a society called Alliance*, -- and on the other hand the commission says it is convinced that Guillaume and Schwitzguébel *still belong to a society called the Alliance*. Is it possible to fall into a more childish contradiction? For either the commission affirms, as it does above, that it has not been sufficiently proved to it that the Alliance still exists, and then it is absurd to say that it is convinced that Guillaume and Schwitzguébel still belong to it; or else it is in fact proved that Guillaume and Schwitzguébel still belong to it, and in that case the commission does not know what it is talking about when it claims that the very existence of this Society has not been sufficiently proved to it.

The commission affirms that this Alliance had Rules completely opposed to those of the International. But the truth, which the commission knows as well as we do, is that the Alliance has really existed; that Bakunin not only attempted, but succeeded in founding it; that it functioned in broad daylight, in public, to everybody's knowledge; that this fact is known by all those who have anything to do with the socialist movement; and that the programme of this Alliance and the rules of the section which bore that name in Geneva *were approved*

in 1869 by the General Council in London, so that they could not be opposed to those of the International.

Further the commission formulates an accusation of fraud against Bakunin. But not the slightest proof has been supplied to the Congress to back up such a grave accusation, and the accused was neither informed nor heard! This is therefore a case of defamation, pure and simple. But it is useless to insist on this for the time being: Bakunin's honour cannot be affected by such indignities.

[...]

Guillaume, being invited to defend himself, refused to do so saying that this would apparently be taking seriously the farce organised by the majority. He limited himself to noting that it was at the whole of the federalist party that the majority wished to strike a blow by the measures taken against a few of its members; but, he added, your revenge is too late, we had anticipated that, our pact of solidarity is drawn up and signed, and we shall read it to you.

And thereupon, *Dave*, a delegate of The Hague, read out the following statement:

Statement of the Minority

We the undersigned, members of the minority at the Hague Congress, supporters of the autonomy and federation of groups of working men, faced with a vote on decisions which seem to us to be contrary to the principles recognised by the countries we represented at the preceding congress, but desiring to avoid any kind of split within the International Working Men's Association, take the following decision, which we shall submit for approval to the sections which delegated us:

1. We shall continue our administrative relations with the General Council in the matter of payment of subscriptions, correspondence and labour statistics.
2. The federations which we represent will establish direct and permanent relations between themselves and all regularly constituted branches of the Association.
3. In the event of the General Council wishing to interfere in the internal affairs of a federation, the federations represented by the undersigned undertake jointly to maintain their autonomy as long as the federations do not engage on a path directly opposed to the General Rules of the International approved at the Geneva Congress.
4. We call on all the federations and sections to prepare between now and the next general congress for the triumph within the International of the principles of federative

autonomy as the basis of the organisation of labour.

5. We resolutely reject any connection whatever with the so-called London World Federalist Council and with any similar organisation alien to the International.

[...]

The members of the majority listened in silence to this unexpected reading. Not a remark was made. As everybody was in a hurry to get it over, the chairman had a vote taken by roll-call on the expulsions proposed by the commission.

About one-third of the delegates had left the Congress, only some forty remained.

Bakunin's expulsion was voted by 27 *for*, 7 *against* and 7 abstentions (the abstainers were the 4 Spaniards, the 2 Jura delegates, and another member of the minority).

Guillaume's expulsion was voted by 25 *for*, 9 *against* and 8 abstentions (the abstainers being the same plus the Irishman MacDonnell).

In respect of Schwitzguébel we do not know the number *for*. There were 17 *against* and 9 abstentions. The number against and abstaining was more than the number for, the expulsion was not adopted.¹

Schwitzguébel immediately protested; he pointed out that his expulsion had been proposed for exactly the same motives as that of Guillaume and that it was absurd to expel one and not the other. The majority did not reply, and Guillaume for his part stated that he continued to consider himself a member of the International.

[..]

General Conclusion from the Hague Congress

Pierre Fluse²

We went to the Hague Congress firmly determined to defend revolutionary and anarchist ideas, for the triumph of which we have not ceased to fight since the origin of our vast and powerful organisation. We met there, marching united with us, all the Belgians from the other Federations, and with them all the Spaniards, the Dutch, the Swiss, a large part of America and a considerable portion of England. The whole of Italy, which reasons of the highest importance had prevented from sending a delegate to the Congress, defends the same principles and fights all restoration of authority. In fact the struggle was on the one hand between the supporters of authority and centralisation, represented above all by the General Council, by the Germans and by the French, and the supporters of pure anarchy on the other. Two major questions were submitted to us for discussion, and both of them were solved in a manner contrary to our hopes. There was first of all the question of extending the powers of the General Council, of increasing the powers which it had possessed until now, and then of sanctioning by the vote of a world Congress the resolution adopted at the London Conference on the political action of the working classes. The General Council has become a veritable power, whereas we would have wished it to lose even the power which it already had; the resolution of the London Conference was accepted, whereas we had fostered the hope that the majority of the Congress, recognising at last that it was entering on a path which was ruinous and dangerous for

the Association, would renounce these erroneous ideas and its counter-revolutionary tendencies.

Before going any further, however, let us add that this double failure, though it saddened us, did not in the least discourage us. The International Working Men's Association is too powerful, the revolution of the nineteenth century is too well entirely embodied in it for it to fear such struggles; and we shall point out with Proudhon that Christianity also had its heresies at the very beginning, and later its great schism; the Reformation had its confessions and its sects; the French Revolution had, to mention only the most famous names, its Constitutionals, its Jacobins, and its Girondins. So may the International too have its anarchists and its authoritarians; the Revolution will recognise its own!

Two trends of ideas divide the International today. Some think that the Working Men's Association must be organised as a *hierarchy*, that is to say, that it needs a head linking together and directing from above the scattered members of this vast body. Force being the guiding principle and the only support of modern states, they think that we also must use the force that is in us, which is the result of our organisation, and constitute ourselves into a powerful political party capable of conquering political power in order to replace the bourgeois state by the people's state, the *Volksstaat* of the German socialists. This is, as we were reminded at the Hague Congress, a return to the programme of the

¹ We borrow these figures from the Brussels *Liberté* and therefore cannot guarantee their absolute accuracy.

² *The Hague Congress of the First International, September 2-7, 1872: minutes and documents* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976)

German communists of 1848. This conception, in our opinion, has no serious philosophical value, because the organisation of the International, the fruit of this entirely mystical conception, is neither free, nor natural, nor, consequently, true. It is not free because it receives its impulse from above, because it creates an authority *outside itself*, and sacrifices the conscience of the people; it is not natural because, coming from above, it does not take into account the liberty, the autonomy of each of its members, but substitutes for the individual's or the group's own, *essential* authority of the acquired and artificial authority of a few men who, by the nature

of the functions they have been given, find themselves at the top of the organisation, at the head of the hierarchy; lastly, it is not true because, by borrowing its mode of functioning from one of the forms of the Absolute, authority, it can only end up by establishing within itself a party, that of the top, holding all the rest of the organisation under its domination, by imposing its own sovereign will on that organisation as the rule of its conduct. This system, which emerged fully armed from the eternally ravaged flanks of the Absolute, must be applied in an equally absolutist manner, if indeed it can ever triumph. The people's state, the last and perhaps the ideal form of revolutionary reaction, emerges naturally, fatally from this artificial and extra-natural organisation. Whatever it does, this people's state, in order to maintain itself, will have to call on the reactionary forces which are natural allies of authority:

the army, diplomacy, war, centralisation of all powers preventing the liberty and initiative of individuals and groups from emerging and manifesting themselves. Liberty, in fact, is illusory in this system, since it exists only by the constant diminution of force, by the progressive destruction of power, and because all the wheels of the system function, on the contrary, in such a way as to render the power of the people's government as crushing as the power of the bourgeois government is today. Once engaged on this arbitrary and despotic road, one must fatally climb one by one all the rungs of authority; there is no place on this fatal road where one can stop. Do you want a new and striking example of this? The Basle Congress gave the General Council the right to *suspend* a section of the International. This formidable right, which in a moment of blind confidence and social inexperience, if we may say so,

we granted to the Council, placed it above the whole of the Federation to which the excommunicated section belonged. We bitterly regretted our error, but we could entertain the hope that this resolution would never be applied. The Hague Congress disillusioned us. We learned there that the Council's authority was not great enough, and the majority of the Congress lost no time in filling this gap. From now on the General Council will have the right to suspend a whole federation, that is to say, it has become the supreme arbiter of the revolutionary destiny of a whole nation. Were we wrong in saying that once engaged on this road, it is

impossible not to encroach more and more on the autonomy of the groups until in the end they are all absorbed and destroyed completely!

Contrary to the supporters of authoritarianism and centralisation, we think with Bakunin (Bakunin, *Almanach du Peuple pour 1870*) that the International Working Men's Association would have no meaning at all if it did not tend invincibly towards the abolition of the state. It only organises the popular masses in view of this destruction. And how does it organise them?

Not from the top to the bottom, by imposing on the social diversity produced by the diversity of labour among the masses, or imposing on the natural life of the masses, an artificial unity and order as states do; but from the bottom to the top, on the contrary, by taking as the point of departure the social existence of the masses, their real aspirations, and inducing and helping them to

group themselves, to harmonise and balance themselves in conformity with this natural diversity of occupations and situations.

This means in other words that we use for the workers' organisation the only rational and positive method, that we group the different trades, first locally, then by federations and nations, and then internationally, leaving to each natural group its own autonomy. Every individual, every group thus develops spontaneously, moves freely, within the limits of law and of justice, and its action can be modified only by the influence exerted on it by all the individuals, all the other organised groups. And when the International has been thus organised everywhere, the political authoritarian workers' party will be of no use for abolishing the state,

this people's state, in order to maintain itself, will have to call on the reactionary forces which are natural allies of authority: the army, diplomacy, war, centralisation of all powers preventing the liberty and initiative of individuals and groups from emerging and manifesting themselves.

for, as Proudhon judiciously observed, a government of reaction, by wanting to save society from revolution, affects the interests of the whole of society. Once the grouping of the proletariat is achieved, it will be the end of the state, and as we do not wish to replace it by another, even a people's state, we have no use for the formation of a working-class army, the purpose of which would be to *conquer* political power. The proletariat's mission is, on the contrary, to dissolve the state in the industrial organisation.

Since the Absolute is completely eliminated from this conception of the International, all the successive creations of the Absolute disappear with it.

In the system of Revolution, God is dethroned, society is the work of man, who is his own beginning and his own end, and the distribution or rather the sharing out of earthly goods is effected according to his will, regulated by reason and justice. There is no class which directs and dominates another class, every member of society works for himself and for all and fulfils his social function alone and entirely himself. All the useful forces are necessary for the development of society, and nobody has the right to deprive it of the co-operation of any one of them. God, no longer being the supreme regulator of human destinies, becomes useless, and poverty ceases to be without remedy: labour and intelligence must naturally overcome it. The Church, deriving the reason for its existence and its force from the Absolute, disappears with it. It is no longer the state, the army, the Church, God, who prance over the government of the world; it is labour, represented by the people, which rules everything, having raised everything to itself. Religion having been destroyed, the people rises from its intellectual and moral degradation; politics having been eliminated, it rises from its economic decay, with which disappears at once the feudalism of finance, of industry, of property, of capital. Social science appears and destroys all which is incompatible with it: politics and government.

“The economic balance being established there is no need of the army to maintain it, war, being by its nature a great parasite, able only to disrupt, not strengthen the established balance. Peace is the necessary result and the sublime crowning of all the forces directed towards labour.

“Labour being essentially a peacemaker, the people emancipated by revolutionary politics strives to give guarantees to its labour and

thereby to the labour of all; instead of creating, as is inevitably the case today, new monopolies for the profit of a few, on the contrary it extends these guarantees, and unites town with town, country with country; it gives all workers solidarity with one another and creates the life of relationships in economic order. Can politics and war still find a place, be it ever so small, in society thus transformed? No, and when this constitution of labour has finally replaced the constitution of the old world, the accession of the working class will have been realised so imperiously and fatally that the most severe justice will recognise its legitimacy and bow down before it” (Victor Dave, “L'autorité ou la Révolution”. *Liberté*, November 13, 1870).

We are reproached with being *abstentionists* in politics. At the Hague Congress this term was proved to be quite inappropriate. In respect of states and governments our politics is in fact *negative*, and in this sense we understand to a certain point that we are called abstentionists. But we have our

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own politics, the true politics of the people and of labour, and that politics is *positive*. It is *federalism* which we oppose to authoritarianism. Every political form being intimately linked to an economic organisation and depending on that organisation, the federalist politics must be different from the authoritarian politics, because the economic organisation corresponding to these two political forms is essentially different. Authoritarianism is, in effect, the political expression of the communist principle which leads to the constitutions of a people's proprietor state; federalism, on the contrary, is the political expression of the collectivist principle which leads to the free federation of free associations of producers. The difference between the two paths followed by the International is therefore clearly seen, and it is not difficult to foresee which of the two will lead to the democratic and social Revolution. When we oppose with all our might the triumph of the authoritarian, unitarian and absolutist principle, we are fighting like Proudhon to realise the interests of each one together with the interests of all, the identity of collective sovereignty and individual sovereignty. Since we must therefore fight adversaries who have appeared in our midst, let us do so with our heart penetrated with mutual loyalty to both parties and with the consciousness of a great duty to be fulfilled. And then let ancient and implacable Nemesis, who is never moved by anything, lead us through all obstacles and not stop us until the people's conscience and the Revolution are satisfied!

Delegate to the Hague Congress *Pierre Fluse*

Resolutions of the Saint-Imier Congress

15-16 September 1872

First Resolution

Attitude of the Federations gathering in Congress at Saint-Imier, in reference to the resolutions of the Hague Congress and of the General Council.

Considering that the autonomy and independence of the workers' federations and sections are the first condition for the emancipation of the workers;

That any legislative and regulatory power given to the Congresses would be a flagrant denial of this autonomy and freedom:

The Congress denies in principle the legislative right of all Congresses whether general or regional, according them no other mission than that of bringing together the aspirations, needs and ideas of the proletariat of different localities or countries, in order that their harmonisation and unification is effected as much as possible; but, in no case can a majority of any Congress will be able to impose its resolutions upon the minority.

Considering, on the other hand, that the institution of a General Council in the International is, by its very nature and inevitably, driven to become a permanent violation of this freedom that must be the fundamental basis of our great Association;

Considering that the acts of the recently dissolved London General Council during the last three years are the living proof of the inherent flaw in this institution;

That, in order to increase its initially very limited power, it has resorted to the most despicable intrigues, lies, calumnies to try to smear all those who dared to oppose it;

That, in order to reach the final fulfilment of its views, it has long prepared the Hague Congress, whose artificially organised majority had obviously no other aim than to secure the triumph in the International of the domination of an authoritarian party, and that, to

achieve this end, it did not hesitate to trample on all decency and justice.

That such a Congress cannot be the expression of the proletariat of the countries which were represented there:

The Congress of delegates of the Spanish, Italian, Jura, American and French Federations, gathering in Saint-Imier, declares that it completely rejects all the resolutions of the Hague Congress, not recognising in any way the power of the new General Council named

by it; and, to safeguard their respective Federations against the governmental pretensions of this General Council, as well as to further preserve and strengthen the unity of the International, the delegates have laid the bases of a proposal for a solidarity pact amongst these Federations.

Second Resolution

Pact of friendship, solidarity and mutual defence between the free Federations

Considering that the great unity of the International is founded not on the artificial and always malignant organisation of any centralising power, but on the real identity of interests and aspirations of the proletariat of all lands on the one hand, and, on the other, on the spontaneous and absolutely free federation of the free federations and sections of all countries;

Considering that within the International there is a tendency, openly displayed at the Hague Congress by the authoritarian party which is that of German Communism,

to substitute its domination and the power of its leaders for free development and this spontaneous and free organisation of the proletariat;

Considering that the majority of the Hague Congress have cynically sacrificed the principles of the International to the ambitious plans of this party and its

the aspirations of the proletariat can have no purpose other than the establishment of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation, based upon the labour and equality of all and absolutely independent of any political government, and that this organisation and this federation can only be the outcome of the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself, of trades unions and autonomous communes

leaders, and that the new General Council named by it and endowed with even greater powers than those it had wished to arrogate to itself by means of the London Conference, threatens to destroy this unity of the International by its attacks on its freedom;

The delegates of the Spanish, Italian, Jura, French and American Federations and Sections, meeting at this Congress have established, in the name of these Federations and Sections, and subject to their definitive acceptance and confirmation, the following pact of friendship, solidarity and mutual defence:

1. The Spanish, Italian, French, Jura and American Federations and Sections, and all those who wish to join to this pact, will have regular and direct communication and correspondence with each other, completely independent of any governmental control;

2. When one of these Federations or Sections finds its liberty attacked, either by the majority of a General Congress, or by the government or General Council created by that majority, all the other Federations and Sections will declare themselves fully in solidarity with it.

They loudly proclaim that concluding this pact has for its principal purpose the salvation of this great unity of the International which the ambition of the authoritarian party has endangered.

Third Resolution

Nature of the Political Action of the Proletariat

Considering:

That wanting to impose a uniform line of conduct or political programme on the proletariat as the only path that can lead to its social emancipation is a pretension as absurd as it is reactionary;

That no one has the right to deprive the autonomous federations and sections of the indisputable right to decide for themselves and to follow the line of political conduct which they believe to be the best, and that any such attempt would inevitably lead us to the most revolting dogmatism;

¹ It must be stressed that at the time the proletariat was a *minority* within the working classes of every nation with the exception of Great Britain. The bulk of the population in

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Considering that every political organisation can be nothing but the organisation of domination for the benefit of a class and to the detriment of the masses, and that the proletariat, if it wanted to seize power, would itself become a dominant and exploiting class;¹

The Congress gathered in Saint-Imier declares:

1. That the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat;

2. That any organisation of a supposedly provisional and revolutionary political power to bring about this destruction can only be another deception and would be as dangerous to the proletariat as all the governments existing today;

3. That, rejecting all compromise to achieve the realisation of the Social Revolution, proletarians of every land must establish solidarity of revolutionary action outside of all bourgeois politics.

Fourth Resolution

Organisation of Labour Resistance - Statistics

Freedom and labour are the basis of the morality, strength, life and wealth of the future. But work, if it is not organised freely, becomes oppressive and unrewarding for the worker; and this is why the organisation of labour is the indispensable condition for the real and

complete emancipation of the worker.

However, labour cannot be freely exerted without the possession of raw materials and all social capital, and cannot be organised unless the worker, freeing himself from political and economic tyranny, conquers the right to the complete development of all his faculties. Every State, that is to say, every government and every administration of the masses from the top-down, necessarily being founded upon bureaucracy, upon

Western Europe were either peasants or artisans, as even Marx had to admit at times. This remained the case until well into the twentieth century. (Editor)

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armies, upon espionage, upon the clergy, can never be able to establish a society organised on labour and justice, since by the very nature of its organisation it is inevitably forced to oppress the former and deny the latter.

According to us, the worker can never free himself from age-old oppression unless he replaces that insatiable and demoralising body with the free federation of all producer groups based upon solidarity and equality.

In fact, in several places attempts have already been made to organise labour to improve the conditions of the proletariat, but the slightest improvement has soon been gobbled up by the privileged class, which is forever trying, without restraint and without limit, to exploit the working class. However, the advantage of this organisation is such that, even as things stand at present, it cannot be abandoned. It makes the proletariat fraternise ever wider in common interests, trains it in collective living, prepares it for the supreme struggle. Moreover, since the free and spontaneous organisation of labour is what must replace the privileged and authoritarian organisation of the political State, it will be, once established, the permanent guarantee of the maintenance of the economic organism against the political organism.

Consequently, leaving the details of positive organisation to the practice of the Social Revolution, we intend to organise and unify resistance on a vast scale. The strike is for us a precious means of struggle, but we have no illusions about its economic results. We accept it as a product of the antagonism between labour and capital, necessarily having the consequence of making workers more and more aware of the abyss which exists between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, strengthening the workers' organisation, and preparing, as a result of ordinary economic struggles, the proletariat for the great and final revolutionary struggle which, destroying all privilege and all class distinction, will give the worker the right to enjoy the full product

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of his labour, and thereby the means of developing in the collectivity all his intellectual, material and moral powers.

The Commission proposes to the Congress the appointment of a committee charged to present to the next Congress a proposal on the universal organisation of resistance, and comprehensive statistical tables on labour statistics from which this struggle will draw light. It recommends the Spanish organisation as the best to date.

Final Resolution

The Congress proposes sending a copy of all resolutions of the Congress, and the *Pact of friendship, solidarity, and mutual defence*, to all the workers' federations of the world, and to reach an agreement with them on questions of general interest to all the free federations.

The Congress invites all the federations who have established between themselves this pact of friendship, solidarity and mutual defence, to consult immediately with all the federations or sections who would want to accept this pact to determine the nature and date of their international Congress, expressing the desire that they will meet no later than in six months.

The participants to the Saint-Imier Congress:

Delegates of Italian sections: Michael Bakunin, Carlo Cafiero, Andrea Costa, Errico Malatesta, Giuseppe Fanelli, Ludovico Nabruzzi.

Delegates of Spanish sections: Carlos Alerini, Rafael Farga-Pellicer, Nicolas Alonso Marselau, Tomàs Gonzàles Morago.

Delegates of French sections: Camille Camet, Jean-Louis Pindy.

Delegates of the Jura Federation: James Guillaume, Adhémar Schwitzguébel

Delegate of American sections: Gustave Lefrançais.

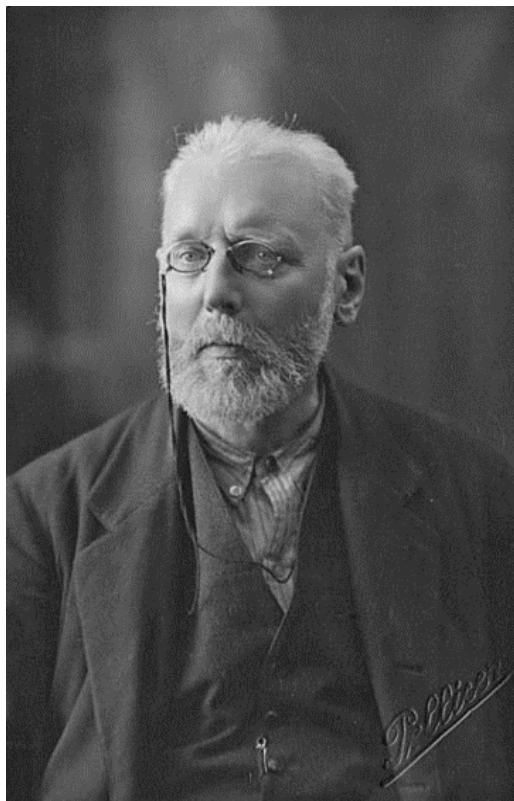
The St. Imier Congress of the International

Max Nettlau

Freedom, September 1922

This September our Swiss comrades in the Jura mountains will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the anti-authoritarian Congress of the old International held at St. Imier, September 15 and 16, 1873; and they will also recall the memory of the Jurassian Federation of the International, which for many years stood in the front ranks of the struggles of the '60s and '70s which created the Anarchist and revolutionary Syndicalist movements of our time. The Congress in question did more: it saved the continuity of the internationalist movement and rescued it from the clutches of the authoritarian politicians gathering round Marx. It even inaugurated the friendly co-existence of movements of different tendencies within the same organisation by establishing the solid basis of complete autonomy and mutual respect for all shades of opinion and tactics. Thus it pointed out ways and methods which have since been abandoned to the detriment of the common cause of social emancipation. To the present English readers many of the facts connected with these events will not be familiar, when they read this rapid summary of these facts they will, I believe, feel solidarity with the Swiss comrades and send them fraternal greetings, and they may also consider whether these events of fifty years ago do not contain some lessons useful in our days, when, indeed, fresh impulse, fresh initiative are wanted more than ever.

The International Working Men's Association, as founded at St. Martin's Hall, in London, September 29, 1864, was to unite and weld together all workers who would work together for their emancipation from Capitalism, irrespective of the shades of opinion on principles and tactics which divided them. This broad principle was respected for five years, until after the Congress held at Basle, Switzerland, in September, 1869, where for the last time State Socialists or Marxists, Revolutionary Collectivists as the Anarchists were then called, Proudhonian Mutualists, Trade Unionists, Co-operators, and social reformers met in



Max Nettlau (1865-1944)

fair discussion and tried to elaborate lines of common action, useful and acceptable to all. The Congresses of 1868 and 1869 showed that the anti-authoritarian and truly revolutionary, anti-parliamentary ideas were making excellent headway, being spread from several intellectual centres of propaganda in Belgium, the Swiss Jura, and Spain, and with so much vigour by Bakunin, who had then lived for two years in and near Geneva, whilst before that time he had first spread these ideas in parts of Italy, mainly Florence and Naples.

Marx, who for all these years had had a free hand in leading the London General Council of the Association, and who had expected that by these means by and by his

personal ideas would meet with international acceptance, was mortified when he saw in 1868, and more so in 1869 by the Basle Congress, that he was not making progress, that revolutionary Anarchism came to the front in a way alarming to him. This made him resort from that date to desperate and utterly unfair means by which he expected to terrorise or discourage the anti-authoritarian sections, and he did not mind trying by foul means to discredit and ruin the advocates of freedom, notably Bakunin, whom he had disliked for many years. A minute unravelling of these machinations will be found in the Life of Bakunin as compiled by me and in the records of the International collected by the late James Guillaume; but all this is surpassed by the cynical discussion of their doings between Marx and Engels in their private correspondence, which has since come to light to a large extent.

These intrigues were permitted a long impunity by the situation created by the war of 1870-71 and the Paris Commune, since this gave a plausible pretext for not meeting in congress in 1870 and a miserable, utterly unfair pretext for replacing the congress of 1871 by a private conference held in London and thoroughly

engineered and controlled by Marx. At this conference he struck the blow long since premeditated, namely, to enforce an official doctrine, that of political action (implying Labour parties, electioneering, etc.), upon the Association. This was too much.

Opinions as to how to resist these authoritarian encroachments were divided. We can study every phase of this from Bakunin's letter to the Paris *Réveil* (end of 1869), the Jurassian attitude against the Geneva politicians at the Congress held at Easter, 1870, Bakunin's letter of August 6, 1871, protesting against the voluntary dissolution of the section called "L'Alliance" at Geneva, the Jurassian letter to the London conference (September 4, 1871), etc.—there was always an opposition between the intransigent attitude of Bakunin, who did not mind a split in the Association, and the Jurassians' (for brevity's sake I will say James Guillaume's) position; the latter whilst repudiating the authoritarians as keenly as Bakunin, never ceased looking for means to maintain the cohesion or unity of the International in any case. This struggle of opinion never left the line of friendly discussion, as both sides had so thoroughly at heart their common cause.

After the London conference (September 17-23, 1871) the Jurassian Federation at their Congress held at Sonvilier (Swiss Jura), November 12, exposed the situation in a long circular, defending the autonomy of the sections and federations, and calling for the intermediate convening of a general Congress to restore the lost freedom in the International. Bakunin did what he could to second this first open movement of protest, which met with hearty support in Italy, Spain, Belgium, etc.

Until then, apart from slanders spread in semi-private communications to Germany and the United States, which have since come to light, and other slanders circulated by zealous subordinates, Marx had left Bakunin alone personally, though anxiously collecting material (namely, of his revolutionary activity) against him by means of repulsive persons like N. Utin and others. But when the Souvillier circular set the ball rolling and the very foundation of his power was in danger of being either deprived of its prerogatives or abolished altogether, he shirked the fair struggle of opinion, freedom versus authority, which Bakunin and his comrades expected to fight out at the coming Congress, and he lowered the level of the debate to personal quarrelling by gathering heaps of incriminations against the revolutionists into a longer private circular signed with the names of the members of the General Council (nearly all of whom had never read or even seen it), called "On the Pretended Split in the International," dated March 5, and printed and circulated end of May, 1872. Bakunin and several others published replies and refutations in the *Jura Bulletin* of June 15. Shortly after this the general

Congress was convened to meet at The Hague in September. The location of the Congress in Holland, so near to London and Germany, and far from Switzerland and the Southern countries, showed that Marx intended absolutely to control this Congress by a packed majority and in one of his letters to his American agent, F. A. Sorge (June 21, 1872; published 1906), Marx asked for not less than twelve American credentials, to be sent to himself and his London partisans. The Congress so long waited for in vain was now to become an absolute farce, another tool of Marx as the conference of 1871 had been and as the General Council still was. The Anarchists were determined to stand this no longer and henceforward to fight for the liberation of the International from Marx's domination. But again opinions as to how to act differed in the sense described above.

Without entering upon dates and documents, published and unpublished, the principal phases may be described. When, in the middle of July, Bakunin and some of the Jurassians met, the latter also were for an intransigent policy, meaning that if the Congress was not held in Switzerland instead of The Hague they would invite the anti-authoritarian federations not to go to Holland but to meet with them in Switzerland and to organise an intimate federation among themselves. In this sense, no doubt, Bakunin then wrote long letters to Italy and to Spain, and the idea was acted upon and further enlarged by the Italians at their conference held at Rimini early in August, where the immediate rupture with the General Council and the convocation of a Congress to be held at Neuchâtel were decided upon.

Meanwhile, however, James Guillaume's constant idea of doing the utmost to keep within the International had prevailed also in the Jura, and found expression in the instructions given to the Jura delegates at the local Congress held in August! They would go to The Hague and the Italians would not. Bakunin sided with the Italians, but—as it was right for true Anarchists to do—all were free to act as they chose, and Guillaume pursued his politics at The Hague with the disapproval of the Spanish Anarchist delegates and of the Italian, Cafiero, who attended the Congress merely as a visitor, but Guillaume met with no interference from their side though they thrashed out the matter in hot discussions.

Guillaume's idea was that instead of a split, leaving authoritarians and Anarchists absolutely separated, it was preferable that all should remain within the International who would accept the *economic solidarity of the workers against Capitalism* and the *complete autonomy of federations, sections, and individual members as to ideas and tactics*, provided the principle that *the emancipation of the workers should be their own work* was not lost sight of. To put it in a nutshell, he worked with the purpose that the *authoritarians* those who would not recognise anybody's freedom but their own and who were bent upon domineering over all

the others, should leave the International, which they never ought to have joined at all, and that all who loved fair play and mutual toleration should be made welcome in it, whatever their shade of Socialist theory and practice should be. During the week of the Congress whilst the packed majority voted almost dictatorial powers to the ruling clique, and Marx imagined that he won constant victories, Guillaume went round quietly discussing these ideas with many delegates, dispelling their prejudices and welding together their forces. Then when the triumph of Marx was at its height, when the vote was about to be taken decreeing the expulsion of Bakunin and his friends, the minority by a declaration read by V. Dave, a comrade who is still alive, declared the mutual solidarity of the autonomous federations which did not recognise any of the regulations and resolutions interfering with their autonomy, and which would henceforth communicate among themselves and prepare the realisation of federalist autonomy within the organisation at the next Congress. Marx was dumbfounded; his authority was defied, and The Hague resolutions were already declared null and void by the Internationalists of Spain, Belgium, Holland, and the Swiss Jura, as far as the delegates who signed the declaration represented them.

Besides this solidarity on the basis of mutual toleration, another link, that of Anarchist ideas held by all, was to keep together the definitely Anarchist federations. This idea Guillaume discussed at Amsterdam (September 8) with Cafiero and the Spanish delegates, and Bakunin since August 30 had already written (at Zurich) the principles and rules of the secret society, the "Alliance of Revolutionary Socialists," which was to ally the action of the Italian and Spanish Anarchists with that of himself and others. To discuss this matter with him the Italian delegates to the anti-authoritarian Congress first met in Zürich (September 6 und following days); on September 11 the Spanish delegates and Cafiero arrived from The Hague; on September 13 the rules of the secret society were definitely accepted, and the St. Imier Congress was then discussed.

Bakunin and these comrades, also a number of Russians, travelled to St. Imier, where the "International Congress" was held on September 15 and 16, being composed of Spanish, Italian (Bakunin among them),

French (mainly Commune refugees), and Jurassian delegates.

Here again the Italian view of complete rupture with the General Council and the Jurassian standpoint, defended by Guillaume, were face to face, and the latter was prevailing. Thus the famous second resolution, called "Pact of friendship, solidarity, and mutual defence between the free Federations," did not go further than the declaration of the minority above described, but this was quite sufficient, as coming events showed.

Bakunin, after long conversations with Guillaume, adhered also to these views and began to act upon the Italians in this sense. It may be said that finally, in March, 1873, the next Italian Congress, held at Bologna adopted a resolution expressing these views of

economic solidarity against Capitalism and complete autonomy as to ideas and tactics in the most definite terms, so this idea of mutual toleration generally prevailed over that of a clean separation.

The further development was facilitated by the maniacal behaviour of the Marxist General Council at New York, which simply suspended all the independent federations, with the result that in the turn of a hand these excommunicated federations continued to form the International *on the basis of the St. Imier principles*, and the General Council and its few acolytes were left out in the cold and henceforth taken no further notice of. The Congress held at Geneva (September, 1873) reorganised the Association on this anti-authoritarian

that all should remain within the International who would accept the economic solidarity of the workers against Capitalism and the complete autonomy of federations, sections, and individual members as to ideas and tactics, provided the principle that the emancipation of the workers should be their own work was not lost sight of.

basis, and further Congresses were held at Brussels, Berne, and Verviers.

The continuity of the International was thus saved by the methods adopted at St. Imier. After the death of Bakunin (June, 1876) another similar effort was made by the Anarchists to live on friendly terms with their opponents on the basis of this autonomy of ideas and tactics, and the universal Congress held at Ghent (1877) is yet another instance. It was owing to this tradition that the International Socialist Congress held at Paris, 1889, and so forth, at the beginning as a matter of course comprised Socialists of all shades of opinion;

and it will be remembered that the Marxists will not rest until by successive and increasing vexations and acts of brutality they gloriously managed at the London Congress of 1896 to at last erect barriers excluding henceforth all who disbelieved in Parliamentary tactics. Then they were *alone* once more and quite happy, and they culled that *unsocial* isolation the “Second International”! There is no more unsocial being than an out-and-out Marxist, who recognises no Socialist comradeship and knows only dictators and slaves

It appears to me that if ever *Internationalism* is to be restored it will never be done by the “diplomacy of the proletariat” (a phrase coined by Engels in a letter to Marx), which is quite as abominable as official diplomacy, never by the leaders of the Second, Two-and-a-half, and Third Internationals putting their heads together in as many conferences, and at a similar cost, as the present capitalist masters of poor Europe. It might be tried on these or similar lines, if the lessons of St. Imier are worth anything:

- Solidarity in the economic struggle against Capitalism;
- Solidarity in the defence of mankind by the repudiation of war and all nationalist oppression;
- Autonomy as to ideas and tactics, provided these do not uphold the State, Capitalism, Nationalism, or war.

When by these means the ground has been cleared for independent action, then another series of international ties would come into operation, namely, those joining together men and organizations holding similar ideas and pursuing similar tactics. Then Internationalism will give them combined strength and they will be able to decide where best to begin to act by free experimentation. Then, at last, something *new* will be before us, not as an oppressive organism imposed by dictatorship, but as an organic growth, and we will all learn by this experience, and the present period of stagnation or oppression will be over.

Documents of Working Class History: Syndicalist Methods Outlined in 1869

War Commentary: For Anarchism, Mid-December 1942

An interesting foreshadowing of the future syndicalist theories was given in the early days of the International Working Men's Association. The Bakuninist section's absolute opposition to the State and to political action, which brought them into immediate conflict with the Marxist groups in the International, is clearly stated in the following speech which the Belgian delegate, Professor Hins, delivered at the Fourth Congress at Basle in 1869:

“Hins said he could not agree with those who looked upon trade societies as mere strike and wages’ societies, nor was he in favour of having central committees made up of all trades. The present trade unions would some day overthrow the present political organisation altogether; they represented the social and political organisation of the future. The whole labouring population would range itself, according to occupation, into different groups, and this would lead to a new political organisation of society. He wanted no intermeddling of the State; they had enough of that in Belgium already. He did not consider it a disadvantage that trade unions kept aloof more or less from politics, at least in his country. By trying to reform the State, or to take part in its councils, they would virtually acknowledge its right of existence. Whatever the English, the Swiss, the Germans and the Americans might hope to accomplish by means of the present political State, the Belgians repudiated theirs.” (*English report of the discussion*, pp. 31-32)

He went on to say that “Trade unions will subsist after the suppression of wages, not in name, but in deed. They will then be the organisation of labour operating a vast distribution of labour from one end of the world to the other. They will replace the ancient political systems; in place of a confused and heterogeneous representation, there will be the representation of labour.

“They will be at the same time agents of de-centralisation for the centres will differ according to the industries which will form, in some manner, each one a separate State, and will prevent for ever the return to the ancient form of centralised State, which will not, however, prevent another form of government for local purposes. As is evident, if we are reproached for being indifferent to every form of government, it is because we detest them all in the same way, and because we believe that it is only on their ruins that a society conforming to the principles of justice can be established.” (*Compte-Rendu of the Fourth International Congress of the International Working Men's Association*, pp. 85-86)

It will be seen that, allowing for a use of terms which might to-day seem ambiguous (‘Government’ and ‘State’ used to designate organisation, for example), many of the root ideas of modern Syndicalism were already being put forward by the Bakuninist section of the International 73 years ago.

The Founding Congress of the International Workers Association

Nick Heath

The founding of the International Workers Association at its constitutive congress in Berlin in 1922 was a long wished for goal of revolutionary syndicalists and anarchists around the world. The First

International had been wound up at the congress in Philadelphia in 1875, and definitively dissolved in July of the following year. The end of the First International due to the clash between Marx and his followers and those who opposed him, including the grouping around Bakunin, Belgian socialists and British trade unionists, was a severe setback for the international workers' movement. The so-called Anti-Authoritarian International founded at St Imier in Switzerland in 1872 had also foundered by 1877.

Many revolutionary syndicalists felt the need for a new International, especially as the social-democratic parties had created their own international, the Second International, in 1889. This had been followed by the reformist trade unions creating their own international, The International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC) in 1901. When this collapsed because of the First World War, the reformist unions created the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) at a congress in Amsterdam in July 1919. This united unions from United States, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Great Britain, Holland, Luxemburg, Norway, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, and Czechoslovakia. It represented 17.7 million workers and had a social-democratic orientation.

The first mass revolutionary syndicalist, anarcho-syndicalist and industrial unionist unions had emerged at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century and included the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) founded 1905, and the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (Workers Regional Federation of Argentina-FORA) the Confédération Générale du

Nick Heath has been an anarchist communist militant since 1966. He is now an active member of the Anarchist Communist Group, founded in 2018. He is the author of numerous biographies of anarchist militants and articles on the Hungarian Revolution and the Third Russian Revolution as well as a major book on anarchist communism, *The Idea: Anarchist Communism, Past, Present and Future* published this year by Just Books.

Travail (General Confederation of Labour-CGT) founded in France in 1895, the Italian *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI), the Swedish *Sveriges Arbetares*

Centralorganisation (SAC) founded in 1910 and the Dutch industrial federations, The Spanish CNT founded in 1910.

The International Syndicalist Congress of 1913

The first attempt to create a new international from these various unions took place in London in 1913. This, the International Syndicalist Congress, took place at Holborn Town Hall between September 27th to October 2nd, at the initiative of the Dutch Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat (National Labour Secretariat –NAS) and the British Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL). Solidaridad Obrera (Workers Solidarity) in Catalonia, a precursor of the CNT, supported the move. However the French CGT opposed the convening of such a congress. It was still within the ISNTUC and feared internal ructions as its reformist wing was strengthening at the expense of the anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist wing.

Thirty eight delegates representing sixty five organisations met and passed the following resolution:

The first International Syndicalist Congress recognises that the working class of all countries suffers the same repression by the State and the capitalist system. For this reason, it declares itself in favour of class struggle, international solidarity and independent organisation of the working class on the basis of the federative union. This tends to the immediate material and moral elevation of the working class until the total destruction of capitalism and the State. This declares, furthermore, that the class struggle is a necessary consequence of the private possession of the means of

production and distribution, and that, therefore, this Congress tends to the socialisation of these means. In this sense, the constitution and development of trade union organisations should be oriented, since they are in the best conditions to ensure the production and distribution of products for the benefit of society as a whole. Verifying that the international unions cannot successfully carry out the class struggle if the workers continue to be divided by political and religious differences, the Congress declares that the class struggle, as such, can only have an economic character, for which the workers' organisations should not seek the stated goal through collaboration with the government or with its allies, and that they should rely solely on the power of the organisations and their direct action. As a consequence of this declaration, the Congress calls on the workers of all countries to unite in independent, federal, industrial organisations, on the basis of international solidarity, in order to liberate themselves completely from the oppression exerted by the state and capitalism.

Thus the principles of revolutionary syndicalism, affirmation of class struggle, international solidarity, socialisation of property and the abolition of capitalism and the State, rejection of parliamentary activity, and struggle on the economic level through direct action, were adopted by the congress.

It was decided to follow this up with another congress the following year. Unfortunately the outbreak of the First World War scuppered this. The NAS then sent out a circular calling for a new congress at the end of the war. Attempts to hold such a congress were foiled at every attempt, by the Dutch, Swedish and Danish governments.

The First World War brought many problems to the international syndicalist movement, with the French CGT supporting the War, apart from a small revolutionary minority around Pierre Monatte and Alphonse Merrheim, the heavy repression unleashed against the IWW in the United States, and the ructions within the USI over support for the war, culminating in the move towards a clear anarchist and internationalist position and the departure of the pro-war faction.

Other problems were caused by the repercussions of the Russian revolution.

The Red Trade Union International

The accession to power of the Bolsheviks in 1917 led on to the founding of the Third International, known under the Russian abbreviation of the Comintern, in 1919, uniting various Communist Parties under the control of Moscow. Alongside this was the founding of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), also known under the Russian abbreviation Profintern in July 1921.

The Soviet leadership sought to unite those trade unions worldwide that were opposed to the so-called Amsterdam international, the IFTU. They worked towards an alliance of Communist-controlled labour organisations, revolutionary syndicalist and anarcho-syndicalist unions, and the revolutionary opposition within Amsterdam unions, as well as anti-colonial movements around the world. They thus sought to establish hegemony over these diverse groupings and to recruit to the Communist Parties.

At first the USI, the CNT, some French unions and currents within the FORA supported the RILU. For example the CNT at its second congress in Madrid in December 1919 passed the following motion in relation to the Third International:

The National Confederation of Labour declares itself a firm defender of the principles that inform the First International, supported by Bakunin. It declares that it adheres, and provisionally, to the Third International, due to the revolutionary character that presides over it, while the International Congress is being organised and held in Spain, which will lay the foundations by which the true International of workers will be governed.

The CNT decided to send delegates to Moscow on a fact-finding mission. Only one of them managed to get there. This was Angel Pestaña, who attended the Second Congress of the Third International, in the summer of 1920. Pestaña began to have doubts about the overbearing attitude of the Bolsheviks. The Bolshevik trade union leader Solomon Lozovski insisted that revolutionaries not leave the reformist trade unions. This was objected to by Pestaña and the German anarcho-syndicalist Augustin Souchy. Further objections came over the subordination of revolutionary syndicalist organisations to the various Communist Parties.

Revolutionary syndicalist bodies were accused of being minority organisations. A hastily convened first congress of international trade unionists and syndicalists then took place on July 15th. Further experiences convinced Pestaña and the USI delegate, the anarchist Armando Borghi, that the differences between the syndicalists and the Bolsheviks were profound and hastened their departure from Russia in late August-early September.

In October Pestaña met with German syndicalists for lengthy discussions in Berlin and then moved on to Italy. However, here he was detained and deported to Spain two months later. He was immediately arrested in Barcelona and spent the whole of 1921 in jail. This deprived the CNT of his views of the Bolshevik government. As a result the CNT held a conference where it was decided to send further delegates to the Third Congress of the Third International in June 1921. These included Andreu Nin, Joaquín Maurín, Jesús Ibáñez, Hilario Arlandis and Gaston Leval. These participated in the first congress of the RILU.

This conference confirmed the dominance of the Bolsheviks. Concerns about anarchist prisoners on hunger strike in the Taganka prison were raised, and led the Bolsheviks into being forced to agree to their deportation.

Tensions rose as both Trotsky and Bukharin denounced Russian anarchists as “petty bourgeois” and “counter-revolutionary”. Alexander Schapiro was not allowed the podium to defend Russian anarchist syndicalists.

The pro- and anti-Bolshevik currents within the CNT took part in heated debates. Both the anarchists and the “pure” syndicalists, who objected to any political activity, objected to the stance of Maurín, Nin, Ibáñez, and Arlandis, who they accused of being too accommodating to the Communists. As a result the anarchist character of the CNT was strengthened and in the following period Maurín and Nin became founders of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers’

Party of Marxist Unification, POUM). The fierce polemic led on to moves by the CNT to disaffiliate from the RILU, and this was reinforced by the reports of Pestaña when he finally emerged from prison in 1922. In June of that year, the CNT held a conference in Zaragoza where Pestaña’s testimony and Gaston Leval’s criticisms of his co-delegates led to the CNT turning against the Third International and the RILU. A large majority agreed that whilst the CNT had supported the Russian Revolution, this did not mean that it supported Bolshevik practice and theory.

However, as support for the Comintern had been agreed on at the congress of 1919, the CNT conference could not overturn the original decision. As a result, it was decided to suspend relations with RILU and continue to discuss within the different unions of the Confederation.

The CNT was now looking towards helping create a new international, hooking up with the German syndicalists. The move by syndicalists in France and Italy to convene a conference in Paris seemed to provide a springboard for this. Earlier German anarchist syndicalists in the Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands- (German Free Workers Union-FAUD)-meeting in Dusseldorf in October made efforts to unite opposition to Moscow within the revolutionary syndicalist unions. The meeting was also attended



by delegates from the NAS, the SAC, and the IWW, and called for the convoking of an international syndicalist conference in Berlin, caused by the failure of the RILU to establish an international free from political influence. This was endorsed by telegram by the USI.

The CGT in France had been much compromised by its support for the world war and its leadership under Léon Jouhaux had accepted posts on various government committees during the war. After the war it had pronounced reformist positions and was hostile to the Russian Revolution. As a result the revolutionary minority within the CGT organised, after the Lyon congress of 1919, the Comités syndicalistes révolutionnaires (CSR) which

grouped together anarchists, pure syndicalists and those now favourable to the Comintern. The CSR were the main force behind the split within the CGT which led to the appearance of the CGTU ("U" for Unitaire, Unified) which had its first conference in late June 1922. At first the anarchists were dominant within the CGTU.

The happenings at the RILU congress exacerbated the differences within the CGTU. It was decided to send delegates to the Berlin congress proposed by the FAUD in June 1922.

Similarly, the FORA was also dismayed by the RILU congress and enthusiastically endorsed the Berlin congress, whilst openly severely criticising Tom Barker, who had taken the FORA mandate to the RILU Congress. The IWW also decided by the end of 1921 that it could not consider membership of the RILU.

The June Conference in Berlin

The CGTU, SAC, NAS, FAUD, USI, CNT were all represented at the Berlin conference of June 16th-18th, as well as the Norsk Syndikalist Federation (NSF) of Norway and claimed to represent a total of 1,400,000 workers. The conference also recognised a delegation of Russian anarchist syndicalists in the shape of Alexander Schapiro and Mark Mrachnyi, who had left Russia for Germany.

The conference had also invited the All-Russian Confederation of Trade Unions to attend. Andreyev, a representative of this Communist-controlled body duly appeared on the second day of the conference and clashed with Mrachnyi, defending Red terror and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and demanding that Mrachnyi's remarks be ruled inadmissible by conference.

For some delegates wavering over what relationship they should have with the RILU, this was the last straw.

The June conference was hardly a complete success. The CGTU delegation stated that it could not vote on any deliberations as its congress would be held in St. Etienne in two weeks and it thus had no mandate. The original libertarian dominance within the CGTU was being challenged by an increasingly belligerent Communist minority and by the syndicalists around Monatte, who were the target of a campaign by the RILU to win them over. Thus it was unsure what the result of the St Etienne congress would be.

Before Andreyev left the conference, he warned that "the RILU will go over the heads of the present leaders of the CGTU and the USI in order to organise the French and Italian workers' movements according to its own directives".

As to taking a stand on the persecution of Russian anarchists, this was fudged by the conference. Louis Lecoin and Henri Toti, speaking for the French delegation, were concerned that the CGTU was close to being captured by the Communists and were sure that the Russians would send a representative to the St Etienne Congress. They appealed to the other delegates not to put a motion forward on the persecutions, which the latter reluctantly agreed to.

More positively, conference agreed to a ten point declaration on syndicalism drafted by Rudolf Rocker of the FAUD and to the setting up of an International Bureau. Rocker concluded that "an existence in common with Moscow will become insufferable even for those filled with false hopes. In the meantime we will lose time and pessimism will infiltrate our ranks". As a result the creation of a revolutionary syndicalist international independent of Moscow was inevitable.

Lozovski of the RILU denounced the forthcoming congress, accusing the syndicalists of sectarianism. The RILU executive broke off all correspondence with the International Syndicalist Bureau.

The Founding of the IWA

Over thirty delegates attended the illegal congress in Berlin from December 25th 1922 to January 2nd, 1923. They represented the USI, the FAUD, the SAC, the NAS, the NSF, and the Syndikalistik Propagandaforbund of Denmark, the FORA, and the CGT of Mexico. The Portuguese CGT sent its consent to the founding of the IWA as did the IWW of Chile, whose delegate only arrived after end of the congress. The delegates of the Spanish CNT were arrested in Paris before they reached Berlin. A delegate from the Federacion Obrera Regional Uruguaya (FORU) of Uruguay similarly arrived too late to take part.

A number of consultative votes were given to the councilist union Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Einheitsorganisation (AAUE), the Russian syndicalists in the form of Schapiro and Yarchuk, and the Czechoslovak Freie Arbeiter-Union.

As to the French, the St Etienne Congress had led to the accession of the Communists in alliance with the syndicalists around Monatte and

Monmousseau. As a result the anarchist Pierre Besnard founded the Comité de Défense Syndicaliste- Committee of Syndicalist Defence (CDS) to organise those opposed to affiliation to the RILU. Besnard and Claudine Lemoine represented the CDS at Berlin but were in a delicate position. Whilst most of the delegations represented organisations that had rejected the RILU, the CDS was an organised minority within the CGTU which was negotiating with the RILU. The CDS grouping hoped to eventually win the day within the CGTU and were reluctant to force a split (there had been a split with the parent CGT only a year before) and called for unity of workers' organisations nationally and internationally. Besnard and Lemoine were thus reluctant to create a new revolutionary syndicalist international.

Lemoine and Dissel of the NAS delegation called for further negotiation with the RILU. Delegate after delegate rose to argue against this, stating that the founding of a new international could not be delayed. A dissenting member of the NAS, Bernard Lansink Jr., got up to state that he truly reflected the majority of NAS members whose referendum had rejected joining the RILU and were in favour of a new international.

Rocker remarked that every syndicalist organisation contacted by the International Bureau in Europe and the Americas were in favour of a new international. He said that "We must finally declare clearly: the Third International and the RILU are not organisations of the revolutionary proletariat, they are agencies for the foreign policy of the Russian government". He warned the French and Dutch that compromise with Moscow would oppose them to other revolutionary syndicalists worldwide. He and other delegates expressed surprise that the NAS leadership had ignored the referendum.

The SAC then moved a resolution rejecting an appeal from the RILU to the syndicalists assembled at Berlin to join their international. Upon the passing of the motion, the NAS delegates withdrew from the congress.

A resolution from the Argentinean, Danish, German, Italian, Norwegian and Swedish delegations calling for the founding of a new international was then passed unanimously.

However, French support was qualified. Besnard declared CDS support for the new International provided that it sought to unite all revolutionary workers willing to overthrow capitalism and the

State. A united front should be sought with those organisations outside the new International. This was perfectly acceptable to nearly all delegates, but the CDS delegation went further and called for a formal instruction to the new Secretariat to approach the RILU for united action.

This was vehemently opposed by the FORA as represented by Diego Abad de Santillan. The Argentineans believed that the FORA form of organisation, combining elements of Italian and Spanish anarchism, was a truer form of values expressed by Bakunin and his associates within the First International than within the European movement, influenced by socialist political parties and politically oriented union organisations. They were particularly suspicious of elements within the Spanish CNT which had initially joined the RILU. They regarded CNT leaders like Pestaña and Salvador Seguí as "chameleons" for their initial support of Moscow. They believed that if the CNT delegates had not been detained, they would have backed the French/NAS motion. They noted "The FORA has clearly signalled its point of view for several years, and if it agreed to the creation of a new international it was with the belief that revolutionary syndicalism throughout the entire world had understood and appreciated its actions over the last several years. In its decision to create a new International of revolutionary workers it absolutely rejects political entities such as those of Amsterdam (Social-Democrats) and Moscow (Communists).

Santillan argued vehemently for opposition to the RILU, saying that unity of the proletariat was a "metaphysical illusion" and to drop any moves by the CDS which would only deliver French workers to Moscow. However, an appreciation among delegates of the delicate situation of the CDS led to an endorsement on Revolutionary Unity, with the FORA abstaining.

There were unfortunate disruptions by the German police who conducted passport checks and arrested 13 people, including at least three delegates.

The Congress agreed to create a revolutionary syndicalist international, emphasising continuity with the past and the First International by calling it the International Workers Association (IWA/AIT). This was on the suggestion of the USI delegate Alibrando Giovanetti, secretary of its metalworkers' union. It also adopted a ten-point document, the Principles of Revolutionary

Syndicalism, drafted by Rocker at the June Congress.

The controversy within NAS continued after the congress for a long time. Eventually in a referendum in May 1923, members voted by 53 to 47 per cent for affiliation to RILU. This eventually led to a secession of the dissidents and the founding of the Nederlands Syndicalistisch Vakverbond (NSV), urging NAS members “Do your duty as true revolutionaries, as libertarian communists, as organised syndicalists”. In November 1923 the NSV had won 8,000 out of 23,000 NAS members over and won a lot of support among metalworkers, textile and tobacco workers. It voted by the end of the year to join the IWA.

In France, once Monmousseau had acceded to power within the CGTU, the French Communist Party (PCF) started expanding a network of Syndical Commissions controlled by it within the CGTU. This caused uproar among those members opposed to domination by political parties and for autonomy the situation was further aggravated by the murder of two anarchist workers, Poncet and Clos, by Communist thugs at the House of Unions in Rue Grange aux Belles in Paris on 11th January 1924.¹ The RILU, of course, took the side of the PCF. This eventually resulted in the founding of the CGT-Syndicaliste Revolutionnaire (CGT-SR) by Besnard and others in November 1926, which affiliated to the IWA.

As to the FORA’s critical stand, any doubts about affiliation to the IWA disappeared when the motion on Revolutionary Unity was rescinded at the IWA’s Innsbruck conference in December 1923. They also felt vindicated by the losses the CDS had sustained in France, which seemed to them to confirm their warning.

During 1923 and 1924 the Mexican CGT, the Uruguayan FORU and the Chilean IWW affiliated to the IWA, to be followed later by syndicalist unions in Brazil, Paraguay and other Central and South American countries. There was also a Japanese affiliate.

As to the IWW of North America, only its Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union affiliated. The IWW had adopted a position of neutrality as regards to the Berlin congress and said that it would join neither the RILU nor the IWA.

Between 1923 the IWA had affiliates in thirty one countries.

However, repression soon began to hit the IWA affiliates. The USI was destroyed by the Mussolini regime between 1922 and 1924. The Portuguese CGT, which had a mass membership, was outlawed in 1926 and almost completely destroyed by 1934. The FAUD lost many of its members between 1923 and 1933 and then suffered destruction by the Nazi regime. The CGT-SR remained a minority union and disappeared with the Second World War. In Latin America, the FORA was outlawed after 1930 as the result of a military coup. The Mexican CGT evolved increasingly in a reformist direction from 1928 onwards. Nevertheless the 1922 Congress was important in its affirmation of revolutionary syndicalism, its recognition of class struggle, its avowal of free communism and its stand against Communist Party domination.

It should be noted that the key statements emerging from the founding congress of the IWA referred to revolutionary syndicalism rather than anarcho-syndicalism. The term “anarcho-syndicalism” was not then currently in use. It had originally been used as a pejorative term by the reformist socialists around Jules Guesde. Shortly after the end of the First World War, the Bolsheviks appropriated the term and continued to use it in a pejorative sense. Eventually the revolutionary syndicalist minority in France decided to reclaim it as a self-descriptor but Pierre Besnard was reluctant to use the term until 1937. Nevertheless the IWA can be described as an anarcho-syndicalist organisation and it was with the foundation of the IWA that anarcho-syndicalism as a current was affirmed on a global level.

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¹ see my article at libcom: <https://libcom.org/article/shoot-out-rue-grange-aux-belles-1924>

Information Bulletin of The International Working Men's Association

No. 1, January 15th, 1923

Resolutions Adopted by the International Congress of Revolutionary Syndicalists held in Berlin from the 25th of December, 1922 to the 2nd of January, 1923.

The following countries were represented at the International Congress, either by their delegates, by the mandates of delegates who could not come in time, or by written adherence sent to the Congress:

Germany:	by the Freie Arbeiter Union (Syndikalisten); by the Allgemeine Arbeiter Union (Einheitsorganisation); by the Anarcho-Syndikalistische Jugend.
Argentine:	by the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (F.O.R.A.)
Chile:	by the I. W. W. of Chile.
Denmark:	by the Syndikalistisk Propagandaforbund.
Spain:	by the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo.
France:	by the Comité de Défense Syndicaliste; by the Fédération Unitaire du Bâtiment; by the Fédération des Jeunesses Syndicalistes de la Seine.
Holland:	by the Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat.
Italy:	by the Unione Sindacale Italiana.
Mexico:	by the Confederación General do Trabajadores.
Norway:	by the Norsk Syndikalistisk Federation.
Portugal:	by the Confederacao Geral do Trabalho.
Russia:	by the Anarcho-Syndicalist Minority.
Sweden:	by the Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation.
Czecho-Slovakia:	by the Freie Arbeiter Union.

I. On the admission of the Red Trade Union International (R. T. U. I.) to the debates of the Congress.

The Secretary of the R. T. U. I., or any other delegate of the R. T. U. I. or of the Confederation of Labour of Russia will be able, if he comes, to make a declaration of any length, in whatever sense he may think fit. The Congress will then let him know the decision arrived at, and will pass to the order of the day.

II. On the Report of the Provisional International Bureau.

The International Congress adopts the report of the Provisional Bureau, considers its activities in full accord with the instructions received by it from the Berlin Conference of June 1922, and discharges the Provisional International Bureau.

III. On the Question of Affiliation to Moscow.

1. The Congress records the refusal of the organisations affiliated to the R. T. U. I. to participate in its work, in spite of the formal invitation addressed to them in the hope and desire of making a last attempt at the unification of the labour forces of East and West, and at finding a basis of agreement for all unions. that accept truly revolutionary tactics.

2. Notwithstanding the great difficulties encountered in the course of its organisation, the Congress

demonstrated, by the very fact of its world success, the futility of the Russian arguments that Russia was the only country where an international congress of revolutionary unions could be held.

3. The Congress considers that this clearly separatist conduct of the wire-pullers of the R.T.U. I. with regard to revolutionary unions is an inevitable consequence of the anti syndicalist policy of Moscow, which does not hesitate to persecute and exile Russian militant revolutionary syndicalists. The Congress declares that no substantial change has taken place since the 2nd Congress of Moscow to cause revolutionary syndicalism to change its attitude towards the R.T.U.I. It enumerates, among others, the following reasons for this assertion:

a. The alterations in the Statutes of the R.T.U.I., brought about at the instance of the French C.G.T.U. (United General Confederation of Labour) are a deception resulting from the political manoeuvres carried out at St. Etienne under the avowed influence of Moscow and of the French Communist Party, manoeuvres already denounced by our comrades of the French minority.

b. The subordination of syndicalism to the politics of the parties aiming at State power so strongly inspires all the paragraphs of the Statutes and all the actions of the R.T.U.I., that the alteration made in paragraph 11,

— which, in no particular, changes its intrinsic value or its meaning, and which, besides, confirms the validity of the other paragraphs of which the signification is identical — sanctifies this game of duplicity, which is too transparent to deceive anyone any longer.

4. The decisions above indicated deprive the appeal of the 2nd Congress of Moscow, issued by the Press to revolutionary syndicalist workers, of all importance and all moral value, by the very fact that the so-called revolutionary syndicalists who solicited it and approved of it are not loyal towards the syndicalist movements of their respective countries, but, on the contrary, are agents of the R.T.U.I. who play the role of syndicalists at the bidding of the Communist International with the object of subjecting the world syndicalist movement to the Communist parties.

For these reasons, the Congress confirms once more the decision of the Conference of June 1922; and, further, in consideration of the categorical mandates of a number of confederations of Europe and America demanding the establishment of an International of revolutionary syndicalists independent of every party and every government,

It decides to constitute the Revolutionary Syndicalist International, and passes on to the order of the day.

IV. On Revolutionary Unity.

Considering the supreme importance of revolutionary unity in the struggle of the proletariat against the offensive of Capitalism and the State;

And, in recognition of the fact that a united block of the sincere forces of the world proletariat is an essential condition for the activity of the new Revolutionary Syndicalist International;

The Congress considers:

That one of the most urgent duties of the Revolutionary Syndicalist International is to take the most energetic initiative for the realisation of the unity of world revolutionary forces, and to enter into relations with all the organisations of the world that are prepared to accept this initiative in a spirit of solidarity and to give it their active support.

In accordance with this decision, and in spite of the fundamental differences of doctrine that separate revolutionary syndicalists from the economic organisations of the R.T.U.I., the Congress authorises the administrative organ of the Revolutionary Syndicalist International to attempt, once again and for the last time, with a view to the realisation of international syndicalist unity, an exchange of views with the R.T.U.I. on the basis of the letter of the 12th of August 1922 addressed to the latter by the retiring Provisional Bureau.

In view of the importance and ultimate inevitability of an agreement between all the revolutionary elements for common action against Capitalism and the State,

The Congress decides, in the event of a definite refusal from the Executive of the R.T.U.I., to address the central organisations affiliated to Moscow, over the heads of this Executive.

Taking note of the declaration of the French Comité de Défense Syndicaliste (Committee of Syndicalist Defense), the Congress hopes that French Syndicalism will join as a whole to support with all its strength the initiative taken by the International Congress of Revolutionary Syndicalists as well as the task of regrouping the Syndicalist family which the new International will undertake on the very morrow of its definite constitution.

V. Statutes of the International of Revolutionary Syndicalists.

STATUTES.

1. Preamble.

The age-long struggle between the exploiters and the exploited has assumed threatening dimensions. All powerful Capital, tottering for a moment after the devastating world war, and especially after the great Russian Revolution and the revolutions, less imposing, in Hungary and Germany, is raising its hideous head again. Notwithstanding the internal conflicts that are tearing the Bourgeoisie and World Capitalism, the latter are on a fair way to come to an agreement, with the object of hurling themselves on the working class with greater unity and increasing force, and of attaching it to their triumphant chariot.

Capitalism is organising itself, and from the defensive position in which it has found itself, it is now passing to the offensive on all the fronts against the working class, which is exhausted by bloody wars and unsuccessful revolutions. This offensive has its deep origin in two well determined causes:

Firstly, in the confusion of ideals and of principles which exists in the ranks of the labour movement; the absence of clearness and of cohesion regarding the immediate and the future aims of the working class; the division into innumerable camps often hostile to one another — in one word, the weakness and disorganisation of the labour movement.

Secondly, and especially, the subsequent distortion of the Russian Revolution which, at the moment of its outbreak, and owing to the very fact of the great principles enunciated by it in November, 1917, had raised the greatest hopes among all the proletarians of the world; and which has now fallen back to the rank of a political revolution that has served to conquer State power and maintain it in the hands of the Communist Party, the sole object of which is to monopolise the

entire economic, political and social life of the country. This deviation of a social revolution into a political revolution has, as a result, led to a hypertrophy of State Socialism with, as consequence, the development of a capitalist system characterised by as much exploitation and domination as any other system of bourgeois origin. The necessity of re-establishing Capitalism in Russia has been the gamble of World Capitalism. State Socialism, miscalled "Communism", has saved bourgeois Capitalism by making an appeal to it for help . . . to save the Revolution!

It is thus that, thanks to these two disorganising elements, viz., on the one hand, the confusion in the ranks of the proletariat and, on the other, capitalist Bolshevism — the great industrial and landed capitalist interests feel their strength increasing and the chances of their rebirth enhanced.

Against this serried international attack of the exploiters of all grades, there is but one weapon: the immediate organisation of the proletarian army into a fighting organisation, welding all the revolutionary workers of all countries into one single block, solid as granite, against which all the assaults of the capitalists will be shattered and which will ultimately crush them under its immense weight.

Several attempts have already been made in this direction. Two of these attempts the Internationals of Amsterdam and Moscow — are still hoping for success. But both bear within themselves poisonous and self-destroying germs. The International of Amsterdam, lost in reformism, considers that the only solution of the social prob. lore is to be found in class co-operation, in the collaboration of labour and capital, and in peaceful revolution to be patiently awaited and realised without violence and without conflict, with the consent and approbation of the bourgeoisie. The International of Moscow, on the other hand, considers that the Communist Party is the supreme arbiter of all revolution, and that it is only under the iron rod of this party that coming revolutions ought to be launched and consummated. It is to be regretted that in the ranks of the conscious and revolutionary proletariat there still exist tendencies supporting that, which neither in theory

nor in practice, can any longer be upheld, namely, the organisation of the State, — i.e., the organisation of slavery, of the wage system, of the police, of the army, of the political yoke: in one word, the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat", which cannot be anything but a brake on the direct expropriating strength of the working class and an instrument for the suppression of its real sovereignty; and which becomes, on that account, the iron dictatorship of a political clique over the proletariat. It is the supremacy of authoritarian Communism, i.e., the worst form of authoritarian despotism or caesarism in politics, — the complete destruction of the individual.

Against the offensive of Capital on the one hand, against politicians of all shades on the other, the revolutionary workers of the world ought indeed to constitute a real international association of workingmen

Against the offensive of Capital on the one hand, against politicians of all shades on the other, the revolutionary workers of the world ought indeed to constitute a real international association of workingmen, of which every member shall know that the final emancipation of the workers will not be possible until the workers themselves, in their capacity as workers, are prepared in their economic organisations not only to take possession of the land and the workshops, but also to conduct them in common and to manage them in such a way as to enable them to continue production.

With this perspective in view, the Inter, national Congress of Revolutionary Syndicalists, assembled in Berlin in December, 1922, adopts the

following Declaration of Principles, elaborated by the Preliminary Conference of Revolutionary Syndicalists held in Berlin in June, 1922:

2. Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism.

a. Revolutionary Syndicalism, basing itself on the class-war, aims at the union of all manual and intellectual workers in economic fighting organisations struggling for their emancipation from the yoke of wage slavery and from the oppression of the State. Its goal consists in the re-organisation of social life on the basis of Free Communism, by means of the revolutionary action of the working class itself. It considers that the economic organisations of the proletariat alone are capable of realising this aim, and, in con: sequence, its appeal is addressed to workers in their capacity as producers and creators of social riches, in opposition to the modern political labour parties which can never be considered at all from the point of view of economic reorganisation.

b. Revolutionary Syndicalism is the convinced enemy of every form of economic and social monopoly, and aims at its abolition by means of economic communes and administrative organs of field and factory workers on the basis of a free system of councils, entirely liberated from subordination to any Government or political party. Against the politics of the State and of parties it erects the economic organisation of labour; against the Government of men, it sets up the management of things. Consequently, it has not for its object the conquest of political power, but the abolition of every State function in social life. It considers that, along with the monopoly of property should disappear also the monopoly of domination, and that any form of the State, including the form of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" will always be the creator of new monopolies and new privileges, but can never be an instrument of liberation.

c. The double task of Revolutionary Syndicalism is as follows: on the one hand it pursues the daily revolutionary struggle for the economic, social and intellectual amelioration of the working class within the framework of existing society; on the other hand, its ultimate goal is to raise the masses to the independent management of production and distribution, as well as to the transfer into their own hands of all the ramifications of social life. It is convinced that the organisation of an economic system, resting on the producer and built up from below upwards, can never be regulated by Governmental decrees, but only by the common action of all manual and intellectual workers in every branch of industry, by the conduct of factories by the producers themselves in such a way that each group, workshop or branch of industry, is an autonomous section of the general economic organisation, systematically developing production and distribution in the interests of the entire community in accordance with a well-determined plan and on the basis of mutual agreements.

d. Revolutionary Syndicalism is opposed to every centralist tendency and organisation, which are but borrowed from the State and the church, and which stifle methodically all spirit of initiative and all independent thought. Centralism is an artificial organisation from top to bottom, which hands over *en bloc* to a handful of men, the regulation of the affairs of a whole community. The individual becomes, therefore,

nothing but an automat directed and moved from above. The interests of the community yield place to the privileges of a few; variety is replaced by unit fortuity; personal responsibility by a soulless discipline; real education by a veneer. It is for this reason that Revolutionary Syndicalism advocates federalist organisation; that is to say, an organisation, from below upwards, of a free union of all forces on the basis of common ideas and interests.

e. Revolutionary Syndicalism rejects all parliamentary activity and all collaboration with legislative organs. Universal suffrage, on however wide a basis, cannot bring about the disappearance of the flagrant contradictions existing in the very bosom of modern society; the parliamentary system has but one object, viz., to lend the appearance of legal right to the reign of lies and social injustice, to persuade slaves to fix the seal of the law on their own enslavement,

f. Revolutionary Syndicalism rejects all arbitrarily fixed political and national frontiers, and it sees in nationalism nothing else than the religion of the modern State, behind which are concealed the material interests of the possessing classes. It recognizes only regional differences, and demands for every group the right of self-determination in

harmonious solidarity with all other associations of an economic, territorial or national order.

g. It is for these same reasons that Revolutionary Syndicalism opposes militarism in all its forms, and considers anti-militarist propaganda as one of its most important tasks in the struggle against the present system. In the first instance, it urges individual refusal of military service, and especially organised boycott against the manufacture of war material.

h. Revolutionary Syndicalism stands on the platform of direct action, and supports all struggles which are not in contradiction with its aims, viz., the abolition of economic monopoly and of the domination of the State. The methods of fight are the strike, the boycott, sabotage, &c. Direct action finds its most pronounced expression in the general strike which, at the same time, from the point of view of Revolutionary Syndicalism, ought to be the prelude to the social revolution.

the Syndicalists do not forget that the decisive struggle between the Capitalism of today and the Free Communism of tomorrow, will not take place without serious collisions. They recognise violence, therefore, as a means of defence against the methods of violence of the ruling classes, in the struggle of the revolutionary people for the expropriation of the means of production and of the land.

i. Although enemies of all forms of organised violence in the hands of any Government, the Syndicalists do not forget that the decisive struggle between the Capitalism of today and the Free Communism of tomorrow, will not take place without serious collisions. They recognise violence, therefore, as a means of defence against the methods of violence of the ruling classes, in the struggle of the revolutionary people for the expropriation of the means of production and of the land. Just as this expropriation cannot be commenced and carried to a successful issue except by the revolutionary economic organisations of the workers, so also the defence of the revolution should be in the hands of these economic organisations, and not in those of any military or other organisations operating outside the economic organs.

j. It is only in the revolutionary economic organisations of the working class that is to be found the force capable of realising its emancipation, as well as the creative energy necessary for the reorganisation of society on the basis of Free Communism.

3. Name of international Organisation.

The revolutionary syndicalist organisations represented at the World Congress decide to create an international instrument of fight and solidarity, under the name of the International Working Men's Association (I. W. M. A.).

4. Aims and Objects of the I. W. M. A.

The I. W. M. A. has the following objects:

- a. To create, or, in those regions where they exist, to reinforce syndicalist organisations in all parts of the world, determined to fight for the destruction of Capitalism and the State.
- b. To intensify the class struggle in the sense indicated above.
- c. To prevent the infiltration of any political party whatsoever into the economic organisations, and to resist with firmness every attempt of the parties to dominate the unions.
- d. To arrive, when occasion demands, at temporary agreements with other proletarian trade unions and revolutionary organisations, with a view to undertaking common international action in the interests of the working class.
- e. To fight against and to expose the arbitrary high-handedness of all Governments with regard to revolutionaries devoted to the cause of the Social Revolution.
- f. To study the problems that concern the international working class, with a view to developing and directing international movements, or movements in groups of countries, for the defence and victory of the working class.

g. To undertake every work of assistance in case of great economic struggles or in acute conflicts with the open or secret enemies of the working class.

h. To further with material and moral help the class movements of every country where the direction of these movements is in the hands of the national economic organs of the proletariat.

The International does not intervene in the labour disputes of any country except when the latter departs from the general principles of the International,

5. Conditions of Affiliation.

The following may be affiliated to the I.W. M.A.:

a. The revolutionary syndicalist confederations that are not affiliated to any International

The affiliation of a second syndicalist confederation in the same country cannot be confirmed except by an international congress after the report of a commission appointed by the administrative organ of the I.W.M.A., and composed of two members of each interested organisation, i.e., of the affiliated confederation, of the confederation seeking affiliation, and of the administrative organ of the I.W.M.A.

b. Revolutionary syndicalist minorities within confederations affiliated to other labour Internationals, each time with the consent of the syndicalist confederation of the country in question, if such exists, affiliated to the I.W.M.A.

c. Independent trade or industrial organisations accepting the declaration of principles and the aims and objects of the I.W.M.A., with the consent of the affiliated syndicalist confederation of the country in question, if such exists.

The trade or industrial organisations that have withdrawn or have been excluded from a syndicalist confederation affiliated to the I.W.M.A. cannot be admitted into the I.W.M.A. except after the unanimous vote of a preliminary conference composed of two representatives of each of the interested organisations, i.e., of the seceding or excluded organisation, of the affiliated syndicalist confederation, and of the administrative organ of the I.W.M.A.

d. Every organisation for revolutionary syndicalist propaganda (one for each country), accepting the declaration of principles and the aims and objects of the I.W.M.A., and operating in a country where there does not exist any confederation affiliated to the I.W.M.A.

6. International Congresses.

The international congresses of the I.W.M.A. shall be held at least once every two years. The decisions arrived at by the international congresses are binding upon all affiliated organisations, except where these latter reject the decisions by a vote of a national congress, or if the decisions in question are, at the demand of at least three

affiliated confederations, submitted by the I.W. M.A. to the ratification by a referendum of all its members.

At the conclusion of national referenda, each affiliated confederation shall have only one vote in the decision of the international referendum.

The method of voting at international congresses of the I.W.M.A. shall be fixed each time by the Congress itself.

7. International Transfers.

Every member of the I.W.M.A. can, in the event of his being in a foreign country, enrol in any syndicalist confederation affiliated to the I.W.M.A. without paying any entrance fees.

8. Administrative Organ.

In order to co-ordinate the international activity of the I.W.M.A., to organise exact information as to the propaganda and the struggle in all countries, to execute and carry out to a successful conclusion the decisions of international congresses, and to direct all the work of the I.W.M.A., the International Congress elects an Administrative Bureau, composed of one member of each national affiliated confederation, with decisive

vote; and of one member for every other affiliated organisation of countries not possessing an affiliated confederation (but no more than one representative for each country), with consultative vote.

Any member of the International Bureau accepting a political mandate shall be obliged to resign his seat.

The seat of the International Bureau shall be determined by each Congress.

The Secretariat of the I.W.M.A. shall be elected by the Congress.

9. Finances.

To meet the expenses of the International Bureau and of exceptional demands of international solidarity, each affiliated organisation shall contribute to the International Bureau at least 1/20/0 of all the sums which the organisation receives as membership dues. The affiliated organisations should, themselves, communicate the exact percentage of contributions which they are in a position to send to the Bureau.

10. Publications.

The International Bureau shall publish a bulletin of information for the labour press, a periodical review dealing with questions of theory and tactics, and other publications from time to time.

11. Commission of Control.

The International Congress shall elect a Commission of Control and Revision, whose object shall be to verify the manner in which the sums placed at the disposal of the International Bureau are spent, and to submit a detailed report to the next Congress.

Va.

a. Seat of the Bureau.

The seat of the International Bureau to be Berlin.

b. The Secretariat.

A Secretariat consisting of three members has been elected.

The following are declared elected:

Rudolf Rocker, Germany

Augustin Souchy, Germany,

Alexander Schapiro, Russia.

c. Commission of Control.

A Commission of Control, consisting of three members, has been elected.

Comrade Schuster (Germany), has been elected president of the Commission. The other two members will be appointed by the Syndicalist Confederation of Germany.

VI. On the Persecution of Revolutionaries.

On the basis of reports received from delegates, the International Congress places on record that revolutionaries in general, and revolutionary syndicalists in particular, of all countries, have been the object of the most ferocious attacks in outbursts of violence and arbitrariness, for having tried to do their duty

during the period of the War, as well as afterwards, when the hostility between the proletarian classes and the bourgeoisie deepened; and, also, for the support given to the Russian Revolution from the very beginning, when it represented to the world the most glorious attempt at the simultaneous abolition of Capitalism and the State — those two symbols of domination and oppression.

To create, or, in those regions where they exist, to reinforce syndicalist organisations in all parts of the world, determined to fight for the destruction of Capitalism and the State.

The International Congress pays a fervent tribute to the memory of those who have dis-, appeared from the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat, and sends its solemn greetings and the expression of its deep solidarity to the members of the great working-class family confined in the prisons of the bourgeoisie. To the victims of the Fascists in Italy, to the brave comrades in France, to the martyrs languishing in the prisons of the United States of America, and everywhere else, the International Congress sends its fraternal greetings and the expression of its admiration for their heroic devotion and their uncompromising idealism.

The International Congress urges all revolutionary syndicalist organisations to fight shoulder to shoulder with all working class organisations in the struggle against World Reaction, and for the liberation of all the victims of this reaction.

VII On the Persecutions in Russia.

Taking into consideration the facts that have come to its knowledge relating to the struggle Carried on by the Russian anarcho-syndicalists and anarchists for the furtherance of a revolution which had for its goal the inauguration, through the intermediary of the Soviet forms of a free administration of production by the producers themselves, independently of all control by parties or the State.

The International Congress expresses to the Russian comrades its approbation of their revolutionary action along with the other sections of the revolutionary advance-guard—an action which they paid for with the blood of their best militants.

The International Congress records with grief, in confirmation of the documentary evidence supplied by the syndicalist press of all countries, as well as of information brought back by syndicalist militants who have visited Russia, that the Russian Government has embarked upon persecution, as enemies of the Revolution, of those who have offered the best of themselves in this struggle for emancipation, — the only reason being that their opinions are opposed to the domination of party politics in the development of the Revolution.

The International Congress declares that the persecutions of the working-class elements of the revolutionary Left in Russia discredit the Russian Revolution and re-enforce the Reaction of other Governments, and urges that revolutionary move, meats of all countries should demand that their brothers-in-arms in Russia be enabled to develop their revolutionary activity without being subjected to constant persecutions.

It condemns with all its force the brutalities perpetrated by the pseudo-Socialist Government of Russia, and it appeals to the international labour movement to demand, jointly with this Congress, the immediate liberation of revolutionaries and workingmen imprisoned in the Bolshevik jails, It sends to these

martyrs the expression of fraternal solidarity, and urges them not to despair, for the world proletariat is awakening to their cry of distress, and the day of their liberation is approaching with rapid strides.

in consideration of the impossibility for any revolutionary organisation at the present moment to operate in Russia, even for bringing relief to imprisoned comrades,

The International Congress appeals to the revolutionary proletariat in general and to revolutionary syndicalist organisations in particular, to create in every country relief organisations for the 'revolutionaries who are languishing in the Socialist prisons of Russia.

VIII On Revolutionary Tactics.

The tactics of a movement being, on the whole, nothing but the logical result of the tendencies and of the aims which these tactics represent, they must necessarily accommodate themselves to these aims and tendencies. Revolutionary syndicalism recognises only such methods of daily fight against the tyranny of Capitalism and of the State — which is its political expression — as are in accordance with its ultimate aspirations, viz., the establishment of a new social order based on Free Communism.

It follows that the Congress rejects every compromise with the existing institutions of capitalist exploitation and of the modern State, and that it categorically maintains that the centre of gravity of syndicalist

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activity ought to be in the direct revolutionary action of the masses themselves.

By *Direct and Revolutionary Action*, the Congress understands:

1. *Propaganda*, i.e. the systematic and indefatigable propagation of the ideas of Revolutionary Syndicalism by speech, by writing, and also by public demonstrations. It is to be noted here that Revolutionary Syndicalism ought to participate in all working-class manifestations which are calculated to lead towards proletarian emancipation, or which are directed against the Reaction—on condition, however, that they apply and propagate their own ideas and tactics in these actions.

2. *The Strike*, i.e. the organised stoppage of production by the workers for the amelioration of the conditions of work; in these periods the syndicalists should always try to deepen the social character of the movement and to raise it above the level of the ordinary struggle for increase in wages, with a view to converting these struggles into conscious actions in the interests of the community, — actions the prime importance of which is to be found in the manifestation of mutual solidarity and collective initiative.

3. *The Boycott*, i.e. the systematic struggle of the consumers, by means of which the sale of certain given products is to be hindered in order that their preparation or manufacture may be effected under better conditions of labour. The products generally used by the masses should especially be taken into consideration. The boycott can also assume a political character, and can be turned, at a favourable moment, against the laws or decrees of the Government that are opposed to the interests of the working class. The great importance of the boycott is that it groups workers together in their capacity as consumers, and opens their eyes to their own strength in this direction.

4. *Sabotage*, i.e. the conscious infliction of losses - on the employer by systematically turning out bad work or by rendering the instruments and machines unfit for use, and in this way compelling the employer to yield to the demands formulated by the workers. It must, however, be categorically declared that revolutionary syndicalists are enemies of any destruction of social riches that have been created by labour, and do not consider the possibility of any such action except when it is a question of the defence of the interests of the whole community or of the fundamental conditions of existence. In this case, the syndicalists reply to the sabotage committed' by the employer against the life and the health of the proletariat, by the sabotage of the products and the means of labour. The forms of sabotage depend on the specific conditions under which it may have to be practiced and on the importance of the object that has to be attained. They vary from the "go-canny" ("strike on the job") right up to systematically

rendering machines, the means of communication, etc., unfit for service, in the event of danger of war, of a *coup d'Etat* of the Reaction, or of any other event that may threaten the life and liberty of the population.

5. *The Action of Social Responsibility*, i.e. the fight of the producers against the manufacture of products dangerous to health, or against the use in the factories of materials of inferior quality, by means of which the community is cheated for the profit of the employer. This form of action will gain in importance, because it is destined to create and develop between the great masses of the people and the producers completely new relations which will bind producers and consumers together by increasingly strong ties.

6. *The General Strike*, i.e. the refusal of all the producers in all the industries and factories to work. This action is the most profound embodiment of the expression of international solidarity. A difference must, however, be made between the General Strike having for its aim the attainment of certain ameliorations within the framework of existing society, and the General Social Strike which, in developing itself by reason of revolutionary situations, is capable of bringing about the social revolution. In this latter case. the General Strike leads to an insurrection of the people and to the occupation of the factories and of the land by the producers. The duty of these latter will then be to give free course to the creative capacities of the people in such a manner as to enable them to realise practically the reorganisation of society and to prevent new forms of political tyranny and economic exploitation from taking the place of the destroyed system.

IX On Unemployment.

The Congress does not consider unemployment as an evil to which human beings are condemned by natural or economic laws, but, on the contrary, sees in it the most striking proof of the inefficiency of the capitalist system of production and of its lack of social cooperation and organisation. The general effects of this system demonstrate the incompetence of human beings to dominate the machinery of production.; the latest crisis has supplied us with one more clear proof of the fact that not only are human beings incapable of controlling the machinery which they have created, but that they end by being controlled by this machinery.

After a period of terrible destruction of materials and human lives, after a period in which all productive forces were occupied for years in the manufacture of engines of destruction instead of products of prime necessity, that is, at a period characterised by a want of food, of clothing, of lodgings, of everything—it is at such a time that millions of workers are thrown into the streets! Although it has been asserted that one cannot avoid poverty except by labour, human beings remain incapable of doing anything whatsoever to remedy the

increasing unemployment or to recommence production.

The Congress finds therein the certain proof either that human beings are completely dominated by their economic system, or that — if -we are to believe what the capitalists affirm, that they know how to manage the machinery of production. — we have the undeniable evidence of the criminal folly of this Capitalism.

Two classes of unemployment may be distinguished: periodical unemployment, and circumstantial unemployment depending upon the general state of things-. The former,

although it does not directly result from the economic system itself, could. be largely mitigated by a more marked development of the organising and communal spirit. Circumstantial unemployment, i.e., employment arising from the general state of things, is, on the contrary, organically bound up with the very method of production of private Capitalism. Just as circumstantial changes made their appearance simultaneously with the system of production of private Capitalism and of big industries, so also periodical unemployment, which is the consequence of

less acute economic circumstances arose at the same time as industrialism. Without entering into the details of these transformations arising from general conditions, the Congress considers that the lack of vigour in production which manifests itself by the insufficiency of demand and the superabundance of supply, is due to the faults of organisation of the capitalist system, or, more correctly, to the complete absence of organisation and cooperation.

The hunt for profits, far money, engenders wars of all against all; of the worker against the employer; of the consumer against the producer; of the buyer against the seller, each one in his capacity as an individual whose sole object is to profit more than the others. Each one awaits a chance of being able to throw himself upon his neighbour. The mutual confidence of human beings is weakened; unscrupulous selfishness takes the place of communal sentiment. Cooperation and organisation are rendered impossible, and the interests of society are trodden under foot by the filibusters of modern economy,

Unemployment is organically bound up with the system of private Capitalism and cannot disappear except after the abolition of this system and its replacement by another whose principles will be cooperation and organisation for the interests of the entire community. The Congress considers, therefore, that the measures that could be undertaken against unemployment within the framework of capitalist society are nothing but palliatives or provisional solutions of the most striking evils of unemployment.

Considering, on the one hand, that unemployment is, after all, a direct result of the capitalist system whose consequences ought to be borne by capitalist society itself; and that working class organisations are in no degree responsible for the evil deeds of capitalist insanity, and are, therefore, not obliged to weaken these consequences by all kinds of benefit funds,

The International Congress is of opinion that the workers ought to try, in critical and acute periods of unemployment, to bring about a general diminution of the hours of labour for all workers so as to prevent the extension of unemployment. Such measures find their justification partly in the general spirit of solidarity,

and partly because they prevent the division of the working class into two groups with opposing interests.

The Congress repeats, however, that these measures cannot be considered as anything but palliatives. It considers that the working class and society in general will not completely liberate themselves from the ravages of unemployment except by the total abolition of capitalism and the reconstruction of the economic system on the basis of Revolutionary Syndicalism.

X. On Workers' Control and Factory Councils.

The Congress considers it necessary that the factory council maintain all its efficiency as an organ capable of taking, and prepared to take, the place of the employer. It declares itself, consequently, opposed to all participation of factory councils in the solution, in conjunction with the employers, of economic conflicts within the factory, leaving this duty, as in the past, to local commissions and to the unions.

The Congress declares:

Unemployment is organically bound up with the system of private Capitalism and cannot disappear except after the abolition of this system and its replacement by another whose principles will be cooperation and organisation for the interests of the entire community.

1. That union control of industrial enterprises, exercised with the object of increasing production for the profit of the capitalist, and of placing a brake upon the demands for amelioration formulated by the workers, subjecting the latter to the conditions of the industry, do not solve the grave and complicated question of the new social order. This remains the primary cause of the disequilibrium between production and consumption, from which arise social conflicts, pauperism, competition, the struggle for the conquest of new markets, etc.; and industrial crises are the result, with unemployment or with economic and political wars, without the possibility of arriving even at a temporary arrangement, whether economic or political, national or international.

2. Union control, while in no way changing for the better the general conditions of society, develops among those who are called upon to exercise this control, and in the organs created for this purpose, a latent collaboration with the employer to the detriment of the revolutionary class spirit which ought to animate the union movement.

3. It considers also as fantastic the exercise of union control of factories in the hope of limiting capitalist speculation and exploitation of the consumer and the worker, because it is possible and easy for industrial enterprises to elude every form of workers' control . if they categorically resort to resistance and violence with the object of hindering the exercise of this control.

4. In the event of resistance offered by the employer to every form of control, the struggle of the proletariat for enforcing its application leads to an enormous expenditure of revolutionary energy for the attainment of an object which does not confer any benefit on the working class, and which, besides, proves to be unrealisable under the bourgeois regime of economic privileges.

The possibility of the management of enterprises by the workers is not realisable by union control, because it is only exercised by a handful of officials. Besides, the multiplication and manipulation of stocks and shares by the capitalists, who are interested in concealing the direct financial resources of the enterprise, prevent future administrators from controlling the real functioning of this enterprise, stock exchange operations, etc. In short, the very system of such speculative enterprises renders their management complicated and their control impossible, even on the part of the shareholders who, themselves, have to submit to the consequences of disastrous speculations undertaken by their directors.

XI. On the Cooperative Movement.

Considering as beyond the function of the Congress the inquiry into cooperatives of bourgeois origin, which, by creating the illusion of emancipating the workers within

the limits of the capitalist regime, turn away the working class from their struggle against the employer,

The International Congress recognises the circumstantial and extenuating reasons which have contributed, in a number of countries, to the creation and development of class cooperation alongside of the unions, and considers workings class cooperation in consumption, labour or production, as embryonic forms of organisation — useful in a period of transition from the bourgeois economic regime to that of a free and equal society — already possessing certain distributive as well as administrative functions in certain branches of industry.

The Congress considers it dangerous, however, for the revolutionary syndicalist movement to fuse cooperatives with the unions, by reason of the special and characteristic functions of cooperatives which, being commercial, agrarian, or industrial enterprises, are often entangled in the commercial machinery and are subordinated, in consequence, to the economic laws of the bourgeois regime in the same way as every other capitalist enterprise.

It considers that class cooperation ought to be made subservient to the union without the latter being called upon to suffer from the degenerating manifestations when these appear on the surface.

With a view to preventing the possibilities of such degeneration, the Congress, on the basis of experience acquired in different countries, proposes:

- a. To avoid the formation of cooperatives of small privileged groups; the 'cooperatives always to be open to all organised workers;
- b. To have always direct control by the unions;
- c. To substitute for the division of profits among the members the devolution of the funds for the benefit of the class struggle and the movement;
- d. Not to allow the introduction, in the management of cooperatives, of elements foreign to the working class,

In those cases where commercial degeneration begins to manifest itself in an acute and insurmountable manner, and becomes capable of demoralising the mass, and weakening the union movement, the union should' be called upon to intervene ruthlessly in order to eliminate the causes of this degeneration, whether with regard to individuals or with regard to the cooperative organ itself.

XII. On the neutrality of the I.W.W.

The Congress has, with regret, taken cognisance of the decision of the 14th Convention of the I. W. W. to hold aloof from the Congress of Revolutionary Syndicalists. It considers that the very broad basis on which the new Workers' International has been constituted, will permit international affiliation, in spite of certain differences

existing between the organisations of different countries; and it cherishes the hope that, . at its next Convention, the fellow,' workers of the I. W. W., to whom is extended the entire sym, pathy of the Congress, will finally adhere to the International Working Men's Association.

XIII. The International Congress of Revolutionary Syndicalists to the World Proletariat.

Workers of all Lands!

When the gigantic debacle represented by the World War which, during four long years, engulfed the peoples in its bloody whirlwind of death and destruction, was at last brought to an unexpected finish by the Revolutions

in Russia and in Central Europe, the working class of Europe found itself at the opening of a new chapter in its history of martyrdom, a chapter that could have brought it nearer to the solution of the great problem of its age-long slavery and oppression. The reign of capitalist exploitation and of tyranny personified by the modern State, which proved incapable of impeding a social catastrophe of such colossal significance but which, on the contrary, systematically prepared it and set it loose in a manner as insolent as it was criminal — this reign has ended in moral bankruptcy. It was bound to perish by its own iniquities. The rotting and ,mutilated corpses of millions of human victims, the horrifying desolation of

enormous territories, and the immeasurable sum of human griefs and super, human sufferings which consecrated this dance of death of the capitalist order, were the horrible witnesses of internal corruption and the un, limited incapacity of a system which threatened to be stifled in the morass of its own crimes.

Never before have such prospects of its approaching emancipation from the yoke of wage-slavery and from the regime of governmental violence presented themselves to the working class; never before had such an occasion. presented itself for undertaking, with all the strength at its disposal, a 'general and irresistible action against the very foundations of exploitation. It was on this very prevision that was based, in every country, the uncompromising opposition to the War on the part of the revolutionary syndicalist organisations that are addressing you today.

The Revolutions in Russia and in Central Europe brought to an end the insensate butchery of human beings. With its aid, political Socialism succeeded in capturing the State power and concentrating it in the hands of certain parties. It is thus that the doctrine of the capturing of State power, which for long years had been assiduously preached to the working masses, suddenly became a reality. It was this doctrine that constituted the fundamental principle of the Right and the Left of the Second International. This International had arisen with the special object of breaking with all those who desired to raise again the standard of the First International, and it suffered an ignominious shipwreck on the rocks of the world war. It gave birth, in con. sequence, to several

Internationals, which continue to tear each other to pieces in the name of the States which they serve or which they would like to serve. In this manner the Socialist parties obtained the possibility of proving once for all the extent of their creative efficiency. But it was just this “indispensable pre-condition” of Socialism, viz., the conquest of power, that proved fatal for Socialism itself' and for the working-class, and destroyed one of the most auspicious chances in the struggle for its emancipation.

The moderate wing of State Socialism was victorious in Germany and took possession of power. But its representatives did not even dare to make the least attempt

at economic reorganisation, and they sacrificed their Socialism on the altar of the bourgeois constitution which resuscitated Capitalism, tottering to its fall, exposed the German working class to the ruthless hunger blockade organised by the agrarian reaction, and represents nothing except the No leaf with which capitalist exploitation covers up its nakedness.

In Russia, it was the radical wing of State Socialism which won the victory with the aid of truly revolutionary elements and which betrayed these latter at the very first opportunity when it was able to concentrate all power in its own hands and sacrifice Socialism for the benefit of the dictatorship of a party. While destroying with one hand, by means of violence and with an iron logic, all institutions that had arisen by the initiative of the people themselves, such as the Soviets, the cooperatives, etc., in order to subject the working class to the newly created class of Commissarocracy, this Party paralysed simultaneously

This so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat”... was well calculated to establish the regime of a new superior caste resting upon the shoulders of the broad masses of the people... But it proved its bankruptcy wherever it attempted to direct the economic and social life of the country into new channels, or to carry out any really constructive work in the direction of Socialism.

the creative activity of the working class and established a new despotism, which strangled all free thought and the entire spiritual life of a whole country by forcing it into the narrow channels created by previously determined political measures,

This so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat”, the fig-leaf of the Bolshevik Reaction, was well calculated to establish the regime of a new superior caste resting upon the shoulders of the broad masses of the people, and to condemn to prison and to death revolutionaries of every other tendency. But it proved its bankruptcy wherever it attempted to direct the economic and social life of the country into new channels, or to carry out any really constructive work in the direction of Socialism. It followed, therefore, by the very logic of things, that after the betrayal of the Russian Revolution by State Communism, and after the bartering away of the natural riches of the country to foreign and native capitalists, its principal task, at the moment, consisted in preventing political and State power from slipping out of the hands of its party.

Never before had this simple truth been more clearly demonstrated than during the past four years—viz., that political parties are not capable of solving the social problem in the direction of a new economic order and of superior social development. And it is significant that it is the Socialist parties themselves that have supplied the most striking evidence of this truth. Politics indeed, far from being a reconciling or constructive factor, have been a factor of decomposition and destruction in the modern labour movement. They do not create the united front so ardently desired by the proletarian masses; on the contrary, they hinder its realisation without the workers being conscious of the fact. Modern politics are nothing but the theology of the State, and the different parties of the present epoch ought only to be considered and conceived of as the different theological tendencies of the governmental politics of our day.

It follows, in consequence, that all attempts at uniting internationally — at Moscow or at Amsterdam — the Socialist forces of the working class, will remain futile and abortive, from the point of view of a working-class movement, thoroughly impregnated with Socialist ideas, and really revolutionary. In the one case, exactly as in the other, the aim, pure and simple, is the open or masked subordination of the entire labour movement to the direction of some political party, or, in other words, of a new edition of politico-bourgeois traditions, but this time under the cover of Socialism. A party is always a portion of a whole, trying to impose, consciously or not: consciously, its aims and objects upon this whole.

It is not in any party that will be found the great importance of the proletarian movement, but rather in the domain of social economy. We are not concerned with the worker as belonging to such and such a party, but in his capacity as producer and creator of riches in

social life. It is most certainly not in parliaments and in the legislative organs of the State, bourgeois or “proletarian”, that the transformation towards Socialism takes place, but in the factories and in the workshops, in the fields and the villages, in the mines and in the bureaus of technicians. It is in the hands of millions of productive units of energy, whose labour always maintains social life and thanks to whose creative work society is reborn from day to day it is in the hands of these millions that lie the destiny of a new future and the chances of a speedy liberation. This liberation will not come of itself in virtue of some fatalistic inevitability of rigid natural laws which know of no deviation; its realisation will depend rather upon the conscious will and the force of revolutionary action of the workers, and will be determined by the latter. The revolutionary Will of human beings is the indispensable and decisive factor in all development on the road to Socialism; it follows, as a consequence, that all the struggles of the proletariat should bear the impress of this WILL to Socialism — this inexhaustible force which arises from the depths of the broad masses and creates new forms of social life.

It is thus proved that the outbreak of proletarian revolutionary struggles of Socialist tendencies can only have its natural foundations in the economic organisation of labour. These revolutionary economic organisations of the working class are not only a sort of provisional organ within the limits of capitalist society; they embody rather the indispensable bases for the development of a new society; they are the embryos from which Socialism will organically develop. Socialism will certainly not come through the intermediary of Government decrees or by a blind belief in the omnipotence of laws — that fatalist heritage of bourgeois revolutions; it will be, above all, the result of the systematic labour of the revolutionary economic organisations of the workers who, alone, are capable of conceiving the administration of the different branches of industry and of transforming them in the direction of Socialism. The “transitional State”, even if it be the most intelligent and the most prudent, will be absolutely incapable of possessing, even approximately, specific knowledge of every trade, a knowledge which is within the reach of every worker in a factory and which is undoubtedly necessary in order to be able to carry to a successful conclusion the work of Socialist transformation. It is only in the revolutionary economic organisations that such a natural unity of forces is possible, because here the worker is directly bound to his work and is individually the bearer, the fighter and the defender of his own interests, whereas in politics he always becomes either the puppet serving the ambitions of parties or the plaything of particular interests which are always falsely represented to him as his own. It is in these organisations alone that we have the possibility of introducing, even today, the provisional palliatives to social conditions within the framework of existing

society, and it is these organisations alone that are the centres of education for the development of the moral and intellectual capacities of the working-class. It is they which ultimately form the cell from which will emerge economic reconstruction based on the principles of True Socialism.

Revolutionary economic organisation is also the lever which is applied in all the decisive actions of the working class in its struggle against the forces of economic exploitation and political oppression. It is this organisation that is the natural source of replenishment of the workers in their capacity as producers. The day when the working class is conscious of this force will also be the day when it will toll the knell of bourgeois society.

It is this experience and this comprehension that induced the revolutionary economic organisations of Italy, of Spain, of Portugal, of Germany, of the Scandinavian countries, of the Argentine and of other countries of Europe and America, to found, upon the bases and principles of the First International, a new International Working Men's Association. These organisations, at the time when the Russian Revolution really represented the federalistic and revolutionary principles of this First International, were prepared to make a united block with this Revolution and to transform it in this manner into the Social World Revolution. But they were obliged after a number of disillusionments and of attempts at reconciliation initiated by them — to offer a resistance to the categorical imperative of Moscow to subject the entire labour movement to the Russian State and to the muddled separatist policies of the Communist Parties; and to draw their fighting ranks closer together by an International bond which should be really independent of all political parties and of the nefarious influence of these parties their final aim remaining the total abolition of all wage shivery and of all domination of an by man.

The International Working Men's Association certainly does not consider as their adversaries the workers affiliated to the Internationals of Moscow or of Amsterdam; it sees in them allies. flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood. It is always ready, in every action of the proletariat towards the emancipation of the working class or against reactionary manoeuvres, to march with them shoulder to shoulder and to give them proofs of the most active and effective solidarity. We

are very far from being the opponents of the intrinsic unity of the working class. We see this unity, however, not by any means in a purely mechanical and arbitrary coupling of mutually antagonistic elements under the iron rod. of a soulless discipline, but rather in the common interests and the common convictions of individuals. The International Working Men's Association fights not the workers who, either through

ignorance or through a misapprehension of their own interests, follow the orders of Moscow or Amsterdam, but rather' the spirit that dominates these organisations and which is an obstacle along the path of the complete emancipation of the proletariat, The Reaction in all countries is mustering its scattered forces

These organisations, at the time when the Russian Revolution really represented the federalistic and revolutionary principles of this First International, were prepared to make a united block with this Revolution and to transform it in this manner into the Social World Revolution.

into a new Holy Alliance so as to be able to strangle by all possible means the spirit of the Revolution and of Socialism. In Italy, the Fascist reaction weighs upon the country like a heavy mass of lead, and holds in its stifling grasp the revolutionary and trade union movements of the country. In Hungary, the labour movement is dying at the blood-stained hands of an organised band of assassins. Thousands of revolutionary workers are languishing in the Bolshevik prisons of Russia. A similar situation reigns in all the other countries of the two hemispheres, even if the external forms of the Reaction are not always so brutal and atrocious. An insensate and desperate Nationalism is ceaselessly pushing towards new bloody conflicts and is already preparing the ground for the coming world war. Everywhere Capitalism is preparing itself and gathering up all its energies with the object of again forcing the working class under the yoke of its arbitrary will; at the same time the terrible spectre of famine stalks through these impoverished countries. And, as a pendant to these evident signs of a triumphant International Reaction, we witness the complete disruption of the working class into dozens of political parties, which, though their mouths are full of unity, nevertheless furiously fight each other, instead of constructing an iron barrier against the ever accelerated onward march of the Reaction. While they speak of the conquest of factories power, they forget the conquest of the factories and of the land. While they think they are disintegrating

bourgeois politics by big Socialist phrases, bourgeois politics succeed in disintegrating Socialism and in handing over the labour movement to the bayonet of the Reaction.

It is only the return to reason, and the definite refusal to travel along the path that can lead to nothing but the ruin of the working class, that will be capable of arresting the imminent catastrophe. The work of decades is at stake, and is in danger of falling a victim to a victorious Reaction, Only the close union of all sincere and revolutionary elements, and the decisive struggle against every form of Reaction can still save

the working class. But this struggle should be taken up by the workers themselves in their capacity as producers. not for the profit of political parties, but only in the interests of proletarian emancipation.

Workers of all countries) Clasp hands, and thereby forge the weapons for the common struggle against all forms of oppression and slavery! Let your unanimous cry be: Bread and Liberty for all! War on Tyranny!

Long live the International of the working people!

Long live the Social Revolution!

Resolution On War and Militarism¹

Militarism is the system of monopolistic State violence for the purpose of defence and expansion of the national theatre of exploitation (defensive war or war of aggression), for bringing fresh theatres of exploitation under control (colonial war) and for coming down hard on the rebellious popular masses (strikes, unrest, rioting).

In every instance, the object is to preserve and increase the profits of the ruling classes, to wit, the proletariat's enemy class.

Militarism is the last and the mightiest resort at the bourgeoisie's disposal in keeping the working class under the thumb and snuffing out its struggles for freedom.

Everywhere that a new militarism has been moulded in national or liberation struggles (Russia, China), it has always rebounded against the workers themselves, because, by its very nature, it is an instrument for repressing the masses for the benefit of a privileged class and needs must oppose all freedom.

So it is the primordial task of the working class not just to combat the capitalist materialism of the present but also to do away with militarism as such. The best means of combating militarism will be those that best suit the anti-militarist mentality.

Above all, the point is to break up the mind-set of militarism, discipline and submissiveness by means of active propaganda, educating soldiers and undermining the foundations of armies so that they lose their efficacy against the workers. Volunteer armies, White armies, fascist armies, etc., should be the subjects of boycott even in peace time.

Since the bulk of the military is made up of workers and since the technology of modern warfare in its present state, is wholly dependent upon war industries, the workers have it in their power to bring all militaristic

activity to a halt by refusing to serve, strikes, sabotage and boycott, even should that military action be undertaken by White troops.

The best way of laying the groundwork in the here and now for such mass action is the individual refusal to serve and for the organized proletariat to refuse to manufacture weaponry.

Above all else, the object is to thwart the outbreak of a new war and, to this end, banish the main causes of war and militarism by means of effecting an economic transformation of our current social order (social revolution).

Congress therefore calls upon all IWA affiliated organisations:

1. To spread, by practical means and with immediate effect, the refusal to manufacture war materials.
2. To persuade the workers in arms plants or in firms likely to be turned into such, that the working class has a duty to answer the threat of war with the threat of strike, to seize war materials and all other materials that might be used to manufacture same; and to render the factories useless to capitalism.
3. Affiliated organizations must, wherever they can, set up General Strike Committees, whose task it will be to look into ways and means of seizing the factories, holding them and, in the event of their being in danger of recapture by the capitalists, destroying them. They must also look into ways and means of seizing the nerve centres of national organization; rail centres and rail lines, mines, power stations, posts and telegraphs, water distribution points, health services and pharmaceutical products; they must take hostages from among the bourgeoisie, politicians, clergy and bankers.

In short, they must work flat-out to turn the insurrectionist general strike into successful revolution.

¹ <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/the-iwa-against-war-and-militarism/>

The Anarchists Versus the Plague:

Malatesta and the Cholera Epidemic of 1884

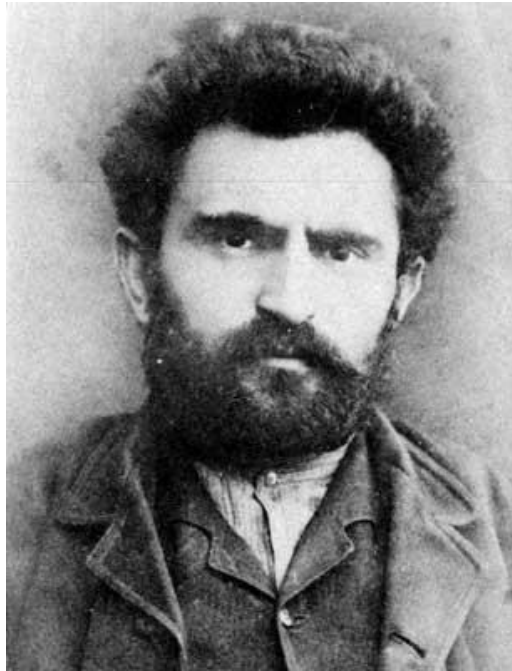
Crimethinc¹

In 1884, cholera tore through Italy, claiming thousands of lives. Despite a three-year prison sentence hanging over his head, Errico Malatesta joined other revolutionary anarchists on a daring mission to Naples—the heart of the epidemic—to treat those suffering from the disease. In so doing, he and his comrades demonstrated an alternative to coercive state policies that remains relevant today in the age of COVID-19.

The following text recounts the story of the outbreak and Malatesta's intervention, including all the available primary materials about the Italian anarchists'

participation, some of which have not previously appeared in English. Much of the historical background is drawn from Frank M. Snowden's excellent *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911*. Thanks to Davide Turcato, the editor of Malatesta's complete works; the *Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme* in Lausanne; and radical archivists and librarians everywhere who preserve anarchist history, enabling us to learn from the past.

“In 1884, cholera blighted several parts of Italy, being especially virulent in Naples. According to the prefect's statistics, cholera affected upwards of 14,000 people in the province, killing 8000 of them, of whom 7000 perished in the city of Naples alone. The state reacted by imposing a crackdown: the city was placed under martial law,



Errico Malatesta (1853-1932)

restrictions on movements were imposed, using methods similar to those employed on the occasion of the Messina earthquake or the more recent quake in L'Aquila. The volunteers from the White Cross, Red Cross, social democrats, republicans, and socialists adopted quite a different approach. Felice Cavallotti, Giovanni Bovio, Andrea Costa, and Errico Malatesta, no less, were active on the streets of Naples. And not without some risk to their own health: the socialist volunteers Massimiliano Boschi, Francesco Valdrè, and Rocco Lombardo caught cholera and perished.”

-Alessia Bruni Cavallazzi's elegy for Florentine Lombard, an English anarchist who served in the Red Cross during the epidemic

Malatesta and other comrades from various parts of Italy went to Naples as medical volunteers to care for those stricken by a cholera epidemic. Two anarchists, Rocco Lombardo and Antonio Valdrè, died there, taken by the illness. The well-known anarchist Galileo Palla especially distinguished himself by his selflessness, energy, and spirit of sacrifice. As a former medical student, Malatesta was entrusted with a section of sick people; they had a particularly high recovery rate because he knew how to force the city of Naples to turn over food and medicine in abundance,

¹ <https://crimethinc.com/2020/05/26/the-anarchists-versus-the-plague-malatesta-and-the-cholera-epidemic-of-1884>

which he distributed liberally. He was offered an official decoration, the order of good merit, which he refused. When the epidemic ended, the anarchists left Naples and published a manifesto explaining that “the true cause of cholera is poverty, and the true medicine to prevent its return can be nothing less than social revolution.”

-Luigi Fabbri’s “Life of Malatesta”¹

Cholera is an infectious bacterial disease, typically contracted from infected water supplies, that can cause vomiting and diarrhoea to the point of death.

Was “the true cause of cholera” indeed poverty, or was that just ideological rhetoric? Read on and decide for yourself.

The Origins of Italy—and Italian Anarchism

Italy was still a new country when the cholera epidemic struck in 1884. To understand why Naples was hit so hard and what it meant that anarchists travelled there from all around the country in solidarity, we have to back up two decades.

Until 1861, there was no such thing as Italy. The peninsula was divided up into various kingdoms and duchies under many different local rulers. The original proponents of Italian unification were nationalists like Giuseppe Mazzini, who called on revolutionary republicans around Europe to overthrow the old monarchs and establish new nations on the basis of shared language, geography, and “unity of purpose.” The idea was that rich and poor should work together in solidarity beneath the banner of the nation.

In fact, people on the Italian peninsula did not possess a common language or culture. Many of the dialects spoken on different parts of the peninsula were mutually unintelligible; there were massive cultural and economic differences between different regions. Mazzini was seeking to invent a

common language and culture where none existed, in order to create the foundation for a competitive modern state.

Contrary to their intentions, those who sought to carry out Mazzini’s program of national liberation ultimately brought about the unification of Italy under a monarchy. Revolutionaries like Giuseppe Garibaldi risked their lives in guerrilla warfare to unify the peninsula as a republic, but whenever they succeeded in toppling one king, another simply assumed control of the area, until King Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia ruled all of Italy.

Once he came to power, King Victor Emmanuel did not work beneath the banner of the nation for the betterment of all Italians; rather, he immediately set about looting the southern part of the peninsula to enrich his own coffers. In imagining that all Italians could share a common interest, Mazzini had failed to apprehend the class conflict at the basis of capitalist society.

In exile in London in 1864, Mazzini participated in the founding of the International Workingmen’s Association, a worldwide federation of labour unions. Karl Marx

forced Mazzini out early on, only to lose control of the International as workers gravitated to the ideas of anarchists like Mikhail Bakunin. Bakunin was himself a former participant in national liberation struggles who had become disillusioned with the shortfalls and betrayals of nationalism.

Born outside Naples in 1853, Errico Malatesta grew up participating in one of Mazzini’s secret societies; studying medicine at the University of Naples, he was expelled and imprisoned for participating in a Mazzinist protest. Yet under the reign of King Victor Emmanuel, he saw first-hand that being ruled by an Italian king was no better

In Italy, it was Bakunin, not Marx, who represented the chief alternative to Mazzini’s nationalism. Malatesta and his comrades joined the International in association with Bakunin and other anti-authoritarians throughout Europe.

¹ Fabbri’s account largely echoes Max Nettlau’s version, published a few years earlier in *Errico Malatesta: The Biography of an Anarchist*: “In the autumn of 1884, Malatesta and other comrades went to Naples, where the cholera had taken alarming proportions, and worked in the hospitals. Costa and other Socialists did the same. Two

Anarchists, Rocco Lombardo, the former editor of the Turin ‘Proximus Tuus,’ and Antonio Valdre succumbed to the epidemic. Those who returned stated in a manifesto that the real cause of cholera was misery and the real remedy the social revolution (c. “Révolté,” September 28, Dec. 7, 1884; Nov. 8, 1885).”

than being ruled by a monarch of any other nationality. By the time of the Paris Commune in spring 1871, Malatesta and his comrades were seeking a new approach to social change.

In Italy, it was Bakunin, not Marx, who represented the chief alternative to Mazzini's nationalism. Malatesta and his comrades joined the International in association with Bakunin and other anti-authoritarians throughout Europe. Arguably, the radicalization of the Italian section of the International marked the emergence of anarchism as a full-fledged social movement. It also had a significant impact on working-class organizing in Italy, where anarchism remained the most powerful current in the labour movement for many years afterwards, shaping the anti-authoritarian ethos of grassroots organizations in Naples and elsewhere around the peninsula.

Malatesta committed himself to a life of revolutionary struggle, helping to establish mutual aid associations for workers throughout Italy and participating in open insurrections in 1874 and 1877. All this attracted the attention of the authorities, leading to a series of court cases and prison terms. In 1883, after years in exile, Malatesta returned to Italy to publish a newspaper and resume organizing.

Naples on the Eve of the Epidemic

In 1884, over half a million people lived in Naples, making it Italy's most populous city. Much of the population consisted of former peasants uprooted from the countryside working as craftsmen or vendors or else simply unemployed. Wages in Italy were among the lowest in Europe, and in Naples they were lower than in any other Italian city. Rent accounted for at least half of the total expenditures of each family. Illegal capitalist organizations set the price of food and worked with the municipal authorities to control what kind of criminal activity was possible.

Following Italian unification, Naples had lost its status as the seat of a monarchy. Consequently, power and wealth remained concentrated in the hands of an elite class, without the economic dynamism that could cause them to trickle down to the rest of the population. Scant resources were invested in public health structures of any kind. Hospitals were unhygienic, overcrowded, and ill-equipped, possessing a well-deserved bad reputation. The right-wing party controlled the government; the left-wing party represented a *loyal opposition* that simply asked for petty reforms,

while the Catholic Church was powerful enough to constitute a third pole in society.

Anarchists saw no possibility for meaningful reform within this system. Instead, they focused on building up grassroots networks via which workers, peasants, and poor people could circulate resources to ensure their collective survival, defend each other against injustices, and spread a vision of a world in which power, resources, and freedom would be shared among all.

Some elements of this setting are analogous to our situation today, when a post-industrial economy has left a large part of the population without stable employment or savings. Austerity measures have gutted public health services to enrich a wealthy few, while the political system has repeatedly failed those who seek to bring about social change.

July 1884: Cholera Arrives in France

Cholera and imperial war have always been interlinked. In 1883, Indian soldiers serving in the British troops that were occupying Egypt brought cholera to the northern coast of Africa, where it killed 60,000 people. In 1884, French troops were engaged in a colonial campaign for control of Indo-China, during which an epidemic swept through the war-torn region. Cholera rode the military supply chain back to the Mediterranean, arriving at the French port of Toulon and spreading to Marseilles by June 25.

The public and the press recognized that French military intervention was the source of the epidemic. Demonstrations and widespread graffiti denounced the French government's policy of colonial expansion. In France as well as Italy, anarchists understood that the colonial domination of other peoples benefitted the ruling class of the colonizers while endangering ordinary people on both sides.

In 1884, well over 200,000 Italians lived in France. The majority were former small landowners or renters who had been engaged in agriculture until the expansion of the world market drove them out of business and across the border to seek employment—exactly the same way that the North American Free Trade Agreement uprooted countless Mexican *campesinos* and pushed them across the US border 110 years later. The highest concentrations were in Toulon and Marseilles, with Italian populations of 10,000 and 60,000, respectively. These were also the French cities hit

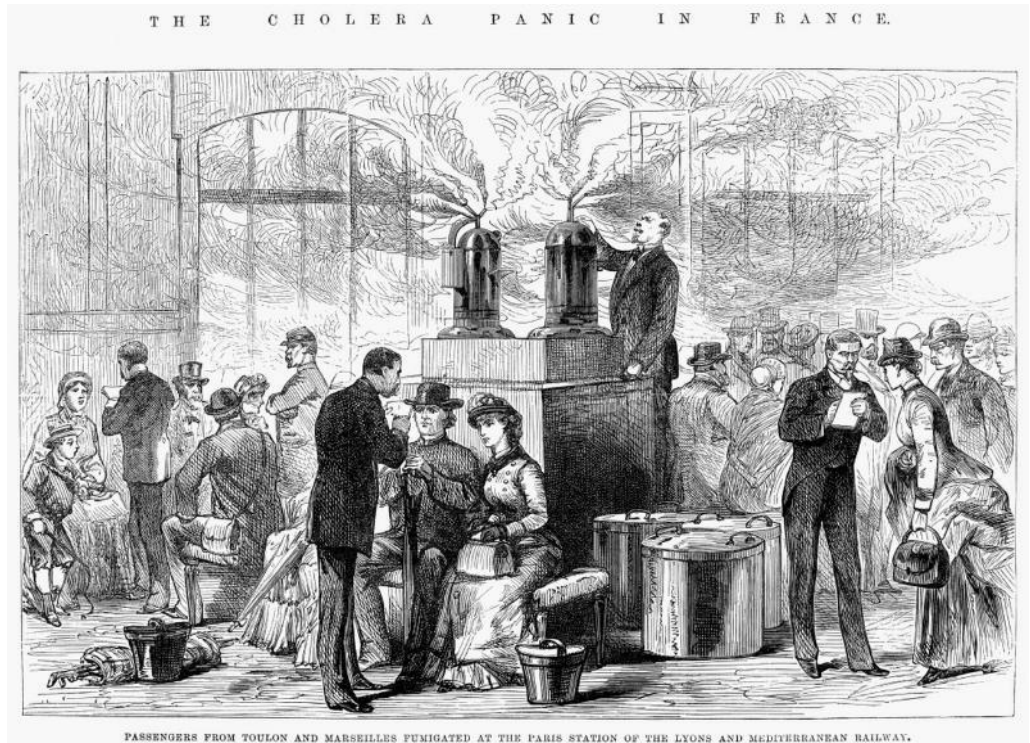
hardest by cholera—and the epidemic hit the poor immigrant communities worst.

“A very large proportion of the victims at Toulon and Marseilles were Italians,” the *New York Times* reported. The death rate for Italian immigrants may have approached 1 in 10. In *Naples in the Time of Cholera*, Frank M. Snowden describes an apocalyptic atmosphere:

The streets were sprinkled with carbolic acid in an attempt to “drown” the choleraic germs; tar and sulphur bonfires were lit at every corner to purify the air; public gatherings of every kind were forbidden; railroad passengers and their baggage were fumigated; and the sewers were flushed. The urban landscape was suddenly transformed beyond recognition by fire, pungent smoke, the unfamiliar smell of acid and the near-desertion of the streets. In this threatening environment, all economic activity halted as factories and shops closed. Provisions became nearly impossible to find, and those who remained anxiously watched for the first premonitory symptoms, convinced that they were inhaling poison with every breath.

In July 1884, while state-sponsored experts from the French Academy of Medicine were still attempting to deny that an outbreak of bona fide cholera was taking place, many Italians were interned in the Pharo hospital in Marseilles. Here, the middle-class French doctors smoked cigars constantly in order to create what they imagined to be a protective smokescreen between themselves and their underclass patients; the doctors experimented with a variety of speculative treatments, including electrical shock. In the first weeks of the epidemic, the fatality rate at Pharo hospital was a terrifying 95%.

To make matters worse, the crisis also intensified bigotry against Italian immigrants. For the French government and ruling class, this was an opportunity to get rid of what some of them regarded as an unruly part of the surplus population. Driven by the threat of death from the epidemic as well as xenophobic attacks and aggressive government policies, tens of thousands of Italians fled back across the border—bringing the epidemic with them.



For all of these reasons, Italian anarchists immediately concerned themselves with the epidemic as it spread along the French coast in July 1884.

At this time, Malatesta was in Florence, Italy, editing the anarchist periodical *La Questione Sociale*. Driven from Italy by police pressure after the failed insurrection of 1877, he had lived in France, England, and Egypt—where, according to Luigi Fabbri, he attempted to join the anti-colonial insurrection led by Ahmed ‘Urabi, the same insurrection that British troops had been brought from India to repress.

Upon his return to Italy in 1883, Malatesta was jailed for six months on fabricated charges of “subversive association,” a form of nebulous conspiracy charge that the Italian state has employed to hamstring anarchist organizing for a century and a half now. In January 1884, without ever coming before a jury, Malatesta was sentenced to three years in prison, but released pending his

appeal. These are the conditions in which he and his comrades were organizing and publishing.

The following article from the July 1884 issue of *La Questione Sociale*, quite possibly written by Malatesta himself, sets forth how Malatesta and his comrades understood the causes of the epidemic. Their theory that cholera originated in polluted river deltas was shared by most educated Italian doctors at the time, though it has since been surpassed by modern research. On the other hand, their argument that capitalism fails to provide an impetus for addressing collective problems remains as timely now as the day it was written. The appendix, a translation of a letter from a Parisian carpenter, is especially chilling to read in a time when capitalists are urging us to go back to work even at risk of death by COVID-19 and a part of the working class is eager to comply.

Il Colera

Cholera is in France: perhaps it will invade much of Europe.

Satisfied people usually accuse us of bias and exaggeration when we attribute the greatest part of the evils that afflict humanity to the prevailing social order. They willingly talk about chance or fate (natural laws) and try to separate the question of responsibility from them and from the social system that produces or supports them, blaming unconscious nature, and often intemperance, or the unexpected, or a thousand other popular vices.

We will see that these people, who always consider other people's pain and misery necessary and inevitable, also have recourse to *natural law* when it comes to cholera, which makes its periodic appearance among humans inescapable or even useful. We argue that the existence of cholera, and its appearance in Europe and the environment conducive to its development that it finds among us, are the fault of the current social system.

Cholera (at least the Asian variety, which is the only truly fearsome one) comes from the Ganges Delta, as the plague once came from the Nile Delta, and as yellow fever still comes from the Mississippi Delta, desolating parts of America and West Africa and continually threatening Europe.

These diseases derive from the swamps that form in the deltas of rivers that are abandoned to themselves, due to the rotting corpses and other organic materials that those immense currents bring to deposit there. Part of the Nile river delta has been remediated; the plague has almost completely disappeared in Egypt and been completely forgotten in Europe. Why not remediate the delta of the Ganges as well?

It might take a lot of work, immense expenditures, but what would that be compared to what governments spend on unproductive or harmful things? What would be the inconvenience or expense of a campaign by European peoples against cholera, compared with the moral and material damage inflicted by one of those wars between peoples that are so often repeated?

The delta of the Ganges has not been remediated, because that work has not hitherto lent itself to private speculation, via which a few capitalists could have enriched themselves on the sweat and death of the impoverished people of India, and because in the absence of solidarity in which we live, rivalry, selfishness, and patriotism prevent all peoples from contributing freely to improving the soil on which one of these peoples lives, instead fuelling hatreds and wars.

Perhaps that delta and all the great unhealthy plagues that corrupt the world will not be healed until the economic and political conditions of humanity are completely transformed—that is, until the world belongs to everyone and everyone has the right and the means to work towards improving it, until nobody can claim an exclusive right over a part of the soil and erect obstacles to prevent people from remediating it, until all the forces that are employed in rebellion and repression today, in wars and preparations for wars, or that are left latent and inactive, can be applied in useful ways and, increased a hundredfold by collective association, return to humanity all the power that we can achieve vis-à-vis the natural environment.

But isn't it ridiculous to speak of the remediation of the Ganges—and here, in

Italy, when the marshes that are close to us are not remediated, when on the contrary, they increasingly enlarge their deadly zone!

And this cholera that we could eliminate but do not because of our form of social organization, this cholera from which we do not free India and that India sends us from time to time, as if to remind us that man never sins with impunity against human solidarity—did this cholera come to Europe by itself, carried by the winds, without it being anyone's fault?

No, not even. On the contrary, it seems that the government of the French republic gave it to us. *Civilized* France goes to conquer *barbarian* Asia and its ships, more or less victorious, carry the terrible scourge back within them. We, *civilized peoples*, inflict massacre and desolation upon the *barbarians* with bayonets and cannons, and the *barbarians* send back massacre and desolation through cholera. Oh human family! Except that the massacre that we carry out is voluntary, inflicted for the purpose of robbery, whereas the revenge of the *barbarians* is involuntary and unconscious. So who is more barbaric?

And aren't there unsanitary homes here in Europe, bad and insufficient food, exhausting work, isn't it poverty (the daughter of individualized property) that makes it possible for the Asiatic disease to spread? When the danger is upon us, the hygienic commissions busy themselves promulgating measures that would be laughable for their impotence if they did not make one cry, or suggestions that succeed only in expressing a bloody irony. You hear these big shots from universities or health councils preach *Eat healthy food and avoid overwork*. And when the farmers who earn an average of 27 cents a day and live on spoiled polenta and water that is not always clean ask for better living conditions, the government that pays university students and health advisers (with the people's money, of course) imprisons the peasants and puts its soldiers at the disposal of the owners. And the doctors who should renounce their office, which has been rendered useless, and place the responsibility on the government and

owners for their murderous activities, continue to report and dictate advice!

Meanwhile, cholera continues to spread slowly, and perhaps soon it will erupt with fearsome energy. And it will inflict more deaths and more pain than ten revolutions, just one of which would be enough to eliminate cholera and a thousand other ailments forever. Yet for a while, tender hearts will continue to fear *revolutionary* excesses!

We present below a faithful translation of a letter that a Parisian carpenter addressed days ago to the daily socialist newspaper *Le Cri du Peuple* ("The Cry of the People"). It is an authentic letter, to which only a few corrections of form have been made: it is grim, wild, but it vividly describes the conditions of struggle that the bourgeoisie have imposed on the workers, it truly expresses the mood of the most energetic, most *dangerous* members of the proletariat.

Bourgeois men, if selfishness has not reduced you completely to foolishness, meditate on this letter; think what would happen to you if on a day of revolution you met these workers who, thanks to your deeds, have retained only one hope, to have to manufacture many coffins, and... but it is useless; you will remain as you are and what is fated will come to pass.

"Some who hear that cholera is among us feel their stomachs turn in fear. On the contrary, rather than being afraid, I call out to cholera: Hail! And come early.

"Life is hard. It's bad. I am a good worker and I love my job. The smell of wood widens my chest. How beautiful are the long shavings which curl, carried away with great strokes of a plane! What a beautiful sound the axes make under hammer blows! I am never as happy as when great drops of sweat fall on my bench from my wet forehead.

"I have no more work! I haven't had a job for two months. The bosses all have—as far as they say—too many workers and not enough commissions. Two months without working! A little longer and my hands will become soft and white like a gentleman's. But meanwhile, everything is in the

pawnshop, even the receipts are expired. In the cupboard there is nothing but hunger. All I have in my room is a nail and a piece of rope. I keep them, they can always be useful.

“I went from door to door offering my skills for cheap. Nothing. I’ve travelled throughout the region. I walked for miles along the white roads, beside which sad elm trees die of thirst. Every time I heard the striking of a hammer in the distance, the screeching of a saw, my heart beat faster. Wretched hope! Yes, hope rises once again! But no, nothing. Everywhere the same thing, and I returned in the evening, when I could not take any more, heartbroken, starved, with a dry throat and the soles of my shoes a little more worn than the day before.

“How do you want me and all who are like me not to shout: Hail cholera? Leaning forward, full of hope, we stretch out our arms and shake our hats, as we do when we see the face of a long awaited friend appear at the turn of a road. So let him come and be quick! In his bony green hands, in the folds of his poisoned cloak, he carries the *disease* of work; work for us. If he comes, the Asiatic, there will be a need for coffins. I can make coffins, I can!

“Big ones and small ones. Some beautiful, some ordinary. For rich and for poor. In oak and in fir. Here it is. Be served. There will be one for everyone. Just ask. Who’s next? Come on, go on with the plan! What? Is it my fault that to live, I need others to die? And hundreds, thousands. Then we, the workers, will have work and we will be able to ask for whatever compensation we want; and we will make merry! Long live cholera.

“You are not afraid of us, scourge. If you have to break our barely living bodies, thank you. It is already no fun to lead the



life we lead. But as we wait for you to take us to hell, you will certainly drop some coins in our pockets, and we will laugh at you. Be as bad as you like, you’re not as murderous as the lack of work, nor as selfish as the bourgeois, nor as cruel as the exploiter.

“Come. My arms are strong enough to make coffins for all Paris, if you want. Fear? Away then! Hail cholera!”

The Florentine police repeatedly targeted *La Questione Sociale*, using minor infractions to justify confiscating all copies of the newspaper. Malatesta and his comrades were forced to cease publishing early in August 1884, just as cholera was spreading around the Mediterranean.

August 1884: Cholera Reaches Italy

In Italy, representatives of the Catholic Church took advantage of the situation to describe the epidemic as the judgment of God on a secular society—specifically as a punishment for the spread of socialism and atheism. They urged people to prostrate themselves in repentance rather than adhering to safety measures.

The state resurrected quarantine procedures from the previous century’s protocol for dealing with bubonic plague, mobilizing the military to form a cordon across the French border. Their policies seemed vacillating and arbitrary; at first, they detained travellers for three days, then for five days, then for seven. Upon release from quarantine, all passengers and their belongings were fumigated with sulphur and chlorine or disinfected with

carbolic acid, corrosive sublimate, or bichloride of mercury. This had no medical effect other than to irritate the lungs. Its chief purpose was to create a dramatic spectacle, so that the state would be seen taking action against the epidemic.

For a modern equivalent, we need look no further than governments pouring resources into fumigating entire cities in response to COVID-19, when the vast majority of cases are spread by person to person contact.

Twice displaced, refugees returning to Italy were not eager to be trapped in camps; many of them eluded the military cordon, traveling illegally through the hills. As cases of cholera nonetheless appeared in one region of Italy after another, further military cordons were deployed all around the country. (This is reminiscent of the aforementioned “subversive association” charges with which the Italian state has attempted to control anarchists by imposing regional limits on travel right up to the present day.) The internal cordons interrupted the economy, imposed famine, generated fear, and spread xenophobia and paranoia around Italy. Some superstitious people came to regard traveling strangers as malefactors intent on spreading disease, just as today ignorant conservatives attribute COVID-19 to some sort of Chinese plot—when they aren’t calling it a Democratic hoax.

By any measure, the attempt to stop cholera via military blockade was a dismal failure. The state was always two steps behind the epidemic—and its heavy-handed interventions only induced people to conceal news of new outbreaks. As Snowden argues,

“In the dawning age of scientific medicine, sound public health policies depended on accurate and prompt information. The threat of military force was instead the best way to sever the lines of communication between the populace and the authorities. Worse still, to move large numbers of soldiers, largely drawn from high-risk social groups, from locality to locality in unsanitary conditions was itself an excellent means of spreading an epidemic. A large part of the history of cholera was the story of the movement of young men in uniform.”

This phenomenon is familiar today, when the police of New York City and Detroit have played a major role in spreading COVID-19, bringing it

from one neighbourhood to the next and turning jails and prisons into death camps.

The first Italian city to experience a major outbreak of cholera was la Spezia, a port city like Toulon. The first deaths were concealed from medical officials, but after cholera contaminated the water supply and fatalities skyrocketed, the military sealed off the city completely, imposing famine and panic. In mid-September, there were two days of desperate fighting as the inhabitants attempted to break through the military cordon by force.

In order to deal with the vast numbers of refugees in quarantine, the Italian authorities established *lazarretos*—quarantine camps—including one on an island immediately outside Naples. In these confinement centres, guards forced refugees to trade the last of their belongings for food; the contagion made its way back to Naples via these ill-gotten goods. These quarantine camps remind us of concentration camps like the one on the isle of Lesbos, in which European governments intern refugees today; in some cases, it remains official government policy to seize refugees’ belongings in return for confining them. These modern-day camps, too, see periodic rioting as refugees struggle to assert their humanity.

By the end of August 1884, people in Naples were dying in such great numbers that it was no longer possible to conceal the arrival of cholera. The military quarantine had not contained the outbreak—it had spread it to Italy’s largest city.

September 1884: The Epidemic in Naples

The military had failed. Now it was up to health officials to treat the epidemic.

Whenever officials learned of a person who was suspected of having cholera, they dispatched a team of guards accompanied by a doctor to seize the sick person and convey him or her to the hospital; then a disinfection squad would show up to destroy or disinfect the sick person’s belongings. At first, the hospital did not even have beds to accommodate the people who were conveyed to it.

In addition, officials initiated a campaign to “cleanse” the city by building great bonfires of sulphur every night at every street corner and in every square. These made the already polluted air nearly unbreathable. The city also posted notices everywhere—in the north Italian idiom, rather than the local Neapolitan dialect—explaining that people could protect themselves from the disease by living in clean and airy rooms, adhering to a

healthy diet of high-quality food, drinking purified water, and avoiding both public restrooms and emotional stress... in short, by being part of the ruling class.

The officials also did some useful things, such as establishing housing and meals for the very poor, and some harmless things, like whitewashing the walls. But cholera had entered the city's drinking water, and the death rate soon rose to well over one out of every 100 people. At the pace that bodies were piling up, it became impossible to bury all of the dead. Some were heaped into mass graves, others left to rot where they lay.

The middle class and the aristocracy fled the city. This time, the class-conscious military made no effort to stop them. The government banned public assemblies, but desperate people crowded together at churches to beg for mercy or roved the streets in religious processions, demanding donations and attacking those who could not pay.

In 1884, scientists knew of no effective treatment for cholera. The doctors in Naples experimented with a wide range of approaches, from irrigating the intestines with acid to administering electrical shocks, strychnine, and subcutaneous injections of saline solution. Many of these treatments only hastened patients' deaths. Those who survived the hospitals told horror stories about the experiments that doctors were conducting upon those in their care.

As a result, and owing to the association of these doctors with the guards who accompanied them and the invasive measures of the state, popular opinion turned against the doctors. Many people also considered it suspicious that these wealthy gentlemen (who could afford clean water and sanitary living conditions) were so rarely afflicted by the disease. People regularly assaulted doctors when they entered poor neighbourhoods, repeatedly triggering riotous confrontations with the military.

With the wealthy having fled, municipal efforts to clean out the sewers and whitewash the walls were read metaphorically as part of an effort to erase and exterminate the poor. As Snowden recounts,

During September 1884, a great phobia of poisoning gripped the city of Naples. Fearing that the municipal officials were engaged in a diabolical plot to eliminate surplus population, the people reasoned that cholera was literal class warfare. The health

officials, doctors, and municipal guards who suddenly appeared in the back lanes of Old Naples were [regarded as] the agents of a deadly conspiracy. Their mission was to kill off the poor, and their weapon was poison.

Such a response, of course, is unintelligible except in the context of the long-term and deeply rooted suspicion of the people towards authority.

In such an unequal society, the authorities had long ago earned this suspicion. The residents of Naples felt betrayed by the power structure that ruled them from northern Italy, just as the poor of Naples felt betrayed by the Neapolitan ruling class. As September progressed, massive clashes unfolded between soldiers and townspeople, escalating to gun battles. There were riots in two of the city's prisons. As Naples descended into chaos, public health policies were rendered moot. Like the army, state health officials had failed to address the situation.

The Grassroots Response

Fortunately, state institutions were not the only ones to respond to the epidemic.

The first grassroots response was organized by ordinary workers in Naples like the ones Malatesta had organized with in the 1870s. On August 29, the Società Operaia ("Workers' Society"), a radical mutual aid organization founded in 1861, announced a new initiative intended to provide assistance to anyone whose family had been struck by cholera. This "sanitary company" involved a handful of trusted doctors accompanied by ordinary laborers serving as nurses. Drawing on the Società Operaia's scant funds, they offered medication, clean blankets, food, and financial assistance to the ill and the bereaved alike. Wanting nothing to do with the hospitals or the city government, they treated cholera patients in their own homes, only going where they were explicitly invited. Being connected to workers throughout the poor neighbourhoods of Naples, they were able to spread the news about their services through word of mouth.

A week later, on September 4, a middle-class newspaper editor named Rocco de Zerbi convened a meeting involving the Società Operaia, the medical faculty of the University of Naples, representatives of the press, and various local notables. The idea was to establish a citywide

organization that scaled up the workers' "sanitary company." As often happens, the initial efforts by radical grassroots organizers had drawn middle-class activists with more resources who were convinced that they could do a better job at what ordinary people had started themselves. The organization that emerged from this meeting, officially named the Committee for the Assistance of the Victims of Cholera, came to be known colloquially as the White Cross.

Workers' associations continued to coordinate grassroots efforts throughout the city—but owing to the resources and credentials of its sponsors, the White Cross received the credit for everything in the international media and subsequent historiography. This is not surprising, considering that the budget of the White Cross ended up being 200 times greater than initial funds that the Società Operaia had raised. All the same, the White Cross depended on the workers' contacts and the trust that radical labour organizations had earned among the poor and angry.

The influence of the workers' associations and the wariness of the workers compelled the White Cross to adhere to a fundamentally anti-authoritarian approach. In order to ensure that no one would doubt their good intentions, the White Cross was comprised entirely of unpaid volunteers. Rather than trying out experimental treatments on patients, White Cross volunteers stuck to providing palliative care and distributing fresh blankets, sheets, mattresses, disinfectants, and food. They never carried weapons with them, and they did not insist on compulsory fumigation or on destroying the property of cholera patients. Learning from the initiative of the Società Operaia, they distanced themselves from the state, only offering assistance when asked and refusing to have anything to do with the guards who attended the state-directed doctors.

As de Zerbi wrote afterwards,

I never allowed a merger between our medical service and that of the city. Any such merger would have made us official and would thereby have destroyed our work... because the public would have feared and shunned us.

While middle-class activists were adopting the model demonstrated by grassroots organizers, other

less savoury characters were vying to present themselves as the saviours of Naples.

King Umberto, the son of Victor Emmanuel under whom Italy had been unified, arrived in Naples on September 9. Umberto was a reactionary conservative, loathed by workers and radicals throughout Italy for his policies. The year he had come to power, in 1878, the anarchist Giovanni Passannante had attempted to assassinate him; years after the epidemic, in 1900, the anarchist Gaetano Bresci succeeded in killing Umberto to take revenge for the king's decision to reward a general who had over 300

demonstrators massacred in cold blood in 1898. (Incidentally, shortly before this, Bresci also risked his life to disarm a would-be assassin who was shooting at Malatesta.) Umberto was no friend to the poor.

Umberto's regime had been feuding with the Catholic Church; his visit to Naples was calculated to repair this relationship, consolidating conservatism in Italy. Other ruling class institutions, such as the Bank of Naples, were looking for ways to re-stabilize the economy through philanthropy. If the monarchy, the Church, and the top tier of financial capitalists succeeded in presenting themselves as the ones looking out for the people of Naples, they would legitimize their power, making it more difficult for organizers to mobilize people to resist the various forms of oppression that preserved their privileges.

Workers' associations continued to coordinate grassroots efforts throughout the city—but owing to the resources and credentials of its sponsors, the White Cross received the credit for everything in the international media and subsequent historiography.

And all the while, thousands were dying in Naples.

The Anarchists in Naples

These were the stakes as Malatesta and other anarchists from around Italy sought to depart for Naples. They had been organising solidarity efforts for those affected by the cholera outbreak since early August. They were eager to join in the grassroots relief efforts on the ground; Malatesta himself had grown up in Naples and studied medicine there. The prison sentence hanging over his head did not deter him. Yet until early September, Malatesta and his comrades in Florence had not been able to raise enough money to pay for the trip.

In “Galileo Palla and the events of Rome (May 1, 1891),” published in the May 23, 1891 issue of the weekly newspaper *La Rivendicazione* (“The Demand”) in Forlì,¹ Malatesta recalls how he met Galileo Palla, an anarchist who helped fund their trip, and praises Palla’s tireless efforts once they arrived in Naples.

I met Palla in Florence in 1884. Cholera raged in Naples, and there were many of us among the Socialists who yearned to hurry to the rescue of those who suffered from cholera. While we were trying to collect the money for the trip, Palla arrived, who was also going to Naples, and as he had more money than he needed for the railway ticket, he stopped in Florence to see if he could provide assistance to anyone who was willing to go but could not leave for lack of money.

He came to my house shouting and gesturing. “How,” he addressed me, “How is it that you are not going to Naples!”

—“Who are you?” I asked.

— “What do you care?” was his answer. “Those suffering from cholera do not need to know the name of who is at their bedside.”

“That’s right,” I said—“Several of us here want to go, but we have not yet been able to put together the money for the trip.” Then Palla emptied his pockets on the table, and so between his money and what we could find in Florence, we were able to leave—Gigia Pezzi, Arturo Feroci, Vinci, Delvecchio, myself, and other companions.

Palla’s conduct in Naples was splendid. Brave, indefatigable, night and day he was always at work. We were all without money, sometimes we went hungry and almost envied the soup that we served to the convalescents. Palla received some money from his home, which was largely based on his needs; but, as each of us would have done, he put it in common so we could all survive until the end of the epidemic.

Ask the anarchists nothing, Rocco De Zerbi—you cannot have forgotten the services of the anarchists of Florence if you remember a tall, thin, rather grumpy-looking young man who, in the moments when he expected responsibilities to be distributed, hung out at the back of the White Cross Committee room, silent, behind everyone, but who, at the first request for a volunteer, would leap up, before anyone else, and come forward shouting: “Me! I will!”

“But you,” they would point out, sometimes, “you are off shift now.”

“It doesn’t matter,” he would reply, “I can go back in.” And he went back in and amazed everyone with his truly extraordinary physical endurance, winning admiration for the heart, the devotion, the delicacy that he put into caring for the sick. That young man was Palla.²

This memoir indicates how closely Malatesta, Palla, and others worked with the White Cross in Naples—and provides a hint at the character of that relationship.

¹ This article was later reproduced in the October 1, 1933 issue of *Studi Sociali* in Montevideo, which was where we read it, thanks to the assistance of Davide Turcato.

² Malatesta continues: “After the cholera epidemic in Naples, I have always been in contact or in intimate relationship with Palla; I have seen him in very difficult circumstances and I have always found him to be good, always ready to put himself and his money at the service of the cause, friends, or needs, always courageous and first to stand up to danger,

always intent on everything his soul, with all his strength dedicated to the triumph of goodness. I have penetrated, by force of intimacy, into the depths of his somewhat wild character, and I have seen an immense love for men, a strong faith in goodness, a firm decision to consecrate his life to the triumph of his idea, and I saw with emotion how these apostolic qualities were harmoniously united with the deep affection he felt for his mother, whom he often remembered, and whose memory filled his blue eyes with tears.”

By September 13, over 1000 volunteers had joined the relief effort from all over Italy as well as Switzerland, France, England, and Sweden. Relative to the efforts of the state, the mobilization was a tremendous success. Roughly two thirds of the patients in the care of the White Cross volunteers survived; this stands in marked contrast to the death rates in hospitals in Naples, in which the majority of cholera patients died.

Anarchists were at the forefront of these efforts. According to Nunzio Dell’Erba (see appendix), Malatesta and Palla were joined in Naples by other comrades from Florence including Luigia Minguzzi, Francesco Pezzi, Arturo Feroci, Giuseppe Cioci, and Pietro Vinci, not to mention many other anarchists from all around the peninsula. We don’t know how

many of them contracted cholera in the course of their work, but we know that two anarchists died of it—Antonio Valdrè and Rocco Lombardo—as well as the socialist Massimiliano Boschi.

The White Cross had divided Naples into twelve sections; according to Luigi Fabbri, Malatesta and his comrades took on responsibility for organizing one of these sections. Fabbri asserts that the cholera patients in this section had the highest recovery rate in all Naples, because Malatesta—having grown up in Naples and being on intimate terms with the most militant elements of the local workers’ movement—was particularly well-equipped to strong-arm the city government into turning over food and medicine, which the anarchists distributed to those in need.

Fabbri’s account is based on stories that he must have heard from Malatesta himself. Some material has reached us from Malatesta corroborating it. According the court record in “Verbale

d’Udienza,” April 21-28, while standing trial in Ancona in 1898, Malatesta testified:

“In 1884, after putting together a group of anarchists, I went to Naples to assist the cholera victims; my professors there put me in charge of the medical service and I stayed in Naples up until the outbreak

passed and was lauded for it.”

A slightly different transcription of these remarks appears in the periodical *L’Agitazione*, in which Malatesta is said to have added

“I too was in Naples during the epidemic and the committee lavished praise on me.”¹

We can catch glimpses of the anarchists’ experience in Naples in the reports from Italy that appeared in the Swiss anarchist

periodical *Le Révolté* between September and December 1884:

“Cholera has also made its fatal appearance in Italy and, at this hour, it harvests many victims, naturally among proletarian families who cannot afford the luxury of hygiene, for the simple reason that it is a privilege that only the bourgeoisie possesses, like all the others.”

-*Le Révolté*, September 14, 1884

“In writing these few lines, I want to offer a fitting tribute of solidarity to our comrade Rocco Lombardo from Genoa.

“A charming young man, barely 27 years old, bold and generous, he was one of the most devoted and intelligent among the revolutionary anarchists of Genoa. He dedicated all his strength and all his thoughts to our cause—that a revolutionary movement took place, wherever it might be,

“Cholera has also made its fatal appearance in Italy and, at this hour, it harvests many victims, naturally among proletarian families who cannot afford the luxury of hygiene, for the simple reason that it is a privilege that only the bourgeoisie possesses, like all the others.”

-*Le Révolté*, September 14, 1884

¹ “Il Processo,” parts 1-10, *L’Agitazione, Supplemento Quotidiano*, nos. 1-10 (April 21-30, 1898). Both of these transcripts appear in English in Davide Turcato’s collection

of Malatesta’s writing, *A Long and Patient Work: The Anarchist Socialism of L’Agitazione, 1897-1898*.

to be sure that it was arranged in the proper way, as his aspirations and his tireless devotion called for.

An opportunity presented itself; cholera was in Naples and reaped many victims from among his proletarian brothers, he joined with other companions and left from Milan, where he was, to go into the heart of the danger.

As soon as he arrived in Naples, he was one of those most noted for his courage and selflessness in helping the victims of the terrible plague. Struck by illness himself, this modest hero of sacrifice died on September 18.

Lombardo was a staunch propagandist. Last year, in Turin, he had founded the newspaper *Proximus Tuus*, which he supported with his companions until the last moment by means of all the sacrifices of which he was capable. This newspaper sustained fire until its last cartridge, remaining on the breach for several months.

Poor Rocco, you died without having a friend near you to pay you a just tribute of solidarity. We are sending it to you today on your grave, we are making the commitment to defend these ideas that were so dear to you and to sacrifice ourselves as you did for the Social Revolution.

-*Le Révolté*, Septembre 28, 1884

“We receive from our friends in Milan a protest against the slanders that the clerical and bourgeois press heaps upon the anarchists, and in particular companion Rocco Lombardo, whose death we announced in our last issue. Comrades, it’s useless to waste time refuting the calumnies of these puppets. Just give them a kick somewhere when you meet them...”

-*Le Révolté*, October 25, 1884

“In Naples, as you know, cholera has wreaked havoc among the workers. There could be no clearer proof of the inequity of today’s society. Our friends who went during the epidemic to treat the sick have just published a manifesto in which they have exposed the real cause of cholera—poverty; and indicated the only remedy—the Social Revolution.

“The newspapers here were scandalized, naturally, and a clerical newspaper did not fail to invoke the wrath of the police against these implacable anarchists, who refuse to permit the people to die in peace.”

- *Le Révolté*, December 7, 1884

Unfortunately, to our knowledge, no one has been able to turn up the manifesto referenced in the December 7 issue.

Victory over the Plague?

The White Cross officially disbanded on September 26, announcing that the crisis had passed to such an extent that the municipal authorities were once again able to handle the epidemic on their own. Presumably the workers’ associations continued to maintain their own mutual aid efforts, just as they had before the appearance of the White Cross. Thanks in part to their efforts, deaths dropped significantly in October, and the epidemic was officially over by early November. The grassroots mobilization had not defeated cholera singlehandedly—but it had accomplished something that the state could not, helping thousands of poor people to survive the catastrophe. Above all, it had demonstrated that the best aid programs are the ones initiated by those in need, enabling them to define for themselves what their needs and priorities are.

Malatesta was offered an official award in recognition of his efforts. He refused it. The same state that was trying to reward him for what he had done in Naples was also waiting to imprison him for things he had not done in Florence. Besides, he did not wish to be a leader—just a comrade among comrades.

If it is true, as Fabbri says, that the poor Neapolitians in the section of Naples that Malatesta helped to organize had the highest survival rate—not because of Malatesta’s medical prowess, but because of the leverage the anarchists were able to bring to bear on the government to force it to turn over hoarded resources—this bears out the claim that “the true cause of cholera was poverty.” In *Naples in the Time of Cholera*, historian Frank Snowden argues that poverty was a major cause of the 1884 epidemic in Naples: “Cholera thrives on poverty because the poor, through malnutrition and intestinal disorders, are predisposed to contracting the disease.”

The chief solution for cholera, as we now know, is to put a clean water supply at everyone’s disposal.

Plumbers, not doctors, are the heroes of that story. But—as repeated cholera outbreaks in Naples and elsewhere throughout the 20th and even 21st centuries demonstrated—kings, capitalists, and presidents alike will all keep some portion of the population languishing in perilous conditions unless collective solidarity and uncompromising rebellion force them to share the resources they try to hoard.

To quote the missing manifesto, **the true medicine to prevent the return of cholera can be nothing less than social revolution.**

Afterwards

That fall, after returning to Florence, Malatesta managed to dodge the prison sentence hanging over his head by escaping from Italy concealed in a box of sewing machines. For the next half century, he continued organising and writing, leaving his mark on the anarchist movement on three continents.

In his writing, he repeatedly drew on his experience with cholera, using it to illustrate how the fates of human beings on opposite sides of the globe are inextricably linked—a point that the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated to us once again today—and emphasizing that the state itself cannot foster health, only hinder doctors from preserving it.

We conclude with a few selections from his work.

“The inhabitant of Naples is as concerned in the improvement to the living conditions of the people inhabiting the banks of the Ganges from whence cholera comes to him, as he is in the drainage of the port warehouses of his own city. The wellbeing, the freedom, and the future of a highlander lost among the gorges of the Apennines are dependent not only on the conditions of prosperity or of poverty of the inhabitants

of his village and on the general condition of the Italian people, but also on workers’ conditions in America or Australia, on the discovery made by a Swedish scientist [Malatesta likely had in mind Alfred Nobel, who had invented dynamite in 1866—an important event in the development of anarchism], on the state of mind and material conditions of the Chinese, on there

being war or peace in Africa; in other words, on all the circumstances large and small which anywhere in the world are acting on a human being.”

-Errico Malatesta,
“Anarchy”

“Those in government office, taken out of their former social position, primarily concerned in retaining power, lose all power to act spontaneously, and become only an obstacle to the free action of others...”

“With the abolition of this negative potency constituting government, society will become that which it can be, with the given forces and capabilities of the moment...”

“If there are doctors and teachers of hygiene, they will organize themselves for the service of health. And if there are none, a government cannot create them; all that it can do is to discredit them in the eyes of the people—who are inclined to entertain suspicions, sometimes only too well founded, with regard to every thing which is imposed upon them—and cause them to be massacred as poisoners when they visit people struck by cholera.”

-Errico Malatesta, “Anarchy”

“Do not ask, a comrade said, what we should substitute for cholera. It is an evil, and evil has to be eliminated, not replaced. This is true. But the trouble is that cholera persists and returns unless conditions of improved hygiene have replaced those that first allowed the disease to gain a foothold and spread.”

-Errico Malatesta, “Demoliamo. E poi?” *Pensiero e Volontà* (Rome) 3, no. 10 (June 16, 1926).

“Do not ask, a comrade said, what we should substitute for cholera. It is an evil, and evil has to be eliminated, not replaced. This is true. But the trouble is that cholera persists and returns unless conditions of improved hygiene have replaced those that first allowed the disease to gain a foothold and spread.”

-Errico Malatesta, “Demoliamo. E poi?”
Pensiero e Volontà (Rome) 3, no. 10 (June 16, 1926).

Appendix: Additional References

The Origins of Socialism in Napoli by Nunzio Dell’Erba and *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* by Nunzio Pernicone both offer short accounts of the anarchist mobilization in response to the epidemic in Naples. Pernicone’s book is available in English, published by AK Press. Here is the relevant material from Nunzio Dell’Erba’s book in rough English:

In the months of August and September [1884], there was an intense participation of the anarchists from all over Italy in efforts of generosity and assistance to the Neapolitan populations affected by cholera.

On September 13, Luigia Minguzzi, Pezzi, Malatesta, Arturo Feroci, Galileo Palla, Giuseppe Cioci and Pietro Vinci left for Naples; in the same period, Cavallotti, Musini, [ex-anarchist politician Andrea] Costa, and others went there. The socialists of Ravenna sent their wishes that the proletarians of the Mezzogiorno [the south of Italy] would “soon, immediately free themselves from choleric contagion, as one day (they will free themselves) from bourgeois contagion, which kills like any disease.”¹ At the solidarity demonstration of the socialists of Ravenna, the lively and powerful voices of the socialists of Parma, Bologna, Lugo, Turin, Alessandria, Genoa, and Milan joined together in protest against

the “sorcerer” [Prime Minister Agostino] Depretis and to assist their fellows of the Mezzogiorno.

Towards the end of September 1884, three of these, the lithographer Rocco Lombardo of the Milanese anarchist group, Massimiliano Boschi of the Association ‘The Rights of Humanity’ of Parma, and Antonio Valdrè of Castelbolognese, became victims of the epidemic.

Cholera exacerbated the already sad conditions of the proletariat by forcing bosses to fire their workers or shopkeepers to close their shops, as occurred in the case of the “union of shoemakers” which involved about 400 members. But, as Carlo Gardelli, a socialist from Romagna who moved to Naples, recalled, cholera “has not only caused serious material damage, but has caused other forms of harm, immensely greater, in the moral field.”²

Further Reading

- *Brigate volontarie d’altri tempi—I sovversivi e il colera di Napoli*, 1884 [Voluntary Brigades of Yesteryear: The Subversives and the Cholera Epidemic of Naples, 1884]
- *Cholera Revolts: A Class Struggle We May Not Like*, Samuel Kline Cohn, Jr.
- *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*, edited by Davide Turcato
- *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892*, Nunzio Pernicone
- *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*, Frank M. Snowden
- *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911*, Frank M. Snowden
- *From the Cholera Riots to the Coronavirus Revolts*, Jesse Walker

the true medicine to prevent the return of cholera can be nothing less than social revolution

¹ *Partenza di socialini per Napoli*, in “Il Comune” (Organo del Partito Socialista Rivoluzionario italiano), Ravenna, 20-21 dicembre 1884, a. 11, n. 50.

² See the letter by Carlo Lardelli, Naples, December 1, 1884, in “Il Comune”, a. II, December 7-8, 1884, n. 59. “The priest knew how to seize the sad occasion and exploit it to his advantage; he knew, in his misfortune, the weakness of the

populace and profited from it. Today he is the master of the field. The doors of the houses are covered with writings still entreating God and the Virgin Mary for liberation from the scourge, the walls are once again smeared with images, as they were under the Bourbon domination. There is no more faith in science and the labor of humanity. More hope is invested in a sprinkle of holy water than in any medicine.”

The First Of May

Errico Malatesta

Commonweal, 1 May 1893

For the third time the thinking proletariat of all countries affirms by means of an international demonstration, true solidarity among the workers, hatred of exploitation, and the will, which from day to day grows more determined, to bring the existing system of things to an end.

Governments and the classes tremble, and they have good reason. Not because on this day the revolution will break out – for that is an event which may happen on any day in the year – but because when the oppressed people begin to feel the weight and the shame of oppression, when they feel themselves brothers, when they forget all the historic hatreds fomented by the governing classes, when they clasp hands across frontiers and feel solidarity in the struggle for a common emancipation, then is the day of deliverance close at hand.

What matters it that men and parties give various reason now-a-days as to their immediate ends, and according to the profit that they hope to derive from them? The main fact remains that the workers announce that they are all united, and are of one accord in the struggle against masters. This fact remains, and will remain, as one of the most important events of the century, and as one of the signs heralding the Great Revolution – a revolution which will bring to birth a new civilisation founded on the welfare of all, and the solidarity of labour: It is a fact, the importance of which is only equalled in the present day by that other proletarian announcement of international association among the workers.

And the movement is the most significant as being the direct work of the masses, and quite apart from and even in opposition to the action of parties.

When the State Socialists in the Paris Congress of 1889, called the 1st of May a day of *international strike*, it was merely one of those platonic definitions that are made at congresses just to state a principle, and which are forgotten as soon as the congress is over. Perhaps they thought further that such a decision might help to give importance to their party, and to be useful to certain

men as an electoral top; for unhappily these people seem to have hearts that can only beat with enthusiasm for election purposes. In any case it remains certain that from the moment they perceived that the idea had made headway, and that the demonstrations became imposing and threatened to draw them into revolutionary paths, they endeavoured to check the movement and take away from it the significance with which popular instinct had endowed it. To prove this, one need but recollect the

Popular movements begin how they *can*; nearly always they spring from some idea already transcended by contemporary thought... If we wait to plunge into the fray until the people mount the Anarchist Communist colours, we shall run great risk of remaining eternal dreamers

efforts that have been made to shift the demonstration from the first *day* of May to the first *Sunday* in May. Since it is not the rule to work at all on Sunday, to speak of suspension of labour on that day is simply a farce and a fraud. It is no longer a strike, no longer a means of asserting the solidarity of the workers and their power of resisting the orders of the employers. It remains nothing but a *fête* or holiday – a little marching about, a few speeches, a few indifferent resolutions, passed with applause from larger or smaller meetings – that is all!

And in order still more effectually to kill the movement which they unthinkingly started, they have got so far as to want to ask the Government to declare the 1st of May an official holiday!

The consequence of all these lulling tactics is that the masses who at first threw themselves into the movement with enthusiasm are beginning to lose confidence in it, and are coming to regard the 1st of May as a mere annual parade, only different from other traditional parades as being duller and more of a bore.

It is for revolutionists to save this movement, which might at some time or other give occasion for most important consequences, and which in any case is always a powerful means of propaganda which it would be folly to give up.

Among Anarchists and Revolutionists there are some who take no interest in the movement, some who even object to it because the first impulse, in Europe at least, was given by the parliamentary Socialists who used the demonstrations as a means of obtaining public powers, the legal eight hours day, international legislation with regard to labour, and other reforms which we know to be mere baits, serving only to deceive the people, and

divert them from putting in substantial claims, or else to appease them when they menace the Government and the proprietary classes.

These objectors are wrong in our opinion. Popular movements begin how they *can*; nearly always they spring from some idea already transcended by contemporary thought. It is absurd to hope that in the present condition of the proletariat the great mass are capable before they stir of conceiving and accepting a programme formulated by a small number to whom circumstances have given exceptional means of development, a programme which can only come to be consciously accepted by the great number through the action of moral and material conditions which the movement itself must supply. If we wait to plunge into the fray until the people mount the Anarchist Communist colours, we shall run great risk of remaining eternal dreamers; we shall see the tide of history flow at our feet while scarcely contributing anything toward determining its course, leaving a free field meanwhile to our adversaries who are the enemies, conscious or unconscious, of the true interests of the people.

Our flag we must mount ourselves, and we ought to carry it high wherever there are people who suffer, particularly wherever there are people who show that they are tired of suffering, and are struggling in any way good or bad against oppression and exploitation.

Workers who suffer, but who understand little or nothing of theories, workers who are hungry and cold, who see their children pine and die of starvation, who see their wives and sisters take to prostitution, workers who know themselves to be marching straight to the workhouse or the hospital – these have no time to wait, and are naturally disposed to prefer any immediate amelioration no matter what – even a transitory or an illusory one, since illusion so long as it lasts passes for reality. Yes, rather this than wait for a radical transformation of society which shall destroy forever the *causes* of wretchedness and of man's injustice to man.

This is easy to understand and to justify, and it explains why the constitutional parties who exploit this tendency by speaking always of pretended reforms as “practicable” and “possible,” and of partial but *immediate* improvements generally succeed better than we do in their propaganda among the masses.

But where the workers make a mistake (and it is for us to set them right) is in supposing that reforms and improvements are more easy to get than the abolition of the wage system and the complete emancipation of the worker.

In a society based upon an antagonism of interests, where one class retains all social wealth and is organised in political power in order to defend its own privileges, poverty and the subjection of the disinherited

masses always tend to reach the highest maximum compatible with the bare existence of man and with the interests of the ruling class. And this tendency meets with no obstacle except in the resistance of the oppressed: oppression and exploitation never stop till that point is reached at which the workers show themselves determined to endure no more of it.

If small concessions are obtained instead of great ones, it is not because they are easier to get, but because the people content themselves with them.

It has always been by means of force or of fear that anything has been won from the oppressors; it has always been force or fear that has hindered the oppressors from taking back what they have granted.

The eight hours' day and other reforms – be their worth what it may – can only be obtained when men show themselves resolved to take them by force, and will bring no improvement to the lot of the workers unless these are determined no longer to suffer what they are suffering today.

Wisdom then, and even *opportunism*, requires that we do not waste time and energy on soothing reforms, but struggle for the complete emancipation of all – an emancipation which can only become a reality through the putting of wealth in common, and by the abolition of governments.

This is what Anarchists have to explain to the people, but in order to do so they must not disdainfully hold aloof, but join the masses and struggle along with them, pushing them forward by reasoning and example.

Besides, in countries where the disinherited have tried for a strike on May 1st they have forgotten the “8 hours,” and the rest, and the 1st May has had all the significance of a revolutionary date, on which the workers of the whole world count their forces and promise one another to be unanimous in the approaching days of decisive battle.

On the other hand, governments work hard to remove all illusion which anyone may cherish, as to the intervention of public powers in favour of the workers; for instead of concessions, all that has been obtained up to the present time have been wholesale arrests, charges of cavalry, and discharge of firearms! – murder and mutilation!

Then LONG LIVE the 1st May!

It is not, as we have said, the revolution day, but it remains all the same a good opportunity for the propagation of our ideas, and for turning men's minds towards the social revolution.

**Anarchists have to... join the masses
and struggle along with them**

Resistance Societies

Errico Malatesta

Agitiamoci per il Socialismo Anarchico, 1 May 1897¹

The *resistance society* is the workers' association for defending their own interests against the contrary interests of the capitalists.

Workers in the same trade, or from various trades attached to the same firm, band together and fight to improve their pay and other working conditions, or in order to stop the master from making existing conditions worse, as well as to protect any of them who may be personally singled out for injustice and annoyance. And, in order to add vim to their struggle and marshal the resources of all behind whatever

section of them may from time to time be involved, these various groupings, conscious of the ever-growing solidarity of interests between workers of every trade and every land, progressively band together into local, national, and international federations for each trade, and into general federations of workers from amalgamated trades.

The normal weapon available to the resistance societies—besides the moral respect that is always obtained by men who have shown themselves capable of understanding and defending their own rights—is the strike, which is to say, the refusal to work.

The meaning and the economic and moral implications of strikes need scrutiny if we are to avoid illusions—which are followed by inevitable disappointments and bring loss of heart and indifference—and unjustified scepticism, which leads to blithe acceptance of all bullying and reduces the worker to the most humiliating dejection.

If the worker were an animal (as all too often he still is), short of intelligence and bereft of willpower, and if there were no forces in society beyond the economic one, the strike would serve no purpose.

Capitalists and the propertied have control over all means of subsistence; they regulate production, they rule the market and set prices. The workers, always threatened by hunger the moment they lack work and

always in danger of being replaced by other unemployed workers and compelled by poverty to any act of vileness, must of necessity endure the conditions it pleases the masters to impose.

If, by some extraordinary effort, helped by the competition of one employer with another and profiting from exceptional circumstances, the workers managed to obtain some improvement, it would only be temporary and would soon turn into a vanished illusion.

If it is an increase in wages (besides the master's being always able to withdraw the increase as soon as the circumstances that helped the strike have passed), it so happens that the price of consumer goods rise in proportion and therefore the increase in wages would only be nominal and nothing would have changed. If it is a reduction in work hours, the master hits back by introducing new machines and making work more intense and wearisome; moreover, after the introduction of the new machines, he might still seize upon the first favourable circumstance to reintroduce the old hours and fire part of his workforce, thereby making any future resistance harder because of the swelling numbers of the unemployed. In the case of a solidarity strike in defence of comrades unjustly targeted, the master would not fail to seek opportunities for revenge and would definitely find one, come the first depression in the market.

In short, in a society where a few have it all and the rest have nothing, those who have nothing are allowed to live only because it suits the former, and in return for their labour, they receive the minimum required to allow them to render the services demanded of them. This tendency of wages to fall to the minimum necessary to survive and reproduce has been described as *the iron law of wages*.

But none of this is wholly true unless, as we stated, the workers had no consciousness, no will, and no capacity to resist—in which case even striking would not be

The mere fact that strikes happen shows that the workers have a certain awareness of their rights and there is a level of suffering past which they refuse to go. This is why the strike has become such an important factor in the history of the emancipation of proletarians.

¹ Translation: Paul Sharkey – volume III of *The Complete Works of Malatesta* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2016).

possible, and humanity would stay forever divided into two unequal parts: a handful of ferocious, grasping oppressors and a mass of abjectly servile slaves.

The mere fact that strikes happen shows that the workers have a certain awareness of their rights and there is a level of suffering past which they refuse to go. This is why the strike has become such an important factor in the history of the emancipation of proletarians.

While it is true that the capitalists control all means of subsistence and can call upon the entire machinery of the state to guarantee their possession and unimpeded use of those means—without which the workers can neither work nor survive—it is also true that the workers have greater numbers and that they alone have the effective capacity to produce. Ultimately, therefore, there is no doubt that, if the workers wanted, they could demand the entire product of their labours and thus radically transform the existing social order.

Meanwhile, the facts are these: the masters are out to exploit the workers as much as possible, and the workers strive to secure as much as they can of their products for their own consumption; the masters are out to reduce the workers to slave status, and the workers to achieve the dignity of free men. And at a given point the real life conditions of the workers, all else being equal, hinges upon the degree of resistance they are capable of putting up against the pretensions of the masters.

These days such resistance mainly takes the form of the strike or the threat of strike.

On examining the history and statistics of strikes we find that, on most occasions, the workers have either been forced to settle for negotiations or have been completely routed—and if one considers the enormous expense incurred and huge suffering endured during the strike and the wages lost, it could reasonably be argued that strikes are, broadly speaking, damaging to workers.

But to get the proper measure of this issue, we need to bear in mind what the workers' conditions would be if strikes never took place, and to observe the conditions in those countries where labour resistance is unknown or still in its infancy, like Italy. In reality the strike is forced on the worker, on pain of seeing his bread gradually whittled away, until he lives as the Chinese and Blacks do. The fact that the masters know that they cannot exploit the worker beyond a given limit without triggering a backlash damaging to their own interests is what sets a limit upon exploitation; and if, say, the

Parisian worker is not reduced to eating rotten polenta like the Lombard peasants, if he does not live in the beastly conditions of the Apulian peasants, it is simply because he would not accept such living conditions.

The same applies to strikes as to political upheavals and revolutions. Those mounting them usually lose their freedom, or their lives, or at least their tranquillity, but it is only because of these upheavals, or the fear of them, that governments concede a little more freedom. Without revolutions we would still be under the lash of the Inquisition; and now, precisely because there has been no revolution for so long and there is no visible disposition to make one, we are gradually reverting to that condition.

So the strike is a good way for the worker to cling to a given measure (however small) of well-being. It is, at any rate, an inevitable fact of life for the proletarian, if

he does not want to sink into an ever lower and more beastly standard of living.

The strike and, even more, the strike's preparations unite workers as brothers, get them used to reflecting upon their conditions, open their eyes to the causes of social wretchedness, and, while uniting them in the pursuit of immediate gains, prepare them for the future emancipation.

However, we should not believe that strikes suffice to solve the social question, or even improve the conditions of all workers in a serious and enduring way.

while they wage the daily struggle of labour resistance, the resistance societies must also aim at a higher and more general target: the transformation of the system of ownership and production.

No matter how determined the workers might be to rebel against living conditions that fall below a certain standard, with production organized as it presently is, there are even stronger circumstances at work crushing all possible resistance. The swelling numbers of the unemployed, crises, and relocation of industries will persist as long as private property and production for profit endure, and poverty will merely swing between a highest and a lowest point without ever going away, forcing workers to travel the same painful road over and over again.

So, while they wage the daily struggle of labour resistance, the resistance societies must also aim at a higher and more general target: the transformation of the system of ownership and production. They must prepare the workers for the great fight and equip them to someday perform those functions in the life of society that are carried out today, to the workers' detriment, by capitalists and rulers.

Organisation

Errico Malatesta

L'Agitazione, June 1897¹

I

For years now this has been a matter of great contention between anarchists. And, as is often the case when heat enters an argument and when insistence that one is in the right is injected into the search for the truth, or when arguments around theory are merely an attempt to vindicate practical behaviour prompted by quite other motives, a great muddling of ideas and words is the result.

Incidentally, and just to get them out of the way, let us run through the straightforward semantic quibbles that have occasionally reached the utmost heights of absurdity, such as, say, “We are for harmonisation, not organisation”; “we are against association but are for agreement”; “we want no secretary and no treasurer, these being authoritarian features, but we put a comrade in charge of correspondence and another looks after our funds” – and let us get down to serious discussion.

Those who stake a claim to the title “anarchists,” with or without a range of adjectives, fall into two camps: the advocates and the opponents of organisation.

If we cannot see eye to eye, let us at least understand each other.

And first of all let us be clear about the distinctions since the question is a triple one: organisation in general as a principle and condition of social life today and in a future society; the organisation of the anarchist movement; and the organisation of the popular forces and especially of the working masses for resistance to government and capitalism.

The need for organisation in social life – even the synonymy between organisation and society, I would be

tempted to say – is so self-evident that it is mind-boggling that it could ever have been questioned.

In order to appreciate this, we need to remember what the specific, characteristic calling of the anarchist movement is, and how men and parties are liable to become consumed by the issue that most directly affects them, forgetting all related issues, paying greater heed to form than to substance, and, finally, viewing matters from one angle only and thereby losing any proper grasp upon reality.

The anarchist movement began life as a backlash against the spirit of authority that prevails in civil society, as well as in all parties and workers’ organisations and has been gradually swollen by all of the revolts promoted against authoritarian and centralising trends.

It is therefore only natural that many anarchists were just about mesmerised by this fight against authority, and that believing, having had an authoritarian education, that authority is the soul of social organisation, combated and repudiated the latter as a means of combating the former.

And, in truth, the mesmerism has gone so far that it has them

supporting some things that truly defy belief.

Co-operation and agreement of any sort were rejected, the argument being that association was the very antithesis of anarchy. The case was made that in the absence of accords, of reciprocal obligations, everything would fall spontaneously into place if each person was to do whatever crossed his mind without troubling to find out what his neighbour was doing; that anarchy means every man should be sufficient unto himself and do for himself in everything without trade-off or pooled effort; that the railways could operate very well without organisation, indeed, that this was already happening over yonder in England (!); that the postal service was not necessary and that anyone in Paris wanting to write

Having therefore to join with other humans, or more accurately, finding himself united to them as a consequence of the evolutionary antecedents of the species, he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity

¹ Translation: Paul Sharkey – volume III of *The Complete Works of Malatesta* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2016) with a few revisions.

a letter to Petersburg... could take it there himself (!!), and so on and so on.

But this is gibberish, you may say, and hardly deserving of mention.

Yes, but this sort of gibberish has been uttered, printed, and circulated; and accepted by much of the public as an authentic articulation of anarchist thinking; and still provides ammunition for our bourgeois and non-bourgeois adversaries in search of an easy victory over us. Then again, such *gibberish* is not without its value, insofar as it is the logical outworking of certain premises and may serve as the acid test of the truthfulness or otherwise of those premises.

A few individuals of limited intellect but endowed with mightily logical turns of mind, once they have embraced some premises, draw every last consequence that flows from them and, if logic so dictates, can blithely arrive at the greatest nonsense and negate the most self-evident facts without flinching. There are others as well, better educated and more open-minded, who can always come up with some way of arriving at pretty reasonable conclusions, even should they have to ride roughshod over logic; and in the case of the latter, theoretical errors have little or no influence upon their actual behaviour. But, all in all, and until such time as certain fundamental errors are shunned, there is still the threat of the die-hard syllogisers and of our having to start all over again.

The fundamental error of the anarchists opposed to organisation is to believe that organisation is impossible without authority – and, once that hypothesis has been accepted, they would rather give up any organisation than accept a modicum of authority.

Now, it seems to us that organisation, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A man in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast, for he is unable to obtain nourishment for himself except in tropical regions or when the population is exceptionally sparse; and he is, without exception, unable to rise much above the level of the animals. Having therefore to join with other humans, or more accurately, finding himself united to them as a consequence of the evolutionary antecedents of the species, he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity; and the most extreme anti-organisers not only are subject to the general organisation of the society they live in, but also in the voluntary actions in their lives, and in their rebellion against organisation, they unite among themselves, they share out their tasks, they *organise* with whom they are in agreement, and use the means that society puts at their disposal... provided, of course, that these are

things genuinely wanted and enacted, rather than just vague, platonic aspirations and dreams dreamt.

Anarchy signifies *society organised without authority*, authority being understood as the ability to *impose* one's own wishes and not the inescapable and beneficial practice whereby the person who best understands and is most knowledgeable about the doing of something finds it easier to have his opinion heeded and, in that specific instance, serves as a guide for those less capable.

As we see it, authority is not only not a pre-requisite of social organisation, but, far from fostering it, is a parasite upon it, hindering its evolution and siphoning off its advantages for the special benefit of one given class that exploits and oppresses the rest. As long as a harmony of interests exists within a community, as long as no one is inclined or equipped to exploit others, there is no trace of authority. Once internal strife comes along and the community is broken down into winners and losers, then authority arises, being naturally vested in the stronger, and helping to confirm, perpetuate, and magnify their victory.

That is what we believe and that is why we are anarchists; if, instead, we believed that organisation without authority is unfeasible, we would rather be authoritarians, for we would prefer authority – which hobbles and stunts existence – to the disorganisation that renders it impossible.

Besides, how things turn out for us is of little account. If it were true that the engineer and engine-driver and station-master simply had to be authorities, rather than comrades performing certain tasks on everybody's behalf, the public would still rather defer to their authority than make the journey on foot. If there was no option but for the post-master to be an authority, anyone in his right mind would put up with the post-master's authority rather than deliver his own letters. And then... anarchy would be the stuff of a few people's dreams, but could never become reality.

II

Admitting as a possibility the existence of a community organised without authority, that is without compulsion – and anarchists must admit the possibility, or anarchy would have no meaning – let us pass on to discuss the organisation of the anarchist party.

Here too organisation strikes us as useful and necessary. If "party" means the ensemble of individuals who share a common purpose and strive to achieve that purpose, it is only natural that they should reach agreement, pool their resources, divide up the work, and adopt all measures that are thought likely to further that purpose and are the *raison d'être* of an organisation. Staying isolated, with each individual acting or seeking to act on his own without entering into agreement with others, without making preparations, without joining one's

modest efforts to a strong group, is tantamount to condemning oneself to impotence, to squandering one's own energies on trivial, ineffective acts and, very quickly, losing belief in one's purpose and lapsing into utter inaction.

But here again the thing strikes us as so self-evident that, rather than labouring direct proof, we shall try to answer the arguments of organisation's adversaries.

Pride of place goes to the – so to speak – pre-emptive objection. “What is this talk of a party?” they say. “We're no party, we have no programme.” A paradox that is meant to indicate that ideas move on and are forever changing and that they refuse to accept any fixed programme that might be fine for today but that will assuredly be obsolete tomorrow.

That would be perfectly fair if we were talking about academics questing after truth without a care for the practical applications. A mathematician, a chemist, a psychologist or a sociologist can claim not to have a programme or to have none beyond the search for truth; they are out to discover, not to *do* something. But anarchy and socialism are not sciences; they are proposals, projects that anarchists and socialists seek to realise and which, therefore, need to be formulated as definite programmes. The science and art of construction advance day by day; but an engineer wishing to build or indeed merely to demolish something, has to draw up his plans, assemble his equipment and operate as if science and art had ground to a halt at the point at which he found them when he embarked upon his task. It may very well be the case that he can find a use for new advances made in the course of the project without giving up on the core of his plan; and it may equally be that fresh discoveries made and new resources devised by the industry are such as to open his eyes to the need to drop everything and start all over again. But in starting over again, he will need to draw up a new plan based on what he knows and possesses at that point and he is not going to be able to devise and set about implementing some *amorphous* construction, with tools *not to hand*, just because, sometime in the future,

science might just come up with better forms and industry supply better tools!

By anarchist party we mean the ensemble of those who are out to help make anarchy a reality and who therefore need to set themselves a target to achieve and a path to follow; and we happily leave the lovers of absolute truth and unrelenting progress to their transcendental musings; never subjecting their notions to the test of action, they finish up doing nothing and discovering less.

The other objection is that organisation creates leaders, an authority. If that is true, if anarchists are incapable of coming together and reaching agreement with one

The other objection is that organisation creates leaders, an authority. If that is true, if anarchists are incapable of coming together and reaching agreement with one another without submitting to an authority, that means that they are still far from being anarchists and that, before giving any thought to establishing anarchy in the world, they should spare a thought for making themselves able to live anarchistically.

another without submitting to an authority, that means that they are still far from being anarchists and that, before giving any thought to establishing anarchy in the world, they should spare a thought for making themselves able to live anarchistically. The remedy does not lie in the abolition of organisation but in the growing consciousness of each individual member.

For sure, if an organisation heaps all of the work and all of the responsibility upon a few shoulders, if it puts up with whatever those few do rather than put effort in and try to do better, those few will, albeit against their wishes, eventually substitute their own will for that of the community. If the members of an organisation, all of them, do not make it their business to think, to try to understand, to seek explanations for that which they do not understand, and to always bring

their critical faculties to bear on everything and everyone, and instead leave it up to the few to do the thinking for all, then those few are going to be the leaders, the directing intelligences.

But, let us say it again, the remedy does not lie in non-organisation. On the contrary: in small societies and in large, apart from brute force, which is out of the question in our case, the origin and justification for authority lie in social disorganisation. When a community has needs and its members fail to organise themselves spontaneously, by themselves, in order to get by, someone, someone comes forward, an authority, to cater for that need by deploying everyone's resources and directing them according to his whim. If the streets are not safe and the people cannot cope, a police force

emerges which, in return for whatever services it renders expects to be supported and paid, imposes itself and tyrannises; if some article is needed, and the community does not know how to arrange with the distant producers to supply it in exchange for goods produced locally, the merchant will appear who will profit by dealing with the needs of one section to sell and of the other to buy, and impose his own prices both on the producer and the consumer.

Look at what has happened in our own ranks: the less organised we have been, the more we have been at the mercy of a few individuals. And that was only natural.

We feel the need to be in contact with comrades elsewhere, to receive and send news, but we cannot, each of us individually, correspond with every other comrade. If we were organised we might charge some comrades with handling our correspondence for us, change them if they are not to our satisfaction and keep abreast of developments without depending on somebody's good grace for our news. If we are disorganised on the other hand, there will be someone with the means and willingness to correspond who will centralise all relations in his hands, passing on or not passing on news depending on his choice of subject or person and, if he is active and clever enough, will be able, unbeknownst to us, to steer the movement in whatever direction he wants, without the rest of us, the bulk of the party, having any means of control and without anyone having the right to complain, since that person is acting on his own, with mandate from none and with no obligation to give an account of his actions to anyone.

We feel the need to have a newspaper. If we are organised we can raise the funds for its launch and get it going, put a few comrades in charge of running it and monitor its direction. The paper's editors will assuredly, to a greater or lesser degree, discernibly stamp their personality upon it, but they will still be folk selected by us, and whom we can change if we are not happy with them. If, on the other hand, we are disorganised, someone with enough get-up-and-go will launch the paper on his own accord; he will find among us his correspondents, distributors, and subscribers and will bend us to his purposes, without our knowledge or consent; and, as has often been the case, we will accept and support that paper even if it is not to our liking, even if we find that it is damaging to the cause, because of our own inability to come up with one that offers a better representation of our thinking.

So, far from creating authority, organisation represents the only cure for it and the only means whereby each of us can get used to taking an active and conscious part in our collective work and cease being passive tools in the hands of leaders.

If we do nothing at all and everybody remains perfectly idle then, to be sure, there will be no leaders and no

flock, no order-givers and no order-followers, but that will be an end of propaganda, an end of the party and of arguments about organisation as well... and that, let us hope, nobody will see as an ideal solution.

But an organisation, it is said, implies an obligation to coordinate one's own actions with those of others and thus violates freedom and fetters initiative. It seems to us that what actually takes away freedom and renders initiative impossible is the isolation that renders one impotent. Freedom is not an abstract right, but the capability of doing something: this is as true amongst ourselves as it is in society as a whole. It is by co-operation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiative.

To be sure, organisation means coordinating resources for a common purpose and a duty upon the organised not to act contrary to that purpose. But where voluntary organisations are concerned, when those belonging to the same organisation actually do share the same aim and are supportive of the same means, the mutual obligations upon them work to everybody's advantage. And if anyone sets aside any belief of his own for the sake of unity, it is because he finds it more beneficial to drop an idea that he could not in any case implement unaided, rather than deny himself the co-operation of others in matters he thinks are of more significance.

If, then, an individual finds that none of the existing organisations encapsulates the essence of his ideas and methods and that he cannot express himself as an individual according to his beliefs, then he would be well advised to stay out of those organisation; but then, unless he wishes to remain idle and impotent, he must look around for others who think as he does and become the founder of some new organisation.

Another objection, and the last one upon which we shall dwell, is that, being organised, we are more exposed to government persecution.

On the contrary, it seems to us that the more united we are, the more effectively we can defend ourselves. And actually every time we have been caught off guard by persecution while we were disorganised, it threw us into complete disarray and wiped out our preceding efforts; whereas when and where we were organised, it did us good rather than harm. And the same applies to the personal interests of individuals: the example of the recent persecutions that hit the isolated as much as they did the organised – and perhaps even worse – is enough. I am speaking, of course, of those, isolated and otherwise, who at least carry out individual propaganda. Those who do nothing and keep their beliefs well-hidden are certainly in much less danger, but their usefulness to the cause is less as well.

In terms of persecution, the only thing to be achieved by being disorganised and preaching disorganisation is to allow the government to deny us the right of association and pave the way for these monstrous criminal

conspiracy trials that it would not dare mount against people who loudly and openly assert their right and the fact of being associated, or, if the government were to dare it, would backfire on it and benefit our propaganda.

Besides, it is only natural for organisation to take whatever form circumstances commend and impose. The important point is not so much formal organisation as the inclination to organise. There may be cases in which, due to the lingering reaction, it may be useful to suspend all correspondence and refrain from all gatherings; that will always be a set-back, but if the will to be organised survives, if the spirit of association endures, if the previous period of coordinated activities has widened one's personal circle, nurtured sound friendships and conjured up a genuine commonality of ideas and actions among comrades, then the efforts of individuals, even isolated individuals, will have a contribution to make to the common purpose, and a means will soon be found of getting together again and repairing the damage done.

We are like an army at war and, depending on the terrain and the measures adopted by the enemy, we can fight in massive or in scattered formations. The essential thing is that we still think of ourselves as belonging to the same army, that we abide by all of the same guidelines and hold ourselves ready to form up again into compact columns when necessary and feasible.

Everything that we have said is directed at those comrades who are authentically against organisation as a principle. To those who resist organisation only because they are reluctant to join or have been refused entry into a given organisation and because they are out of sympathy with the individuals belonging to that organisation, we say: set up another organisation of your own, along with those who see eye to eye with you. We would certainly wish all were able to agree and unite all the forces of anarchism in a strong league; but we do not believe in the solidity of organisations which are built up on concessions and assumptions and in which there is no real agreement and sympathy between members. Better disunited than badly united. But we would wish that each individual joined his friends and that there should be no isolated forces, or lost forces.

III

It remains for us to speak of the organisation of the working masses for resistance against both the government and the employers.

We have stated it before: in the absence of organisation, be it free or imposed, there can be no society; in the absence of considered, deliberate organisation, there can

be neither freedom, nor guarantees that the interests of the component members of society will be respected. And anyone that fails to organise, fails to seek out the co-operation of others and volunteer his own co-operation on a reciprocal basis of fellowship, inescapably places himself in a condition of inferiority and plays the part of a thoughtless cog in the machinery of society that others operate according to their whims and to their own advantage.

The workers are exploited and oppressed because, being disorganised in everything having to do with safeguarding of their own interests, they are compelled by hunger or brute force to comply with the wishes of the rulers for whose benefit society is presently being run and must themselves supply the force (soldiers and capital) that helps hold them in subjection. They will

To carry out propaganda, we have to be amongst the people, and it is in the workers' associations that the worker finds his comrades and especially those most inclined to understand and accept our ideas.

never be able to emancipate themselves so long as they do not find in union the moral, economic, and physical strength needed to defeat the organised might of the oppressors.

There have been some anarchists – and there are still a few – who, while recognising the need for organisation in the society of the future and the need to get organised today for propaganda and action, are hostile to all organisations that do not have anarchy as their immediate objective and that do not follow anarchist methods. And some of them have remained apart from all workers' organisations designed to address and improve conditions in the current state of affairs, or have meddled in them with the express intention of disorganising them, while others have conceded that membership of existing resistance societies may be legitimate, but have looked upon attempts to organise new ones as bordering upon defection.

To those comrades it looked as if all of the forces organised for a less than radically revolutionary purpose were forces siphoned away from the revolution. It seems to us, by contrast, that their approach would doom the anarchist movement to perpetual sterility, and experience has already vindicated us only too well.

To carry out propaganda, we have to be amongst the people, and it is in the workers' associations that the worker finds his comrades and especially those most inclined to understand and accept our ideas. But even if

it were feasible to carry out as much propaganda as we might like outside of the associations, this would not have any discernible impact on the working masses. Apart from a small number of individuals who are better educated and capable of abstract thought and theoretical fervour, the worker cannot arrive at anarchy in one leap. To become a convinced anarchist, and not in name only, he must begin to feel solidarity that binds him to his comrades, to learn to co-operate with others in the defence of common interests and, fighting the bosses and the government that supports them, he realises that bosses and governments are useless parasites and that the workers could run the apparatus of society themselves. And when he understands this, the worker is an anarchist even if he does not use the title.

Besides, the encouraging of all kinds of popular organisations is the logical consequence of our fundamental ideas and should therefore be an integral part of our programme.

An authoritarian party, which aims at seizing power so as to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining a formless mass incapable of acting for itself and therefore always easily dominated. Logically, therefore, it should want organisation only to the extent and of the sort that assists the seizure of power: electoral organisation, if it hopes to achieve it by legal means; military organisation if it relies upon violent action.

But we anarchists do not want to *emancipate* the people; we want the people to *emancipate themselves*. We do not believe in the good that comes from above, imposed by force; we want a new social order to emerge from within the people and to match the degree of development reached by men and to progress as men move forward. Therefore it matters to us that all interests and all opinions should find their expression in a conscious organisation and influence community life in proportion to their importance.

We have undertaken the task of struggling against existing social organisation, and of overcoming the obstacles to the advent of a new society in which freedom and well-being would be assured to everybody. To achieve this objective we organise ourselves in a party and seek to become as numerous and as strong as possible. But if it were only our party that was organised; if the workers were to remain isolated like so many units unconcerned about each other, bound to a common chain; if we ourselves besides being organised as anarchists in a party, were not as workers organised with other workers, we could achieve nothing at all, or at most, we might be able to impose ourselves... and then it would not be the triumph of anarchy but our

triumph. We could then go on calling ourselves anarchists, but in reality we should simply be rulers and as incapable of doing good as any other ruler is.

Revolution is often spoken of, the belief being that the word represents the ironing out of every difficulty. But what should this revolution that we long for be and what could it be?

Established authorities toppled and property rights pronounced dead. Fine. A party could do as much... though that party should still rely, in addition to its own strength, upon the sympathy of the masses and on sufficient preparation of public opinion.

Then what? The life of society accepts no interruptions. During the revolution – or insurrection, whatever we want to call it – and in its immediate aftermath, people have to eat and clothe themselves and travel around and publish and treat the sick, etc., and these things do not do themselves. At present the government and the capitalists have them done so as to extract profit from them; once we are rid of the government and the capitalists, the workers are going to have to do them all for everybody's benefit; otherwise, whether under those designations or something different, new governments and new capitalists will emerge.

And how could workers be expected to provide for pressing needs unless they were already used to coming together to deal jointly with their common interests and, to some extent, are not ready to accept the legacy of the old society?

The day after the city's grain merchants and bakery bosses lose their property rights and thus have no further interest in catering for the market, there must be vital bread supplies available in the shops to feed the public. Who is going to see to that, if the bakery workers are not already associated and ready to manage without bosses, and if, pending the arrival of the revolution, it has not occurred to them to work out the city's needs and the means of meeting them?

We do not mean by that that we must wait until all workers are organised before the revolution can be made. That would be impossible, given the proletariat's circumstances; and, luckily, there is no need. But at the least there must be some nuclei around which the masses can rally once freed of the burden oppressing them. If it is utopian to want to make revolution once everybody is ready and once everybody sees eye to eye, it is even more utopian to seek to bring it about with nothing and no one. There is measure in all things. In the meantime, let us strive for the greatest possible expansion of the conscious and organised forces of the proletariat. The rest will follow of itself.

But we anarchists do not want to *emancipate* the people; we want the people to *emancipate themselves*

Anarchism and Syndicalism

Errico Malatesta

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, November 1907

The question of the position to be taken in relation to the Labour movement is certainly one of the greatest importance to Anarchists.

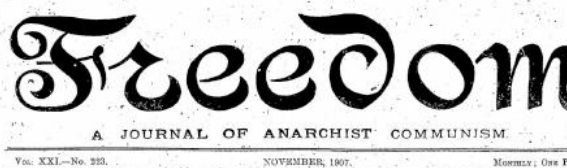
In spite of lengthy discussions and of varied experiences, a complete accord has not yet been reached—perhaps because the question does not admit of a complete and permanent solution, owing to the different conditions and changing circumstances in which we carry on the struggle.

I believe, however, that our aim may suggest to us a criterion of conduct applicable to the different contingencies.

We desire the moral and material elevation of all men; we wish to achieve a revolution which will give to all liberty and well-being, and we are convinced that this cannot be done from above by force of law and decrees, but must be done by the conscious will and the direct action of those who desire it.

We need, then, more than any the conscious and voluntary co-operation of those who, suffering the most by the present social organisation, have the greatest interest in the Revolution.

It does not suffice for us—though it is certainly useful and necessary—to elaborate an ideal as perfect as possible, and to form groups for propaganda and for revolutionary action. We must convert as far as possible the mass of the workers, because without them we can neither overthrow the existing society nor reconstitute a new one. And since to rise from the submissive state in which the great majority of the proletariat now vegetate, to a conception of Anarchism and a desire for its realisation, is required an evolution which generally is not passed through under the sole influence of the propaganda; since the lessons derived from the facts of daily life are more efficacious than all doctrinaire preaching, it is for us to take an active part in the life of the masses, and to use all the means which circumstances permit to gradually awaken the spirit of



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revolt, and to show by these facts the path which leads to emancipation.

Amongst these means the Labour movement stands first, and we should be wrong to neglect it. In this movement we find numbers of workers who struggle for the amelioration of their conditions. They may be mistaken as to the aim they have in view and as to the means of attaining it, and in our view they generally are.

But at least they no longer resign themselves to oppression nor regard it as just—they hope and they struggle. We can more easily arouse in them that feeling of solidarity towards their exploited fellow-workers and of hatred against exploitation which must lead to a definitive struggle for the abolition of all domination of man over man. We can

induce them to claim more and more, and by means more and more energetic; and so we can train ourselves and others to the struggle, profiting by victories in order to exalt the power of union and of direct action, and bring forward greater claims, and profiting also by reverses in order to learn the necessity for more powerful means and for more radical solutions.

Again—and this is not its least advantage—the Labour movement can prepare those groups of technical workers who in the revolution will take upon themselves the organisation of production and exchange for the advantage of all, beyond and against all governmental power.

But with all these advantages the Labour movement has its drawbacks and its dangers, of which we ought to take account when it is a question of the position that we as Anarchists should take in it.

Constant experience in all countries shows that Labour movements, which always commence as movements of protest and revolt, and are animated at the beginning by a broad spirit of progress and human fraternity, tend very soon to degenerate; and in proportion as they acquire strength, they become egotistic, conservative, occupied exclusively with interests immediate and

restricted, and develop within themselves a bureaucratic spirit which, in all cases, has no other object than to strengthen its own position.

It is this condition of things that has influenced many an individual from the Trade Union movement, and a combat it as something reactionary and injurious. It results from the fact that our influence diminished as the field was left free to those who wished to lead the movement for personal or party interests that had nothing to do with the cause of the workers' emancipation, and that there were only organisations with a narrow spirit

insufficiently conservative, of which the English Trade Unionists, and the Syndicalists, who, under the name of politicalists, most often "Socialists," were only elected as for the elevation into power of particular individuals.

Happily, other comrades thought that the Labour movement should be kept from these influences, and that the task of bringing them closer to the work of achieving original aims—of getting from them all the advantage offer to the Anarchist cause. And they have successively, chiefly in France, a very interesting which, not to speak of "Revolutionary Syndicalism," seeks to suggest workers, independently of all bourgeois and political influences, to win their emancipation by the direct action of the wage against the masters.

This is a great step in advance; but we must not be misled and imagine, as some comrades say, that we shall realise Anarchism, as a matter of course, in the progressive development of Syndicalism.

Every institution long enough to extend the same independent itself, and to become an end in itself. It is a thing, then, if those who have initiated the movement take the most prominent part therein, fall into the same trap, and regard Syndicalism as the equivalent of Anarchism, as the supreme means, that in itself replaces all means, for its realisation. But that makes it the more to avoid the danger, and to define well our position.

Syndicalism, in spite of all the declarations of its ardent supporters, remains in itself, by the very nature of its function, an element of degeneration which have on Labour movements in the past. In effect, being a movement which proposes to defend the present interests of the wage against the interests which come to the fore in the

struggle of the day. It is so far from the interests of a section of the whole class, Syndicalism is so far from the interests of the workers of our country as the same as those of the vast international body, that in so far as the interests of our movement are not in contradiction with the interests of the workers, Syndicalism in itself is good—perhaps in the

beginning, but unfortunately it is not always so. Harmony of interests, solidarity amongst all men, which we wish to achieve, is the aim for which we struggle that is not the actual cause, no more between men same class than between those of different classes. The result is the antagonism and the interdependence of interests of time; the struggle of each against all, and of all against all; and there can be no other condition, in a society of consequences of the capitalist system of production, which is based on the monopoly of the means of production, and organised internationally for the profit of individual elements, than to work to fill them.

It is impossible to isolate oneself, whether as an individual or as a nation, since the conditions of work of one or more, or less directly on the general conditions of the

very soon to degenerate; and in proportion as they acquire strength, they become egoistic, conservative, occupied exclusively with interests immediate and restricted, and develop within themselves a bureaucracy which, as in all such cases, has no other object than to strengthen and aggrandise itself.

It is this condition of things that has induced many comrades to withdraw from the Trade Union movement, and even to combat it as something reactionary and injurious. But the result has been that our influence diminished accordingly, and the field was left free to those who wished to exploit the movement for personal or party interests that had nothing in common with the cause of the workers' emancipation. Very soon there were only organisations with a narrow spirit and fundamentally conservative, of which the English Trade Unions are a type; or else Syndicates which, under the influence of politicians, most often "Socialist," were only electoral machines for the elevation into power of particular individuals.

Happily, other comrades thought that the Labour movement always held in itself a sound principle, and that rather than abandon it to the politicians, it would be well to undertake the task of bringing them once more to the work of achieving their original aims, and of gaining from them all the advantages they offer to the Anarchist cause. And they have succeeded in creating, chiefly in France, a new movement which, under the name of "Revolutionary Syndicalism," seeks to organise the workers, independently of all bourgeois and political influence, to win their emancipation by the direct action of the wage-slaves against the masters.

That is a great step in advance; but we must not exaggerate its reach and imagine, as some comrades seem to do, that we shall realise Anarchism, as a matter of course, by the progressive development of Syndicalism.

Every institution has a tendency to extend its functions, to perpetuate itself, and to become an end in itself. It is not surprising then, if those who have initiated the movement, and take the most prominent part therein, fall into the habit of regarding Syndicalism as the equivalent of Anarchism, or at least as the supreme means, that in itself replaces all other means, for its realisation. But that makes it the more necessary to avoid the danger and to define well our position.

Syndicalism, in spite of all the declarations of its most ardent supporters, contains in itself, by the very nature of its function, all the elements of degeneration which have corrupted Labour movements in the past. In effect, being a movement which proposes to defend the present interests of the workers, it must necessarily adapt itself to existing conditions, and take into consideration interests which come to the fore in society as it exists to-day.

Now, in so far as the interests of a section of the workers coincide with the interests of the whole class, Syndicalism is in itself a good school of solidarity; in so far as the interests of the workers of one country are the same as those of the workers in other countries, Syndicalism is a good means of furthering international brotherhood; in so far as the interests of the moment are not in contradiction with the interests of the future, Syndicalism is in itself a good preparation for the Revolution. But unfortunately this is not always so.

Harmony of interests, solidarity amongst all men, is the ideal to which we aspire, is the aim for which we struggle; but that is not the actual condition, no more between men of the same class than between those of different classes. The role to-day is the antagonism and the interdependence of interests at the same time: the struggle of each against all and of all against each. And there can be no other condition in a society where, in consequence of the capitalist system of production—that is to say, production founded on monopoly of the means of production and organised internationally for the profit of individual employers—there are, as a rule, more hands than work to be done, and more mouths than bread to fill them.

It is impossible to isolate oneself, whether as an individual, as a class, or as a nation, since the condition of each one depends more or less directly on the general conditions of the whole of humanity; and it is impossible to live in a true state of peace, because it is necessary to defend oneself, often even to attack, or perish.

The interest of each one is to secure employment, and as a consequence one finds himself in antagonism—i.e., in competition—with the unemployed of one's country and the immigrants from other countries. Each one desires to keep or to secure the best place against workers in the same trade; it is the interest of each one to sell dear and buy cheap, and consequently as a producer he finds himself in conflict with all consumers, and again as consumer finds himself in conflict with all producers.

Union, agreement, the solidary struggle against the exploiters,—these things can only obtain to-day in so far as the workers, animated by the conception of a superior ideal, learn to sacrifice exclusive and personal interests to the common interest of all, the interests of the moment to the interests of the future; and this ideal of a society of solidarity, of justice, of brotherhood, can only be realised by the destruction, done in defiance of all legality, of existing institutions.

To offer to the workers this ideal; to put the broader interests of the future before those narrower and immediate; to render the adaptation to present conditions impossible; to work always for the propaganda and for action that will lead to and will accomplish the Revolution—these are the objects we as

Anarchists should strive for both in and out of the Unions.

Trade Unionism cannot do this, or can do but little of it; it has to reckon with present interests, and these interests are not always, alas! those of the Revolution. It must not too far exceed legal bounds, and it must at given moments treat with the masters and the authorities. It must concern itself with the interests of sections of the workers rather than the interests of the public, the interests of the Unions rather than the interests of the mass of the workers and the unemployed. If it does not do this, it has no specific reason for existence; it would then only include the Anarchists, or at most the Socialists, and would so lose its principal utility, which is to educate and habituate to the struggle the masses that lag behind.

Besides, since the Unions must remain open to all those who desire to win from the masters better conditions of life, whatever their opinions may be on the general constitution of society, they are naturally led to moderate their aspirations, first so that they should not frighten away those they wish to have with them, and next because, in proportion as numbers increase, those with ideas who have initiated the movement remain buried in a majority that is only occupied with the petty interests of the moment.

Thus one can see developing in all Unions, that have reached a certain position of influence, a tendency to assure, in accord with rather than against the masters, a privileged situation for themselves, and so create difficulties of entrance for new members, and for the admission of apprentices in the factories; a tendency to amass large funds that afterwards they are afraid of compromising; to seek the favour of public powers; to be absorbed, above all, in co-operation and mutual benefit schemes; and to become at last conservative elements in society.

After having stated this, it seems clear to me that the Syndicalist movement cannot replace the Anarchist movement, and that it can serve as a means of education and of revolutionary preparation only if it is acted on by the Anarchistic impulse, action, and criticism.

Anarchists, then, ought to abstain from identifying themselves with the Syndicalist movement, and to consider as an aim that which is but one of the means of propaganda and of action that they can utilise. They

should remain in the Syndicates as elements giving an onward impulse, and strive to make of them as much as possible instruments of combat in view of the Social Revolution. They should work to develop in the Syndicates all that which can augment its educative influence and its combativeness,—the propaganda of ideas, the forcible strike, the spirit of proselytism, the distrust and hatred of the authorities and of the politicians, the practice of solidarity towards individuals and groups in conflict with the masters. They should combat all that which tends to render them egoistic, pacific, conservative,—professional pride and the narrow spirit of the corporate body, heavy contributions and the accumulation of invested capital, the service of benefits and of assurance, confidence in the good offices of the State, good relationships with masters, the appointment of bureaucratic officials, paid and permanent.

On these conditions the participation of Anarchists in the Labour movement will have good results, but only on these conditions.

These tactics will sometimes appear to be, and even may really be, hurtful to the immediate interests of some groups; but that does not

matter when it is a question of the Anarchist cause,—that is to say, of the general and permanent interests of humanity. We certainly wish, while waiting for the Revolution, to wrest from Governments and from employers as much liberty and wellbeing as possible; but we would not compromise the future for some momentary advantages, which besides are often illusory or gained at the expense of other workers.

Let us beware of ourselves. The error of having abandoned the Labour movement has done an immense injury to Anarchism, but at least it leaves unaltered the distinctive character.

The error of confounding the Anarchist movement with Trade Unionism would be still more grave. That will happen to us which happened to the Social Democrats as soon as they went into the Parliamentary struggle. They gained in numerical force, but by becoming each day less Socialistic. We also would become more numerous, but we should cease to be Anarchist.

Anarchists, then, ought to abstain from identifying themselves with the Syndicalist movement, and to consider as an aim that which is but one of the means of propaganda and of action that they can utilise. They should remain in the Syndicates as elements giving an onward impulse, and strive to make of them as much as possible instruments of combat in view of the Social Revolution.

An Anarchist Programme

Unione Anarchica Italiana¹

July 1920²

The programme of the *Italian Anarchist Union* is the revolutionary anarchist-communist programme, that fifty years ago was already upheld in Italy within the International under the name of the socialist programme, was later identified by the name of anarchist-socialist, and finally, after the increasing authoritarian and parliamentary degeneration of the socialist movement and in reaction to it, was simply called anarchist.

1. What We Want

We believe that most of the ills that afflict mankind stem from a bad social organisation; and that Man could destroy them if he wished and knew how.

Present society is the result of age-long struggles of man against man. Not understanding the advantages that could accrue for all by co-operation and solidarity; seeing in every other man (with the possible exception of those closest to them by blood ties) a competitor and an enemy, each one of them sought to secure for himself, the greatest number of advantages possible without giving a thought to the interests of others.

In such a struggle, obviously the strongest or more fortunate were bound to win, and in one way or another subject and oppress the losers.

So long as Man was unable to produce more than was strictly needed to keep alive, the conquerors could do no more than put to flight or massacre their victims and seize the food they had gathered.

Then when with the discovery of grazing and agriculture a man could produce more than what he needed to live, the conquerors found it more profitable to reduce the conquered to a state of slavery, and put them to work for their advantage.

Later, the conquerors realised that it was more convenient, more profitable and certain to exploit the

labour of others by other means: to retain for themselves the exclusive right to the land and working implements, and set free the disinherited who, finding themselves without the means of life, were obliged to have recourse to the landowners and work for them, on their terms.

Thus, step by step through a most complicated series of struggles of every description, of invasions, wars, rebellions, repressions, concessions won by struggle, associations of the oppressed united for defence, and of the conquerors for attack we have arrived at the present state of society, in which some have inherited the land and all social wealth, while the mass of the people, disinherited in all respects, is exploited and oppressed by a small

possessing class.

From all this stems the misery in which most workers live today and which in turn creates the evils such as ignorance, crime, prostitution, diseases due to malnutrition, mental depression and premature death. From all this arises a special class (government) which, provided with the necessary means of repression, exists to legalise and protect the owning class from the demands of the workers; and then it uses the powers at its disposal to create privileges for itself and to subject, if it can, the owning class itself as well. From this the creation of another privileged class (the clergy), which by a series of fables about the will of God, and about an after-life etc., seeks to persuade the oppressed to accept oppression meekly, and (just as the government does), as well as serving the interest of the owning class, serves its own. From this the creation of an official science which, in all those matters serving the interests of the ruling class, is the negation of true science. From



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¹ This excellent statement of revolutionary anarchist politics was agreed by the *Unione Anarchica Italiana* (Italian Anarchist Union) at its Congress in Bologna held in July 1920 and is based on Errico Malatesta's "Il nostro programma" (*La Questione Sociale*, September 1899).

² Translation: Vernon Richards – *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* (London: Freedom Press, 1965). Some of text missing from this translation has been included from volume IV of *The Complete Works of Malatesta* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019).

this the patriotic spirit, race hatred, wars and armed peace, sometimes more disastrous than wars themselves. From this the transformation of love into torment or sordid commerce. From this hatred, more or less disguised, rivalry, suspicion among all men, insecurity and universal fear.

We want to change radically such a state of affairs. And since all these ills have their origin in the struggle between men, in the seeking after wellbeing through one's own efforts and for oneself and against everybody, we want to make amends, replacing hatred by love, competition by solidarity, the individual search for personal well-being by the fraternal co-operation for the well-being of all, oppression and imposition by liberty, the religious and pseudo-scientific lie by truth.

Therefore:

1. Abolition of private property in land, in raw materials and the instruments of labour, so that no one shall have the means of living by the exploitation of the labour of others, and that everybody, being assured of the means to produce and to live, shall be truly independent and in a position to unite freely among themselves for a common objective and according to their personal sympathies.
2. Abolition of government and of every power which makes the law and imposes it on others: therefore abolition of monarchies, republics, parliaments, armies, police forces, magistrates and any institution whatsoever endowed with coercive powers.
3. Organisation of social life by means of free association and federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members, guided by science and experience, and free from any kind of imposition which does not spring from natural needs, to which everyone, convinced by a feeling of overriding necessity, voluntarily submits.
4. The means of life, for development and well-being, will be guaranteed to children and all who are prevented from providing for themselves.
5. War on religions and all lies, even if they shelter under the cloak of science. Scientific instruction for all to advanced level.
6. War on rivalries and patriotic prejudices. Abolition of frontiers; brotherhood among all peoples.
7. Reconstruction of the family, as will emerge from the practice of love, freed from every legal tie, from every economic and physical oppression, from every religious prejudice.

This is our ideal.

2. *Ways and Means*

We have outlined under a number of headings our objectives and the ideal for which we struggle.

But it is not enough to desire something; if one really wants it adequate means must be used to secure it, And these means are not arbitrary, but instead cannot but be conditioned by the ends we aspire to and by the circumstances in which the struggle takes place, for if we ignore the choice of means we would achieve other ends, possibly diametrically opposed to those we aspire to, and this would be the obvious and inevitable consequence of our choice of means. Whoever sets out on the highroad and takes a wrong turning does not go where he intends to go but where the road leads him.

It is therefore necessary to state what are the means which in our opinion lead to our desired ends, and which we propose to adopt.

Our ideal is not one that depends for its success on the individual considered in isolation. The question is of changing the way of life of society as a whole; of establishing among men relationships based on love and solidarity; of achieving the full material, moral and intellectual development not for isolated individuals, or members of one class or of a particular political party, but for all mankind – and this is not something that can be imposed by force, but must emerge through the enlightened consciences of each one of us and be achieved with the free consent of all.

Our first task therefore must be to persuade people.

We must make people aware of the misfortunes they suffer and of their chances to destroy them. We must awaken sympathy in everybody for the misfortunes of others and a warm desire for the good of all people.

To those who are cold and hungry we will demonstrate how possible and easy it could be to assure to everybody their material needs. To those who are oppressed and despised we shall show how it is possible to live happily in a world of people who are free and equal; to those who are tormented by hatred and bitterness we will point to the road that leads to peace and human warmth that comes through learning to love one's fellow beings.

And when we will have succeeded in arousing the sentiment of rebellion in the minds of men against the avoidable and unjust evils from which we suffer in society today, and in getting them to understand how they are caused and how it depends on human will to rid ourselves of them; and when we will have created a lively and strong desire in men to transform society for the good of all, then those who are convinced, will by their own efforts as well as by the example of those already convinced, unite and want to as well as be able to act for their common ideals.

As we have already pointed out, it would be ridiculous and contrary to our objectives to seek to impose freedom, love among men and the radical development of human faculties, by means of force. One must therefore rely on the free will of others, and all we can

do is to provoke the development and the expression of the will of the people. But it would be equally absurd and contrary to our aims to admit that those who do not share our views should prevent us from expressing our will, so long as it does not deny them the same freedom.

Freedom for all, therefore, to propagate and to experiment with their ideas, with no other limitation than that which arises naturally from the equal liberty of everybody.

But to this are opposed – and with brute force – those who benefit from existing privileges and who today dominate and control all social life.

In their hands they have all the means of production; and thus they suppress not only the possibility of free experimentation in new ways of communal living, and the right of workers to live freely by their own efforts, but also the right to life itself; and they oblige whoever is not a boss to have to allow himself to be exploited and oppressed if he does not wish to die of hunger.

They have police forces, a judiciary, and armies created for the express purpose of defending their privileges; and they persecute, imprison and massacre those who would want to abolish those privileges and who claim the means of life and liberty for everyone.

Jealous of their present and immediate interests, corrupted by the spirit of domination, fearful of the future, they, the privileged class, are, generally speaking incapable of a generous gesture; are equally incapable of a wider concept of their interests. And it would be foolish to hope that they should freely give up property and power and adapt themselves to living as equals and with those who today they keep in subjection.

Leaving aside the lessons of history (which demonstrates that never has a privileged class divested itself of all or some of its privileges, and never has a government abandoned its power unless obliged to do so by force or the fear of force), there is enough contemporary evidence to convince anyone that the bourgeoisie and governments intend to use armed force to defend themselves, not only against complete expropriation, but equally against the smallest popular demands, and are always ready to engage in the most atrocious persecutions and the bloodiest massacres.

For those people who want to emancipate themselves only one course is open: that of opposing force with force.

It follows from what we have said that we have to work to awaken in the oppressed the conscious desire for a radical social transformation, and to persuade them that by uniting they have the strength to win; we must propagate our ideal and prepare the required material and moral forces to overcome those of the enemy, and to organise the new society, and when we will have the strength needed we must, by taking advantage of favourable circumstances as they arise, or which we can ourselves create, to make the social revolution, using force to destroy the government and to expropriate the owners of wealth, and by putting in common the means of life and production, and by preventing the setting up of new governments which would impose their will and to hamper the reorganisation of society by the people themselves.

we have to work to awaken in the oppressed the conscious desire for a radical social transformation, and to persuade them that by uniting they have the strength to win; we must propagate our ideal and prepare the required material and moral forces to overcome those of the enemy, and to organise the new society

All this is however less simple than it might appear at first sight. We have to deal with people as they are in society today, in the most miserable moral and material condition and we would be deluding ourselves in thinking that propaganda is enough to raise them to that level of intellectual development which is needed to put our ideas into effect.

Between man and his social environment there is a reciprocal action. Men make society what it is and society makes men what they are, and the result is therefore a kind of vicious circle. To transform society men must be changed, and to transform men, society must be changed.

Poverty brutalises man, and to abolish poverty men must have a social conscience and determination. Slavery teaches men to be slaves, and to free oneself from slavery there is a need for men who aspire to liberty. Ignorance has the effect of making men unaware of the causes of their misfortunes as well as the means of overcoming them, and to do away with

ignorance people must have the time and the means to educate themselves.

Governments accustom people to submit to the Law and to believe that Law is essential to society, and to abolish government men must be convinced of the uselessness and the harmfulness of government.

How does one escape from this vicious circle?

Fortunately existing society has not been created by the inspired will of a dominating class, which has succeeded in reducing all its subjects to passive and unconscious instruments of its interests. It is the result of a thousand internecine struggles, of a thousand human and natural factors acting indifferently, without directive criteria; and thus there are no clear cut divisions either between individuals or between classes.

Innumerable are the variations in material conditions; innumerable are the degrees of moral and intellectual development; and not always, we would almost say very rarely, does the place of any individual in society correspond with his abilities and his aspirations. Very often individuals accustomed to conditions of comfort fall on hard times and others, through exceptionally favourable circumstances succeed in raising themselves above the conditions into which they were born. A large proportion of the working class has already succeeded either in emerging from a state of abject poverty, or was never in such a situation; no worker to speak of, finds himself in a state of complete social unawareness, of complete acquiescence to the conditions imposed on him by the bosses. And the same institutions, such as have been produced by history, contain organic contradictions and are like the germs of death, which as they develop result in the dissolution of institutions and the need for transformation.

From this the possibility of progress – but not the possibility of bringing all men to the necessary level to want, and to achieve, anarchy, by means of propaganda, without a previous gradual transformation of the environment.

Progress must advance contemporaneously and along parallel lines between men and their environment. We must take advantage of all the means, all the possibilities and the opportunities that the present environment allows us to act on our fellow men and to

develop their consciences and their demands; we must use all advance in human consciences to induce them to claim and to impose those major social transformations which are possible and which effectively serve to open the way to further advances later.

We must not wait to achieve anarchy, in the meantime limiting ourselves to simple propaganda. Were we to do so we would soon exhaust our field of action; that is, we would have converted all those who in the existing environment are susceptible to understand and accept our ideas, and our subsequent propaganda would fall on sterile ground, or if environmental transformations brought out new popular groupings capable of receiving new ideas, this would happen without our participation, and thus would prejudice our ideas.

We must seek to get all the people, or different sections of the people, to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms that it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them; and in always propagating all aspects of our programme, and always struggling for its complete realisation, we must push the people to want always more and to increase its pressures, until it has achieved complete emancipation.

3. *The Economic Struggle*

The oppression which today impinges most directly on the workers and which is the main cause of the moral and material frustrations under which they labour, is economic oppression, that is the exploitation to which bosses and business men subject them, thanks to their monopoly of all the most important means of production and distribution.

To destroy radically this oppression without any danger of it re-emerging, all people must be convinced of their right to the means of production, and be prepared to exercise this basic right by expropriating the land owners, the industrialists and financiers, and putting all social wealth at the disposal of the people.

But can this expropriation be put into effect today? Can we today pass directly, without intermediate steps, from the hell in which the workers now find themselves to the paradise of common property?

Facts demonstrate what the workers are capable of today.¹

¹ A reference to what became known as the *Biennio Rosso* (“Red Biennium” or “Two Red Years”) between 1919 and 1920 marked by intense social conflict in Italy, partly inspired by the Russian Revolution (indeed, a general strike called in solidarity with the Russian Revolution on 20-21 July 1919). There was significant growth on trade union membership (the *Italian Syndicalist Union* grew to 800,000 members) and left-wing groups and parties. Industrial action and rural unrest grew significantly, with 1,663 industrial strikes in 1919 (compared to 810 in 1913) involving more than one million industrial workers (three times more than in 1913) while 1920

saw 1,881 industrial strikes along with 189 rural strikes (from 97 in 1913) which involved over a million peasants. The movement peaked in August and September 1920 when armed metal workers in Milan and Turin occupied their factories in response to a lockout by the employers. Factory occupations swept the “industrial triangle” of north-western Italy, with some 400,000 metal-workers and 100,000 others taking part. A useful account of this period, albeit one which concentrates on the Marxist parties, is provided in Gwyn A. Williams, *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, factory*

Our task is the moral and material preparation of the people for this essential expropriation; and to attempt it again and again, every time a revolutionary upheaval offers us the chance to, until the final triumph. But in what way can we prepare the people? In what way must one prepare the conditions which make possible not only the material fact of expropriation, but the utilisation to everybody's advantage of the common wealth?

We have already said that spoken and written propaganda alone cannot win over to our ideas the mass of the people. A practical education is needed, which must be alternately cause and effect in a gradual transformation of the environment. Parallel with the workers developing a sense of rebellion against the injustices and useless sufferings of which they are the victims, and the desire to better their conditions, they must be united and mutually dependent in the struggle to achieve their demands.

And we as anarchists and workers, must incite and encourage them to struggle and join them in their struggle.

But are these improvements possible in a capitalist regime? Are they useful from the point of view of a future complete emancipation of the workers?

Whatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers learn to take care of their class interests, they learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off: they will earn more, work fewer hours and will have more time and energy to reflect on the things that matter to them, and will immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the causes of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activity and they will in the end understand that to make their victory secure and definitive, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of the moral elevation

and emancipation of the workers must benefit by the fact that workers unite and struggle for their interests.

But, once again, can the workers succeed in really improving their conditions in the present state of society

This depends on the confluence of a great number of circumstances.

In spite of what some say, there exists no natural law (law of wages) which determines what part of a worker's labour should go to him; or if one wants to formulate a law, it could not be but that: wages cannot normally be less than what is needed to maintain life, nor can they normally rise such that no profit margin is left to the boss.

It is clear that in the first case workers would die, and therefore would stop drawing any wages, and in the

second the bosses would stop employing labour and so would pay no more wages. But between these two impossible extremes there is an infinite scale of degrees ranging from the miserable conditions of many land workers to the almost respectable conditions of skilled workers in the large cities.

Wages, hours and other conditions of employment are the result of the struggle between bosses and workers. The former try to give the workers as little as possible and get them to work themselves to the bone; the latter try, or should try to work as little, and earn as much, as possible. Where workers accept any conditions, or even being discontented, do not know how to put up effective resistance to the bosses' demands, they are soon reduced to bestial conditions of life. Where, instead, they have ideas as to how human beings should live and know how to join forces, and through refusal to work or the

latent and open threat of rebellion, to win the bosses respect, in such cases, they are treated in a relatively decent way. One can therefore say that within certain limits, the wages he gets are what the worker (not as an individual, of course, but as a class) demands.

Through struggle, by resistance against the bosses, therefore, workers can up to a certain point, prevent a worsening of their conditions as well as obtaining real

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improvement. And the history of the workers' movement has already demonstrated this truth.

One must not however exaggerate the importance of this struggle between workers and bosses conducted exclusively in the economic field. Bosses can give in, and often they do in face of forcefully expressed demands so long as the demands are not too great; but if workers were to make demands (and it is imperative that they should) which would absorb all the bosses profits and be in effect an indirect form of expropriation, it is certain that the bosses would appeal to the government and would seek to use force to oblige the workers to remain in their state of wage slavery.

And even before, long before workers can expect to receive the full product of their labour, the economic struggle becomes impotent as a means of producing the improvements in living standards.

Workers produce everything and without them life would be impossible; therefore it would seem that by refusing to work they could demand whatever they wanted. But the union of all workers, even in one particular trade, and in one country is difficult to achieve, and opposing the union of workers are the bosses organisations. Workers live from day to day, and if they do not work they soon find themselves without food; whereas the bosses, because they have money, have access to all the goods in stock and can therefore sit back and wait until hunger reduces their employees to a more amenable frame of mind. The invention or the introduction of new machinery makes workers redundant and adds to the large army of unemployed, who are driven by hunger to sell their labour at any price.

Immigration immediately creates problems in the countries where better working conditions exist, for the hordes of hungry workers, willy-nilly, offer the bosses an opportunity to depress wages all round. And all these facts, which necessarily derive from the capitalist system, conspire in counteracting and often destroying advances made in working class consciousness and solidarity. And in every case the overriding fact remains that production under capitalism is organised by each capitalist for his personal profit and not, as would be natural, to satisfy the needs of the workers in the best possible way. Hence the chaos, the waste of human effort, the organised scarcity of goods, useless and harmful occupations, unemployment, abandoned land, under-use of plant and so on, all evils which cannot be avoided except by depriving the capitalists of the means of production and, it follows, the organisation of production.

Soon then, those workers who want to free themselves, or even only to effectively improve their conditions, will be faced with the need to defend themselves from the government, with the need to attack the government, which by legalising the right to property and protecting

it with brute force, constitutes a barrier to human progress, which must be beaten down with force if one does not wish to remain indefinitely under present conditions or even worse.

From the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to the struggle against government; and instead of opposing the capitalist millions with the workers' few cents scraped together with difficulty, one must oppose the rifles and guns which defend property with the more effective means that the people will be able to find to defeat force by force.

4. *The Political Struggle*

By the political struggle we mean the struggle against government. Government is the *ensemble* of all those individuals who hold the reins of power, however acquired, to make the law and to impose it on the governed, that is the public.

Government is the consequence of the spirit of domination and violence with which some men have imposed themselves on other, and is at the same time the creature as well as the creator of privilege and its natural defender.

It is wrongly said that today government performs the function of defender of capitalism but that once capitalism is abolished it would become the representative and administrator of the general interest. In the first place capitalism will not be destroyed until the workers, having rid themselves of government, take possession of all social wealth and themselves organise production and consumption in the interests of everybody without waiting for the initiative to come from government which, however willing to comply, would be incapable of doing so.

But there is a further question: if capitalism were to be destroyed and a government were to be left in office, the government, through the concession of all kinds of privileges, would create capitalism anew for, being unable to please everybody it would need an economically powerful class to support it in return for the legal and material protection it would receive.

Consequently privilege cannot be abolished and freedom and equality established firmly and definitely without abolishing government – not this or that government but the very institution of government.

As in all questions of general interest, and especially this one, the consent of the people as a whole is needed, and therefore we must strain every nerve to persuade the people that government is useless as well as harmful, and that we can live better lives without government.

But, as we have repeated more than once, propaganda alone is impotent to convince everybody – and if we were to want to limit ourselves to preaching against

government, and in the meantime waiting supinely for the day when the public will be convinced of the possibility and value of radically destroying every kind of government, then that day would never come.

While preaching against every kind of government, and demanding complete freedom, we must support all struggles for partial freedom, because we are convinced that one learns through struggle, and that once one begins to enjoy a little freedom one ends by wanting it all. We must always be with the people, and when we do not succeed in getting them to demand a lot we must still seek to get them to want something; and we must make every effort to get them to understand that however much or little they may demand should be obtained by their own efforts and that they should despise and detest whoever is part of, or aspires to, government.

Since government today has the power, through the legal system, to regulate daily life and to broaden or restrict the liberty of the citizen, and because we are still unable to tear this power from its grasp, we must seek to reduce its power and oblige governments to use it in the least harmful ways possible. But this we must do always remaining outside, and against, government, putting pressure on it through agitation in the streets, by threatening to take by force what we demand. Never must we accept any kind of legislative position, be it national or local, for in so doing we will neutralise the effectiveness of our activity as well as betraying the future of our cause.

The struggle against government in the last analysis, is physical, material.

Governments make the law. They must therefore dispose of the material forces (police and army) to impose the law, for otherwise only those who wanted to would obey it, and it would no longer be the law but a simple series of suggestions which all would be free to accept or reject. Governments have this power, however, and use it through the law, to strengthen their power, as well as to serve the interests of the ruling classes, by oppressing and exploiting the workers.

The only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it. Conflict may be open or latent; but it always exists since the government does not pay attention to discontent and popular resistance except when it is faced with the danger of insurrection.

When the people meekly submit to the law, or their protests are feeble and confined to words, the government studies its own interests and ignores the needs of the people; when the protests are lively,

insistent, threatening, the government, depending on whether it is more or less understanding, gives way or resorts to repression. But one always comes back to insurrection, for if the government does not give way, the people will end by rebelling: and if the government does give way, then the people gain confidence in themselves and make ever increasing demands, until such time as the incompatibility between freedom and authority becomes clear and the violent struggle is engaged.

It is therefore necessary to be prepared morally and materially, so that when this does happen the people will emerge victorious.

A successful insurrection is the most potent factor in the emancipation of the people, for once the yoke has been shaken off, the people are free to provide themselves with those institutions which they think best, and the time lag between passing the law and the degree of civilisation which the mass of the population has

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attained, is breached in one leap. The insurrection determines the revolution, that is, the speedy emergence of the latent forces built up during the "evolutionary" period.

Everything depends on what the people are capable of wanting.

In past insurrections unaware of the real reasons for their misfortunes, they have always wanted very little and have obtained very little.

What will they want in the next insurrection?

The answer, in part, depends on our propaganda and what efforts we put into it.

We shall have to push the people to expropriate the bosses and put all goods in common and organise their daily lives themselves, through freely constituted associations, without waiting for orders from outside and refusing to nominate or recognise any government or constituted body in whatever guise (constituent, dictatorship, etc.) even in a provisional capacity, which ascribes to itself the right to lay down the law and impose with force its will on others.

And if the mass of the population will not respond to our appeal we must – in the name of the right we have to be free even if others wish to remain slaves and because of the force of example – put into effect as many of our ideas as we can, refuse to recognise the new government and keep alive resistance and seek that those localities where our ideas are received with sympathy should constitute themselves into anarchist communities, rejecting all governmental interference and establishing free agreements with other communities which want to live their own lives.

We shall have to, above all, oppose with every means the reestablishment of the police and the armed forces, and use any opportunity to incite workers in non-anarchist localities to take advantage of the absence of repressive forces to implement the most far reaching demands that we can induce them to make.

And however things may go, to continue the struggle against the possessing class and the rulers without respite, having always in mind the complete economic, political and moral emancipation of all mankind.

5. Conclusion

What we want, therefore is the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man, we

want men united as brothers by a conscious and desired solidarity, all co-operating voluntarily for the wellbeing of all; we want society to be constituted for the purpose of supplying everybody with the means for achieving the maximum well-being, the maximum possible moral and spiritual development; we want bread, freedom, love, and science for everybody.

And in order to achieve these all important ends, it is necessary in our opinion that the means of production should be at the disposal of everybody and that no man, or groups of men, should be in a position to oblige others to submit to their will or to exercise their influence other than through the power of reason and by example.

Therefore: expropriation of landowners and capitalists for the benefit of all; and abolition of government.

And while waiting for the day when this can be achieved: the propagation of our ideas; unceasing struggle, violent or non-violent depending on the circumstances, against government and against the boss class to conquer as much freedom and well-being as we can for the benefit of everybody.

On Bolshevism

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Anarchy

Errico Malatesta

“La dittatura del proletariato e l’anarchia,” *Volontà*, 16 August 1919¹

Dearest Fabbri:

Upon the question that so occupies your mind, that of the dictatorship of the proletariat, it seems to me that we are fundamentally in accord.

Upon this question it seems to me that there can be no doubt among anarchists, and in fact there was none prior to the Bolshevik revolution. Anarchy signifies non-government, and therefore for a greater reason non-dictatorship, which is an absolute government without control and without constitutional limitations.

But when the Bolshevik revolution broke several of our friends confused that which was the revolution against the pre-existent government and that which was the new government that came to superimpose itself upon the revolution so as to split it and direct it to the particular ends of a party... and they came themselves very close to claiming to be bolsheviks.

Now, the bolsheviks are simply marxists, who have honestly and coherently remained marxist, unlike their

masters and models—the Guesdes, the Plekanoffs, the Hyndmans, the Scheidemanns, the Noskes, who finished as you know. We respect their sincerity, we admire their energy, but as we have not been in accord with them on the ground of theory, we cannot affiliate with them when from theory they pass to action.

But perhaps the truth is simply this, that our Bolshevized friends intend with the expression “dictatorship of the proletariat” merely the revolutionary act of the workers in taking possession of the land and of the instruments of labour and trying to constitute a society for organizing a mode of life in which there would be no place for a class that exploited and oppressed the producers.

Understood so the dictatorship of the proletariat would be the effective power of all the workers intent on breaking down capitalist society, and it would become anarchy immediately upon the cessation of reactionary resistance, and no one would attempt by force to make the masses obey him and work for him.

¹ *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (AK Press, 2014).

And then our dissent would have to do only with words. Dictatorship of the proletariat should signify dictatorship of all which certainly does not mean dictatorship, as a government of all is no longer a government, in the authoritarian, historic, practical sense of the word.

But the true partisans of the dictatorship of the proletariat do not understand the words so, as they have clearly shown in Russia. Obviously, the proletariat comes into it as the people comes into democratic regimes, that is to say, simply for the purpose of concealing the true essence of things. In reality one sees a dictatorship of a party, or rather of the heads of a party; and it is a true dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal laws, its executive agents and above all with its armed force that serves today also to defend the revolution for its external enemies, but that will serve tomorrow to impose upon the workers the will of the dictators, to arrest the revolution, consolidate the new interests and finally defend a new privileged class against the masses.

Bonaparte also served to defend the French revolution against the European reaction, but in defending it he killed it. Lenin, Trotsky and their companions are

certainly sincere revolutionaries—as they understand the revolution, and the will not betray it; but they prepare the governmental cadres that will serve those that will come, who will profit from the revolution and kill it. They will be the first victims of their method, and with them, I fear, will fall the revolution. And history will repeat itself; *mutatis mutandis*, it was the dictatorship of Robespierre that brought Robespierre to the guillotine and prepared the way for Napoleon.

These are my general ideas upon things in Russia. Inasmuch as the news we get from Russia is too contradictory to base upon it a judgement, it is possible that many things that seem bad are the fruit of the situation, and that in the peculiar circumstances in Russia it was impossible to do otherwise than was done. It is better to wait, much more so in that whatever we might say would have no influence upon the developments in Russia, and might be ill interpreted in Italy and seem to echo the interested calumnies of the reaction.

The important thing is what we must do. But there we go again, I am far away, and it is impossible for me to do my part...

The Third International

Errico Malatesta

Umanità Nova, 24 April 1920¹

We are asked what is or what will be our attitude towards the “Third International” which is founded or going to be founded, [however] we do not really know.

The issue will certainly be posed at the next Congress of the *Italian Anarchist Communist Union*, as it will be to the other anarchist groups that exist, and we believe that a common decision will be reached.

In the meantime, we will give our own opinion.

What is this Third International, mythical in our opinion, whose prestige is due to the fact that it was announced by a Russia in revolution but which is still shrouded in the mists of legend?

Does it already have an established programme that everyone who wants to join should accept?

Or should its programme be proposed, discussed and formulated at its first Congress?

And, if so, according to what criteria will the Congress be convened? Will delegates from all workers’ organisations and all subversive parties be able to intervene with equal rights? In short, will anarchists be invited and admitted?

If by “Third International” they mean a socialist organisation whose goal is the conquest of power to

establish the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat and succeed in establishing an authoritarian communist State, we would obviously have nothing to do with it. It would be the Socialist International or another Socialist International... because there are, amongst socialists, different opposing tendencies which could hardly coexist all together without provoking the paralysis and death of the body that would unite them in one and the same framework. This International would correspond to the *Anarchist International*, but both would be party organisations – aiming to realise their own particular programme – and not the *Workers’ International*.

A true Workers’ International should unite all workers who are aware of their class interests, all workers who know that they are exploited and who no longer want to be, all workers who intend to fight against capitalism, whatever be their preferred means of doing so.

In a *Workers’ International* like this, we could all unite, anarchists, socialists, syndicalists, without anyone renouncing their own ends and means. Everyone would find in it a field of action to make their own propaganda; all of us would find in it a powerful lever to draw the masses to the final struggle.

For now, let’s wait.

¹ “La Troisième Internationale”, *Anarchistes, Socialistes et Communistes* (Annecy: Group 1er Mai, 1982).

What is the Third International?

Errico Malatesta

Umanità Nova, 20 July 1920¹

Maxim (we would like to state his name to give full weight to his words, but we are not authorised to do so)

Maxim therefore writes:

The Socialist Party is not the Third International, any more than its “abstentionist communist” fraction is. So why waste precious time with the abstainers of the SP instead of trying to find out whether or not there are insurmountable differences between the communist-anarchists and the Third International which is, in reality, the engine of the world revolution? You wait to “know what its programme is” (U.N. of May 22); it seems to me, on the contrary, that so many genuine documents of the Third International have already been published in Italy that, with a little goodwill, everyone can get an exact idea not only of its programme but also of how this programme is being applied.”

Without a doubt. But then, who are the members of the Third International in Italy? Not the socialists, nor their abstentionist-communist fraction, not the anarchists of

course, since they are against dictatorship, and the reformists even less so. So who?

And how to explain the presence of socialist officials, including D’Aragona, at the Moscow Congress? And the vote of solidarity with the Third International at the Congress of the Confederation of Labour held the other day in Bologna?

In reality, *Maxim* considers as genuine documents of the Third International those documents which emanate exclusively from the Russians.

But, as far as I know, Lenin is not yet dictator of the world; what Lenin and his followers say therefore represents, for us, the idea of the founders of the Third International, the programme which they propose and defend, but not the programme of the Association as long as it has not been formulated and approved by the adherents of the different nations and until its acceptance has become a condition for full admission.

Our position of expectation still seems fully justified to us.

At Last! What is the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’?

Errico Malatesta

Umanità Nova, 28 September 1920²

A straight talker at long last!

Up to now, whenever we said that what the socialists term dictatorship of the proletariat is only, in fact, the dictatorship of some men who, with the assistance of a party, superimpose and impose themselves on the proletariat, they used to treat us as if we were little short of slanders.

Flying in the face of all probability and all known facts the insistence was that in Russia the whole problem of a squared circle – that is a government truly representative of the interests and the wishes of the governed, had already been solved.

Consequently, Moscow had become the Mecca of the proletariat; the source of light, and, as well as light, peremptory orders as to the ideas that those who, with permission from their betters, wished to call themselves communists ought to profess and the conduct they should observe.

As a result of this marvellous Russian-made discovery of a government made in the image and likeness of the people and for the people’s (or proletariat’s as one might say) benefit, all that emanated from Russia seemed to be invested with a miracle working virtue and it was enough to call them Soviets, Russian-style for any Council or Committee to reach the exalted position of the supreme factor of revolution.

But here I have it – the spell is broken.

This time it is not we – we, the anarchists, those irreverent defamers if ever there were any – who strip away the mask. No, this time it is the official Italian Socialist Party daily, up to now the most authorised mouthpiece for the word from Moscow:

It is *Avanti!* on the 26th that says:

”In Russia, under the Soviet regime, the Party really directs all State policy and all public activities; individuals as well as groups being utterly subordinated to the decisions of the

¹ “Qu’est-ce que la Troisième Internationale?”, *Anarchistes, Socialistes et Communistes* (Annecy: Group 1er Mai, 1982).

² *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, Vol 1 No 5 (translation corrected)

Party, so that *the dictatorship of the proletariat is really the dictatorship of the Party and, as such of its Central Committee.*”

Well now we know what we have to look forward to: the dictatorship of the Leadership of the Socialist Party, or of the as yet unborn Communist Party or, to be more specific, of D’Aragona and his accomplices!

But the leaders of the Socialist Party, those aspiring to the dictatorship ought to understand that, in Italy at least, that is impossible; it is impossible because of us, the anarchists and syndicalists being present.

If we were outnumbered by the socialists to the same degree as our comrades maybe inside Russia, nothing would be simpler: the dictators would get rid of us by all the methods used by all dictatorships, gallows and jails and would keep on going until brought to a halt by revolution or reaction.

But we are now a force to be reckoned with and what’s more we are growing rapidly, favoured by circumstances and what *Avanti!* terms the generous temperament of the working masses. And we are determined not to submit.

It is not that we think the masses are always right and that we shall always want to follow them in their changeable attitudes. We have a programme, an ideal to make victorious and this sets us apart from the mass and we are party men. We want to act upon the mass, to prod them towards that course we believe best, but, as our end is one of liberation and not domination, we want to get the masses used to thinking for themselves and acting for themselves.

We believe that liberty educates to freedom and solidarity and thus we abhor any authoritarian set-up whether it be in society generally or any particular party or association.

The Authoritarian Psychosis of the Socialist Party

Errico Malatesta

Umanità Nova, 3 October 1920¹

By seven votes to five the Socialist Party leadership ”adopts the twenty one points of the Moscow convention on the founding of communist parties, according to which it must proceed to a thorough going purge, rooting out from the party all reformist and opportunist elements such as and how they arise from the debates of the next Congress.”

Whilst accepting the formula devised by Moscow, the other five’s order of the day ”affirms the need to tailor the political outlook of each section of the Third Communist International to the historical background and actual, concrete circumstances of each country

The socialists want to prepare the people for liberty through authority.

And so: if, to take a hypothesis we do not accept, it were true that if the revolution is to succeed and the new society structured, public powers need to be concentrated in the hands of a few, if it were true that it is necessary for someone to give the orders, then let the Socialists note this well, we would want it to be us who gave the orders and we would not submit, except by force, to the orders of those who are, in our view, mistaken.

It follows from this that in Italy a revolution made with an authoritarian outlook with dictatorial objectives would, of necessity, lead to a war between revolutionary and revolutionary.

We do not want that: the socialists should not want that.

This being so then, theories aside, and taking a realistic view of things it would behove the socialists to drop all dictatorial claims and accept the libertarian view of revolution; of a revolution developing variously in accordance with the various moral and material conditions in the different regions, communes and corporations; which would assume a varying complexion according to which party held sway in the various locations, this party or that, and which would reach a common end through the gradual harmonisation of interests and wills, and not through authoritarian imposition from above.

Were the socialists to accept this programme – freedom for all – much mutual suspicion would vanish and we should be able to co-operate to bring down the current regime and help ourselves tomorrow towards a happier development of the revolutionary future.

subject to the approval of the International and, in this light, reaffirms the need to maintain the unity of the Italian Socialist Party on the basis and within the confines of what is laid down by precisely that 21st point, according to which anyone rejecting and not voluntarily accepting its discipline cannot be a member of the Third International.”

”It is understood that individual instances of indiscipline must be subjected to a more rigorous vigilance and punishment, with the Party leadership being awarded a more centralised power than it has had at its disposal thus far.”

¹ *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, Vol 1 No 5.

So it has been left up to the congress which will convene at the end of December, to decide whether there is to be schism and purge on a massive scale or merely individual expulsion of the most compromised and most compromising members.

We will be happy if the Socialist Party's quandary comes to an end and if its present lumbering organisation, with its roots in groups that are mutually contradictory and cancel each other out, were to be replaced by homogeneous groupings with well-defined, trustworthy principles.

Meanwhile, we note that the Socialist Party is still afflicted with that authoritarianism that has undermined its internal framework and jeopardized its orientation from its earliest days.

Authoritarianism is an infirmity of the mind which has its roots in arrogance and humility. It is a claim to nothing short of infallibility, and a belief in the infallibility of others which, on the one hand, makes one fawningly, slavishly and blindly obedient to whoever is or believes himself to be a superior and, on the other, intolerant of all opposition emanating from someone who is, or believes himself to be, an inferior.

And the Socialist Party, even if it does have a penchant for calling itself scientific, critical and so on, has always demonstrated a need for intellectual leaders to invoke and practical leaders to obey.

The ultimate leader was Marx and theoretically he remains so. In the whole of socialist literature and oral propaganda, Marx and the Communist Manifesto of 1848 are invoked like Prophet and Gospel, and in addition to backing their policies up with rational argument, they debate as to whether this assertion or that tactic is or is not compatible with the holy books. That is just what the Catholics, the Mazzinians, the Jurists, all religious people and all authoritarians do – so, in their spiritual make-up they are all of a piece.

But Marx has been dead for a long while now and as always is the case with prophets that spoke in riddles, his followers have interpreted him variously, with the outcome that one would be hard put to it to justify one teaching and one all-encompassing tactic. For this reason, Marx was being pushed aside by the demands of practical politics and thus there was a threat that he would be forgotten.

But along came Lenin – and what with him having the prestige of force triumphant everyone, and I mean all or almost all, socialists who have not gone over to the enemy, recognises him as the truest and best interpreter of Marx and fall into line behind him.

Now comes the business of interpreting Lenin and the theses he had voted at the Second Congress of the Third International.

But Lenin is ultra-authoritarian; he issues orders and I still find that repugnant.

But Marx has been dead for a long while now and as always is the case with prophets that spoke in riddles, his followers have interpreted him variously, with the outcome that one would be hard put to it to justify one teaching and one all-encompassing tactic.

With Lenin what we have is what happens with all parvenus, all who are newcomers to power or wealth.

The *nouveaux riches* is always more hateful, more unbearable than the Lord who is born to it. The latter, being born to privilege and raised in it, believes he has a right to his position, thinks that the world could not be other than it is and consequently, exploits and oppresses with a perfectly clear conscience and with a feeling of security that, except in cases of particular individual badness, invests him with a certain moderation and affability that, from time to time, makes him, unfortunately, a

likeable fellow in the eyes of those under him. In contrast the *nouveaux riches*, *el piojo resucitado* (the beggar on horseback), is greedy for his pleasures, needs ostentation and seems to want to submerge the pangs of conscience and fear of being poor again in luxury and superciliousness.

The same thing goes for political power. Former revolutionaries come to govern are more tyrannical than governors drawn from among the traditional governing classes; in the long run "liberals" are more reactionary and more base than conservatives.

It could not have been otherwise in Russia.

People who have been persecuted all their lives, ever threatened by the gendarme and gaoler and sometimes by the hangman manage with a single blow to seize power and have their own gendarmes, gaolers and hangmen! Is it any wonder then, if they become intoxicated, if they undergo a rapid change of trade and set about issuing orders like a Czar and think they can give orders even where their writ does not run?

Lenin imagines he can treat Turati like some unruly corporal in his red guard!

That is a mistake.

With his authoritarian, centralising obsession, Marx was one of the causes of the break-up of the First International which he had made such a powerful contribution to establishing.

Lenin and his friends, who have now founded a Third International will end up killing it with that same authoritarian, centralising obsession.

Except that, with things moving so much more quickly these days, whereas Marx was able to see his creation completely operational before he did it to death, Lenin risks killing off the Third International before it really gets born.

That is distasteful to us, for the Third International which could have been a powerful influence for progress with its dictatorial claims and having retained the germ of corruption of parliamentary activity in its bosom already threatens to come to the same ignominious end that the Second International did, unless it is overtaken by the revolution in action.

The First International: About the fiftieth anniversary of the Congress of Saint-Imier

Errico Malatesta

Umanità nova, 9 September 1922¹

In mid-September, it is the fiftieth anniversary of the Congress of Saint-Imier (Switzerland), famous in the history of the First International and of socialism in general because from it begins, officially one could say, the anarchist movement.

Swiss comrades celebrated the event during a party amongst friends, in which at least some of the few survivors undoubtedly took part; it must have been a moving celebration for anyone who has lived through these days of laborious intellectual struggles, enthusiasm intact, and still retains whole and stronger than ever, after fifty years of vicissitudes of all kinds and not the happiest, the faith and hope of his early youth.

The International Workers' Association, outlined in 1862, took shape in London in September 1864 and changed overnight the terms of the struggle for progress and for the emancipation of man.

Until then, when they took an interest in political and social questions, the working masses did so in the wake of and on behalf of bourgeois parties and they expected everything from the coming to power of better men and governments. The proletariat lacked class consciousness, the consciousness of the antagonism of interests between those who work and those who live from the labour of others, the consciousness of the fundamental injustice from which social evils flow; and so the great majority, almost all of the workers, even the most advanced, aspired only to superficial changes (to

change the forms of government), to petty reforms which left intact the right of a few to monopolise the means of production and thus real domination over the whole of social life.

A new era began with the International, founded on the initiative of the few who at the time understood the true nature of the social question and the necessity of removing the workers from the leadership of the bourgeois parties. The workers, who had always been a brute force in the wake of others, good or bad, rose to the rank of the main factor in human history and, by fighting for their own emancipation, they fought for the good of all, for human progress, to found a superior civilisation.

We have already written on this and we can only repeat it:²

The International separated the workers from the wake of bourgeois parties and endowed them with a class consciousness, a programme of their own, a policy of their own; it posed and discussed all the most vital social questions and elaborated the whole of modern socialism which some writers then claimed was the product of their own heads; it made the mighty tremble, it roused the ardent hopes of the oppressed, it inspired sacrifice and heroism... and just as it most looked destined to lay capitalist society to rest, it disintegrated and perished.

¹ "La Première Internationale", *Anarchistes, Socialistes et Communistes* (Annecy: Group 1er Mai, 1982).

² "La nuova Internazionale dei Lavoratori", *La Rivoluzione Sociale* (5 November 1902). For a different translation, see "The Workers' New International", *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (AK Press, 2014). (*Black Flag*)

Why?

The fact that the International broke apart is generally attributed either to the persecutions to which it was subjected, or to personal struggles that arose within it, or to the way in which it was organised, or to all of these causes simultaneously.

This is not my opinion.

The persecutions would not have been enough to break up the Association and they often even served to make it more popular and give it momentum.

The personal struggles were actually only a secondary concern and, as long as the movement had vitality, they instead served to spur the various parties and most prominent personalities into action.

The manner of its organisation, which had grown centralist and authoritarian under the impetus of the General Council in London and especially of Karl Marx who was its driving force, actually led to the International splitting into two branches: but the federalist and anarchist branch that included the federations from Spain, Italy, francophone Switzerland, Belgium, southern France, and independent sections in other countries, did not long outlive the authoritarian branch. It will be argued that even within the anarchist branch there still existed the maggot of authoritarianism and that, even there, a few individuals were able to do and undo in the name of the masses who passively followed them, and that is true. But it should be noted that in this case, the authoritarianism was unintended and did not derive from the forms of organisation, nor from the principles inspiring it; it was a natural and inevitable consequence of the phenomenon to which I chiefly attribute the break-up of the Association, a phenomenon I will now explain.

Within the International, which was founded as a federation of resistance societies to provide the broadest base for the economic struggle against capitalism, two tendencies very quickly surfaced, one authoritarian, the other libertarian, and they divided the Internationalists into

hostile factions, which had the names of Marx and Bakunin, at least on the two extreme wings.

One wanted to turn the Association into a disciplined body under the orders of a Central Committee, the other wanted it to be a free federation of autonomous groups. One wanted to subjugate the masses in order to do it good by force, according to the age-old authoritarian superstition, the others wanted to raise them up and persuade them to free themselves. But those

who inspired the two factions had this characteristic feature in common: they passed on their own ideas to the mass of the membership of the Association, and thought that they had converted them when they had obtained a more or less unconscious adherence.

This is how we saw the International quickly become mutualist, collectivist, communist, revolutionary, anarchist; and the speed of this evolution, which the reports of the Congresses and in the daily press attest, could not correspond to a real and simultaneous evolution in the great mass of its members.

As there were no different

bodies for the economic struggle and the political and ideological struggle, and as all Internationalists applied all their activity on the plane of thought and action within the International, it inevitably followed that the most advanced individuals would have had to go down to and remain at the level of the backward and sluggish mass or – and this is what happened – progress and evolve with the illusion that the mass would understand and follow them.

These more advanced elements studied, discussed, discovered the needs of the people, they formulated the vague aspirations of the masses into concrete programs, they affirmed socialism, they affirmed anarchism, they predicted the future and they prepared for it – but they killed the Association. The sword had worn out the scabbard.

Not that I am saying that this was a bad thing. If the International had remained a simple

Within the International, which was founded as a federation of resistance societies to provide the broadest base for the economic struggle against capitalism, two tendencies very quickly surfaced, one authoritarian, the other libertarian

organisation for resistance and not been buffeted by the storms of party thought and passions, the International would have survived as the English Trade Unions survived, useless and perhaps even harmful to the cause of human emancipation. It is better that it perished throwing fertile seeds into the wind: and in fact, it is from it that the socialist movement and anarchist movement were born.

But I say to you that today we cannot, must not, remake the International of old. Today there are well-established socialist and anarchist movements; today, the illusions and ambiguities in which the old International lived and died are no longer possible. The causes that killed the old Workers' International, that is to say the antagonism between authoritarians and libertarians on the one hand, and the distance between the thinkers and the semi-conscious mass driven only by its interests, on the other, these causes can still thwart the birth, development and survival of an International which is, like the first, simultaneously a society for economic resistance, a workshop of ideas, and a revolutionary association.

A new International (I speak of an association of workers united as workers, and not of associations founded on a sharing of revolutionary ideas and aims), a new Workers' International should, in order to be viable and fulfil its mission, have the aim of uniting all workers, or as many as possible, without distinction of social, political, or religious outlook, for the struggle against capitalism; this is why it must be neither individualist, nor collectivist, nor communist; it must be neither monarchist nor republican, nor anarchist; it should be neither religious nor anti-religious. It should have a single common idea, a single condition [for entry], a single mission: to want to fight the bosses.

Hatred of the boss is the beginning of salvation.

And if, later, enlightened by propaganda, educated by the struggle which teaches it to go back to the causes of social ills and to seek their remedies, stimulated by the example of the revolutionary parties, forced by the reaction of the bosses, the mass of the members were to burst into socialist, anarchist, and anti-religious affirmations, so much the better because then the progress would be real and not illusory.

Basically, this is the goal, this is the hope that makes us interested in the labour movement.

An old Internationalist

In 1871, immediately after the Paris Commune, taking advantage of the fact that the political conditions in various States prevented the delegates of the federalist sections from going to London, the General Council in London had wanted, during a "conference" of expressly selected people, to impose on the whole International its authority and its particular doctrine: the conquest of political power.

The Italian Federation of the International was the first to react: meeting in August in Rimini, it severed all solidarity with the Marxist General Council in London with the following resolution:

Considering that the London "Conference" (September 1871) sought, by its IXth decision, to impose on the entire International Workers' Association a particular doctrine which is exactly that of the German Communist Party;

– that the General Council was the instigator and supported it;

– that the doctrine in question, that of the authoritarian communists, is the negation of the revolutionary sentiment of the Italian proletariat;

– that the General Council has used unworthy means such as slander and deceit for the sole purpose of reducing the entire International Association to only its authoritarian communist doctrine;

– that the General Council has shown the measure of its unworthiness by its restricted circular from London, dated 5 March 1872, in which, continuing its slanderous and deceitful activity, it reveals an unbridled passion for authority;

– that the reaction of the General Council provoked the revolutionary opposition of the Belgians, the French, the Spanish, the Slavs, the Italians, the Swiss of western Switzerland and the Jura;

– for all these reasons, the meeting solemnly declares, before the workers of the whole world, that henceforth the Italian Federation of the International Workers' Association severs all solidarity with the London General Council, while reaffirming its economic solidarity with all workers...

Unlike the Italians who flatly refused to go to the Congress at the Hague in 1872, convened for insidious purposes by the General Council, the other Federations opposed to the Marxist leadership decided to participate. And this Congress, even in the opinion of Marxists and of men not very fond of anarchists, did no honour to Marx who certainly had his vengeance and obtained the expulsion of Guillaume and Bakunin, but

not without dealing a fatal blow to the First International.

Returning from this Congress, the delegates who had formed the anti-authoritarian minority joined the Italian delegates gathered in Switzerland at the same time. The meeting took place in Saint-Imier on 15 September 1872 at the Maison de l'Hôtel-de-Ville. Attending were: Costa, Cafiero, Bakunin, Malatesta, Nabruzzi, Fanelli, for the Italian Federation; Pindy and Carnot, for various French sections; Lefrançais, for American sections 3 and 22; Guillaume and Schwitzguébel, for the Jura Federation.

After having rejected the arbitrary decisions taken at the Hague, the Congress expressed its opposition by passing the following resolution:

Nature of the Political Action of the Proletariat

Considering:

- that wanting to impose a uniform line of conduct or political programme on the proletariat as the only path that can lead to its social emancipation is a pretension as absurd as it is reactionary;
- that no one has the right to deprive the autonomous federations and sections of the indisputable right to decide for themselves and to follow the line of political conduct which they believe to be the best, and that any such attempt would inevitably lead us to the most revolting dogmatism;
- that the aspirations of the proletariat can have no purpose other than the establishment of an

absolutely free economic organisation and federation, based upon the labour and equality of all and absolutely independent of any political government, and that this organisation and this federation can only be the outcome of the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself, of trades unions and autonomous communes;

Considering that every political organisation can be nothing but the organisation of domination for the benefit of a class and to the detriment of the masses, and that the proletariat, if it wanted to seize power, would itself become a dominant and exploiting class;

The Congress gathered in Saint-Imier declares:

- that the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat;
- that any organisation of a supposedly provisional and revolutionary political power to bring about this destruction can only be another deception and would be as dangerous to the proletariat as all the governments existing today;
- that, rejecting all compromise to achieve the realisation of the Social Revolution, proletarians of every land must establish solidarity of revolutionary action outside of all bourgeois politics.

From that moment anarchism was born. From the individual thought of a few isolated men, it became the collective principle of groups now spread across the world.

Anarchist principles as formulated in 1872 at the Congress of St. Imier under the inspiration of Bakunin

Errico Malatesta

Pensiero e Volontà, 1 July 1926¹

1. Destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat.
2. Any organisation of an allegedly provisional revolutionary political power to achieve this destruction cannot be other than one trick more, and would be as dangerous to the proletariat as are all present governments.
3. In refusing every compromise for the achievement of the social revolution, workers of the world must establish solidarity in revolutionary action outside the framework of bourgeois politics.

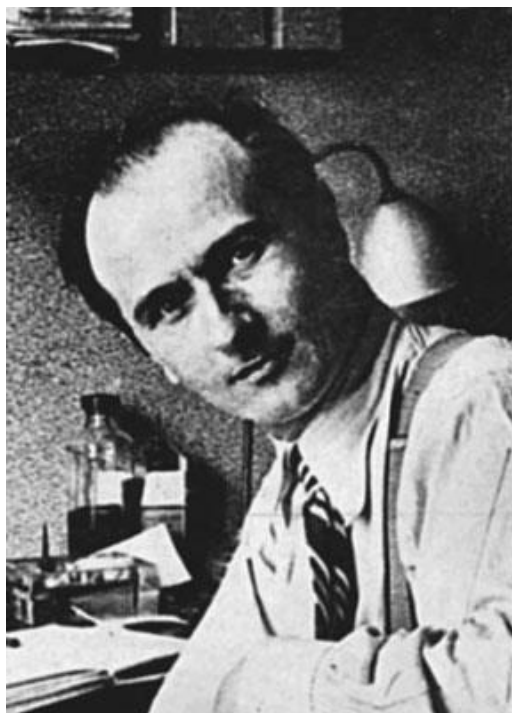
These principles continue to point to the right road for us. Those who have tried to act in contradiction to them have disappeared, because however defined, State, dictatorship, and parliament can only lead the masses back to slavery. All experience so far bears this out. Needless to say, for the delegates of St. Imier as for us and all anarchists, the abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege.

¹ *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* (London: Freedom Press, 1993)

Camillo Berneri

Emma Goldman¹

Camillo Berneri, lofty idealist, sweet singer of revolt, lover of all mankind, was foully murdered in Barcelona, May 7th, 1937. By his daring opposition to the insidious activities in Spain of Stalin's henchmen, Camillo had incurred the wrath of the Soviet torquemada and so he had to die. The gruesome story of his end is related in the tributes paid our martyred comrade by several writers, now gathered with some of his letters in this book. There is no need for me to elaborate on it. I want rather to write of my recollections and impressions of Camillo Berneri, of our camaraderie in Barcelona when we both worked almost side by side to help our comrades in their struggle for the Spanish Revolution and against Fascism.



Camillo Berneri (1897-1937)

I had heard much about Professor Berneri, his fine personality and his gentle spirit, before I met him in Paris. The meeting was very fleeting; we could but exchange a few words. It was enough, however, to give me a definite impression of the man and his aims. I was particularly carried away by the sensitiveness of his face and the charm of his manner. We promised each other to meet again soon when we would have time really to get acquainted. Little did either one of us dream that we would meet so soon in Spain and be joined in our passionate desire to help our Spanish comrades.

Comrade Berneri had preceded me to Barcelona by two months. On my arrival there in September, 1936, I already found him in the thick of the struggle: at the Huesca front as the delegate of the Italian column – every hour taken up with various tasks on his return from the front – discussing with young comrades until daybreak. That and many other things kept our comrade busy and absorbed.

Frail and evidently worn from the strain of his labours, Camillo yet responded generously to every call on his energies. Extremely sensitised as he was, he easily sensed the needs of others, often imaginary needs hardly worth the waste of our comrade's strength. He

was not unaware of the advantages taken of his gentle nature, but he continued to give out of his rich fount of sympathy and compassion.

The amazing thing to me was that though always in the midst of crowds, Camillo Berneri could yet hold aloof his own integrity as well as his independence of mind. He never hesitated to bring both into play the moment anybody attempted to encroach upon what he considered the most sacred part of his being. How he did it, he explains in one of the beautiful letters to his wife....

In this as in many other circumstances Camillo Berneri proved his keen sense of the comic side of life and the understanding of the small and

trifling affairs that loom so high to little people.

The multitude of jobs imposed upon our comrade are also set forth by him in another letter to his family...

I saw his crowded days and I hesitated to become one of the many who clogged his steps. It was he who sought me out when back from the front one day, and I had returned from my tours of inspection of collective industries and farms. As I have already stated, Camillo Berneri had preceded me to Spain by two months. His experience of the heights and depths of the revolutionary situation was therefore invaluable to me. In addition was the fact that I was inarticulate in Spanish. He spoke that language as well as French, outside his own Italian, and he was therefore of great help to me.

Our exchange of thoughts was grateful to my hopes and fears for the future of the Revolution and the continued strength of the CNT and the FAI. We soon found that we shared these fears. In fact we struck up a harmonious chord before we had been together an hour. I was touched by Camillo's concern in my needs and his thoughtfulness in offering help to find me comfortable quarters and anything else I might want. This was the more moving because he himself, while living in the

¹ Emma Goldman, Preface to *Pensieri e Battaglie* (1938). Included in *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press 2006), edited by David Porter. (Editor)

same hotel with me, was taking his meals in the poorest of proletarian restaurants. This sweet solidarity and kindness revived the memory of one whom I had sought out during the first agonised conflict after my arrival in Russia – Maxim Gorki.

He had been the idol of my youthful days – he, the poet of the Song of the Falcon and the Snake, and so many other stirring songs; Gorki who had articulated the tragedies of the lower depths, who had been the clarion voice in the dreadful silence of the pre-revolutionary Russia... He would understand my inner turmoil, the revolutionary incongruities that haunted my waking and sleeping hours. I went to him for some light in the dark horizon of the inexorable Bolshevik regime.

Maxime Gorki regarded me with unseeing eyes. He did not understand my quest. He had become a cog in the Soviet machine. He had nothing left of his former self to give.

I thought of this episode while talking with Camillo about the contrasts between the Spanish and Russian Revolutions, the contrasts, too, in the protagonists of both world events. In my own mind I also contrasted the two men, Maxime Gorki and Camillo Berneri. There was a whole world between them.

The most outstanding day of the camaraderie with Camillo Berneri remained vividly in my mind. It was the 7th of November, 1936 – the [nineteenth] anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Barcelona was in festive attire. Vast masses of workers marched through the streets; the CNT-FAI and the Libertarian Youth represented the largest contingent. Proudly they carried the red and black banner and the air resounded with their triumphant cry: “CNT-FAI! CNT-FAI! CNT-FAI!” In these letters the Spanish revolutionary workers have put all their aspirations, all their dreams of the new world they had begun to build on the 19th of July.

Inspired by the memory of the Russian Revolution, by the valiant workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors who *alone* had brought about the world-stirring event, our comrades in Barcelona joyously participated in the festivities. They were blissfully ignorant of the fact that the celebration of the Russian Revolution organised by Stalin’s vassals was a travesty of the Revolution.

In point of truth it had been hurled from its lofty zenith in the early days of 1917, kicked about by Lenin’s experiment until it bled from a thousand wounds. The final thrust that ended the agony of the Russian Revolution was left to Stalin. It was this man whose virtue and desert were to be expressed in a paean song,

November 7th, 1936, in revolutionary Spain – a travesty indeed.

We of the foreign section and especially the Russians who had witnessed the slow death of the Russian Revolution were of course not deceived. For us the 7th of November was a day of mourning. We resented the participation of our Spanish comrades in this event. Some of them even condemning the CNT-FAI as having gone back on their Russian comrades languishing in Soviet concentration camps. My heart was heavy with sadness, yet I could not sit in judgement over our comrades of the CNT-FAI.

Through our numerous talks I had come to appreciate the clarity of his mind and the lucidity in presenting his thoughts, but his written form was even more impressive and convincing.

Franco and his hordes were slowly creeping up to the gates of Madrid. Arms were desperately needed. It was a matter of life and death. In their own high idealism and revolutionary ethical traditions, the Spanish Anarchists accepted Stalin’s proffered hand on its face value. It never occurred to them that along with arms he will also send his blessings that had turned Russia into a vale of tears and had covered her soil with rivers of blood.

Camillo Berneri came to see me. He brought with him a statement he had prepared dealing with the many puzzling questions

confronting us all. Not reading Italian and on the eternal move from place to place and country to country, I had been unable to follow the life and work of our comrade. In point of truth the statement, which fortunately was in French, was the first piece of writing by Camillo I had read. Through our numerous talks I had come to appreciate the clarity of his mind and the lucidity in presenting his thoughts, but his written form was even more impressive and convincing. Above everything else the statement contained the purity that motivated his criticism of the leading comrades in the CNT-FAI. It shone like a light through every line. This and our long discussion after I had read his criticism brought our comrade near to me as one of the truly great souls in our ranks, as well as one of the ablest of his generation.

The letter to Federica Montseny in this volume grew out of the statement I had read on the 7th of November, 1936. In the light of subsequent events in May, the destruction of some of the constructive achievements of the CNT-FAI, the political persecution of real revolutionists, Camillo Berneri proved himself astonishingly prophetic – clairvoyant, I would say. Not that I agreed with him in what he wrote about the decline of the Spanish Revolution. I am only too aware that the Revolution had received a jolt through the alignment of the anti-Fascist forces with their Russian

ally. True, it might even have been done to death by Stalin's satraps as the Russian Revolution had been destroyed, were it not for the continued moral strength of the CNT-FAI and the fact that the adherents of Moscow had overreached themselves. They had counted without their hosts, they had overlooked the Spanish people and their libertarian ideas woven into the very texture of their being.

Had Camillo Berneri lived he would have seen as I have, on my second visit to Spain, that the Revolution is still very much alive and that the increased constructive work goes on regardless of all obstacles. Moreover there is the indestructible quality of the Spanish people and their determination to fight to the bitter end. These were the matters Camillo and I differed on, but for the rest we felt deeply in everything concerning Spain, and we too were determined to serve the Revolution and the people to the uttermost.

Among the many horrors the world war brought in its wake and increased by Fascism, Nazism and Bolshevism, is the manhunt of political refugees. They are indeed the modern Ahasuerus – nowhere wanted, driven from frontier to frontier – often into death. Camillo Berneri did not escape this tragic fate of the political refugee. His letters describing the persecution, the arrests, the brutal treatment, the imprisonment to which he had been subjected in every country, are a scathing indictment of the post-war world turned into a fortress for those who will not bend their knees to the dictator's commands or become a party to their crimes.

The sufferings Camillo Berneri had endured had impaired his health. It failed utterly to affect his spirit. All through his terrible experiences his revolutionary zeal and flaming ideal burned like red-white heat. Even

his rich humour never left him for long. The story of the policeman whose heart Camillo softened for a brief moment by his detection of the picture of Voltaire on the officer's pipe, and another story, bear witness to

Camillo Berneri's humanity. It is when he invites the policeman sent to watch his house to have real, strong, hot Italian coffee to save him from the cold. Camillo Berneri, professor of philosophy, dangerous anarchist, showing kindness and compassion to an officer who had been sent to watch him day and night – how should the dull of mind and empty of heart know that it was precisely Camillo Berneri's love for mankind and his feeling with all human suffering that made him the anarchist he was?

Camillo Berneri's letters to his family are moving in their beauty and their devotion. He adored his wife, he idolised his two daughters and he revered his mother. Again and again he pours out his loving heart to them – to Giliane, his ten-year-old, and Marie Louise, the elder one. They were the very apple of his eye. Yet his supremacist love was his ideal. That had first call on him. Often Camillo found it painful to choose because of the pain his choice might cause his loved ones, but he never wavered or stopped in the path that led him to the fulfilment of his ideals. It was uppermost in his mind, and the complete dedication to it his strongest, most compelling force. In one of his letters to his wife he assures her that if he could save Bilbao with his life he would give it gladly. No one who knew Camillo could possibly doubt this. Alas, it was not given to our comrade to lay down his beautiful life as he willed. Instead he was murdered in cold blood: arbitrarily arrested on the night of 6th May

together with his comrade, Barbieri. Their bodies were found riddled by bullets on the following morning in front of the Generalidad.

It is not so much how one dies that counts in the ultimate evaluation of one's worth. It is how one lives; and the life of Camillo Berneri stands out in all its inner strength and radiant beauty.

Camillo Berneri was one of the most rounded standard-bearers of contemporary anarchism. He boasted exceptional gifts. He was one of the best-informed writers in the anarchist camp, and this enabled him to write on the most widely varying topics, which he knew how to treat with stunning erudition [...] a leading light of Italian libertarian communism, a philosopher and writer of world renown

– José Peirats, *The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution*.

It is not at all true to say that Berneri was merely a scientist and theoretician. He was much more: he was a fighter. And more still: he was a man. A man on whose word one could depend, whose actions could face the light of day – a man filled with ardour for the ideal of Justice, and Freedom and Human Dignity. All this was merged for him in the one word:

ANARCHISM. [...] Berneri is dead. A grievous loss for the Libertarian Movement, more especially for Italian Anarchism. But his ideal is alive, and new champions will rally to its banner.
– Augustin Souchy, *Spain and the World*.

Camillo Berneri, was one of the most distinguished anarchists in Italian ranks. [...] From the very first moment of the Spanish revolution, July 19th, Berneri rushed to Spain [...] He organised the first Italian column. He fought at many fronts and he was the spirit of all the Italians in the rear. I had occasion to meet and know Berneri and I found him one of the kindest and sweetest personalities, besides being one of the most brilliant.
– Emma Goldman, *Spain and the World*.

State and Bureaucracy

Camillo Berneri

Umanità Nova, 25 December 1920

The scandals that have occurred in ministerial and military circles, the millions absorbed vampire-like by the thieves with a medal, the farce and the anxiety, the bureaucratic errors that flushed millions and millions down the drain in misguided or shady deals, in delays to shipments of goods due to the mammoth and lazy bureaucracy, the whole ensemble of robberies and errors due to the complicated and parasitic mechanism on which State centralisation rests is not an evil of a

given regime, but is the result of the existence of the State, a centralised body that hinders, constricts,

corrupts the whole of national life.

The unitary and centralising State, be it bourgeois or Bolshevik, is a lead-cloak which suffocates the economic and political life of a nation. In the crisis caused by the economic conditions concomitant with the war, the State machine has revealed all its impotence.

Legislative and administrative uniformity is absurd in a nation like ours, where there are such marked economic and psychological differences between the North, the

Centre and the South. A Bolshevik State that wanted to centralise powers and functions in a Bolshevik-like bureaucracy would only foster, like the current government, parasitic functions to the detriment of all productive functions. The problems of the economic and social life of the Italian people have their own physiognomy, different from region to region, from place to place, and each require their own specific solution. A socialist government that wanted to do everything would end up in centralisation, that is in the most mammoth and irresponsible bureaucracy. From this point of view, the anarchist anti-State critique coincides with the democratic-federalist one, differing from it in various points which, for now, there is no need to examine.

One of the necessities of centralised regimes is bureaucracy, which is all the more parasitic, oppressive and irresponsible, the more the government tends to concentrate the administration of the various branches of the economic and legal life of the nation into its

hands. The ministries are the main hubs of bureaucracy. Thousands of people every day turn to them who have measures to solicit, claims to make, interests to protect. From the responses given after months and months, the confusion of documents, not to mention the intrigues and corruption, is a whole collection of things that makes the ministerial bureaucracy the most monstrous expression of technical, legal and administrative centralisation.

The unitary and centralising State, be it bourgeois or Bolshevik, is a lead-cloak which suffocates the economic and political life of a nation.

Many socialists are inclined to [support] municipal autonomy. This decentralisation is fictitious if it does nothing more than make the Municipalities into small ministries. Let us see what would happen if, having overthrown the central government, that is to say ministerial government, administrative power passed to the Municipalities, which remain what they are today but with greater powers.

The people's commissar, having taken over the Municipality, issues a manifesto in which he invites the

citizens to address their grievances, frustrated by bourgeois administrations, to him and, if he does not continue with the old methods of intrigue, what will happen is that this commissar will be swamped by complaints, questions, petitions, befuddled by requests and protests, and will be at his wit's end. The socialist Municipality will naturally want to take care of everything: roads, lighting, education, hygiene, etc., etc., and the commissar will have to work miracles: to have a hundred eyes like Argus, to have St. Anthony's gift of ubiquity, to have a hundred arms like a statue of an Indian deity. Given that *pulsate et aperietur vobis*¹ will be mandatory in a communist administration, assuming that it can listen to all those who want something, how can it discern the real from the fake, the necessary from the superfluous?

Assuming that instead of a people's commissar there is a communal Soviet and that the functions are divided, I doubt that in the large Municipalities it is possible to supervise the spectacular stream of requests,

¹ Latin for "ask and it will be given you" (*Black Flag*)

suggestions, protests pouring from the population into the administration. The need will therefore remain, on the part of the custodians of central power, to get help from other people who will not lend their labour free of charge: that is, for officials. These officials will have to be earnestly supervised by their superiors so that they do not spend their eight hours smoking, chatting, reading newspapers rather than regulating. Therefore bureau chiefs will be needed. These who need the services of the administration will have to, in order to spur the lazy employee, avail themselves of a friend or a superior of the employee. In centralised schemes the intermediary becomes necessary. Hence lobbying and favouritism.

Let us not mention the huge costs that this bureaucracy would represent. The budgets of centralised administrations amount to millions: like the Municipality of Naples which, in 1901, spent 23 million. When it comes to governments, bureaucratic expenses reach billions. Centralisation becomes more parasitic and mafia-like the higher up it goes: the ministries are more parasitic and mafia-like than the provincial administrations, the provincial ones more than the municipal ones.

No centralised administration can escape its inherent flaws which are due its constitution. In southern Italy, corruption caused by the centralisation of the administrations expresses itself with more pronounced symptoms than in other parts of Italy. As Gaetano Salvemini has shown, the administrative unity of Italy was an unprecedented economic disaster for the South.

Many believe that centralisation is an inevitable outcome of urban development and conclude that it is only possible to apply more decentralised autonomy to small countries. This deduction, which starts from a factual observation, is not correct. Decentralisation has more justification to be applied in a metropolis than in a village. And the metropolis does not prevent the development of a federal administration by the magnitude of its population and its lifestyle. An example is London which, although much larger than Naples, is not affected by the bureaucratic-mafioso diseases that afflict the Neapolitan city because it is federally administered.

Suppose a large city is federally administered. In this case it would not form a single Municipality but ten, twenty Municipalities, depending on its geographical conditions and the setup of local interests. In each of these Municipalities, the administration is not concentrated into a single council but splits into several independent councils, each of which has its own administration and is elected by the interested parties,

these councils have a given task to perform: education, lighting, roads, hygiene, etc. If all these functions are amassed in a single council, the accumulation of so many activities would require the daily work of administrators who would be paid, that is officials paid by the community. The single council having many responsibilities would end up having none and could not cope with the numerous and varied matters [it has to handle] if it is not composed of many members. On the other hand, in the federal system each council, having its share of the administration, can be made up of a few people who can carry out their tasks with a few hours work a day; many employees are thus eliminated and many expenses abolished. These elected administrators have a specific, well-defined responsibility and are under the immediate and continuous control of the voters who, being interested in the proper functioning of that administration, will keep their eyes open and will intervene to prevent any problems.

In order to administer well, you need to have special expertise: from the food supply to street rubbish. Each of the specialised councils would have its own particular budget. In centralised administrations, the figures cannot be checked and by virtue of little thefts, the general budget is found to have huge holes and so it goes down the drain. There is no one who will waste his time studying the budget and who can check if the expenses are all regular. This is demonstrated by the military administrations which send reams of administrative paperwork to ministerial offices, where the missing sums and other administrative mischief of the officers and quartermasters are certainly not discovered. In a small administration you see at a glance the revenue and expenditure and the right of control of contributors and interested parties is not hindered by complicated bureaucratic procedures.

The federal system has a social, educational as well as an economic value.

All this participation of the citizens in the administrative life of the nation contributes to the development and improvement of their civic capabilities. "In the federal system," writes Gaetano Salvemini, "the citizen is educated in public life, he governs himself, he is accustomed to rely only on his own initiative and not on that of a distant authority; and at the same time that the sense of his own individuality develops within him, he sees that he is not an atom separate from other atoms and united by a central point, but is part of a much more complex system in which he is closely united with his neighbour, and then with others who are less close, and then with others more distant: the sentiment of individual autonomy will therefore be nurtured in him with the sentiment of social solidarity."

The concept of autonomy, while becoming increasingly important in the field of legal science, tends to go beyond the sealed realm of law to enter the wider and more fruitful field of political economy. Only in this field can autonomy find its natural, stable foundation to become a real structure. Many distinguished scholars and thinkers study the current tendencies towards [free] association, follow its development in its various aspects and in its many forms, and recognise that the supreme sovereignty of the State is declining, and some who view State sovereignty as a glorious conquest of modern constitutionalism fear that autonomy would, in their view, lead today's society back to the Middle Ages. This tendency of political life to return to the autonomy of the era of the [Medieval] Communes is not a step backwards but a leap forwards; it is a healthy *recourse* that has in itself the possibility of restoring the innermost rationale, the real conditions for its viability.

Autonomy is the bedrock upon which the political edifice will rest; it will be its natural and solid base. A realistic reconstruction of politics based on the autonomist concept, while it must draw upon several findings from our modern life, must not fail to draw upon examples from the past, from our national past. Our Middle Ages, in the period called Communal, gives us a model of a free political constitution, although we do not yet know its inner historical structure in depth.¹

Historians and politicians have debased historical truth with their academic manipulations so that even today, due to *ad asum delphini*, the history of the Middle Ages is synonymous with obscurantism and barbarism.

Modern history has brought the Middle Ages out of obscurity and neglect so that today it shines with a new and living light in the face of modern life and culture. Historical science as shown us that autonomy was the dominant note, the main constitutive element of the public life of our medieval towns, and that it was an idea-force and a lived fact that left a great legacy in the fields of Law, politics and art.

Autonomy was the expression and sufficient condition for the emergence and development of freedom and association. External causes and congenital deficiencies constricted, arrested, cancelled the impetuses, the vital impulses that had made the life of the Communes free, strong and rich, but this does not detract from the fact that the era of the Communes remains to demonstrate the beneficial effects of communal autonomy.

The idea of the State is more alive than ever in the scientific and political mindset of the ruling classes and is the backbone of legalitarian and centralising communism. There is however a decentralising force, an element of autonomy, and it is very strong, in the nature of the Italian people and in the geographic-economic conditions of our peninsula. The theorists of autonomy have conducted a lot of research and have seen in it more a judicial concept than a political and social concept, as it is in reality and as it is looks to those who consider it from a broader and more comprehensive point of view than that of jurists, economists and cabinet and academy politicians.

Our concept of autonomy is more board and more libertarian than that of those for whom autonomy represents the restoration of regional independence, but it is certain that the administrative and legislative autonomy of individual regions is likely to encourage that of individual municipalities, of individual councils and trade unions; so that a pyramidal form of Confederation is achieved whose base rests on the will of the association and the reciprocity of the citizens and whose top is represented by a central body for consultation or implementation, but not of actual command. True freedom is expressed and is protected only in autonomy, in its various federative forms. Traditional individualism, now outdated by the associational spirit of the century, must be replaced by the individualism, or rather the liberalism, of groups, of associations, of councils, of Communes. The practical implementation of the concept of autonomy awaits its trials and will have its achievements. For now, let us fight the centralising spirit of State socialism and follow the autonomist currents that are taking shape in today's political and economic life with an attentive and critical spirit.

A French jurist, Boncour, says that "contemporary society is on the way to full decentralisation, a integral federalism, both industrial and administrative", and other distinguished scholars of legal, economic and political sciences enrich the decentralist and federalist programme of libertarian communism, a programme that will find a fruitful engagement with the federalist republican thought of [Carlo] Cattaneo and [Giuseppe] Ferrari and will find elements of life in the treasure trove of autonomist and federalist experiences that the history of the medieval Communes provides us.

¹ Kropotkin discusses this period in his lecture "The State: Its Historic Role" (1896) later issued as a pamphlet and then revised as Part III of *Modern Science and Anarchy* (1913) as

well as in chapters V and VI of *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902). (*Black Flag*)

Marxism and the Extinction of the State

Camillo Berneri

Guerra di classe, 9 October 1936

In the camp of the Italian anti-fascist emigration it has become common for some time now to hear anarchists attribute to Marxism, both during public meetings and in the context of friendly discussions, a tendency towards State-worship, which is indeed found in certain currents of social democracy which claim to be Marxist, but cannot be ascertained when one goes right back to Marxist socialism.

The disappearance of the State is clearly prophesied by Marx and Engels and this explains the possibility that, within the First International, there was political coexistence between Marxist socialists and Bakuninist socialists, a coexistence that would not have been possible without that theoretical concurrence.

In *The Poverty of Philosophy* Marx wrote:

The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called.

Engels, in turn, stated in *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*:

The State will inevitably disappear along with classes. Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of State where it will then belong: into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.

And Engels did not postpone the extinction of the State to a final phase of civilisation, but presented it as closely connected to the social revolution and inevitably arising from it. In fact, he wrote in an article from 1873:

All Socialists are agreed that the political State, and with it political authority, will disappear as a result of the coming social revolution, that is, that public functions will lose their political character and will be transformed into the simple administrative functions of watching over the true interests of society.

The State is equated by Marxists with government and they place that before a system in which “the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things”, which for Proudhon constituted anarchy.

Lenin in *The State and Revolution* (1917) reaffirms the conception of the extinction of the State, noting: “We do not after all differ with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the State as the *aim*.”

It is difficult to discern the tendentiousness from the tendency of the aforementioned statements, given that Marx and Engels had to struggle with a strong Proudhonian and Bakuninist current and that Lenin in 1917 saw the political necessity of an alliance between the Bolsheviks, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (influenced by *maximalism*) and the anarchists. It seems certain, however, while not excluding bias in the form and timing of those statements, these corresponded to a real tendency. The affirmation of the extinction of the State is too closely connected, too inevitably derivable from the Marxist conception of the nature and origins of the State, to attribute an absolutely opportunistic character to it.

What is the State for Marx and Engels? It is a political power in the service of preserving social privileges and economic exploitation.

In the preface to the third edition of Marx’s work *The Civil War in France*, Engels wrote:

According to the [Hegelian] philosophical notion, the State is the “realisation of the idea” or the Kingdom of God on earth, translated into philosophical terms, the sphere in which eternal truth and justice is or should be realised. And from this follows a superstitious reverence for the State and everything connected with it, which takes roots the more readily as people from their childhood are accustomed to imagine that the affairs and interests common to the whole of society could not be looked after otherwise than as they have been looked after in the past, that is, through the State and its well-paid officials. And people think they have taken quite an extraordinary bold step forward when they have rid themselves of belief in hereditary monarchy and swear by the democratic republic. In reality, however, the State is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the proletariat, just like the [Paris] Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at the

earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation, reared in new and free social conditions, will be able to throw the entire lumber of the State on the scrap heap.

Marx (in *The Poverty of Philosophy*) says that, after the abolition of classes has been accomplished, “there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society.”

That the State is reduced to a *repressive* power over the proletariat and to a *conservative* power is a partial thesis, whether we examine the State anatomically or we examine it physiologically. In the State, the government of men is linked with the administration of things: and it is this second activity which ensures its permanence. Governments change. The State remains. And the State is not always a function of bourgeois power: as when it imposes laws, promotes reforms, creates institutions at odds with the interests of the privileged classes and supports, instead, the interests of the proletariat. The State is not only the gendarme, the judge, the minister. It is also the bureaucracy, as powerful, and sometimes more powerful, than the government. Today in Italy, the fascist State is something more complex than a police body and guardian of bourgeois interests, because it is linked by an umbilical cord to a group of political and corporatist cadres having their own interests, which do not always and never entirely coincide with the class that brought fascism to power and which the fascist dictatorship serves to stay in power.

Marx and Engels faced the bourgeois phase of the State and Lenin faced the Russian State in which the game of democracy was minimal. All the Marxist definitions of the State give an impression of being partial; the structure of the contemporary State cannot enter the framework of traditional definitions.

Marx and Engels also formulated a partial theory of the origin of the State. Expressed in the words of Engels, it goes like this: “At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the split of society into classes, the State became a necessity owing to this split. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes not only will have ceased to be a necessity, but will become a positive hindrance to

production. They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them the State will inevitably fall.” (*Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*)

Engels reverted to Hobbes’s philosophy of natural law, adopting its terminology and merely substituting for the necessity to tame *homo homini lupus* the necessity to regulate the conflict between classes. The State would have arisen, according to Marx and Engels, when classes had already formed and it would have been born as a class organ. Arturo Labriola (*Au-delà du capitalisme et du socialisme*, Paris 1931) says on this issue:

These issues of “origins” are always very complicated. Common sense would advise throwing some light on them and tracing the materials that concern them, without deluding ourselves that we will ever be able to solve them. The idea of being able to have a theory of the “origins” of the State is a fiction. All that can be expected is to indicate a few elements which in historical order probably contributed to creating it. That the birth of classes and the birth of the State must have a relationship between them is obvious, especially when we remember the predominant role that the State had in the rise of capitalism.

According to Labriola, the scientific study of the genesis of capitalism “confers a truly unsuspected character of realism to the anarchist theses on the abolition of the State.” And again:

The extinction of capitalism as a result of the extinction of the State seems far more likely that the extinction of the State as a result of the extinction of capitalism.

This seems evident from research by Marxists themselves when they are serious studies, like that of Paul Louis in *Le travail dans le monde romain* (Paris, 1912). It is clear from this book that the Roman capitalist class was formed as a parasite of the State and therefore protected by the State. From brigand generals to governors, tax gatherers to wealthy families, custom officials to army suppliers, the Roman bourgeoisie was formed through war, State interventionism in the economy, taxation, etc. far more than by other means. And if we examine the interdependence between the State and capitalism, we see that the latter has profited largely from the former for State and not clearly capitalist interests. So much so

It is from this conviction that the State was and is the father of capitalism, and not only its natural ally, that we derive the belief that the destruction of the State is the prerequisite for the disappearance of classes and their non-reappearance.

that the development of the State precedes the development of capitalism. The Roman Empire was already a very large and complex organisation when Roman capitalism was still managed by the family. Paul Louis does not hesitate to proclaim: "Ancient capitalism was born from war." The first capitalists, in fact, were generals and tax collectors. The entire history of the formation of *fortunes* is a history in which the State is present.

It is from this conviction that the State was and is the father of capitalism, and not only its natural ally, that we derive the belief that the destruction of the State is the prerequisite for the disappearance of classes and their non-reappearance.

In his essay on *The Modern State*, Kropotkin noted:

To ask an institution which represents a historical growth that it serves to destroy the privileges that it strove to develop is to acknowledge you are incapable of understanding what a historical growth is in the life of societies. It is to ignore this general rule of all organic nature, that new functions require new organs, and that they need to develop themselves.¹

Arturo Labriola, in the book cited above, observes in turn:

If the State is a conserving power with respect to the class that dominates it, it is not the disappearance of this class that makes the State disappear but it is the disappearance of the State, which is specific to the anarchist critique, which, from this point of view, is much more accurate than the Marxist critique. As long as the State conserves a class, that class does not disappear. The stronger the State becomes, the stronger the class protected by the State, that is to say, the more powerful its life-force becomes and the more secure its existence. Now a strong class is a class more highly differentiated from other classes. To the extent that the existence of the State depends on the existence of classes, the very fact of the State – if Engelsian theory is true – determines the indefinite existence of classes and therefore of itself as a State.

A grand, decisive confirmation of the accuracy of our thesis on the State generating capitalism is offered by the USSR, where State socialism promotes the emergence of new classes.

The State and Classes

Camillo Berneri

Guerra di Classe, 17 October 1936²

Lenin in 1921 defined the Soviet Russian State as "a workers' State with a bureaucratic deformation in a country with a peasant majority." This definition must today be modified in the following way: the Soviet State is a bureaucratic State in which a bureaucratic bourgeoisie and a petit-bourgeois working class are in the process of formation while the agrarian bourgeoisie still survives.

Boris Souvarine in his book on *Stalin* (Paris, 1935) gives this portrayal of the social aspect of the USSR:

So-called Soviet society rests on its own method of exploitation of man by man, of the producer by the bureaucracy, of the technician by the political power. For the individual appropriation of surplus value is substituted a collective appropriation by the State, a deduction made for the parasitic consumption of functionaries... official documentation leaves us no doubt: the bureaucracy takes an undue part of the produce, corresponding more

or less to the old capitalist profit, of the subjugated classes, which it submits to an inexorable sweating system. There has thus been formed around the Party a new social category, interested in maintaining the established order, and perpetuating the State of which Lenin predicted the extinction with the disappearance of classes. If the Bolsheviks have not the legal ownership of the instruments of production and the means of exchange, they retain the State machinery which allows them all the spoils by varied circuitous means. The mere freedom from restriction in imposing retail costs several times higher than manufacturing costs, contains the true secret of bureaucracies technical exploitation, characterised moreover by administrative and military oppression.

Bonapartism is no more than the political reflection of the tendency of this new bourgeoisie to conserve and enhance its own socio-economic situation. In the 1935

¹ "Can the State be used for the Emancipation of the Workers?", Chapter XI, Part IV, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, 352. (Editor)

² "The State and the Classes", *The Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, No. 4, 1978. We have revised the translation and included the two-thirds missing from the original. (*Black Flag*)

appeal to the world proletariat by the Bolshevik-Leninist Tambov, one can read:

The aim of the party bureaucracy consists solely of the isolation and torture of opponents until they publicly become worthless, that is to say apolitical wretches. The bureaucrat, in fact, does not wish you to be a true Communist. He does not need that. For him that is harmful and mortally dangerous. The bureaucrat does not want independent Communists, he wants miserable slaves, self-seekers and citizens of the worst sort...

Would it be possible that under a true proletarian power the struggle against bureaucracy, against the thieves and brigands who appropriate with impunity the goods of the soviets, who are the cause of the loss of hundreds of thousands of men through cold and famine; would it be possible that a struggle or a simple protest against these wretches be considered as a counterrevolutionary offence?

The cruel struggle between the “revolutionary” oppositions and “conservative” orthodoxy is a phenomenon that is quite natural in the setting of State Socialism. The Leninist opposition has good reason to point out to the world proletariat the deformations, deviations and degenerations of Stalinism, but if the oppositional diagnosis is almost always correct, the oppositional aetiology is almost always inadequate. Stalinism is only the consequence of the Leninist set up of the political problem of the Social Revolution. To oppose the effects without going back to the causes, to the original sin of Bolshevism (bureaucratic dictatorship as a function of the dictatorship of the Party), is equivalent to arbitrarily simplifying the chain of causality which leads from the dictatorship of Lenin without any great breaks in continuity. Liberty within a party which denies the free play of competition amongst the progressive parties within the soviet system would today be a spectacular miracle. Workers’ hegemony [over the peasant majority], Bolshevik absolutism, State Socialism, industrial fetishism: these seeds of corruption could only produce poisoned fruit such as the absolutism of a faction and the hegemony of a [new] class.

Trotsky in the role of Saint George struggling with the Stalinist dragon cannot make us forget the Trotsky of Kronstadt. The responsibility for current Stalinism goes back to the formulation and practice of the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party in the same way as to the illusion of the extinction of the State as a fruit of the

In history there is no absurdity. An autocratic bureaucracy is a class, therefore it is not absurd that it should exist in a society where classes remain: bureaucratic and proletarian. If the USSR were a “classless” society, it would also be a society without a bureaucratic autocracy, which is the natural fruit of the permanent existence of the State.

disappearance of classes under the influence of State Socialism.

When Trotsky wrote (6 September 1935): “The historical absurdity of an autocratic bureaucracy in a ‘classless’ society cannot and will not endlessly endure,” he was saying an absurd thing about the “historical absurdity”. In history there is no absurdity. An autocratic bureaucracy is a class, therefore it is not absurd that it should exist in a society where classes remain: bureaucratic and proletarian. If the USSR were a “classless” society, it would also be a society without a bureaucratic autocracy, which is the natural fruit of the permanent existence of the State.

It is because of its function as the party controlling the State machine that the Bolshevik Party became a centre of attraction for careerist petty bourgeois elements and for lazy and opportunist workers.

The bureaucratic wound has not been opened and infected by Stalinism: it is contemporaneous with the Bolshevik dictatorship.

Here are some news items from 1918 and 1919, published by the Bolshevik press. *Vetsertsia Isvestia* of 23 August 1918 talking of the disorganisation of the postal service, states that despite the 60% decrease in correspondence the number of employees had increased by 100% compared to the period before the Revolution.

Pravda of 11 February 1919 points out the continual creation of new offices, of new bureaucratic institutions, for which officials are named and remunerated before these new institutions begin to operate. “And all these new employees,” says *Pravda* of 22 February 1919,

“overrun and occupy entire palaces, when, seeing their number, a few rooms would be enough.”

Work is slow and obstructionist, even in offices with industrial functions. “An employee of the Commissariat of Lipetzk,” relates *Isvestia* of 29 November 1918, “in order to buy nine boxes of nails at the price of 417 roubles had to fill in twenty forms, obtain ten orders and thirteen signatures, and he had to wait two days to get them as the bureaucrats who should have signed could not be found.”

Pravda (No. 281) denounced “the invasion of our party by petty bourgeois elements”, making requisitions “for personal use.” In the 2 March 1919 issue, the same paper states:

We must recognise that recently comrades who are in the Communist Party for their first year have begun to make use of methods that are inadmissible in our Party. Making it their duty not to take any notice of the advice of local organisations, believing themselves charged to act personally on the basis of their rather limited authority, they order and command without rhyme or reason. From the imposing of a number of abuses with their individual dictatorship comes a latent discontent between the centre and the periphery.

Speaking of the province of Pensa, the Commissary of the Interior Narkomvnutel said:

The local representatives of the central government conduct themselves not as representatives of the proletariat, but like true dictators. A series of facts and proofs asset that these strange representatives go armed to the poorest of people, taking from them the necessities of life, threatening to kill them, and when they protest, they beat them with sticks. The possessions they have thus requisitioned are resold, and with the money they receive, they organise scenes of drunkenness and orgies. (*Wecernia-Isvestia*, 12 February 1919)

Another Bolshevik, Meserikov, wrote:

each one of us sees each day innumerable cases of violence, of abuse of power, of corruption, of laziness etc. All of us know that into our soviet institutions, cretins and incompetents have entered *en masse*. We all regret their presence in the ranks of the Party, but we do nothing to clean ourselves of these impurities.

...If an institution chases out an incompetent, they straight away find another to replace him, and they entrust him with a responsible post. Often instead of punishment he gets promotion. (*Pravda*, 5 February 1919).

In a speech given at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (18-23 March 1919) Lenin acknowledged:

In places careerists and adventurers have attached themselves to us like leeches, people who call themselves Communists and are deceiving us, and who have wormed their way into our ranks because the Communists are now in power, and because the more honest government employees refused to come and work with us on account of their retrograde ideas, while careerists have no ideas, and no honesty. Their only aim is to make a career.

The Bolshevik government revealed itself to be

powerless in the face of a bureaucracy which is super-abundant, parasitic, despotic and dishonest.

Five million bureaucrats [in 1921] became nearly ten million. In 1925 there were 400,000 officials in the Co-operatives (*Pravda*, 20 April 1926), In 1927 the Russian Federation of Food Workers had some 4,287 officials for 451,720 members, and the Moscow Metalworkers Union some 700 officials for

130,000 union cards. (*Truda*, 12 June 1928).

This plethoric bureaucracy does not correspond to intense and efficient administrative activity. “The directorate of the soviet system from the bottom to the highest degree has a function of paper-shuffling. The provincial committee usually sends out one or two circulars every day on every possible and imaginable question and judges that it has thus fulfilled its obligations.” “The number of circulars giving directives which are received by local cells varies between 30 and 100 per month.” (*Pravda*, 7 June 1925).



Stalingrad Tractor Plant (1937)

Another official, Dzerjinsky, wrote:

They demand from enterprises the most varied sort of information, reports and statistical facts, which in our system form a torrent of paper which obliges us to employ an excessive number of personnel and damages our real work; a sea of papers is created in which hundreds of people are entangled; the situation of the accounts and statistics is quite simply catastrophic; businesses wearily bear the burden of providing information on dozens and hundreds of different forms; the accounts are now measured in *poods*. (*Pravda*, 23 June 1926).

A forestry bureau demands within a week the numbers of partridges, hares, bears, wolves, etc. living in the sectors of the officials asked (*Krasnaia Gazeta*, 14 May 1926). The provincial directorate of agriculture of Viatka stipulates that the cantonal executive committees count the earth worms found in the fields (*Pravda*, 1 March 1928).

The Leather memo by the Commissariat of Trade contained 27,000 questions; a Ukrainian agriculture memo contains 20,000 (*Isvestia*, 11 December 1927). A local executive committee sends a questionnaire to village soviets with 348 questions, and this during the wheat harvest (*Pravada*, 18 April 1928). The Institute of Experimental Agronomy issues a 6-metre-long survey full of questions about tractors (*Diednota*, 14 April 1929).

At the Fifteenth Party Congress, Stalin cited the case, amongst many others, of a maimed man who had to wait seven years for a prosthetic limb. A worker who makes a complaint against the management of a company must pass through 24 bureaucratic procedures (*Trud*, 14 January 1928) A workshop has to complete 210 forms for every worker hired, and it is known that the workforce has a high turnover. (*Trud*, 5 August 1928) A watch imported into the USSR has to go through 142 items of paperwork (*Isvestia*, 9 December 1928) An inventor, who went to Moscow to test his discovery, does the paperwork to obtain a room. After a year and a half, he did not get it but he put together a collection of the bureaucratic forms related to that process: 400 documents (*Vetchernaia Moska*, June 1929).

Party officials are overburdened with duties, Kamenev, before being expelled, was a member of the party's Central Committee and Politburo, president of the Council of Labour and Defence, president of the Moscow Soviet, deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, member of the collective presidency of the Supreme Economic Council, member of the Central Executive Committee of the Union and the Executive Committee of the Soviet Republic, Director of the Lenin Institute, co-editor of *Bolshevik*,

the party's official magazine, and certainly this list of his positions is not complete. Even younger leaders are overworked. A young communist had 16 positions. (*Pravda*, 21 March 1925).

With such a plethora of bureaucracy, with such a complicated administrative machine, with so little control, it is natural that theft is one of the characteristics of Russia's bureaucratic life. Another union official, Dogadov, reported to the central union council in 1925 that nearly half (47%) of the Russian trade union confederation's budget (70 million roubles) had been devoured by officials (*Pravda*, 9 December 1926). In one year, 5 million 323 thousand roubles were squandered in the co-operatives (*Torgovo-Promychlenaia Gazeta*, 23 May 1926) All the Bolshevik press in the following years is full of reports on bureaucratic waste in the co-operatives. Tomsy, then president of the Russian trade union confederation, said at the eight congress of the Central Union:

Where is it stolen... Everywhere: in factory committees, in mutual help societies, in clubs, in regional, departmental and district branches; everywhere, in a word. There is even an entry entitled "unknown", which means it is stolen somewhere, but we do not know where. And who steals? For most of our trade unions, I must say that the presidents are capitalists. How are the thieves divided from a political point of view? The division is almost equal between communists as amongst people whose political orientation is "unknown". As far as the youth are concerned, the situation is distressing. Union activists do not include more than 9% of young people in any echelon, but amongst thieves it is 12.2%.

In November 1935, *Il Risveglio de Ginebra* published a letter from a hotel employee which, amongst other things, said:

In March 1925, during an international fair in Lyon, I was at the Nouvel Hotel, where the owner, a hundred percent fascist, had received with honours the Soviet mission. They occupied the best rooms, which the owner charged 120 francs per person per day, prices which at the time were exorbitant, but which the Bolsheviks paid without discussion. And, well, I can verify that they had the same vices as the Russian nobility. At dinner, at the table, they were drunk with cognac, and in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat they were served the best wines from Bordeaux.

"Decorum" leads to lavish and extravagant habits: these habits lead to corruption.

Pravda of 16 October 1936 reported two cases of bureaucratic corruption worth mentioning: "Foreign Industry", a part of the People's Commissariat of

Foreign Trade, had received money for illicit purposes from the Ukraine trust, from the fuel department of the Commissariat of Roads and Communications, and from other economic organisations; “Light Industry”, a part of the Commissariat of the same name, had received money, also for illicit purposes, from the administration of Kiev’s local industry, from the cotton department of the Commissariat of Agriculture, from the cotton trust and the trust of hides and skins.

The Russian newspapers are lacking relevant news about the corruption of the bureaucracy and are full of reports concerning “the purge of the party”. Indeed, the purge involves the elimination of elements that were not “following the line”. Here are some typical cases, excerpted from the *Bolchevistskaia Petchat* (numbers 13 and 14 of 1935). The chief editor of the Saratov *Kommunist*, secretary of the local branch of the Communist Party, was dismissed, not only because that newspaper followed a “wrong political line” but also because the chief of staff, Davidodov, had demonstrated “criminal neglect” by hiring proof-readers and editors of a non-proletarian or prejudiced origin: Goverdovski “whose parents had been expelled from Moscow”; citizeness Znamenskaia, “daughter of a white officer killed during the civil war”; the citizeness Gonciarenev, expelled from Moscow as a counter-revolutionary; the scholar Landi, “expelled from the party for complete degradation (sic), ex-noble, having an aunt in Poland”; the photographer Kruscinski, expelled from the party for going to Latvia without authorisation and having relatives in that country; the citizeness Ronguis, relative of a woman imprisoned for participation in a banned association.

The somewhat independent officials, and they are the most honest and most capable, are systematically eliminated, while the opportunists, almost all corrupt and incompetent, remain in their post.

Even party positions have become reliable sinecures. The rotation of leaders is now abolished. While the statutes of the Russian Communist Party stipulate that the leaders of the party, the unions and the soviets should change every year, a certain Kakhiani was secretary of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party for eight years in a row.

This state of affairs encourages the consolidation of the bureaucracy and the technocracy as a class.

In his book *Vers l’autre flamme* (Paris, 1929), Panait Istrat put relevant numbers to this situation, describing the different proportions which the different classes of the Russian people had saved and deposited in bank accounts in 1926: 12% were workers’ savings, 3.6% were peasants’, while officials and other unspecified categories had deposited 56.7%

This phenomenon of the reconstitution of classes “by means of the State” was foreseen by us and virulently denounced by us.

The new technical-bureaucratic bourgeoisie is supported by the category of foremen and dedicated workers or “stakhanovites”.

Unskilled workers constitute the true industrial proletariat. In 1935 the average wage of that category varied from 100 to 150 roubles per month, a starvation wage when you consider food prices in the same year. In Moscow, for example, a kilogramme of white bread cost from 2 to 6 roubles, meat cost from 10 to 15 roubles per kilogramme and a kilogramme of butter from 28 to 30 roubles. A tram ticket [cost] from 10 to 25 kopeks (i.e., a quarter of a rouble) and an underground ticket 50 kopecks.

The *Isvestia* of 9 May 1935 announced that a head of the blast furnace workshops of Krivoy Rog (Ukraine) had received 3,300 roubles as a salary (April). *Humanité*, the Paris Bolshevik newspaper, in its issue of 16 December 1935 spoke of a worker who had received 4,361 roubles in 24 days and of worker who had received 233 roubles for a single working day. On 15 December 1935, *Humanité* announced that the USSR savings bank had a reserve of 4,256,000 roubles more than that of 1 December 1934. In 1936 (from 1 January to 11 May) total savings increased by 403 million roubles, compared to 261 million for the corresponding period of 1935: Messrs Lewis and Abramson, who were in Russia on behalf of B.I.T., recently published a report confirming the increasing differentiation in industrial wages:

In the metallurgical industry, the wage scale most often applied comprises eight classes (or categories). The rate of the least qualified worker is represented by the coefficient 1, that of the next class by the coefficient 1.15, and, progressively, 1.32; 1.52; 1.83; 2.17; 2.61; finally, 3.13.

Piecework, wage scales, bonus systems: all this is creating a petit-bourgeoisie that supports the technical-bureaucratic bourgeoisie and delays the “third revolution”, predicted by the revolutionary opposition, consolidating the dictatorship of a coterie.

This phenomenon of the reconstitution of classes “by means of the State” was foreseen by us and virulently denounced by us. The Leninist opposition did not succeed in deepening their aetiological examination of the phenomenon, and it is because of this that they did not come to revise the Leninist position in the face of the problems of the State and revolution.

Abolition and Extinction of the State

Camillo Berneri

Guerra di Class, 24 October 1936¹

Whereas we anarchists desire the extinction of the State through the social revolution and the establishment of a new autonomist-federal order, the Leninists desire the destruction of the bourgeois State but they also want the conquest of the State by the “proletariat.” The “proletarian” State – they tell us – is a semi-State since the complete State is the bourgeois one, destroyed by the social revolution. And even this semi-State would die, according to the Marxists, a natural death.

This theory of the extinction of the State which is the basis of Lenin’s book *The State and Revolution* has been derived by him from Engels who in *Anti-Dühring* says:

The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production in the first instance into State property. But, in doing this, it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the State as State. Society thus far, based upon class antagonisms, had need of the State, that is, of an organisation of the particular class, which was pro tempore the exploiting class, for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, and, therefore, especially, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited classes in the condition of oppression corresponding with the given mode of production (slavery, serfdom, wage-labour). The State was the official representative of society as a whole; the gathering of it together into a visible embodiment. But it was this only in so far as it was the State of that class which itself represented, for the time being, society as a whole: in ancient times, the State of slave-owning citizens; in the Middle Ages, the feudal lords; in our own time, the bourgeoisie. When at last it becomes the real representative of the whole of society, it renders itself unnecessary. As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a State, is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the State really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society – the

taking possession of the means of production in the name of society – this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a State. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The State is not “abolished”. *It dies out.* This gives the measure of the value of the phrase “a free people’s State”, both as to its justifiable use at times by agitators, and as to its ultimate scientific insufficiency; and also of the demands of the so-called anarchists for the abolition of the State out of hand.

Between the State-Today and the Anarchy-Tomorrow there would be the semi-State. The State which dies is the “State as State” that is to say, the bourgeois State. It is in this sense that one must take the phrase which at first sight seems to contradict the proposition of the socialist State. “The first act by virtue of which the State really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society – the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society – this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a State.” Taken literally and out of context, this phrase would signify the temporal simultaneity of economic socialisation and the extinction of the State. In the same way also, taken literally and out of context, the phrases relating to the proletariat destroying itself as proletariat in the act of seizing the power of the State would indicate the lack of need for the “Proletarian State.” In reality, Engels under the influence of “dialectical style” expresses himself in an unfortunate manner. Between the bourgeois State today and the socialist-anarchist tomorrow, Engels recognises a chain of successive eras during which the State and the proletariat remain. It is to throw some light on the dialectical obscurity that he adds the final allusion to the anarchists who want the State to be abolished “out of hand” that is to say, who do not allow the transitory period as regards the State, whose intervention according to Engels becomes superfluous, “in one domain after another” that is to say, gradually.

It seems to me that the Leninist position on the problem of the State coincides exactly with that taken by Marx and Engels when one interprets the spirit of the writings of these latter without letting oneself be deceived by the ambiguity of certain turns of phrase.

¹ “Abolition and Extinction of the State”, *The Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, No. 4, 1978. We have revised the translation. (Black Flag)

The State is, in Marxist-Leninist political thought, the temporary political instrument of socialisation, temporary in the very essence of the State, which is that of an organism for the domination of one class by another. The socialist State, by abolishing classes, commits suicide. Marx and Engels were metaphysicians who frequently came to schematise historical processes from love of system.

“The Proletariat” which seizes the State, bestowing on it the complete ownership of the means of production and destroying itself as proletariat and the State “as the State” is a metaphysical fantasy, a political hypostasis of social abstractions.

It is not the Russian proletariat that has seized the power of the State, but rather the Bolshevik Party which has not destroyed the proletariat at all and which has on the other hand created a State Capitalism, a new bourgeois class, a set of interests bound to the Bolshevik State which tend to preserve themselves by preserving the State.

The extinction of the State is further away than ever in the USSR where State interventionism is ever more immense and oppressive, and where classes are not disappearing.

The Leninist programme for 1917 included these points: the discontinuance of the police and the standing army, abolition of the professional bureaucracy, elections for all public positions and offices, revocability of all officials, equality of bureaucratic salaries with workers’ wages, the maximum of democracy, peaceful competition amongst the parties within the soviets, abolition of the death penalty. Not a single one of the points in this programme has been achieved.

We have the USSR a government, a dictatorial oligarchy. The Central Committee (19 members) dominates the Russian Communist Party which in turn dominates the USSR.

All those who are not [loyal] “subjects” are charged with being counter-revolutionaries. The Bolshevik revolution has engendered a Saturnal government, which deports [David] Riazanov founder of the Marx

Engels institute, at the time when he is preparing the complete and original edition of *Capital*; which condemns to death [Grigory] Zinoviev, president of the Communist International, [Lev] Kamenev and many others amongst the best propagators of Leninism, which excludes from the party, then exiles, then expels from the USSR a “duce” like Trotsky, which inveighs against eighty percent of the supporters of Leninism.

In 1920 Lenin wrote very highly of self-criticism within the Communist Party, but he spoke of “errors” recognised by the “party” and not of the right of the citizen to denounce the errors, or those that seemed to him to be such, of the governing party. When Lenin was

dictator, whoever caused a stir in denouncing the same mistakes which Lenin himself recognised in retrospect risked or underwent ostracism, prison or death. Bolshevik Sovietism was an atrocious joke even for Lenin who vaunted the god-like power of the Central



Members of the Presidium of the Cheka (1919)

Committee of the Russian Communist Party over all the USSR in saying: “No important political or organisational question is decided by any State institution in our republic without the guidance of the Party’s Central Committee.”

Whoever says “proletarian State” says “State Capitalism” whoever says “dictatorship of the proletariat” says “dictatorship of the Communist Party”; whoever says “strong government” says “Tsarist oligarchy of politicians.”

Leninists, Trotskyists, Bordighists, Centrists are only divided by different tactical ideas. All Bolsheviks, to whatever current or faction they belong are supporters of political dictatorship and State Socialism. All are united by the formula: “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” an ambiguous phrase which corresponds to “The People Sovereign” of Jacobinism. Whatever Jacobinism is, it is certain to cause the Social Revolution to deviate. And when it deviates, the shadow of a Bonaparte looms.

One would have to be blind not to see that the Bonapartism of Stalin is merely the horrible and living shadow of Leninist dictatorship.

Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism

Camillo Berneri

Guerra di Class, 5 November 1936¹

The *Dictatorship of the Proletariat* is a Marxist conception. According to Lenin “only he is a Marxist who *extends* the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*.” Lenin was right: the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is, in effect, for Marx no more than the conquest of the State by the proletariat which, organised into a politically dominant class, leads, by way of State Socialism, to the elimination of all classes.

In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* written by Marx in 1875 we read:

Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other.

Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the State can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.

The *Communist Manifesto* (1847) says:

the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class...

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class.

Lenin in *State and Revolution* only confirms the Marxist theory:

The proletariat needs the State only temporarily. We do not after all differ with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the State as the *aim*. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we

must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources, and methods of State power *against* the exploiters, just as the temporary dictatorship of the oppressed class is necessary for the abolition of classes.

The State withers away insofar as there are no longer any capitalists, any classes, and, consequently, no *class* can be *suppressed*. But the State has not yet completely withered away, since the still remains the safeguarding of “bourgeois law”, which sanctifies actual inequality. For the State to wither away completely, complete communism is necessary.

The Proletarian State is conceived of as a temporary political structure destined to destroy the classes. Gradual

expropriation and the idea of State Capitalism are at the basis of this conception. Lenin’s economic program: of the eve of the October Revolution ends with this phrase: “Socialism is nothing more than a State Socialist Monopoly”.²

According to Lenin:

The distinction between Marxists and the anarchists is this: (1) The former, while aiming at the complete abolition of the State, recognise

Marxists... do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but rather the conquest of the State by the party which presumes to represent the proletariat.

¹ “Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism”, *The Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, No. 4, 1978. We have revised the translation. (*Black Flag*)

² Presumably a reference to Lenin’s claim that “socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly *which is made to serve the interests of the whole people* and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly.” (“The Impending Catastrophe and how to Combat It”). (*Black Flag*)

that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution, as the result of the establishment of socialism, which leads to the withering away of the State. The latter want to abolish the State completely overnight, not understanding the conditions under which the State can be abolished. (2) The former recognise that after the proletariat has won political power it must completely destroy the old State machine and replace it by a new one consisting of an organisation of the armed workers, after the type of the Commune. The latter, while insisting on the destruction of the State machine, have a very vague idea of what the proletariat will put in its place and how it will use its revolutionary power. The anarchists even deny that the revolutionary proletariat should use the State power, they reject its revolutionary dictatorship. (3) The former demand that the proletariat be trained for revolution by utilising the present State. The anarchists reject this.

Lenin misrepresents things. Marxists do not propose “the complete abolition of the State” but foresee the natural extinction of the State as a consequence of the destruction of the classes by the means of “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, that is to say State Socialism, whereas Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which suppresses, with classes, the State. Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but rather the conquest of the State by the party which presumes to represent the proletariat. Anarchists accept the use of political power by the proletariat, but this political power is understood as [being formed by] the entire corpus of communist

management systems – trade union organisations, communal institutions, both regional and national – freely constituted outside and against the political monopoly of a party and aiming at minimal administrative centralisation. Lenin, for polemical purposes, arbitrarily simplified the facts about the current difference between the Marxists and us.

The Leninist phrase, the Marxists “demand that the proletariat be trained for revolution by utilising the present State” is the basis of Leninist Jacobinism just as it is the basis of Parliamentary Government and Social Reformist Ministerialism.

At the International Socialist Congresses of London (1896) and Paris (1900) it was established that only parties and workers’ organisations which recognised the principle of the “socialist conquest of the public authorities by the proletariat organised into a class party” could join the Socialist International. The split came about at this point, but in effect the exclusion of the Anarchists from the International was only a triumph of Ministerialism, opportunism, and “Parliamentary Cretinism”.

The anti-parliamentary syndicalists, as well as certain communist factions referring to Marxism, rejected the pre-revolutionary or a-revolutionary Socialist conquest of the public authorities.

Whoever looks back on the history of Socialism after the exclusion of the Anarchists can see for themselves the gradual degeneration of Marxism as a political philosophy through the interpretations and practices of the Social-Democrats. Leninism constitutes, without any doubt, a return to the revolutionary spirit of Marxism, but it also constitutes a return to the fallacies and abstractions of Marxist metaphysics.



Lenin, for polemical purposes, arbitrarily simplified the facts about the current difference between the Marxists and us.

Malatesta on War and National Self-Determination:

Lessons for Anarchists Considering the Ukrainian War

Wayne Price

There is a debate among anarchists in the U.S. and internationally about the proper approach to the Ukrainian war with the Russian state. Some (such as myself) express solidarity with the Ukrainian people against the invasion by the Russian Federation. (The “Ukrainian people” are mostly the working class, lower middle class, farmers, and the poor.) Others reject support for the Ukrainians. Ukraine, they point out, has a capitalist economy, has a state, is a nation, and gets aid from U.S. imperialism and its NATO allies (all of which is true).

Both sides have been known to cite the Italian anarchist, Errico Malatesta (1853-1932). He was a younger friend and comrade of Bakunin and Kropotkin, regarded as “founders” of anarchism. “Malatesta, whose sixty-year career is little known outside of Italy, stands with Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin as one of the great revolutionaries of international anarchism.” (Pernicone 1993; p. 3)

Since the Russian military invaded Ukraine, I have engaged in many Internet debates with opponents of support for the Ukrainian people (not the state but the people). Some arguments have been with state socialists who are essentially on the side of the Russian invaders. Virtually no anarchists, however, have illusions in Putin’s Russia. (Nor do they have illusions in the benevolence of U.S. imperialism, unlike most liberals.) Yet many anarchists reject any support for the Ukrainian people, treating them as no better than the Russian invaders. (For my view, see Price 2022.)

A few writers have posted references to Malatesta’s opposition to World War I, claiming that this shows that a leading anarchist was opposed to “war” as such. During the First World War, most anarchists opposed both sides, but a minority supported the Allies. This minority included Kropotkin, the most respected anarchist thinker of his time! Malatesta wrote rebuttals to these pro-war anarchists. (See “Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles,” and “Pro-Government Anarchists,” in Malatesta 2014.)

He wrote, “[Anarchists] have always preached that the workers of all countries are brothers, and that the enemy—the ‘foreigner’—is the exploiter, whether born near us or in a far-off country.... We have always chosen our...companions-in-arms, as well as our enemies, because...of the position they occupy in the

social struggle, and never for reasons of race or nationality. We have always fought against patriotism...and we were proud of being internationalists....Now...the most atrocious consequences of capitalist and State domination should indicate, even to the blind, that we were in the right....” (Malatesta 2014; p. 380)

But in the same work, he wrote, “I am not a ‘pacifist.’... The oppressed are always in a state of legitimate self-defense, and have always the right to attack the oppressors.... There are wars that are necessary, holy wars, and these are wars of liberation, such as are generally ‘civil wars’—i.e., revolutions.” (same; p. 379)

In other words, all sides of a war among oppressors were to be opposed—such as the First World War between blocs of imperialist states (France-Britain-Russia-and later the U.S. vs. Germany-Austria-Turkey). But wars of the oppressed against oppressors were wars of liberation, to be supported. Nor did Malatesta limit this to class wars, such as revolutions by slaves, peasants, or modern workers. (This is sometimes expressed as “No War but Class War!”) He also included wars by oppressed nations.

Malatesta on National Liberation

In 1911, the Italian state, in competition with the Turkish empire, sought to conquer parts of north Africa. Malatesta denounced “the loot-and-pillage war that the Italian government meant to wage on the people of Libya.” (same; p. 353) But he did not condemn both sides.

“If, by some misfortune, a clash were to erupt between one people and another we stand with the people that are defending their independence.... It is the Arabs’ revolt against the Italian tyrant that is noble and holy.... We hope that the Italian people...will force a withdrawal from Africa upon its government; if not, we hope the Arabs may succeed in driving it out,” (same; p. 357) He did not support the politics of the Arabs’ rulers; but he was in solidarity with the Arab people and wanted them to drive out the Italian imperialists.

Another example: In 1900, Malatesta spent a brief period in Cuba. It was not that long after the Cuban War of Independence which had driven out the Spanish colonizers. In his talks (reprinted in Malatesta 2019;

pp. 218—237) he praised the Cuban anarchists who participated in the national struggle; he praised the Cuban workers who fought for their freedom; he warned of the establishment of a new state with its capitalist backers; and he warned of the U.S. imperialists taking the place of the Spanish.

“Permit me to send a greeting to the brave Cuban workers, white and black, born here or elsewhere.... I have long admired the selflessness and heroism with which they fought for their country’s freedom....” (same; p. 231)

“...My comrades’ thoughts on the issue of [Cuban] independence.... Anarchists, being the enemies of all governments and claiming the right to live and grow in total freedom for all ethnic and social groups, as well as for every individual, must necessarily oppose any actual government and side with any people that fights for their freedom.” (same; p. 233)

“We anarchists want Cuba’s freedom, just as we want that of all peoples: we want true freedom though. And for this we have fought and will continue to fight.” (same; p. 234)

Malatesta was fully aware of the limitations of Cuban independence. “Cubans have managed to reap very little from the expulsion of the Spanish government because the Spanish capitalists who exploit them remain here... [and] they remain subject to other capitalists, Cubans [and] Americans....” (same; p. 233) He warned that a new, capitalist, state was being formed, under the protection of the U.S.

Even within those limitations, he felt that the struggle had not been in vain. “There is something, though, that the Cubans have achieved, and that is the awareness that, having managed to drive Spanish rule out of Cuba by force, they will obtain by force whatever they aim for.” (same; p. 226) That is, they learned the possibility of revolution. The fight for full freedom in Cuba was not over. “The struggle will have only just begun and it will be necessary to continue it, unrelenting and without mercy, against every government and every exploiter.” (same; p.236)

Malatesta had an approach, a method of organizing. (See Price 2019.) Calling himself a “revolutionary anarchist-socialist,” he advocated that anarchists should participate in every popular movement for improving people’s lives, no matter how limited. At the same time, he advocated that revolutionary anarchists who agreed with each other should organize themselves to promote anarchism as a program and a vision within broader movements. He advocated that anarchists participate in unions, union-organizing, and strikes. But he opposed dissolving the anarchist movement into the labor movement (as he believed some anarcho-syndicalists proposed). Instead he wanted anarchist groups to be inside and outside the unions.

Similarly, he wanted Italian anarchists to participate in the anti-monarchist movement. He proposed to ally with the left wing of the movement, which was in favor of a popular revolution to overthrow the archaic Italian king. Malatesta was prepared to form a coalition with social democrats (mostly Marxists) who hoped to replace the king with an elected parliament, in which they would gradually move toward state socialism. Also with radical republicans, who just wanted to create a parliamentary democracy. In the course of a popular revolution, he hoped that the anarchists would be able to take it further than their allies originally wanted.

“By taking part in the [anti-monarchist] insurrection...and playing as large a part as we can, we would earn the sympathy of the risen people and would be in a position to push things as far as possible.... We must cooperate with the republicans, the democratic socialists, and any other anti-monarchist party to bring down the monarchy; but we must do so as anarchists, in the interests of anarchy, without disbanding our forces or mixing them in with others’ forces and without making any commitment beyond cooperation on military action,” (same; pp. 161-2) Italian anarchists and syndicalists attempted to carry out this approach in the fight against the rise of Fascism.

Malatesta’s method was summarized by a younger revolutionary, Eugenio Pellaco: “Wherever the people are to be found, that is where the anarchist must be, ready to propagandize and fight....” (Pernicone 1993; p. 273) (

Malatesta vs. Lenin on National Self-Determination

Malatesta’s views on national self-determination (or wars of national liberation) can be put in a broader context. A great many anarchists regard a recognition of the reality that nations exist—and that some are oppressed by others—is the same as “nationalism.” But national oppression is an objective problem (the denial of a people’s freedom to choose their own economic and political society). “Nationalism” is one program for dealing with the problem.

Anarchists reject the nationalist program. It calls for the unity of all classes within the nation, under the leadership of capitalist rulers, establishing a state, and denying the common interests of the workers of the oppressed nation with workers in other countries. Nor does it work. Even if the oppressed nation wins its political independence, it will still be dominated by the world market which is ruled by the big capitalist economies (imperialism). Politically it will still be dominated by the big states with their huge military forces. Anarchist-socialists believe that the only final solution to national oppression (that is, achieving national liberation) is through an international revolution of the world’s working class and all

oppressed people, establishing world-wide anarchy. Not the same as nationalism.

Many anarchists ignorantly believe that “national self-determination” is a Leninist concept. Actually it is one of the basic bourgeois-democratic demands raised in the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions of Britain (1640), the U.S. (1776), France (1789), and others. These included freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of religion, as well as land to those who use it, the right to bear arms, habeus corpus, the election of officials, no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, nationality, and so on. Of course, the capitalist class has never upheld its own democratic program in any consistent way; the implementation of these demands has always depended on the struggles of the exploited and oppressed against the ruling classes.

Lenin’s idea was for his party to do more than fight for improved workers’ wages and working conditions. It should defend the bourgeois-democratic rights of all oppressed, no matter how close or distant to the workers’ class struggle. This included big groups such as the peasants, or women—and nations oppressed by the Czarist empire or by other imperialisms. He also advocated supporting smaller groups such as censored writers, conscripted soldiers, religious minorities, etc.

The problem with Lenin’s program was not that it was too democratic!! The problem was that its democracy was only instrumental. Its aim was to get his party into centralized state power. Lenin was for land to the peasants, as a step toward the merger into large-scale state farms—supposedly voluntary, although that is not how Stalin or Mao carried it out. Similarly, if the socialists in the imperialist country supported the rights of workers in an oppressed country, then supposedly these workers would eventually trust the socialists and be willing to voluntarily merge—again, not how it worked out in practice (as in Ukraine).

By supporting national self-determination, Lenin hoped to eventually get to a merged, homogenized, and centralized one-world state—a true monstrosity. Anarchists are also internationalists, seeking the end of national states. But they are also decentralists and pluralists, regionalists and federalists. They work toward a world of many cultures, interacting through federations and networks—with no country dominating any other. This is the fundamental basis of anarchist support for national self-determination.

Ukraine

What light do Malatesta’s views cast on the Ukrainian war? Certainly he would oppose an inter-imperialist war between Russia and the U.S.A. and its NATO allies—if it ever got to that—just as he denounced World War I. The war between the Russian state and the people of Ukraine is another matter. Russia is an

imperialist aggressor. Ukraine is a weak, poor, and non-imperialist country.

As Malatesta shows, it is a distortion to say that real anarchists do not support oppressed peoples (nations, countries) against imperial oppressors. It is true that the Ukrainian people are not anarchists or socialists; they accept their state and capitalism. Does that mean that anarchists should punish them by refusing to defend them when attacked by a strong enemy which massacres their people and smashes their cities?

It is true that the Ukrainians have taken arms from the only source available, namely Western imperialists. This does not change the basic nature of the war—but the Ukrainians should be careful and not trust the U.S. Its government might betray them easily if its leaders thought it was worth it. (The Cubans got aid against Spain from the U.S. In itself this was not unprincipled. Their mistake was to not prepare to resist the U.S. as the war ended.)

As far as I can tell, Ukrainian anarchists have in fact followed Malatesta’s approach. Virtually the whole country has risen up to oppose the invasion. There is voluntary organizing throughout the nation, both military and providing social services, despite chaos and destruction. Ukrainian anarchists have not made fools of themselves by opposing the resistance of the people. Instead they have merged with the broader movement of Ukrainians. Some have provided non-military services through mutual aid groups, such as food distribution. Others have formed a military unit composed of anarchists and anti-fascists. Although they have a good deal of autonomy, they coordinate with the Territorial Defense Forces.

Some anarchists in other countries have criticized them for cooperating with the state. Of course it would be better if they could form a large scale anarchist militia or guerrilla force. But given the limitations of the anarchist groupings, this seems a reasonable tactic for now. Following Malatesta’s approach, participation in the nation-wide effort to beat back the Russian invaders may make it possible for anarchists to have a wider influence in the future Ukraine.

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Review: Workers Unite!

The International 150 years later

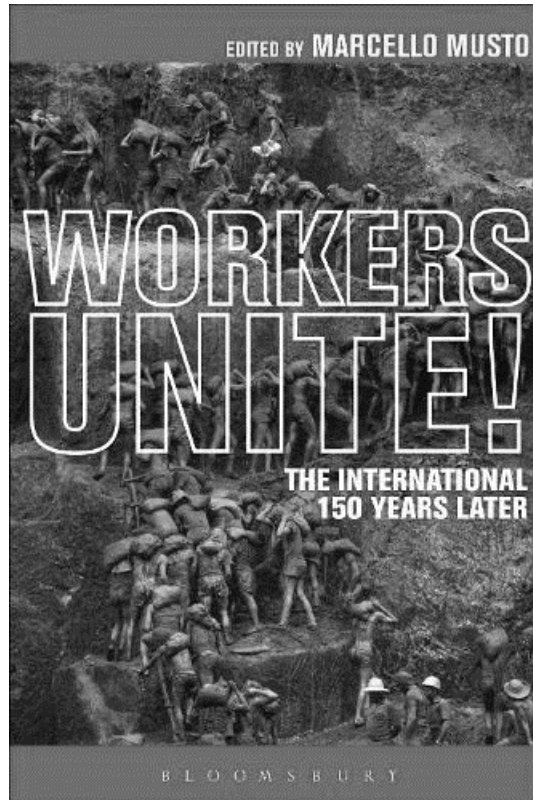
Iain McKay

The editor of *Workers Unite!* should be congratulated on his aim, namely to make the debates within the *International Working Men's Association* (IWMA) accessible for radicals active 150 years after it was founded in 1864. Yet while the book's subtitle states "150 years later" the introduction is written as if those 150 years do not exist. This is explained by the editor being a Marxist and so unwilling to admit that Marx helped push the workers' movement into a dead end.

The reason this book was produced is grand. Marcello Musto, the editor, notes that the "world of labour has suffered an epochal defeat" and "it is sunk in profound ideological subordination to the dominant system". The "task today, then, is to build again on the ruins, and direct familiarity with the original theorizations of the workers' movement may help significantly to reverse the trend." This is "the first motivation for this book" to offer "to a new and inexperienced generation [...] the beginnings of the long path taken" before and "not to obtain mere palliatives to the existing reality, so that the legacy of the International may live again in the critique of the present day." (xv)

This means including all texts and speeches which "outlined the alternative to the capitalist system". (xv) These are grouped into 13 parts, with those on "Trade Union and Strike", "Co-operative Movement and Credit", "Collective Ownership and the State" and "Political Organisation" having the most newly translated material and relevance for today's debates within the socialist movement.

This desire to discover and hopefully learn from the past will chime with many activists and any serious anarchist will be happy to see a work which presents 80



selections from the documents and debates of the IWMA written by "more than 30 internationalists, many of them ordinary workers" of which 33 are newly translated.¹ (xv, xvi) However, the problems with the book are in many ways the problem with the IWMA – namely Marxism. Musto is clearly a Marxist and must, even if the facts are at odds with reality, show "Marx's indispensable contribution" (xv) and in "the conflict between communists and anarchists" (xvi) sides with the former.

This means that the framework within which the book is constructed is fundamentally flawed. Marxist accounts of the IWMA generally express four things. First, a contempt of anarchist thinkers and

anarchism in general. Second, praise for Marx which, at best, borders on the embarrassing. Third, an unwillingness to consider what happened next after the apparent success of Marxism at the Hague Congress. Fourth, self-contradiction as the facts differ from the ideologically correct narrative. Musto's introduction is marked by all four and this influences the material selected and so the most interesting debates – such as the syndicalist contributions at the Basel congress – being mentioned almost in passing

Musto is right, in a sense, to state that the IWMA "gave birth to the prototype of all organisations of the workers' movement, which both reformists and revolutionaries take as their point of reference" (2) however given that the reformists (presumably the Second International) were originally revolutionaries before working in the system slowly changed them, we need to do far more than eulogise Marx as this book does. So while combating the "orthodox Soviet view" of Marx, Musto presents him as single-handedly

¹ The translations are of varying quality, for example the resolution on Resistance Societies (moved by Pindy at the 1869 Basle Congress) is entitled "Resolution on Resistance Funds" and the use of the official contemporary English

translation of the 1868 resolution on Collective Ownership hides the Proudhon-inspired terminology of the French original.

dragging the International forward (6) and in terms of texts, Marx (29 in total, 24 as sole author) and Engels (7 in total, 3 as sole author) get the bulk of the entries. Again we have the IWMA and its debates being little more than the background to the genius of Marx.

This can be seen when Musto describes the initial creation of the IWMA. Thankfully, he rejects the mythology that see so many proclaim it *Marx's* International and, correctly, notes that Marx played no role in its organising (which was actually done by British and French trade unionists, the latter followers of Proudhon). He, however, suggests a “third” grouping “in importance” at the meeting as those “grouped around” Marx, which he insultingly suggests were the only “anticapitalist” ones. He defines “anticapitalist” as being “opposed the existing system of production and espoused the necessity of political action to overthrow it.” (4) Yet the followers of Proudhon (the mutualists) even if they rejected “political action” opposed the capitalist system for as Musto himself notes they aimed for a society in which “the worker would be at once producer, capitalist and consumer” (13) based on “the founding of producer cooperatives and a central People’s Bank”. (19) Sadly, the ideas of Proudhon are not accurately recounted so reinforcing the foregone conclusion – Marxism is right.

This kind of selective reporting undermines the potential usefulness of this book and, as such, undermines its aim of giving current activists the material needed to be inspired by and learn from the past. This is the past already judged and its conclusions already found – with the appropriate texts selected or ignored to ensure that the reader sees that this is the only possible ones to draw. This does not get us far. For if it is true – and it is – that an “abyss separates the hopes of those times from the mistrust so characteristic of our own” (65) we need to be willing to admit that it was dug by those who pursued the Marxist agenda so clearly approved of by Musto. It is *not* enough to state “the workers’ movement adopted a socialist [i.e., Marxist] programme, expanded throughout Europe and then the rest of the world” and then complain that the “passion for politics among the workers who gathered in London in 1864 contrasts sharply with the apathy and

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resignation prevalent today” (65) when the one helped to produce the other.

To indicate the potential for today of revisiting the IWMA we need to bring out what Musto fails to mention or gets wrong thanks to his Marxist blinkers. Once we correct his mistakes (often, but not always, simply by quoting other words of his¹) and present what he misses out, it soon comes clear that it is not a case of Marx “winning every major conflict inside the organisation” (20) but rather one of Marx happening to be on the same side of a majority moving in roughly the same direction (socialisation of land and support for strikes) or using his position against the majority of the organisation (the imposition of “political action” in 1871-2). It is not the case that “partly through his own tenacity, partly through occasional splits, Marx’s thought became the hegemonic doctrine”. (6) Marx used his position to foster his prejudices onto the IWMA even when the majority clearly opposed him (the “splits” in question were usually Marx siding with a minority against a libertarian majority). Like the reader of this book, the International deserved better than to be reduced to that of a ladder used to place Marx onto his pedestal.

Proudhon: The missing piece of the jigsaw

As a Marxist, Musto cannot bring himself to do the research necessary to challenge his own assumptions about Proudhon’s ideas, their influence or their evolution. As such, he gets the debates within the International on socialisation wrong and cannot understand why Bakunin’s influence so quickly spread within it. This can be seen from his chapter entitled “Defeat of the mutualists” that summarises a debate which not only had mutualists on both sides but also whose conclusion reflects Proudhon’s ideas down to the very words used.

¹ Thus it is well known that Marx hand-picked the London Conference of 1871 yet Musto suggests that “[d]espite the efforts to make the event as representative as possible, it was in fact more in the way of an enlarged General Council.” (36) The reality is admitted on the next page when Musto writes that “Marx summoned all his energies [...] to check Bakunin’s growing influence.” (37) Similarly with the Hague Congress of the following year that when Musto contradicts

himself by first proclaiming it to be “the most representative gathering in the history of the International” (42) before admitting that the “representation of the delegates was indeed completely skewed, not reflecting the true relationship of forces within the organisation” and some “mandates were highly debatable” while others “had been delegated as members of the General Council and did not express the will of any section.” (43)

In terms of the first point, while Musto fails to mention it other writers on the International do note that the debate on land nationalisation was between self-proclaimed followers of the French anarchist. “Like the Parisians,” one book notes, “the Belgium socialists considered themselves mutualists. At Lausanne de Paepe had tried to support the case for land nationalisation on mutualist grounds.” At the Lausanne congress de Paepe introduced an amendment recommending land nationalisation as a subject of study by the movement” and had “insisted that, as a ‘mutualist’, he wanted not only ‘that the cultivator should be guaranteed by society the full product of his toil,’ but also that society in its turn should have some control over what was produced. Social ownership must be extended to the land as the most fundamental of all means of production.”¹ To quote de Peape:

“I am just as much a mutualist as Tolain and Chémalé, but I do not see that the collective ownership of land is opposed to the mutualist program. This program demands that the whole product of labour shall belong to the producer, and shall be exchangeable only for produce created by precisely the same quantity of labour. But land is not the product of any kind of labour, and reciprocity of exchange does not apply to it. To stand on the same footing with productive labour, the rights of the owner of land must be restricted to a right to own the produce of the land... To make the land itself the property of a few individuals amounts to making all the other members of society the vassals of these few. The landowners need merely come to an agreement among themselves, and they would be able to starve the others into submission.”²

At the International’s Brussels Congress the idea of a Proudhonian *Bank of the People* “found enthusiastic support among the Belgian delegates” with the Brussels branch “praising Proudhon directly for his inspiration.” For de Paepe “his ‘mutualism’ would assure the cultivator as well as the artisan of receiving the totality of what was produced by his labour”.³ Engels admitted the same in a private letter in September 1874:

“Jealousy of the growing power of the only people who were really ready to work further along the lines of the old comprehensive programme — the German Communists —

drove the Belgian Proudhonists into the arms of the Bakuninist adventurers.”⁴

Ignoring Engels’ attempt to rewrite history to hide the awkward fact it was “the German Communists” who were the ones seeking to replace the “old comprehensive programme” with their own one of “political action” and political parties, the fact remains that the collectivisation debates within the International were not actually that suggest by Musto and a long line of other Marxist commentators.

So it must be stressed that the debate was not between private and social ownership at all. It was focused on a very specific topic, namely land ownership.⁵ This can be seen from the summary of the exchange which started the debate:

“Longuet [...] agrees with these conclusions, provided that it is quite understood that we define the State as ‘the collective body of citizens’ [...] it is understood also that these services will not be run by State officials [...] He understands that railways, canals, mines, etc., shall be constructed, exploited or administered by working class Companies, who will be bound to give their services at cost price [...] in submission to the general principles of mutualism.

“De Paepe [...] says that the only difference between Longuet’s theory and his is that Longuet accepts collectivism [*collectivité*] for all under the ground, for railways and canals, while he (de Paepe) wished to extend it to the land as a whole.”⁶

Musto is right to suggest that it was the workers who “were already side-lining Proudhonian doctrines” (20) in terms of opposition to strikes but it is not true that they “convinced the French leaders of the International of the need to socialise the land and industry.” (21) As historian Julien Archer notes in his account of the International in France:

“The endorsement of collectivism by the International at the Basel Congress might appear to be a rejection of the French position on co-operatives. Actually, it was not, for collectivism as it was defined by its proponents meant simply the end of private ownership of agricultural land. Lumped together with this was usually

¹ Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British labour movement: years of the First International* (Macmillan; St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 141, 129.

² Quoted by G. M. Stekloff, *History of The First International* (Martin Lawrence, London, 1928), 128.

³ Julian P. W. Archer, *The First International in France, 1864-1872: Its Origins, Theories, and Impact* (Lanham/Oxford: University Press of America, Inc, 1997), 126, 101.

⁴ *Marx-Engels Collected Works*: 45, 41-2.

⁵ “Unity was shattered” on collective ownership “when de Paepe introduced an amendment recommending land nationalisation as a subject of study by the movement.” (Collins and Abramsky, 129) The proponents of collectivisation at the Lausanne Congress wanted to “extend Tolain’s ideas to all property.” (Archer, 101)

⁶ *Revolution from 1789 to 1906* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), P.W. Postgate (ed.), 392-3.

the demand for common ownership of mines and railways.”¹

At the Brussels Congress, de Paepe “reminded Tolain and other opponents of collective property that they were in favour of collectivising mines, railroads, and canals [...] the same logic which led Tolain’s group to accept these collectivisations should lead it to accept collective property” in land. To the list of property agreed at previous congresses “was added the collectivisation of agricultural property [...] which would be turned over to ‘agricultural companies’ [...] with the same guarantees as those required of the ‘workers’ companies”²

The issue, then, was *not* socialisation but rather the socialisation of agricultural land and to suggest otherwise is to distort the historical record. Even the Leninist Stekloff – in between insults like “individualist”, “middle-class”, “bourgeois”, “petty bourgeois” – managed to admit, if only in passing, that the “Proudhonist” were “prepared to approve of the socialisation of machinery and of the means of industrial production in general”³

Musto does reference Archer’s book (footnote on page 4) and so knows these facts. This can be seen when he implicitly contradicts himself by noting that the 1867 Lausanne congress voted in favour of collective ownership of industry but that “the mutualists remained totally opposed to the socialisation of land ownership” and “discussion of the issue was postponed until the next congress”. (19) To then proclaim that “the mutualists” were “opposed [to] socialisation of the land and the means of production” (19-20) is simply not true – particularly when the truth can be seen from the titles of the extracts he himself presents which are all on landed property. Needless to say, he does not bother to include any of the opposition speeches and arguments and so an impoverished account of the International is presented.

¹ Archer, xxi.

² Archer, 127, 128.

³ Stekloff, *History of The First International*, 129. Henryk Katz also notes that at Lausanne “Tolain was in favour of collectivising the means of transport and of mining property, but not land. De Paepe [...] insisted in his defense that he was still a ‘mutuelliste’ [...] Tolain proposed to remove from the motion the controversial words [on land], and it was accepted by a large majority [...] So began one of the greatest controversies in the history of the International.” (*The*

The tendency to proclaim the Parisians the only mutualists and present them as opposed to all forms of social ownership is not limited to Musto, of course. The reason for this reflects the lack of understanding of Proudhon’s ideas, particularly in Marxist circles who think that *The Poverty of Philosophy* is an accurate critique.⁴ That it also helps inflate the influence of Marx in the International is undoubtedly a bonus. Marx presents Proudhon as a backwards looking reactionary who was opposed to large-scale industry but, in reality, he argued for workers’ associations to manage such concerns. The clear links between the debate in the IWMA and Proudhon can be seen when comparing the Basel resolution (90-2) to his 1848 Manifesto:

“under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social*

ownership [...] We do not want expropriation by the State of the mines, canals and railways: it is still monarchical, still wage-labour. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers’ associations operating under State supervision, in conditions laid down by the State, and under their own responsibility. We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic.”⁵

Eight years previously, in *What is Property?*, Proudhon had argued that “the land is

indispensable to our existence” and “consequently a common thing” and that “all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor.” Thus “property in product [...] does not carry with it property in the means of production [...] the right to means is common” and “all property becomes [...] collective and undivided.” Managers “must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves.”⁶ In *System of Economic Contradictions*, he sketched the nature of workers’ associations needed to run industry

Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International [New York/London: Greenwood Press 1992], 33)

⁴ See my “Proudhon’s Constituted Value and the Myth of Labour Notes,” *Anarchist Studies* 25: 1 (Summer 2017) and “The Poverty of (Marx’s) Philosophy,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 70 (Summer 2017).

⁵ *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), Iain McKay (ed.), 377-8.

⁶ *Property is Theft!*, 105, 118, 112, 137, 119.

in mutualist socialism,¹ a subject he continually returned to in his writings. Hence the French Internationalists advocating “the emancipation of labour from capitalism through cooperatives”.² Given this, for Musto to proclaim Marx’s “theoretical contribution was fundamental” (65) in understanding the need to overcome wage-labour is just ridiculous.

The version Musto includes of the resolution does not include the significant phase “double contract” which appears in other translations³ although it does indicate that social property would be “let by the state” to “companies of working men bound by contract to society” with goods and services produced “at a price nearly as possible approximate to the working expense” with a “second contract” to “guarantee the mutual right of each members of the companies in respect to his fellow workmen.” (91) Compare this to Proudhon’s *General Idea of the Revolution* and its discussion of workers’ associations and its “double contract” between the members of the co-operative and between it and society. While its members have “an undivided share in the property of the company”, the company itself was “a creation and a dependence” of society and “holds its books and records at the disposition of Society, which [...] reserves the power of dissolving the workers company, as the sanction of its right of control.” The company was to be run democratically with “all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members” so producing an institution which “has no precedent and no model.”⁴

So Musto’s “decisive step forward in defining the economic basis of socialism” in terms of “the socialisation of the means of production” (21) simply repeated Proudhon. Which raises the interesting question of how *agreeing* with Proudhon means the debates on land ownership within the International had “eradicated Proudhonism even in its French homeland”? (23) Musto simply fails to mention that awkward fact and so presents a Marxist narrative which is fundamentally false. The debates were consistent with Proudhon’s ideas, focused purely on the social ownership of land as collective ownership of industry was not disputed, were conducted between followers of Proudhon and the resolutions were written in Proudhonist terminology rather than Marxian.

The debate focused on land ownership for a reason. Proudhon’s ideas – or at least his terminology – underwent a modification with the popular support of Louis-Napoleon by the peasantry. While pre-1851 he

clearly advocated the abolition (socialisation) of property, after 1851 his works tended to call peasant possession of land “property” undoubtedly in an attempt to woo the peasantry away from reaction. Indeed, Longuet at Basel made this very point arguing that “the country people whom you have not consulted, and who are not represented here, will turn against you as in June 1848. I have seen the days of June and I do wish that they may never occur again.”⁵

In short, those habitually labelled French “Proudhonists” and “mutualists” stressed the 1851-and-after aspect of Proudhon’s legacy in terms of land ownership while the so-called collectivists like de Peape and Bakunin stressed the earlier aspect. Both, however, shared a common support for workers’ associations for industry. As Daniel Guérin suggests:

“Proudhon is too often confused with what Bakunin called ‘the little so-called Proudhonian coterie’ which gathered around him in his last years. This rather reactionary group was stillborn. In the First International it tried in vain to put across private ownership of the means of production against collectivism. The chief reason this group was short-lived was that most of its adherents were all too easily convinced by Bakunin’s arguments and abandoned their so-called Proudhonian ideas to support collectivism.

“In the last analysis, this group, who called themselves *mutuellistes*, were only partly opposed to collectivism: they rejected it for agriculture because of the individualism of the French peasant, but accepted it for transport, and in matters of industrial self-management actually demanded it while rejecting its name. [...]

“Proudhon really moved with the times and realized that it is impossible to turn back the clock [...] With regard to large-scale modern industry requiring a large labour force, he was resolutely collectivist [...] Property must be abolished [...] The means of production and exchange must be controlled neither by capitalist companies nor by the State [...] they must be managed by associations of workers”⁶

It is simply not the case that the 1868 resolution was the International’s “first clear pronouncement on the socialisation of the means of production by state

¹ *Property is Theft!* 213-5. Also see K. Steven Vincent’s excellent discussion on this subject (*Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], 154-6)

² Archer, 136.

³ Collective property “will be conceded by society not to capitalists as to-day, but to workers’ Companies, in virtue of a double contract; [...] guaranteeing to society [...] the services

of the Company at a price as near as possible to cost price, the right to inspect the Company’s books” and “guaranteeing the mutual rights of each member of the workers’ Association in face of his colleagues.” (*Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 393)

⁴ *Property is Theft!*, 585-6.

⁵ quoted in Collins and Abramsky, 154.

⁶ *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 44-5.

authorities” (22) for while state ownership of some kind was accepted their actual running would be done by workers’ co-operatives. As such, it is wrong to suggest as some have that by 1868 de Paepe “was beginning to see the answer in terms of workers’ rather than State control”¹ for, like Proudhon, he had been advocating it from the start. This is sharply at odds with Marxist nationalisation – which is rooted in state rather than workers’ control – but, then, Musto confuses nationalisation with “socialist principles”. (22) Given that the mutualists (on both sides) supported state ownership, this raises more questions than it answers – what kind of state? The resolution talks of “a state itself subject to the laws of justice” (21) which is a very Proudhonian way of putting the matter. We will return to the subject of the state.

So while Musto admits that the mutualists wanted “the founding of producer cooperatives and a central People’s Bank” (19) he makes no attempt to understand what was implied by this nor how it related to Proudhon’s ideas. His ignorance of Proudhon also means he unwittingly suggests that the despised petit-bourgeois Frenchman had “formulated what later became the classical position of the workers’ movement” that “wars are inevitable in a capitalist system” (18) by quoting César de Peape who, in turn, was obviously summarising the conclusion of Proudhon’s *War and Peace*.² Likewise, the resolution on machinery from the Brussels congress (90) reads like a summary of Proudhon’s discussion in *System of Economic Contradictions*³ both in terms of its critique and solution (workers owning machinery by means of co-operatives⁴).

Similarly, it is wrong to suggest that “it was the workers’ movement that demonstrated, in opposition to

the mutualists... viewed [the State] as an instrument of minority class rule which could not be captured and used by working people to free themselves. Instead, they formed the International to create institutions that would produce the economic reforms which would result in the state being ended along with wage-labour as Proudhon had repeatedly argued from the 1840s.

Proudhon, that it was impossible to separate the social-economic question from the political question.” (21) Proudhon – like other anarchists – had argued that state and capitalism were interwoven and both had to be combated. He “look[ed] upon the political question and the economic question as one and the same” for “the labour question and the question of the State [...] are, at bottom, identical and susceptible to one and the same solution.”⁵ The question was how to correctly answer “the political question” rather than ignoring it. In 1846 Proudhon had argued as follows:

“Such is the war that you have to sustain: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege. [...] Now, to combat and reduce power, to put it in its proper place in society, it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave. [...]

“Thus power, the instrument of collective might, created in

society to serve as a mediator between labour and privilege, finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat. No political reform can solve this contradiction [...] The problem before the labouring classes, then, consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly – that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them.”⁶

He raised a similar call during the 1848 revolution and “propose[d] that a provisional committee be set up [...]

¹ Collins and Abramsky, 142.

² As can also be seen from Tolain’s amendment to a resolution at the Lausanne Congress that “war has its first and principal cause pauperism and the lack of economic equilibrium, and to end war [...] it is [...] necessary to modify social organisation in the direction of a more equitable distribution of production.” (quoted by Archer, 103)

³ *Property is Theft!* 182-195.

⁴ Proudhon’s views were reflected in the motion “by a statement that the only way workers could come to possess machines was through mutual credit funding the creation of cooperatives.” (Archer, 123)

⁵ *Property is Theft!*, 496.

⁶ *Property is Theft!*, 225-6.

amongst the workers [...] in opposition to the bourgeois representatives,” so that “a new society be founded in the centre of the old society” for “the government can do nothing for you. But you can do everything for yourselves.” This “organisation of popular societies was the pivot of democracy, the cornerstone of republican order” and would “rip the nails and teeth off State power and hand over the government’s public force to the citizens.”¹

Which, incidentally, explains why the mutualists were “hostile to state intervention in any field”. (19) They, rightly, viewed it as an instrument of minority class rule which could not be captured and used by working people to free themselves. Instead, they formed the International to create institutions that would produce the economic reforms which would result in the state being ended along with wage-labour as Proudhon had repeatedly argued from the 1840s.

Marx, of course, disagreed and Musto quotes him on how workers getting social reform legislation passed would “transform that [state] power, now used against them, into their own agency.” (13-4) Musto smugly comments that “far from strengthening bourgeois society (as Proudhon and his followers wrongly believed), these reformist demands were an indispensable starting point for the emancipation of the working class”. (14) Yet given that the working class has not been emancipated and bourgeois society is still going strong, why were Proudhon and his followers wrong? Looked at objectively, it would appear that it was Marx who “wrongly believed” in the impact of reforms achieved by means of “political action.” For example, the Illinois legislature passed an eight-hour law in early 1867 but the Chicago anarchists were leading the union struggle for it in 1886. So as should be obvious, laws will be completely ignored – unless there was a strong union to enforce them – as would be expected given it is a capitalist state. Moreover, Marx’s position also strengthens reformist notions – if the *Klassenstaat* (class-state) can be used to defend workers then an obvious conclusion to draw is only the *Klassenstaat* because the wrong people have been elected into government and it can, therefore, become the *Volksstaat* (People’s State). Which is precisely what the Social Democracy did conclude – with appropriate quotes by Marx and Engels to show its orthodoxy.²

The history of the next 150 years has not been kind to the position Musto so unquestioningly repeats. This does not mean that Proudhon’s vision of economic and political reform by means of co-operative credit and workplaces is correct – and later anarchists rejected this in favour of militant trade unions as the means for changing society – simply that it cannot be dismissed as

easily as Musto seeks to do, particularly for an alternative which has not brought us any nearer to socialism.

Ultimately, for all of Marx’s (and Musto’s) disdain for Proudhon and his followers it must be remembered that without the French mutualists helping to found the International Marx’s ideas would never have reached the audience they did. Similarly, Marx was more than happy to report – without noting their obvious sources – on the mutualist ideas raised during the Paris Commune and, like Marx, Musto also fails to mention that the “17 members of the International” (32) were almost all the despised Proudhonists. So it is hardly surprising that *The Civil War in France* is Marx’s most appealing work as he is simply summarising Proudhon’s libertarian socialist vision of a federated society with a co-operative economy which the anarchist’s followers had infused the Commune’s proclamations.³

A Syndicalist International?

Proudhon’s ideas developed over his lifetime. As you would expect, he modified his views in light of new developments in society and in the labour and socialist movements (for example, the experiences of the 1848 revolution brought his anarchist ideas to the fore while its defeat produced a moderation in tone). It comes as no surprise that they continued to develop after his death by those he influenced which means the death of mutualism at the Basel congress which Musto gleefully asserts is wrong. Infused by a false picture of Proudhon’s ideas and their legacy, such reports confuse evolution with extinction. This helps explain Musto’s inability to account for Bakunin’s rapid rise in influence across the sections of the International.

In reality, the International was evolving into a syndicalist body from a mutualist one and this was a natural progression as Proudhon had in 1846 postulated the need for a workers’ organisation to transform society – the “industrial and agricultural combination”. It was surely such a combination which the French mutualists wished to create when they helped found the International and it was the extension of this into militant trade unionism which occurred between 1864 and 1869.

Eugène Hins was the secretary of the Belgium federation and wrote an article in February 1868 on these ideas in its newspaper *L’Internationale*. It discussed how in the socialist future the current *Conseil fédéral* (federal council) made up of delegates from the *sociétés de résistance* (resistance societies) would co-ordinate the activities of the trades as well as fixing cost and sale prices (and so wages) while the *sociétés de résistance* would organise production. The

¹ *Property is Theft!*, 321-2, 407.

² See section H.3.10 of volume 2 of *An Anarchist FAQ*.

³ See “Anarchism, Marxism and the Lessons of the Paris Commune”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 80 (Summer 2020); 81 (Winter 2021); 82 (Spring 2021).

International's *sections* would include all workers and would reflect matters of general concern in a *Comité administratif* (administrative council). Consumer co-operatives would function as communal shops (*bazars communaux*) and control the distribution of goods on a non-profit basis. General insurance funds would exist for old age, sickness and life-insurance based on the *caisses de secours mutuel et de prévoyance* (mutual aid and contingency funds). In this way "the economic and political organisations of the working classes were to remain outside the bourgeois framework, so that it could supersede the bourgeois institutions and power in the long run."¹

These ideas were raised in the International by delegates from the Belgium section at the Brussels conference in 1868. Unions were for "the necessities of the present, but also the future social order," the "embryos of the great workers' companies which will one day replace the capitalist companies with their thousands of wage-earners, at least in all industries in which collective force is used and there is no middle way between wage slavery and association." The "productive societies arising from the trades unions will embrace whole industries [...] thus forming a NEW CORPORATION" which would "be organised equitably, founded on mutuality and justice and open to all."²

As Musto notes, "[i]n Belgium, the period following the Brussels Congress of 1868 had been marked by the rise of syndicalism" (26) and this was reflected the following year at the Basel Congress of the IWMA when "Hins of Brussels outlined the first syndicalist programme to be presented to an International Congress"³ where he argued that the trade unions "represented the social and political organisation of the future".⁴ So "Trade Unions will continue to exist after the suppression of the wage system [...] they will be the organisation of labour."⁵ This "mode of organisation leads to the labour representation of the future" as "wage slavery" is "replaced by the free federation of

free producers" while the organisation of trade unions "on the basis of town or country [...] leads to the commune of the future": "Government is replaced by the assembled councils of the trade bodies, and by a committee of their respective delegates."⁶

It is one of the book's few redeeming features that Musto includes extracts from the speeches of these libertarian trade unionists. Thus we read Jean Louis Pindy at the Basel Congress in 1869 arguing that

"labour will organise for the present and future by doing away with the wages system [...] grouping of corporations by town and country [...] forms the commune of the future [...] the associated councils of the various trades [...] will replace politics." These "federations will [...] be charged with [...] the regulation of strikes and activity to ensure their success, until such time as the wage system is replaced with the federation of free producers." (133, 134) Hin is quoted on how "resistance societies will persist after the abolition of the wages system [...] they will organise work [...]

They will replace the old political systems [...] this will be an agency of decentralisation". (135) "Resistance societies", Adhémar Schwitzguébel argued, "have the great advantage of preparing the general organisation of the proletariat [...] they are the basis for the coming organisation of society, since workers' associations will [...] take over the running of industrial and agricultural enterprises" (138-9)

In short, the most representative congress of the International expressed a syndicalist position. This should not be seen as a *rejection* of Proudhon but rather an *evolution* of mutualist positions which did lead to a few of his positions – namely opposition to strikes – being rejected while the bulk remained. This vision of a future economic regime based on federations of workers' associations echoed Proudhon's vision — right down to the words used!

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¹ D.E. Devreese, "An Inquiry Into the Causes and Nature of Organisation: Some Observations on the International Working Men's Association, 1864-1872/1876," *Internationalism in the Labour Movement 1830-1940* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), Frits van Holthoorn and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), 1: 293-5.

² *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 393-4.

³ Collins and Abramsky, 156.

⁴ quoted in Collins and Abramsky, 156.

⁵ *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 394.

⁶ *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), Daniel Guérin (ed.), 218.

The links are all too obvious. Take Eugène Varlin, for example, whom Musto proclaims “abandoned mutualist positions”. (25) In reality, it is better said that he abandoned *some* “mutualist positions” – like opposition to strikes – and kept others. Indeed, his political evolution paralleled Bakunin’s and he, like the Russian, argued that unions “form the natural elements of the social edifice of the future; it is they who can be easily transformed into producers associations; it is they who can make the social ingredients and the organisation of production work.”¹ While arguing that co-operatives were “actively preparing the bases for the future society” he, like Proudhon and Bakunin, warned that “placing everything in the hands of a highly centralised, authoritarian state [...] would set up a hierarchic structure from top to bottom of the labour process” and that “the only alternative is for workers themselves to have the free disposition and possession of the tools of production [...] through co-operative association”² Similarly with the right-wing mutualists, with Tolain and other Parisians now supporting strikes “as a means of transition from our present state of affairs to one of association.”³

So it was within the International that libertarians applied Proudhon’s ideas on “an agricultural and industrial combination” in the labour movement. Here we discover the syndicalist idea of unions as the means of both fighting capitalism and replacing it being raised.⁴ The Basel Congress was the first which Bakunin attended and where he “emerged as the main champion of collectivism.”⁵ As two historians note, “Hins had outlined a complete syndicalist programme at the Basel Congress and there was always the possibility that Bakunin’s anarchism and Belgian syndicalism might come together.”⁶ This is precisely what did happen. This was because “Bakunin’s anarchism” was rooted in a syndicalist strategy for social revolution.

Bakunin: “Proudhonism widely developed and pushed to these, its final consequences.”

For Musto, just as Marx had “laid the spectre of Proudhon rest” there “formed a new tendency – collectivist anarchism”. (24) Yet once you understand Proudhon’s ideas and influence, this is not the surprise Musto implies. After all, as Bakunin noted, his ideas were “Proudhonism widely developed and pushed right to these, its final consequences”⁷ and were in-line with wider developments within the International. So it is unsurprising, then, when Bakunin met Varlin at the Basel Congress and “once the program of the Alliance was explained to” him, the French activist said he

“shared the same ideas and agreed to co-ordinate with their revolutionary plans.”⁸

Just as with his account of Proudhon, Bakunin is badly served by Musto. It is clear that he is no fan of the Russian, dismissing him by proclaiming “Bakunin’s deficient sense of reality” (55) and – ironically given Marx’s indulging in both – that he “lacked the theoretical capacities of his adversary, preferred the terrain of personal accusations and insults”. (51) Yet by not adequately addressing Bakunin’s ideas, his introduction is at odds to explain why Bakunin so quickly became such a threat to Marx and his plans for the International.

Nothing is too trivial to be distorted. Musto, presumably in an attempt to be objective, notes that Marx and Engels “often chose to caricature Bakunin’s position, painting him as an advocate of ‘class equalisation’” (51) but indulges in this himself by referencing Lehning’s anthology of Bakunin’s writings and stating that the “translation provided in this book is inaccurate and misleading”. (23) He fails to admit that Lehning presents the revised version based on Marx’s comments to Bakunin.

The affair is simple enough and not worthy of note if it were not for Marx’s later use of it against the Russian. Bakunin sent the Alliance programme to the International’s General Council and received a letter from Marx which stated that its “equalisation of classes” clause “literally interpreted” would mean “harmony of capital and labour” as “persistently preached by the bourgeois socialists” for it was “not the logically impossible ‘equalisation of classes’, but the historically necessary, superseding ‘abolition of classes’” which was the “true secret of the proletarian movement” and which “forms the great aim of the International Working Men’s Association.” The letter adds the following: “Considering, however, the context in which that phrase ‘equalisation of classes’ occurs, it seems to be a mere slip of the pen, and the General Council feels confident that you will be anxious to remove from your program an expression which offers such a dangerous misunderstanding.”⁹

Bakunin agreed with Marx on the ambiguity of the term and the Alliance changed its Programme to call for “the final and total abolition of classes and the political, economic and social equalisation of individuals of either sex.”¹⁰ Lehning, as would be expected, reprints the revised version of the Alliance’s programme and so Musto claiming that “Engels and Marx quoted directly

¹ quoted in Archer, 196.

² *The Paris Commune of 1871: The View From the Left* (London: Cape, 1972), Eugene Schulkind (ed.), 63-4.

³ quoted by Collins and Abramsky, 141.

⁴ Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 46-7, 54.

⁵ Archer, 170.

⁶ Collins and Abramsky, 293.

⁷ *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), Arthur Lehning (ed.), 198.

⁸ Archer, 186.

⁹ *Marx-Engels Collected Works*: 21, 46.

¹⁰ *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, 174.

from Bakunin's original document" is misleading particularly as he himself notes that "the Alliance modified its programme". (24) This is indicative of a Marxist perspective which undermines the usefulness of the book.

Similarly, Musto seems to forget that members of the International could express ideas different than Marx's when he proclaims that distribution of both International and Alliance documents "was a prime example of the Bakuninite confusion and theoretical eclecticism of the time". (28) Is he seriously suggesting that an organisation which was affiliated to the International could not spread its ideas within it? If so, then his proclaimed support for pluralism is contradicted by this implicit support for Marx's activities after the Paris Commune which imposed an explicitly Marxist policy on it. If not, then why is doing so "confusion" and "eclecticism"? After all, the International's founding documents were written in a way that French mutualists could agree with them and to ensure that people with a wide range of social views could join.

Which raises the question of what were the politics of the Alliance? Once that is understood then we can start to understand why Bakunin's influence quickly rose in the IWMA. The key thing to note that Bakunin's position echoed the conclusions of most Proudhon's followers in the International, namely that building co-operatives – while important – was not sufficient to end capitalism. Rather the International had to build militant trade unionism and recognise the need for a social revolution – insurrection, smashing the state and expropriation of capital by workers' associations.

Bakunin, then, was "convinced that the co-operative will be the preponderant form of social organisation in the future" and could "hardly oppose" their creation under capitalism but argued that Proudhon's hope was unlikely to be realised as it did "not take into account the vast advantage that the bourgeoisie enjoys against the proletariat through its monopoly on wealth, science, and secular custom, as well as through the approval – overt or covert but always active – of States and through the whole organisation of modern society. The fight is

The key thing to note that Bakunin's position echoed the conclusions of most Proudhon's followers in the International, namely that building co-operatives – while important – was not sufficient to end capitalism. Rather the International had to build militant trade unionism and recognise the need for a social revolution – insurrection, smashing the state and expropriation of capital by workers' associations.

too unequal for success reasonably to be expected."¹ Thus capitalism "does not fear the competition of workers' associations – neither consumers', producers', nor mutual credit associations – for the simple reason that workers' organisations, left to their own resources, will never be able to accumulate sufficiently strong aggregations of capital capable of waging an effective struggle against bourgeois capital."² What was needed was the building of an International federation of unions:

"the serious, final, complete liberation of the workers is possible only upon one condition, that of the appropriation of capital, that is of raw materials, and all tools of labour, including land by the whole body of workers [...] The organisation of the trade sections, their federations in the International and their representation by the Chambers of Labour, not only create a great academy, in which the workers of the International, combining theory and practice, can and must study economic science, they also bear in themselves the living germs of the new social order which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."³

While Musto does quote Bakunin to this effect, he also makes the usual mistake of Marxists by confusing Bakunin's "lumpen-proletariat" with Marx's. (54) Not

¹ *The Basic Bakunin* (Buffalo, NY:, Prometheus Books, 1994), Robert M. Cutler (ed.), 153, 152.

² *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), G.P. Maximov (ed.), 293.

³ Quoted by Rocker, 77.

only does he not seem to notice the obvious contradiction this interpretation has with his previous quotation of Bakunin's, he also fails to mention how the Russian had previously defined his revolutionary agency in the same work:

"I do not think that I need show that for the International to be a real power, it must be able to organise within its ranks the immense majority of the proletariat of Europe, of America, of all lands."¹

Bakunin's "lumpen-proletariat" was, then, all workers bar the "semi-bourgeois" workers, "the upper layer, the aristocracy of labour, those who are the most cultured, who earn more and live more comfortably than all the other workers" to which he claimed Marx looked.² It is also important to note, as Musto does not, that "the factory proletariat" (54) Marx was focused upon was a *minority* of the working classes in all countries bar Britain. If, as Musto asserts, Bakunin's ideas "were more in keeping with a region where the industrial proletariat had a presence only in the main cities, and where the workers' movement was still very weak and mainly concerned with economic demands" (39) then this was the situation throughout Europe for the rest of the century – and usually well into the 20th. However, Musto's assertion is just Marxist dogma hiding behind a scientific veneer – parts of the industrial proletariat embraced syndicalism, for example, while few of that class embraced Marxism in its revolutionary rather than reformist form.

So as Mark Leier notes Bakunin "rarely used the word 'lumpenproletariat.' While he does use the French word *canaille*, this is better translated as 'mob' or 'rabble' [...] When Bakunin does talk about the *canaille* or rabble, he usually refers not to the lumpenproletariat as such but to the poorer sections of the working class [...] While we might translate 'destitute proletariat' as 'lumpenproletariat,' Bakunin himself [...] is referring to a portion of the proletariat and the peasantry, not the lumpenproletariat."³ This explains Bakunin's syndicalist vision of the International:

"the organisation of solidarity in the economic struggle of labour against capitalism [...] first, by the establishment and coordination of strike funds and the international solidarity of strikes; second, by the organisation and the international (federative) coordination of trade and professional unions; third, by the spontaneous and direct development of philosophical and sociological ideas in the International, ideas which inevitably develop

side by side with and are produced by the first two movements."⁴

Ironically, Musto points out that Bakunin's "declaration of principles was close to the original aims of the IWMA and pointed in a direction very different from the one taken by Marx". (53) Yet he cannot bring himself to explain Bakunin's position and instead proclaims his "militant activity" as involving building secret societies which would "prepare the insurrection and carry out the revolution" (55) with no mention of his syndicalism. Yet without his syndicalism and how it links up with the ideas of Internationalists across mainland Europe, the rise of Bakunin's influence will remain a closed book – so Musto is at a loss to explain how the Russian managed to become the public face (if you like) of the anti-Marx majority so quickly and is reduced to proclaiming that "thanks to his charisma and forceful style of argument, he had already managed to affect the outcome of its deliberations." (24)

Given Musto's low opinion of Bakunin and his political thought, the fact that "Bakunin's ideas began to spread" (27) causes him problems insofar as he cannot explain it. This flows from his low opinion – based on a lack of understanding – of Proudhon's actual ideas rather than Marx's distortion of them for if he had this he would see why Bakunin's influence grew – his extension of Proudhonian ideas on workers' associations, federalism and the primacy of economic change into support for unions, strikes and social revolution expressed the same conclusions many others – primarily workers – influenced by the Frenchman had drawn. As Musto admits, Spanish workers had "previously [been] exposed to Proudhon's texts" (28) and so Bakunin's ideas would have found a fertile soil to grow and blossom. Although Musto cannot bring himself to admit it, the awkward fact is that the areas of strongest growth in the International were those with the most libertarian influence. Thus he notes that "the International continued to expand in Belgium and Spain [...] and experienced a real breakthrough in Italy" (35) and its "expansion [...] above all, [in] Spain and Italy". (57) Unsurprisingly, Musto fails to mention Bakunin's role in Italy combating Mazzini and instead suggests Garibaldi's joining as the key factor.⁵ (35)

So it is obvious that Bakunin's supporters did far more than setting up secret societies and, in fact, successfully set up both unions and branches of the International – so successfully that they became the majority. As Marxist Paul Thomas notes, "the International was to prove capable of expanding its membership only at the behest of the Bakuninists" and "[w]herever the International was spreading, it was doing so under the mantle of

¹ *Bakunin on Anarchism* 2nd Edition (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), Sam Dolgoff (ed.), 293.

² *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 294.

³ *Bakunin: The Creative Passion* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2006), 221.

⁴ *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 303-4.

⁵ The best account of Bakunin's key role in defeating Mazzini's influence in Italian radical and worker circles is still T.R. Ravindranathan's *Bakunin and the Italians* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

Bakuninism.”¹ This was helped by Proudhon’s influence in these countries and that the new collectivist ideas were built upon his ideas.

Musto proclaims the federalists to be the “minority” (57) but in reality they were the majority within the International – as shown by his own figures, the vast majority of members were in non-Marxist sections, the British closely followed by the French, Belgian, Spanish and Italian. (7) This means that opportunistically working with a few Blanquist exiles after the Paris Commune to “strengthen the opposition to Bakuninite anarchism within the International” would hardly “create a broader consensus for the changes deemed necessary [by Marx!] in the new phase of the class struggle” (37) for it was making Marx’s minority slightly less small. It is unsurprising that “Marx’s victory soon proved to be ephemeral” (38) due to the revolt against the General Council across most of the organisation and so Musto is understating the issue to proclaim this “miscalculation on Marx’s part accelerated the crisis of the organisation.” (41)

In terms of Bakunin’s secret societies, they played their role by like-minded activists spreading their ideas but what needs to be remembered is that secrecy was needed due to the repression of states. So while Nechavaev is mentioned by Musto to condemn Bakunin who, we are informed, “enthusiastically supported” his “advocacy of secret societies” (38) in fact Bakunin had advocated the need for secret societies long before – and after – meeting him. Bakunin’s perspectives on the need for secret societies is never actually discussed which comes across like denouncing Marxists in 1934 for organising secretly in Germany and forgetting to mention Hitler’s dictatorship. Needless to say, Musto admitting that the International “was on the margins of legality for a number of years and its members were subject to persecution” (7) does not stop him quoting approvingly Marx’s comments against secret societies. (55) He also fails to mention that Bakunin and Guillaume were expelled by a commission at the packed Hague Congress for being in a secret organisation which it could not determine still existed. (47)

As noted, Musto proclaims that Bakunin simply insulted Marx and uses this to avoid engaging with his critique,

suggesting that “the only exception” to these personal attacks was an unsent letter to *La Liberté* (51) yet he has to admit that his writings on Marx “offered an interesting critical contribution on the questions of political power, the state and bureaucracy.” (52) The objective reader would conclude that Musto uses the word “interesting” as an euphemism for “correct” particularly when some recognition of what happened between 1864 and 2014 creeps in when he admits that “despite Bakunin’s sometimes exasperating refusal to distinguish between bourgeois and proletarian power, he foresaw some of the dangers of the so-called ‘transitional period’ between capitalism and socialism –

particularly the danger of bureaucratic degeneration after the revolution.” (56) Yet this “refusal” is the whole point: there are commonalities between the so-called proletarian state and the bourgeois state simply because *they are states*. That Bakunin “foresaw” the “degeneration” of the Bolshevik regime while Marx never recognised the possibility (as seen by, for example, his marginal notes to Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*) is significant and requires more discussion than this.

Simply put, in terms of “proletarian” power the Bolshevik regime used state power to crush the actual proletariat in the name of the higher interests of an idealised proletariat whose objective

interests the party claimed to embody. Unsurprisingly enough, a centralised structure which concentrates power in the hands of a few specifically to exclude popular participation and control did not change its nature just because the few at the top proclaimed their socialism. The “proletarian” state did *not* “degenerate” into bureaucracy as it was marked by this *from the start* because that is what a state is.²

Marxist dogma comes out in strange ways. “Partly because of his scant knowledge of economics,” Musto informs us, “the federalist path indicated by Bakunin offered no really useful guidance on how the question of the future socialist society should be approached.” (57) This, surely, means something to Musto but what is hard to fathom what Bakunin was very impressed by Marx’s *Capital* so is Musto suggesting that reading that work imparts you with “scant knowledge of economics”? Doubtful. What of “federalist” ideas

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¹ *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), 315, 319.

² See section H.1.7 of volume 2 of *An Anarchist FAQ*.

lacking “useful guidance” on “how the question of the future socialist society should be approached”? If anything useful can be gathered from the monstrosity which was the Soviet experience, it is that centralised economic structures do not create a socialist – classless – society nor work particularly well. Marx’s “knowledge of economics” did suggest that capitalism would become more and more centralised but, surely, utilising those structures – shaped as they are by minority interests – for the majority would be problematic? Which it was – the Bolsheviks undermined workers attempts at federated self-management in favour of a centralised economic body and so handed the means of production to the bureaucracy.

Finally, there is a certain irony to be appreciated to read a Marxist proclaim that a congress of the federalist International saw the “theoretical-political armoury of the Internationalists [...] enriched by the idea of the general strike as a weapon to achieve the social revolution” (61) when he presumably knows that Engels mocked (after, of course, caricaturing) the idea in his diatribe “The Bakuninists at Work” and that the reformists and bureaucrats of the Second International used that mockery to combat radicals within Marxist ranks seeking to utilise it (in spite of best efforts of the likes of Rosa Luxemburg to get around the holy texts by changing “General Strike” to “Mass Strike”). So while it is true that the “groundwork was thus laid for what came to be known as anarcho-syndicalism” (62) at this congress the fact is that anarcho-syndicalism predates it as syndicalist ideas has been advocated in the International from 1868 onwards by the Belgium mutualists, Bakunin, Varlin and many others.

In short, Musto’s account of Bakunin’s ideas is as flawed as his account of Proudhon’s. This means that his introduction simply does not explain the actual development of the International. Instead we get uncritical cheerleading of Marx whose brilliance is assumed while enough is said about the next 150 years to make the objective reader ponder whether Bakunin was right all along.

Political Action Triumphant, or not learning from history

Given the lengths to which Marx went in order to secure the transformation of the international from a quasi-syndicalist body into a political party, it would be wise to indicate its success. We have had 150 years of evidence to do so but, unsurprisingly, Musto does not consider this as worthwhile and instead we get assertions: for the “new advance in the class struggle, Marx thought it indispensable to build working-class political parties in each country” and so “the party was considered essential for the struggle of the proletariat”. (45)

So Musto’s Marxist biases are clear when he suggests that “[w]hereas the Geneva Congress of 1866 established the importance of trade unions, the London Conference of 1871 shifted the focus to the other key instrument of the modern workers’ movement: the political party.” (38) Given that *every* successful workers’ political party has become reformist (or, worse, dictatorial) the objective observer would surely conclude that it is hardly a “key instrument” of the workers’ movement but rather a symbol of its adjustment to capitalism. Marx, as Musto notes, remained “absolutely convinced” that political action to secure social reforms “should strengthen the working-class struggle to overcome the capitalist mode of production rather than integrate it into the system” (55) but he, unlike Musto, did not have the experiences of the next 150 years to draw conclusions from.

What, then, of the rise and then fall of Social Democracy? It is mentioned but only to attack anarchism. Musto proclaims that Bakunin “grotesquely likened Marx’s conception of communism to the Lassallean *Volkstaat* that he had always tirelessly combated” (53) yet fails to mention that *Der Volkstaat (The People’s State)* was the central organ of the *Social Democratic Workers Party of Germany* between 1869 and 1876 and that Marx and Engels contributed to the paper and helped in its editing. Also, this party was founded by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht in 1869 and only merged with the Lassallean *General German Workers’ Association* at a conference held in Gotha in 1875, taking the name *Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany*. So the alleged “Lassallean” *Volkstaat* was associated with the party most influenced by Marx and Engels rather than by Lassalle. It also appears that “tirelessly combated” means mentioning it in a few private letters and in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* which, while written in 1875 and so years after Bakunin’s polemics, was first published in 1891 and so 15 years after the Russian’s death.

Therefore we can understand why Bakunin did not realise that Marx had “always tirelessly combated” the notion of a *Volkstaat* particularly as Marx and Engels repeatedly argued that there would be a state between capitalism and communism. Marx’s “conception” of a transitional state is very much in line with the “People’s State” notion even if the terminology was different. Moreover, this was how de Peape made use of the concept (as shown in the documents that Musto provides). Then there is the admission that Marx thought there were countries “where the workers can attain their goal by peaceful means” (45) not to mention the 1871 change to the IWMA’s statutes to include the necessity of “political action” which singularly failed to mention that socialism could not be created using the current state. Musto, of course, presents the full text of this resolution along with another five by Marx and Engels on the subject plus one by a French Blanquist (not to mention two others directed at Bakunin). None

suggest anything which would make the notion of a “People’s State” obviously inaccurate. Needless to say, while the advocates of political action are well served the anarchists get two responses, one of which is a paragraph.

Perhaps this is unsurprising insofar as the anarchists were proven right, as Musto inadvertently admits. Given his obvious support for “political action”, it is bizarre to read him explain how the Reform Act which “expanded the franchise to more than a million British workers” and legalisation of trade unions resulted in a situation where “the [British] labouring classes, so unlike their French counterparts, felt a growing sense of belonging as they pinned their hopes for the future on peaceful change.” (17-18) This was reflected in Marx as well, who suggested – much to the annoyance of Lenin – that socialism could be voted into being. Still, we get a wonderful piece of idealist hopeful thinking that “internationalism” would be the party’s “vaccine against the deadly embrace of the state and the capitalist system”. (46)

So the 150 years of Musto’s subtitle confirmed Bakunin’s fears not Marx’s hopes that when “common workers” are sent “to Legislative Assemblies” the result would be that the “worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois [...] For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them.”¹

This process was already at work within the International. Musto notes that “Bakunin’s activity [in Geneva] divided the organisation into two groups of equal size” before admitting that the “group aligned with London was slightly smaller” (27) and failing to mention that the smaller group was the reformist one and predominantly middle class while Bakunin’s had the support of the authentic proletariat in Geneva. E. H. Carr in his (hostile) biography of Bakunin, noted that

¹ *The Basic Bakunin*, 108.

² *Michael Bakunin* (London: Macmillan, 1937), 361. As Marxist Paul Thomas confirms, “Bakunin’s initial support in Switzerland – like Marx’s in England – came from resident aliens, political refugees [...] but he also gathered support among *Gastarbeiter* for whom Geneva was already a centre, where builders, carpenters and workers in heavy industry tended to be French or Italian”. Bakunin “also marshalled considerable support among French speaking domestic

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the “sections of the International at Geneva fell into two groups.” Skilled craftsmen formed the “Right wing” while “the builders, carpenters, and workers in the heavier trades, the majority of whom were immigrants from France and Italy, represented the Left.” Unsurprisingly, these different groups of workers had different politics. The craftsmen “concentrated on [...] reform” while the others “nourished hopes of a complete social upheaval.” Bakunin, as would be expected, “fanned the spirit of revolt” among these, the proletarian workers and soon had a “commanding position in the Geneva International.”² It should be noted that Marx and the General Council of the International consistently supported the reformist wing of the International in Geneva that organised political alliances with the middle-class liberals during elections.³

Still, it would be wrong to suggest that Musto is unique in his unwillingness to recognise that anarchist warnings on “political action” were correct. Thus we find the Bolshevik Stekloff noting how the anarchists “regarded the Marxist tactics as a series of compromises which could only advantage the bourgeoisie and the capitalist State” before asserting in his best ex-cathedra voice that the “Bakuninists invariably identified the political struggle with the electoral struggle, and they looked upon the latter as nothing else than an electoral pact with the bourgeois parties. They completely failed

workers and watchmakers in the Jura.” (*Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, 390)

³ Kropotkin later recounted how disgusted he was by the “wire-pulling by the leaders” of reformist wing who tried to manipulate a union meeting to stop workers striking because they considered “a strike at that time would be disastrous for the election of the lawyer” (*Memoirs of a Revolutionist* [Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1989], 260)

to understand Marx's famous contention that every class struggle is a political struggle; neither could they in the least realise how needful and advantageous to the workers a political party might become, a party which would be independent of bourgeois influence and would march out against the bourgeoisie." Perhaps it is not too surprising that he relegates to an end note the admission that "[s]ubsequently, the tactics of the social democrats went far to justify Bakunin's forecast. But this has absolutely no force as against the tactics of the communists (the Marxists), and does nothing to impair the significance of the political struggle of the proletariat when that political struggle has assumed a revolutionary form."¹ He seems to have forgotten that Bakunin raised his forecast against the tactics advocated by Marx himself and which he imposed upon the International in 1871 London Conference. As Kropotkin later put it:

"According to this disastrous resolution the forces of the Association, which until then were joined together for an economic-revolutionary struggle—the direct struggle of the workers unions against the capitalism of the bosses—were going to get involved in an electoral, political, and Parliamentary movement, where they could only wither and be destroyed."²

In short, while proclaiming Marx to be right in the International, Musto – like most Marxists – fails to note what happened next. For good reason as it showed Bakunin had a deeper understanding of the issue but for a work intended to help current activists it is strange to see it downplaying the 150 years of its subtitle in favour of proclaiming the genius of Marx and the inherent failings of Proudhon and Bakunin.

The "S" word: A storm in a teacup?

The debates within the International before and after its split focused on many issues but the decisive one was over the state. Musto presents some of the texts of these debates and, given his prejudices, we get more material from the pro-state advocates than the anti-state ones. So while he presents a lengthy extract of de Peape's speech on the state the reply of an anarchist is not included.³

As would be expected, the issue of the state arose before Bakunin joined the International and figured in the resolutions on collective ownership. This is worth looking at as it puts the subsequent debates into context. At Lausanne a French mutualist agreed to social

ownership "provided it is quite understood that we define the State as 'the collective body of citizens'" and "that these services will not be run by State officials" but by "working class Companies [...] in submission to the general principles of mutualism."⁴ This was the foundation for general agreement:

"Though the Lausanne Congress could not agree on collectivisation of agricultural property, there was unanimous accord that the state should own the means of transportation and exchange of goods – that is, roads, canals, and railways [...] due to the Congress's endorsement of a special definition of the state as a 'collectivity of individuals' with no power superior to the individual and having 'no interests apart from society.'⁵

The Brussels resolution stated social ownership would rest with "the community, represented by the state, a state itself subject to the laws of justice"⁶ (91) while at the congress, de Peape contrasted "present-day society with the state as it is presently constituted" and "purely political" to the state which has "become economic [...]" to be no more than a federation of the various groups of workers represented by their delegates". (174)

All this reflected Proudhon's ideas whether in the words "the laws of justice" or a restructured state based on a representation of labour groups which echoes his call in 1848. Moreover, Proudhon started to use the term "state" in the same manner as de Peape in the 1850s and 1860s, apparently giving up distinguishing between libertarian and authoritarian social organisation as he had in his polemics of the 1840s.⁷ Bakunin also used the term "state" in the same ambiguous manner in the 1860s, for example urging "the destruction of all national and territorial states, and the construction on their ruins of the international state of millions of workers. It will be the role of the International to build that state." (177) The problem with this is obvious:

"The anarchists soon saw [...] that it was rather dangerous for them to use the same word as the authoritarians while giving it a quite different meaning. They felt that a new concept called for a new word and that the use of the old term could be dangerously ambiguous; so they ceased to give the name 'State' to the social collective of the future."⁸

¹ Stekloff, *History of The First International*, 250, 422.

² Peter Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2018), 130.

³ The response by Adhémar Schwitzguébel is included by Daniel Guérin in *No Gods, No Masters* (230-7) so there really is no excuse not to provide it.

⁴ *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 392.

⁵ Archer, 101.

⁶ The resolution provided by Musto seems incomplete.

Another translation states property "would belong to the social body as a whole, represented by the State, but by the State regenerated and subject to the law of justice." (*Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 393)

⁷ Compare "Resistance to the Revolution" written in December 1849 to "The Federative Principle" written in 1863 (*Property is Theft!*, 479-94; 689-720)

⁸ Guérin, *Anarchism*, 60-1.

The advocates of the “people’s state” or the “semi-state” or the “workers’ state” (or whatever possessive, adjective or prefix is currently in vogue) implicitly acknowledge that the anarchists were right. The numerous possessives, adjectives and prefixes required to distinguish the new, wonderfully democratic state from every other state that has ever existed show this. Indeed, de Peape noted “this traditional notion of the state, which, in fact, has thus far never been anything other than authority, power, and, further, despotism” (187) yet also argued “what is that regional or national Federation of communes going to be, in essence, other than a state?” (189)

If a state were organised in a libertarian manner would it still be a state? Could it be? Can de Peape’s “a non-authoritarian state” exist? (190) The fact is that the state has always been an instrument of minority class rule and so James Guillaume was simply generalising from the experiences of history when he argued “as we define it, every state is the organisation through which one class rules over the others, every state is a *Klassenstaat*.” (192) Subsequent experience has confirmed his prediction:

“If you establish a new state [...] you will have [...] created a new privileged class, a class of rulers who will dominate the masses [...] armed with a power even greater than that which the bourgeois governments hold; for they will have control over all the social capital” (193)

For all its talk of being “scientific”, Marxism has failed to produce a scientific theory of the state (i.e., one drawn from empirical analysis) nor has it learned from subsequent experience (i.e., the dismissal failure of all so-called workers’ states). Marxism’s metaphysical definition (drawing an essence of the state as an instrument of any class’s rule rather than a minority class) has helped ensure confirm Bakunin’s fears that the Marxist revolution would simply change masters rather than systems. Kropotkin – who did produce a scientific analysis of the state – summed up the situation well: “The State is necessarily hierarchical, authoritarian—or it ceases to be the State”¹

If you have to distinguish *between* states by possessives, adjectives or prefixes would it not just be easier to use the term state to describe the centralised, top-down, instrument of minority rule it has *always* been historically and use another word to describe the decentralised, bottom-up, social organisation of a free humanity? In short, a federation of communes is a social organisation but it is *not* a state so while a state is a social organisation, not all social organisations are states.

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In his speech, de Peape used the analogy machinery noting how workers initially destroyed it but later came to recognise that they could use it to produce for themselves: “Machinery belongs to us! The state is a machine”. (190) This is flawed as machinery is *not* neutral as bosses often pick it precisely to undermine workers’ power in production and to secure their control (often sacrificing potential profits from more participatory possibilities to do

so). This means that workers will have to transform and humanise their workplaces and its machines. Unlike the state which *can* be replaced by other social institutions, this process needs to take time as production cannot be disrupted by smashing the machinery. The machinery of a workplace may initially stay the same but the management structure is transformed within it. In the state, the management structure remains intact (i.e., power is delegated to the few) and the machinery is used for the same purpose (i.e., enforcing the decisions of that few).

The dangers are all too obvious (at least to non-Marxists) and are summed up by Lenin’s comments to Bolshevik’s political police (the Cheka) in 1920:

“Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be

¹ Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, 227.

employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves.”¹

Perhaps needless to say, it was the party leaders who determined what was “wavering and unstable” based on their superior knowledge of the real interests of the masses. For, as Marx and Engels put it in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, “a portion of the bourgeois goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.” The Communists are “the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties” and “they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement.”² This gives a privileged place to the party (particularly the “bourgeois ideologists” who join it) – a place which can be easily abused in favour of party power and hierarchical leadership from above. Which it was once the Bolsheviks seized state power.

So while a workplace produces useful goods and so will need to continue to do so immediately after a revolution, the state is an instrument of class rule and its product (coercion) is not needed as a free people can organise and defend themselves using their own organisations created in the struggle for freedom (unions, councils, etc.).³ It is important to stress that anarchist opposition to the state does *not* mean opposition to social organisation nor defending a revolution.⁴ To quote Bakunin:

“the federative Alliance of all working men’s associations [...] will constitute the Commune [...] by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates [...] vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates [...] all provinces, communes and associations [...] would send] their representatives to an agreed meeting place [...] vested with similar mandates to constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces [...] to organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction [...] it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution [...] Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free

federation of agricultural and industrial associations [...] organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation.”⁵

A better analogy than machinery would be a trade union. Unlike the state, a union is in theory an organisation of the many – created by the many to identify and defend their interests. However, a union can be organised in different ways. It can be decentralised or centralised, federal or unitary, bottom-up or top-down. In short, it can be organised in a libertarian or authoritarian manner. Significantly, when it is organised in the latter way it empowers a few bureaucrats at the expense of the membership – *as in the state*. As Kropotkin summarised:

“the difference between a Trade Union and a Parliament is that one is an organisation for fighting capital, while the other (Parliament, be it well understood) is an organisation to uphold the State and authority. The one sometimes becomes revolutionary, the other never does. The one (Parliament) represents centralisation, the other (the Trade Union) represents autonomy, etc. The one (Parliament) is repugnant to us *on principle*, the other is a modifiable or a modified side of a struggle that most of us approve of.”⁶

The question is whether de Peape or Marx were right in suggesting that the state could be captured and transformed. The answer so far as been no: while various socialist parties have become the head of the state in numerous countries capitalism has remained. Of course, it will be objected that these parties were socialist in name only but to utilise that defence confirms the anarchist critique that reformism would replace revolution when socialists use “political action”.

What of the Bolshevik regime? Ignoring its degeneration into Stalinism, the awkward fact is that very quickly the regime became a workers’ state in name only. The centralisation of power isolated the ruling party from the people who it claimed to represent and, to secure its power, quickly undermined soviet democracy and replaced it with party dictatorship. Worse, the party placed the necessity of its *own* dictatorship – equated, of course, with the class dictatorship – at the core of its ideology and used state power to break any working class protest to secure it.⁷

The fate of Marxism – its degeneration into reformism or state capitalism – confirms that this is not a case of semantics. The intellectual confusion expressed in using

¹ *Collected Works* 42: 170.

² *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 44, 46.

³ See section I.2.3 of volume 2 of *An Anarchist FAQ*.

⁴ See section H.2.1 of volume 2 of *An Anarchist FAQ*.

⁵ *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), Arthur Lehning (ed.), 170-2.

⁶ *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), Iain McKay (ed.), 390-1.

⁷ See section H.6 of volume 2 of *An Anarchist FAQ*.

Marx, Engels and the International

the same name to describe things that are fundamentally organised in different ways and for different purposes is reflected in both these developments. The state needs to be smashed and de Peape's arguments hide this necessity. For not to smash the state means that you can recreate all the institutions of the class-state under the illusion that you are creating a state "of the people" or "of the workers" – as the Bolsheviks did, with sadly predictable (and predicted!) results.

This debate was not about the definition of words. How you define and so view the state has obvious implications for your political activity. If you view the state as the only form of social organisation possible then you have two options – capture the existing state and reform it or create a new state (with an appropriate prefix, possessive or adjective). In terms of the former, this ignores the dangers of both electioneering (the slow descent into reformism) and how easy it will be (the state has evolved a structure to ensure minority rule and that bureaucracy has the real power and will hinder use of political power for the many¹). As for the latter, the natural tendency is to produce all the institutions we associate with the state – executive bodies, top-down processes, etc. – under the illusion that the power of a prefix or possessive will ensure that this does not have the same results as when the ruling minorities implemented them to secure their position.

So, as noted, we have had 150 years of experience to draw upon. Who was right? Well, social democracy became as reformist as predicted and capitalism remains while the Bolsheviks produced the dictatorship *over* the proletariat and state capitalism remains in only a few countries. Sadly, Musto fails to discuss this and instead leaves the reader with Marxism triumphant for the Ghent workers Congress in 1877 "confirmed that Marx had merely been in advance of the times".² (64)

Marx and Engels – just like their followers today – were not there to work with and learn from others as equals – and so enrich everyone's politics – but rather to announce to the working class what their objective interests were and, consequently, what was expected of them (all as discovered by Marx)

While Musto, like most Marxists, paint Marx and Engels in the best possible light the facts are they were more than happy to undermine the democratic decision making bodies of the International when it suited them.

This was for the simple enough reason: to retain control over it. For, as Marx wrote to Engels in 1867, "when the next revolution comes, and that will perhaps be sooner than might appear, *we* (i.e., you and I) will have this mighty ENGINE *at our disposal*."³ Indeed, the contempt of Engels for the highest decision making body of the international – its annual congress – is quite shocking:

"The congress really does appear to have been swept away in the French tide this time, the number of Proudhonist resolutions is really far too large [...] whatever they resolve there is more or less wasted breath as long as the CENTRAL COUNCIL remains in London."⁴

This desire to use their positions to marginalise opposition – even if it were in the majority – may have been expressed in its full force against Bakunin and those close to him but it was a recurring theme. For example, Engels wrote that "up to now this opposition [in Belgium] has kept itself within the bounds of legality and will likewise be dealt with when the time is

ripe. Apart from De Paepe, the Belgians were never anything much."⁵ Marx later dismissed de Paepe as a "bombastic chatterbox"⁶ and both he and Engels expressed contempt for the Belgian socialists in spite of their obvious contributions to socialist theory. "Mr Hins and his wife", Marx complained, "are Bakuninists" while, for Engels, the "whole International there [in Belgium] is just so much hot air and nothing more."⁷

This arrogance could not but help undermine the organisation as Marx and Engels clearly saw no one as their equal and abused their position accordingly. Thus

¹ See section B.2 of volume 1 and section J.2.2 of volume 2 of *An Anarchist FAQ*.

² Which, of course, contradicts his claims that it was not the struggle between Marx and Bakunin which ended the IWMA but rather "changes taking place in the world around it that rendered the International obsolete" (49) and that "the socio-economic conditions in those countries made it unthinkable" to build Marx's "working-class political parties". (61) A

week may be a long time in politics but five years is hardly sufficient to transform a socio-economic epoch and industrialise Spain, Italy, France and so on.

³ *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 42: 424.

⁴ *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 42: 425.

⁵ *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 44: 289.

⁶ *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 45: 277.

⁷ *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 44: 263, 407.

we see Musto admit that a British Federal Council was finally agreed in 1872 because in “Marx’s view” it was “no longer necessary to exercise close supervision over British initiatives.” (38) Thus Marx and Engels – just like their followers today – were not there to work with and learn from others as equals – and so enrich everyone’s politics – but rather to announce to the working class what their objective interests were and, consequently, what was expected of them (all as discovered by Marx). Musto’s hero worship – such as proclaiming Marx “not only the brains shaping its political line, but also as one of its most combative and capable militants” (37) – would be amusing if it did not express the same sort of arrogance and so undermines the contribution of his book.

Conclusion

If the biased, incorrect and frankly question-begging “Introduction” is ignored, we do have a book which may be of help to modern activists. It does present texts – even if over-edited and whose selection is skewed – which played key roles in the development of all schools of socialism. It contains a wide selection from the debates and minutes of the International and it is good to see texts by such people as Jean Louis Pindy, Eugène Hins, Adhémar Schwitzguébel, James Guillaume and César de Peape appear in English for the first time. Whether the book’s price warrants purchase based on these – sadly – minority of pages will very much depend on the tolerance and budget of the reader. In short, this book is a wasted opportunity.

While Musto may think that “Marx undoubtedly played a key role in the long struggle to reduce Proudhon’s influence in the International” (20) the reality is that Proudhon’s ideas were transformed by debates between his followers in which Marx played little or no role. Just as the founding of the International took place without him so did the debates on agricultural collectivisation and the final resolutions on collectivisation were steeped in Proudhonist terminology. This is unsurprising as, regardless of Musto’s assertions, Proudhon was in favour of socialisation of capital and support for its extension to land is by no means alien to his work.

So given that the key debate within the International was primarily between self-proclaimed mutualists and was consistent with Proudhon’s ideas, it is simply false to proclaim that Marx’s “ideas were fundamental to the theoretical development of its leaders”. (20) The resolution on collective property would have passed anyway without Marx – as can be seen from the awkward fact that he was not even at the congresses at which the issue was debated. All the other real and lasting developments in the International were produced – like the International itself – by those influenced by Proudhon, not Marx. Similarly Musto does recount how, if the Parisians had listened to Marx, there would not have been a Paris Commune (31) yet he does not let

this stop him proclaiming Marx “fortified the workers’ movement, impelling it to adopt more radical positions and to intensify its militancy”! (35)

Which raises a key issue with the book. As can be seen from his account of Bakunin, by concentrating on the “official” documents of the International a false picture of its evolution is presented. No articles are included from meetings or journals of its sections and so key discussions are either missed or summarised based on reports of debates at the annual congresses. So the articles on how trade unions should become the institutional framework of a free society are not quoted and so the actual majority position in the International is downplayed. It also means that Bakunin’s ideas are pretty much incomprehensible to the typical reader who almost certainly will not have read *The Basic Bakunin* and its collection of articles written when Bakunin was a member of the International and seeking to influence its direction (needless to say, this key work is not even referenced by Musto). Sam Dolgoff’s *Bakunin on Anarchism* is quoted but only in relation to the struggle with Marx and then only unpublished works. As for *Statism and Anarchy*, well, it goes unmentioned that this was published after the split and in Russian.

This shoddy scholarship reflects Musto’s Marxist prejudices and could be understandable (if lamentable) in an obvious polemical attack on anarchism but this book is presented as a work making the ideas and debates of the International available to a new generation. This task needs objectivity rather than cheerleading.

So if we reject Marxist cheerleading, what lessons are to be drawn from the First International? Musto thinks that the “aims of the organisation founded in London 150 years ago are today more vital than ever. To rise to the challenges of the present, the new International cannot evade that twin requirements: it must be plural and it must be anticapitalist.” (66) Except, of course, that Musto seems to equate “anticapitalist” with Marxist and think that Marx was right to foster his own political programme on the organisation. For if Marx did achieve “a non-exclusionary [...] political programme that won it a mass character beyond all sectarianism” (5) *he* was also the one who destroyed it by fostering a specific political programme – his own – on it.

In terms of “plural”, this is remarkably at odds with the Marxist tradition for if “there was a definitive parting of the ways between anarchists and socialists” (63) then this was driven by Marxists and their insistence on “political action.” After the anarchists were expelled from the Brussels Congress of the Second International in 1891 Engels proclaimed that it “proved a brilliant success for us [...] And, best of all, the anarchists have been shown the door, just as they were at the Hague Congress. The new, incomparably larger and avowedly Marxist International is beginning again at the precise

spot where its predecessor ended.”¹ We can expect a similar process at work in any attempt to create a militant workers organisation today.

In the last analysis, while it should be possible to unite many in an organisation based on direct action and extra-parliamentarian solidarity the fact is that Marx’s children will – like him – undermine it by insisting that it stand candidates in elections. So while the Second nor the Third Internationals may have “constantly referred to the values and doctrines of the First International” (65) they were built of political parties and not unions and we can expect the same of any sixth International the Marxists would seek to produce from any movement unfortunate enough to be deemed – like Marx with the IWMA – worthy of their presence. While Marx may be forgiven by incorrectly – unlike Bakunin – predicting the consequences of this, those active today have 150 years of experience to learn from. Yet, like Musto, they do not and are left wondering why socialism is now further away than when the IWMA was founded.

It is not hard to conclude that Marxism *itself* is part of the problem, not least because its adherents do not recognise that its own strategy (political action) and goal (state socialism) do not work. The sooner people recognise that Marx is just one thinker amongst many who contributed to our critique and analysis of capitalism and, more importantly, that contribution can be appreciated without having to embrace the rest of his ideology, the better.

And that is the problem – we have socialist ideology, not socialist theory as we had in the International. As Musto and so many others inadvertently show, while theory is where you have ideas, ideology is where ideas

have you. It is this that allows someone to discuss the IWMA and conclude that Marx was right – *in spite of 150 years of history that proves the opposite.*

The key lesson for anarchists to learn from the International is why, given the balance of forces in 1872, that within ten years we saw the rise of social democracy and the marginalisation of anarchism in many of its previous strongholds. This gives the Marxist account a plausibility which the subsequent history of social democracy undermines. It is hard not to conclude, as the likes of Malatesta and Kropotkin did, that it was the lack of actual practical activity in the here-and-now that was the cause. The ultra-revolutionism of the late 1870s and early 1880s, the ignoring of mundane activities like winning reforms by union organising and struggle, was the key issue – it is no coincidence that anarchist strength in Spain is the one exception in this marginalisation process or that it was reversed with the rise of syndicalism from the 1890s to 1910s.

Kropotkin never tired of repeating the need to pursue the strategy of the anarchists in the International, namely getting involved in the struggles and organisations of workers in order to push them towards revolutionary means and ends. He was right to do so and this, rather than the hagiography of Marx Musto provides, is what we should take from the International 150 years later.

Workers Unite! The International 150 years later
Marcello Musto (ed.)
Bloomsbury Academic
New York/London
2014

Parish Notices

There’s never a good time to be in prison, COVID-19 is making a bad thing worse. Haven Distribution aims to provide practical support to prisoners within the UK by: purchasing educational literature for inmates who are currently attending courses whilst in prison; providing dictionaries in English and other languages to inmates whose first language is not English; providing large print dictionaries and books on improving reading and writing skills to inmates with dyslexia: havendistribution.org.uk

The Solidarity Federation-IWA has a new, ‘Local-information’, SF Newcastle: solfed.org.uk/local/newcastle

The Anarchist Communist Group continue to publish their free bulletin, *Jackdaw*, both hardcopy and online: anarchistcommunism.org/jackdaw-2

The Sam and Esther Dolgoff Institute has a new website, “Keeping the ideas of Anarchism and industrial unionism alive through the history and spirit of Sam and Esther Dolgoff”: dolgoffinstitute.com

The Stuart Christie Memorial Archive now has a website. This includes pdfs of issues of *Black Flag* and *Black Flag Quarterly*: stuartchristie.maydayrooms.org

Lobster 83 (2022) is now available: lobster-magazine.co.uk/issue83.php

Statement from *Liverpool Anarchist*: “Final Issue - After 24 issues, having begun in October 2019, this will be the final release of *Liverpool Anarchist*. The newsletter is wrapping up due to people moving away from Liverpool. As it stands, no one has chosen to take over the publication, but it is a possibility for the future. Regardless, the anarchist movement in the city and surrounding areas will continue and hopefully pick up as more people seek genuine solutions to the many crises biting into our lives and futures.”

Let’s hope someone takes up the baton. Issue XXIV (July 2022) and all other issues, available here: liverpoolanarchist.wordpress.com/issues-archive

¹ *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 49: 238.

Manifiesto (1872)

Spanish Regional Federation of the International Workers' Association

We want justice to be achieved in all human relations;

We want the abolition of all social classes and their fusion into a single class of free, honest and cultured producers;

We want work to be the basis on which society rests; that the world be converted into one immense federation of free working class local collectives which, by federating among themselves, will constitute a completely autonomous local federation; that the local federations in one canton will constitute the cantonal federation, that the various cantonal federations in a region will constitute the regional federation and finally that all the regional federations of the world will constitute the large international federation.

We want the instruments of work, the land, the mines, the shipyards, the merchant navy, the railways, factories, machine, etc. having become the property of the whole of society should not be utilised except by the workers Collectives who will make them produce directly and within which the worker will receive the full produce of his work;

We want for all individuals of both sexes a complete education in science, industry and the Arts so that intellectual inequalities almost entirely imaginary, will disappear, and that the distinctive effects of the division of labour should not recur; one will then secure the unique, but positive, advantages from that economic force by the production of that which is destined to satisfy human needs;

We believe that by the organisation of society in a vast federation of workers



Collectives based on work, all authoritarian powers will disappear, converting themselves into simple administrators of the collective interests, and that the spirit of nationality and patriotism, so antagonistic to union and solidarity among men, will be obliterated before the great fatherland of work, which is the whole world.

Such is the socialism that is proclaimed by the International of which the two fundamental affirmations are: collectivism in economics and anarchy as a political principle. Collectivism, that is the common property in the instruments of work, their use by the workers' Collectives which use them to produce directly, and individual ownership of the whole product of each person's labour. Anarchy, or the abolition of governments, that is to say their conversion into the simple administrators of collective interests.

Federal Council

Translation: Vernon Richards – Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1975).