

DIRECT STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITAL

A PETER KROPOTKIN ANTHOLOGY



EDITED BY IAIN McKAY

Peter Kropotkin

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*Edited by
Iain McKay*

*I dedicate this to my partner
for her support, help and
love; to my children, who
make the world a better place;
and finally, to all the unknown
working class anarchists,
past, present and future,
whose hopes and struggles
make Kropotkin relevant.*

The “right to well-being” means the possibility of living like human beings, and of bringing up children to be members of a society better than ours, whilst the “right to work” only means the right to be always a wage-slave, a drudge, ruled over and exploited by the middle class of the future. The right to well-being is the Social Revolution, the right to work

*means nothing but the
Treadmill of Commercialism.
It is high time for the worker
to assert his right to the
common inheritance and to
enter into possession.*

—Peter Kropotkin
“Well-Being for All,” *The
Conquest of Bread*

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Introduction

Bread and Liberty

Kropotkin... was a prominent figure in the realm of learning, recognised as such by the foremost men of the world. But to us he meant much more than that. We saw in him the father of modern anarchism, its revolutionary spokesman and brilliant exponent of its relation to

*science, philosophy, and
progressive thought. As a
personality he towered high
above most of his
contemporaries by virtue of
his humanity and faith in the
masses. Anarchism to him was
not an ideal for the select few.*

*It was a constructive social
theory, destined to usher in a
new world for all of mankind.*

*For this he had lived and
laboured all his life.*

—Emma Goldman[[1](#)]

Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) was the foremost anarchist theoretician of the late 19th and early 20th century. His fellow anarchist and friend Errico Malatesta rightly stated he was “without doubt one of those who have contributed most” to the “elaboration and propagation of anarchist ideas” and has “well deserved the recognition and the

admiration that all anarchists feel for him.”[[2](#)] Leading anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker stated he “owed a great deal to Kropotkin” and his books “had influenced my whole development, had shaped my whole life.” Kropotkin “was a scholar and a thinker, a man of extraordinarily wide reading and learning, a historian, geographer, economist and

social philosopher.” He “was no utopist. He had a practical view of life.”[[3](#)] For George Orwell, Kropotkin’s “inventive and pragmatic outlook” made him “one of the most persuasive of Anarchist writers.”[[4](#)]

Kropotkin’s ideas left their mark on the libertarian[[5](#)] movement across the globe, a movement that is still indebted to his decades of activism

within it as “one of the most seminal figures in the history of the anarchist movement” as well as “one of its most important theoreticians.”[[6](#)]

As Nicholas Walter summarised:

Kropotkin’s most characteristic doctrines are... anarchist communism as the end—that the whole of society should be organised on the

basis of common
ownership and popular
control at grass roots—and
of revolutionary
expropriation as the means
—that this must be
accomplished by the
forcible seizure by the
mass of the people of all
capital and property. His
political doctrines may be
summed up by the phrase
used for the [title of the]

Russian edition of *La
Conquête du pain...*:
“Bread and Liberty.”[7]

While not the first advocate of communist-anarchism, Kropotkin was instrumental in helping it to become the dominant anarchist theory of the late 19th century, a position it holds to this day. His works were spread across the globe, influencing the labour and anarchist

movements in Europe, the Americas and Asia (particularly in Japan, Korea and China). As well as being the world's leading anarchist thinker for five decades, Kropotkin was an active anarchist militant who participated in the many debates within the movement over strategy and tactics. He consistently advocated a vision of socialism from below, built

by the working class managing their own struggles:

Workmen's organisations are the real force capable of accomplishing the social revolution—after the awakening of the proletariat has been accomplished, first by individual action, then by collective action, by strikes and revolts extending more and more; and where

workmen's organisations have not allowed themselves to be dominated by the gentlemen who advocate "the conquest of political power," but have continued to walk hand in hand with anarchists—as they have done in Spain—they have obtained, on the one hand, immediate results (an eight-hour day

in certain trades in Catalonia), and on the other have made good propaganda for the social revolution—the one to come, not from the efforts of those highly-placed gentlemen, but from below, from workmen's organisations.[[8](#)]

His anarchism was built upon the awareness that the worker “claims his share in the riches

he produces; he claims his share in the management of production; and he claims not only some additional well-being, but also his full rights in the higher enjoyment of science and art.”[[9](#)] His goal was to produce a society fit for humans to live in, prosper and fully develop their potential rather than one marked by classes and hierarchies within which most

people simply survive. This vision of self-liberation of the oppressed is reflected in the strategies he advocated (direct action and revolutionary unionism), his vision of revolution (mass action to expropriate capital and destroy the State) as well as his sketches of a free society (created and managed from below by the people themselves, directly) and is

expressed in numerous articles for the anarchist press.

Unfortunately, although critically important in getting a clear understanding of Kropotkin's politics, most of these writings are unknown. [10] The most easily available of his texts are those that are very general and theoretical, *not* those dealing with the concrete political and strategic issues facing the anarchist

movement at the time. This means that he far too often gets cast as a visionary or as a theorist rather than as an active anarchist militant actively engaged in the issues of the day, grappling with challenges facing the workers' movement and anarchist strategies within and outwith it to produce social transformation.

So in order to get a better

grasp of Kropotkin's ideas, we need to look at the articles he wrote for the libertarian press, which he himself stated "are more expressive of my anarchist ideas." [[11](#)] While he mentions in passing anarchist advocacy of direct action, economic class war and revolutionary unionism in his general introductions to libertarian ideas, it is his articles in anarchist

newspapers which are more focused on these practical matters. As he acknowledged in one polemic over syndicalism in 1907, “I now ask myself if it would not be useful to make a selection of these articles” on the labour movement “and publish them in a volume” for if he had then it would show that he along with other anarchists had “always believed that the

working class movement—organised in each trade for the *direct conflict* with Capital (today in France it is called Syndicalism and ‘direct action’) constitutes true strength, and is capable of *leading up* to the Social Revolution and *realising* it.”[[12](#)]

This anthology seeks to show the importance Kropotkin placed on the

workers' movement both as a fertile area for anarchist propaganda and as a means of creating libertarian communism. It seeks to challenge the all-too-common notion that he was a dreamer, presenting enticing visions of a better world but with no idea how to reach it. In reality, he was keenly aware of the need to understand capitalism and the State, to participate in the

oppositional movements and struggles within it and to learn the lessons of previous revolutions to ensure the success of the next one.

To do so will show why Kropotkin's influence was so great and the impact he had on the development of anarchism. It aims to combine his better-known theoretical works with the less well-known articles he wrote to influence the

anarchist and workers' movements, showing how he built upon and developed the libertarian ideas previously championed by Proudhon and Bakunin. These ideas, such as anti-statism, anti-capitalism, self-management, possession, socialisation, communal-economic federalism, decentralisation, working class self-emancipation, and so forth, are as important today

as they were in his time. It aims to allow a new generation of radicals to gain an understanding of Kropotkin's libertarian communism in order to develop it for the struggles we face today.

Anarchism before Kropotkin

Just as anarchism did not spring into existence, Minerva-

like, in 1840 with the publication of Proudhon's *What is Property?*, so Kropotkin's ideas grew and developed over time, building upon workers' struggles and the legacies of previous libertarian thinkers. When he became an anarchist, he was part of a movement which, influenced by Proudhon and Bakunin, had experienced both the joy and crushing

defeat of the Paris Commune as well as the struggles within the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) over political action and the so-called workers' State.

In order to understand Kropotkin's ideas and his contributions to the commonwealth of ideas which is anarchism, we first need to sketch their political context. While Kropotkin, particularly

in his later works like the article on Anarchism for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, presented anarchism as something which has existed as long as hierarchical authority has, anarchism is better understood as being a specific socio-economic theory and movement which was born in the nineteenth century. Before 1840, no libertarian theory was called

“anarchism” nor was there any popular movement termed “anarchist” by its members (many had been called this by their governmental and wealthy opponents as an insult[[13](#)]).

This does not mean that anarchistic theories and movements did not exist—they did, but they only became retrospectively called anarchist once the anarchist movement

discovered them. This can be seen from William Godwin, whom Kropotkin suggested had “stated in 1793 in a quite definite form the political and economic principle of Anarchism” and so was “the first theoriser of Socialism without government—that is to say, of Anarchism.”[[14](#)]

However, Godwin never used the term anarchism, and he was only rediscovered (along

with Max Stirner) by anarchists in the 1890s. His ideas had no direct influence on anarchism, which developed independently after his death in 1836.

Therefore, regardless of the merit of the ideas of Godwin and Stirner, it would be anachronistic to discuss them when sketching anarchism before Kropotkin joined the movement. We therefore start

with Proudhon's reformist anarchism before discussing Bakunin's contribution to revolutionary anarchism. The latter is particularly important, given that it was in the IWMA that many of the strategies normally associated with anarchism (union organising and struggle, social revolution, etc.) first developed: "Within these federations [of the IMWA] developed... what

may be described as *modern anarchism*.”[[15](#)] However, as will be seen, Proudhon’s influence in the IWMA was significant, and many of the ideas of revolutionary anarchism have their roots in his reformist anarchism.

This placing anarchism within a historical context does not mean, however, that it is the product of a few gifted individuals. While thinkers like

Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin helped to develop anarchist ideas, anarchism itself “originated in everyday struggles” and “the Anarchist movement was renewed each time it received an impression from some great practical lesson: it derived its origin from the teachings of life itself.”[[16](#)]

Proudhon developed his ideas in the context of the rise of the

French workers' movement and its demands for self-managed workplace associations to replace wage-labour, as well as the 1848 revolution.[17](#) Bakunin, likewise, contributed to anarchism by taking up ideas already expressed within the IWMA by workers across Europe.

Little wonder, then, that Kropotkin stressed that

“Anarchism had its origins in the same creative, constructive activity of the masses which has worked out in times past all the social institutions of mankind—and in the revolts... against the representatives of force, external to these social institutions, who had laid their hands on these institutions and used them for their own advantage.” In this sense “from all times there have

been Anarchists and Statists” but “Anarchy was brought forth by the same critical and revolutionary protest which gave birth to Socialism in general.” Anarchism, unlike other forms of socialism, “lifted its sacrilegious arm, not only against Capitalism, but also against these pillars of Capitalism: Law, Authority, and the State.” All anarchist writers did was to “work out a

general expression” of anarchism’s “principles, and the theoretical and scientific basis of its teachings.”[[18](#)]

THE BIRTH OF ANARCHISM

PROUDHON AND MUTUALISM

Anarchism as a named socio-economic theory and movement starts with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), a working-class French writer who was one of the

most influential socialist thinkers of his time. His works defined anarchism as a form of libertarian (or anti-State) socialism with a goal of a federation of self-managed workplace and self-governing communities.

Proudhon ensured his fame with his seminal 1840 work *What is Property?* which, as well providing the enduring radical slogan “property is

theft,” saw him proclaim: “I am an anarchist.” This book analysed the justifications for property, turning them against the institution, and concluded “that those who do not possess to-day are proprietors by the same title as those who do possess; but, instead of inferring therefrom that property should be shared by all, I demand, in the name of general security, its entire

abolition.”[[19](#)]

Property, Proudhon argued, “violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism.” It has “perfect identity with theft” and the worker “has sold and surrendered his liberty” to the proprietor who exploits the workers by appropriating their “collective force.” Anarchy was “the absence of a master, of a sovereign,” while the

proprietor was “synonymous” with the “sovereign,” for he “imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control.” Thus “property is despotism” as “each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property” and so freedom and property were incompatible. Property had to be socialised, with “accumulated capital being social property” and the

land “a common thing.” He also advocated industrial democracy: “every industry needs... leaders, instructors, superintendents... they must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves.”[[20](#)]

He developed these ideas in his 1846 *System of Economic Contradictions*. This analysed the contradictory nature of capitalism. For example, while

machinery “promised us an increase of wealth” and “liberty” it also produced “an increase of poverty” and “brought us slavery”—having “degraded the worker by giving him a master, [it] completes his degeneracy by reducing him from the rank of artisan to that of unskilled labourer.” Under capitalism, machines “make the chains of serfdom heavier” and “deepen

the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers.”[[21](#)]

Under capitalism workers have “sold their arms and parted with their liberty” to the boss and so “[u]nder the regime of property, the surplus of labour, essentially collective, passes entirely, like the revenue, to the proprietor.” However, “[b]y virtue of the

principle of collective force, workers are the equals and associates of their leaders” and so “that association may be real, he who participates in it must do so” as “an active factor” with “a deliberative voice in the council” based on “equality.” This implied socialisation of property as workers must “straightway enjoy the rights and prerogatives of associates and

even managers” when they join a workplace. Recognising that the “present form” of organising labour “is inadequate and transitory,” he urged “a solution based upon equality,—in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property.”[[22](#)] As he summarised two years later:

under universal

association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership... We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations...

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.[[23](#)]

His influential 1851 work, *General Idea of the Revolution*, saw him at his most radical: “No authority, no government, not even popular, that is the Revolution”; “Capitalist and landlord exploitation stopped everywhere.” The State was

“established for the rich against the poor,” its laws simply “[s]pider webs for the rich and powerful, steel chains for the weak and poor, fishing nets in the hands of the Government.” Co-operatives would ensure “wage-labour abolished” due to “the immorality, tyranny and theft suffered” in capitalist firms, which “plunder the bodies and souls of the wage-workers”

and are “an outrage upon human dignity and personality.” Instead the “industry to be carried on, the work to be accomplished, are the common and undivided property of all those who take part therein.” Land and housing would “revert” to “the commune” with “repairs, management, and upkeep of buildings, as well as for new constructions” being organised

by communes and “building workers’ associations.”[[24](#)]
This would produce a federal system:

Unless democracy is a fraud, and the sovereignty of the People a joke, it must be admitted that each citizen in the sphere of his industry, each municipal, district or provincial council within its own territory, is the only natural

and legitimate
representative of the
Sovereign.[[25](#)]

Proudhon's vision of a free economy was based on workers' self-management of production with "the exchange of produce among working men's associations by means of labour-cheques issued by the National Bank."[[26](#)]
Socially, he advocated a system of communal

federalism as only this ensured “not an abstract sovereignty of the people, as in the Constitution of 1793 and subsequent constitutions, or as in Rousseau’s Social Contract, but an effective sovereignty of the working, reigning, governing masses... how could it be otherwise if they are in charge of the whole economic system including labour, capital, credit, property

and wealth?”[[27](#)] An *agricultural-industrial federation* would “shield the citizens” of the federated communes from “capitalist exploitation as much from the inside as from the outside” and stop “the political decay of the masses, economic serfdom or wage-labour, in a word, the inequality of conditions and fortunes.” This was necessary as “political right must have

the buttress of economic right.”[[28](#)]

Federation was based on mandating and recalling delegates for “we can follow [our deputies] step by step” and “make them transmit our arguments and our documents; we shall indicate our will to them, and when we are discontented, we will revoke them.” Thus “the imperative mandate, permanent

revocability, are the most immediate, undeniable, consequences of the electoral principle. It is the inevitable program of all democracy.” He also urged “the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power through its joint deliberations and votes.”[[29](#)] These ideas, it

must be noted, were applied during the Paris Commune and were praised by Karl Marx in *The Civil War in France*.[\[30\]](#) As anarchist James Guillaume argued at the time, “the Paris Revolution is federalist... in the sense given it years ago by the great socialist, Proudhon.” It is “above all the negation of the nation and the State.”[\[31\]](#)

To achieve these goals

Proudhon opposed revolution in favour of reform. He saw mutual banking (co-operative credit) as the means by which labour would organise and emancipate itself, arguing it was “the organisation of labour’s greatest asset” and would lead to the “spontaneous, popular formation of groups, workshops or workers’ associations.”[[32](#)] Proudhon

did not abstractly compare an ideal system to the current one, arguing against such speculation by the Utopian Socialists. Rather than seeking to invent another perfect community or social panacea, he urged radicals to analyse, understand, and so transcend capitalism by seeing what tendencies within it point beyond it:

It is important, then, that

we should resume the study of economic facts and practices, discover their meaning, and formulate their philosophy. Until this is done, no knowledge of social progress can be acquired, no reform attempted. The error of socialism has consisted hitherto in perpetuating religious reverie by launching

forward into a fantastic future instead of seizing the reality which is crushing it.[[33](#)]

He stressed that radicals had to be forward-looking rather than seeking to recreate past glories, denouncing “this queer preoccupation which, in time of revolution, bedazzles the most steadfast minds, and, when their burning aspirations carry them forward into the

future, has them constantly harking back to the past... Could [society] not turn its gaze in the direction in which it is going?"[[34](#)] This was combined with a strong advocacy of working class self-emancipation:

Workers, labourers, men of the people, whoever you may be, the initiative of reform is yours. It is you who will accomplish

that synthesis of social composition which will be the masterpiece of creation, and you alone can accomplish it.[[35](#)]

Social reform had to be done outside of the State for “the problem of association consists in organising... the producers, and by this organisation subjecting capital and subordinating power. 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.” He rejected the idea that the State could be captured for social change, arguing that it “finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat” and so “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.” During the 1848 revolution he “propose[d] that a provisional committee be set up... 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.”[[36](#)]

These ideas would be expounded and developed by subsequent anarchists, not least Kropotkin, who highly respected Proudhon as “undoubtedly one of the greatest writers who have ever dealt with economical questions,” a writer who was “one of the most suggestive—maybe *the* most suggestive—amongst those writers who lead men to think for

themselves. He has covered in his works nearly the whole field of human enterprise: economics, politics, art, war; and everywhere he has dealt with the subject in the most suggestive way.”[[37](#)]

Moreover, “the point of view of Proudhon” was “the only one which, in my opinion, was really scientific”[[38](#)] and the Frenchman was “the writer whom I like best of all those

who wrote about the social question.”[[39](#)] At “the bottom of” Proudhon’s *General Idea of the Revolution* “lay a deeply *practical* idea—that of Anarchy.”[[40](#)]

This does not mean Kropotkin was uncritical of the French anarchist’s ideas, specifically rejecting his reformism and ideas on payment by labour done, concluding that while as “a

critic he is great, as a constructor [he is] weak.”[[41](#)]
Suffice it to say, this did not stop Kropotkin repeatedly noting Proudhon’s importance as a thinker and his contributions to anarchism.

LIBERTARIANS IN THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

Proudhon had infused anarchism with most of its basic concepts—anti-statism, anti-capitalism, federalism,

workers' self-management—
as well as a clear focus on the
working classes as the agents
of social transformation
premised on their self-
organisation and self-
emancipation, albeit within a
reformist strategy. After his
death in January 1865,
Proudhon's followers applied
his ideas within the nascent
labour movement across
Europe but particularly in

France. So when the French mutualists helped found the IWMA, libertarian ideas were set for a new evolution based on the requirements of this new environment—trade unions. This would give birth to *revolutionary* anarchism, initially collectivist and then communist.

It is necessary to stress that the IWMA was *not* created by Marx but by French and

British trade unionists.[[42](#)]
Sadly, the Marx-centric perspective is common within radical circles, and so the IWMA itself is marginalised. Combined with an all-too-frequent ignorance of Proudhon's ideas, this means that we do not know much about its debates, and what we think we know is often wrong.

This can be seen from the so-called “collectivism”

debates which climaxed at the Basel Congress of 1869 with the success of a collectivist motion which was opposed by some of the French Internationalists. This is usually portrayed as the victory of Marxism over Proudhon's ideas, but in reality, it was a debate on the specific issue of agricultural collectivisation:

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 the

demand for common
ownership of mines and
railways.[[43](#)]

Thus it was “not a debate over co-operative production in favour of some other model” but rather concerned its extension to agriculture. At the Geneva Congress of 1866 the French Internationalists, usually labelled Proudhonists, “persuaded the Congress to agree by unanimous vote that

there was a higher goal—the suppression of ‘salaried status’ [i.e., wage-labour]—which... could be done only through co-operatives.” At the Lausanne Congress of 1867, they “acknowledged the necessity of public ownership of canals, roads, and mines” and there was “unanimous accord” on public ownership of “the means of transportation and exchange of

goods.”[[44](#)] This was Proudhon’s position as well and the resolution on collectivisation had a remarkably Proudhonian tone, with it urging the collectivisation of roads, canals, railways, mines, quarries, collieries and forests, and these to be “ceded to ‘workers’ companies’ which would guarantee the ‘mutual rights’ of workers and would

sell their goods or services at cost.” The land would “be turned over to ‘agricultural companies’ (i.e., agricultural workers) with the same guarantees as those required of the ‘workers’ companies’.”[[45](#)] De Paepe clarified the issue: “Collective property would belong to society as a whole, but would be conceded to associations of workers. The State would be

no more than a federation of various groups of workers.”[[46](#)]As Proudhon had advocated workers’ companies to run publicly owned industries as well as arguing the land was common property and be transferred to communes, the resolution was not the rejection of Proudhon’s ideas that many assume. In fact, it can be considered a logical fusion of his arguments

on land ownership and workers' associations. Given that the main leader of the "collectivist" position was César De Paepe, a self-proclaimed mutualist, this debate was fundamentally one amongst followers of Proudhon, not between mutualists and Marxists. Indeed, the 1869 resolution was consistent with Proudhon's ideas meaning that

“in the congresses of the First International the libertarian idea of self-management prevailed over the statist concept.”[[47](#)]

It was also 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.[[48](#)] They were first 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.”[[49](#)]

The then secretary of the Belgium federation, Eugène Hins, wrote an article on these ideas in its newspaper *L'Internationale* which discussed how 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). The *sociétés de résistance* themselves would organise production. The International's *sections* would include all workers and would reflect matters of general concern at a local level based on a *Comité administratif* (administrative council). Consumer co-operatives would function as communal shops (*bazars communaux*)

and control the distribution of goods at cost-price (i.e., 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.”[[50](#)]

At the Basel Congress of the IWMA this was repeated: “Trade Unions will continue to exist after the suppression of the wage system... they will be the organisation of labour.”[[51](#)] 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.”[[52](#)]

This vision of a future

economic regime based on federations of workers' associations echoed Proudhon's vision—right down to the words used! It reflected both current trade union organisation and the Frenchman's ideas as expressed in, for example, *System of Economic Contradictions* and *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, and was a

common idea within the
libertarian wing of the
International:

As early as the 1860s and
1870s, the followers of
Proudhon and Bakunin in
the First International were
proposing the formation of
workers' councils designed
both as a weapon of class
struggle against capitalists
and as the structural basis
of the future libertarian

society.[[53](#)]

So we see the Barcelona Internationalist paper *La Federación* argue, in November 1869, that the International “contains within itself the seeds of social regeneration... it holds the embryo of all future institutions.”[[54](#)] The next year saw French left-mutualist (and future Communard martyr) Eugène Varlin argue

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.”[[55](#)]

BAKUNIN AND REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

So by 1869 a clear collectivist

current that advocated common ownership of both land and capital as well as embracing trade unions as both *the* means of struggle and the structure of a free society had developed in the IWMA. The most famous champion of these ideas was Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876).

Bakunin was, like Kropotkin, a Russian aristocrat who renounced his

title to join the struggle against autocracy and became an anarchist. Embracing Hegelian philosophy as a student, Bakunin became a left-republican and spent time in Paris discussing ideas with his friend Proudhon. A man of action, he enthusiastically participated in the 1848 revolutions but was arrested and sent back to Tsarist Russia to be imprisoned in solitary

confinement in the Peter-and-Paul prison. After pressure from his family, the Tsar finally reduced his sentence to exile in Siberia, from which he escaped to Europe. There he developed his ideas towards revolutionary anarchism and created the Alliance of Social Democracy to spread them. Failing to convince the League for Peace and Freedom to embrace libertarian socialism,

he joined the IWMA in July 1868.

As Kropotkin summarised, Bakunin:

found the proper surroundings and ground for his revolutionary agitation in the International Working Men's Association. Here he saw masses of workers of all nations joining hands across frontiers, and

striving to become strong enough in their Unions to throw off the yoke of Capitalism. And at once he understood what was the chief stronghold the workers had to storm, in order to be successful in their struggle against Capital—*the State...*
“*Destroy the State!*”
became the war-cry ...
“*Down with Capitalism*

*and down with the
State!”*[[56](#)]

He took up and expanded upon the ideas already being expressed in the libertarian wing of the IWMA, arguing that socialism had to be based on a federation of workers' councils:

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.[[57](#)]

Anarchists could only achieve

their goal “by the development and organisation... of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses as much in the towns as in the countryside.”[[58](#)] This meant that workers had to organise themselves at the point of production:

Toilers, count no longer on anyone but yourselves. Do not demoralise and

paralyse your growing strength by being duped into alliances with bourgeois Radicalism...

Abstain from all participation in bourgeois Radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The bases of this organisation are... the workshops and the federation of workshops, the creation of fighting

funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation, not only national, but international. [[59](#)]

A “living, powerful, socialist movement” can “be made a reality only by the awakened revolutionary consciousness, the collective will, and the organisation of the working masses themselves.”[[60](#)] The

International, therefore, had to “expand and organise itself... so that when the Revolution... breaks out, there will be... a serious international organisation of workers’ associations... capable of replacing this departing world of States.”[[61](#)] Therefore the “organisation of the trade sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by Chambers of

Labour... bear in themselves the living germs of *the social order*, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself.”[[62](#)]

The “war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is unavoidable” as there was “an irreconcilable antagonism which results inevitably from their respective stations in life”

and would only end with the “abolition of the bourgeoisie as a distinct class.” In order for the worker to “become strong” he “must unite” with other workers in “the union of all local and national workers’ associations into a world-wide association, *the great International Working-Men’s Association.*” It was only “through practice and collective experience” and

“the progressive expansion and development of the economic struggle” that the worker would “recognise his true enemies: the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeoisie, and the nobility; and the State, which exists only to safeguard all the privileges of those classes.” There was “but a single path, that of *emancipation through practical action*,” which “has

only one meaning. It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means *trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds.*"[[63](#)]

Strikes were “the beginnings of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie... Strikes are a valuable instrument from two points of view. Firstly, they

electrify the masses... awaken in them the feeling of the deep antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie... secondly they help immensely to provoke and establish between the workers of all trades, localities and countries the consciousness and very fact of solidarity: a twofold action, both negative and positive, which tends to

constitute directly the new world of the proletariat, opposing it almost in an absolute way to the bourgeois world.”[[64](#)] In addition, as “strikes spread from one place to another, they come close to turning into a general strike. And with the ideas of emancipation that now hold sway over the proletariat, a general strike can result only in a great cataclysm which

forces society to shed its old skin.”[[65](#)]

Thus the socialist movement must be based on workplace organisation and struggles as strikes “create, organise, and form a workers’ army, an army which is bound to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and the State, and lay the ground for a new world.” However, this did not imply ignoring political issues

or struggles. Anarchism, Bakunin stressed, “does not reject politics generally. It will certainly be forced to involve itself insofar as it will be forced to struggle against the bourgeois class. It only rejects bourgeois politics” as it “establishes the predatory domination of the bourgeoisie.”[[66](#)] This needed to be fought and to “create a people’s force capable of

crushing the military and civil force of the State, it is necessary to organise the proletariat”[[67](#)] as revolution requires “an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward.”[[68](#)]

As well as union organisation, Bakunin also saw the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle.

The Alliance of Social Democracy was “the necessary complement to the International. But the International and the Alliance, while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses... regardless of nationality or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body: the Alliance,

on the other hand, tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction.” This did not mean that the Alliance was imposing a foreign theory onto the members of the unions, because the “programs of one and the other... differ only in the degree of their revolutionary development... The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International.”[[69](#)] The

Alliance would work within popular organisations and “unleashes [the peoples’] will and gives wider opportunity for their self-determination and their social-economic organisation, which should be created by them alone from the bottom upwards.” It must “not in any circumstances... ever be their master... What is to be the chief aim and pursuit of this organisation? *To help*

the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality and fullest human freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination... that is without any sort of government control.”[[70](#)]

With these ideas Bakunin inevitably came into conflict with Marx. While the latter wished the International to

become a political party and participate in elections (“political action”), Bakunin rejected this in favour of economic direct action by unions, predicting that when “common workers” are sent “to Legislative Assemblies” the result is 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.”[[71](#)] This analysis was confirmed by the rise of reformism within the ranks of Marxist Social Democracy.

This, however, reflected a deeper issue, namely on whether social transformation should proceed from above

(by a few leaders) or from below (by the masses). A socialist State, whether created by elections or revolution, would not lead to liberation. The State, stressed Bakunin, “is the government from above downwards... by one or another minority.” It has “always been the patrimony of some privileged class” and “when all other classes have exhausted

themselves” it “becomes the patrimony of the bureaucratic class.” The Marxist State “will not content itself with administering and governing the masses politically” it will “also administer the masses economically, concentrating in the hands of the State the production and distribution of wealth.” This will result in “a new class, a new hierarchy,” which would exploit the

masses as the State was “the sole proprietor” and “the only banker, capitalist, organiser, and director of all national labour, and the distributor of all its products.”[[72](#)] This also was confirmed by the Bolshevik regime under Lenin.
[[73](#)]

This happens because “every State, even the pseudo-People’s State concocted by Mr. Marx, is in essence only a

machine ruling the masses from above, through a privileged minority of conceited intellectuals who imagine that they know what the people need and want better than do the people themselves.”[[74](#)] Hence, Bakunin stressed, anarchists do “not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional

governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.”[[75](#)]

Thus, as Kropotkin suggested, the International was “essentially a working-

men's organisation, the workers understanding it as a labour movement and not as a political party.”[[76](#)] This was at the heart of the Bakunin-Marx conflict, a conflict which did not reflect personalities but rather different visions of the labour movement—the Marxists “endeavoured by means of all sorts of intrigues to transform the International Association, created for the

purposes of *a direct struggle against capitalism*, into an arm of parliamentary politics.”[[77](#)] This struggle came to its head in 1872 and the Hague Congress, where gerrymandering by Marx and Engels ensured the expulsion of Bakunin and committed the International to “political action.”[[78](#)] The majority of the IWMA met at St. Imier in 1872 and urged “the

proletarians of every land” to “establish solidarity of revolutionary action outside of all bourgeois politicking.” This “Organisation of Labour Resistance” created “a community of interests, trains [the proletariat] in collective living and prepares it for the supreme struggle.” The strike was “a precious weapon in the struggle” and “a product of the antagonism between labour

and capital.” These “ordinary economic struggles” prepare “the proletariat for the great and final revolutionary conquest” which will destroy “all class difference.” The future socialist society would be created by the “proletariat itself, its trades bodies and the autonomous communes.”[[79](#)]

Kropotkin embraced Bakunin’s position; for him, the IWMA was the classic

example of what a genuine labour movement should be, namely “a vast organisation of trade unions, which it was intended to spread all over the world, and which would have carried on, with international support, the direct struggle of Labour against Capital.”[[80](#)]

Within its libertarian wing “grew up then the young power which... took up the struggle for freedom in Europe

and developed gradually into Communist Anarchism, with its ideal of economical and political equality, and its bold negation of the exploiting of man by Capital and State alike.”[[81](#)]

Anarchists, Kropotkin summarised, “do not seek to constitute, and invite the working men not to constitute, political parties in the parliaments. Accordingly,

since the foundation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864–1866, they have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation.”[[82](#)]

Kropotkin's ideas

Anarchism, then, has always been a form of libertarian socialism and opposed both State and capitalism. It sees the working class as the means of social transformation, for only those who were oppressed and exploited by capitalism and the State had an interest in freeing themselves from both. This was the theoretical context when Kropotkin joined the

anarchist movement in 1872. By the time Kropotkin escaped from a Tsarist prison and went into exile in 1876, Bakunin was dead but the movement he was part of continued. Kropotkin contributed immensely to the further development of this rich commonwealth of ideas.

This can be seen in all aspects of Kropotkin's thought. Thus he defined

anarchism as “the no-government system of socialism.”[[83](#)] In this he, like Bakunin, followed Proudhon who stressed that “the capitalist principle” and the “governmental principle are one and the same principle” and so “the abolition of the exploitation of man by man and the abolition of government of man by man are one and the same

formula.” It is “to protect this exploitation of man by man that the State exists” and so anarchists are “simultaneously striving for the abolition of capital and of the State” for “if you do away with the former, you still have to do away with the latter, and *vice versa*.”[[84](#)]

Kropotkin (like Bakunin) also accepted most of Proudhon’s fundamental principles, such as workers’

self-management of
production, federalism,
socialisation, anti-statism and
anti-capitalism. He, like
Bakunin, recognised the
necessity of social revolution,
rejecting Proudhon's
reformism, as well as his
patriarchy in favour of a
consistent libertarian
egalitarianism. He took
Bakunin's union-based
revolutionary anarchism and,

like others in the IWMA, developed it towards an explicit acceptance of (libertarian) communism, the goal of distribution according to need rather than labour done.

In addition, Kropotkin applied his scientific training to anarchism. This meant gathering evidence and drawing conclusions from it, analysing capitalist society and

discovering the tendencies within it that pointed to a future free society. Just as change had to come from below, from the actions of the people themselves, so revolutionary politics had to be based on an analysis of the facts and built upwards. While there is a tendency to portray him as someone pining for a past that never existed (such as idealising the Medieval

Commune[[85](#)]), the reality is different. Ironically, this is best seen by the very book often used to characterise him as backward-looking: *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. As becomes clear reading this work, his conclusions are based on a detailed analysis of industrial trends within all the major advanced capitalist economies of the time. Similarly with his arguments

for communism and anarchism, which he supported with examples drawn from modern society. Thus he pointed to the federalism used within the European railways as evidence in favour of free agreement as well as examples of distribution according to need such as free roads, libraries, and so on.[[86](#)] He focused his analysis on *contemporary*

society:

We shall not construct a new society by looking backwards. We shall only do so by studying, as Proudhon has already advised, the *tendencies* of society today and so forecasting the society of tomorrow.

The only basis upon which it is possible to construct the society of the

future is the *new* conceptions which germinate in men's minds. And these alone can give the revolutionary, aided by his revolutionary fire, the boldness of thought necessary for the success of the Revolution.[[87](#)]

This applied to movements that arise *within* class society but in *opposition* to it. The “origin of the anarchist

inception of society” lies in “the criticism... of the hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society” and “the analysis of the tendencies that are seen in the progressive movements of mankind.” Kropotkin discussed the various social institutions humanity had created to survive in the hostile environment of class society, institutions which “resist the

encroachments upon their life and fortunes” by those “who endeavoured to establish their personal authority” over them. These took the form of “the primitive clan, the village community, the medieval guild” and the unions from which modern anarchism sprang: “the labour combinations... were an outcome of the same popular resistance to the growing

power of the few—the capitalists in this case.”[[88](#)]
This expressed itself during revolutions as well, when these popular organisations become strong enough to overthrow the current system and become the framework of a new one.

ON CAPITALISM AND THE STATE

For anarchism capitalism is an exploitative, oppressive, class-

riddled economic system defended by a centralised, hierarchical State. Kropotkin echoed this analysis of Proudhon and Bakunin: “it is evident that in present-day society, divided as it is between masters and serfs, true liberty cannot exist; it will not exist so long as there are exploiters and slaves, government and governed.”[[89](#)]

Modern society was based upon the “liberty to exploit human labour without any safeguard for the victims of such exploitation and the political power organised as to assure freedom of exploitation to the middle-class.”[[90](#)] Its political and economic aspects “are facts and conceptions which we cannot separate from each other. In the course of history these institutions

have developed, supporting and reinforcing each other” and so they “are connected with each other—not as mere accidental co-incidences” but “by the links of cause and effect.”[[91](#)] The two were interwoven, as “the *political* regime... is always an expression of the *economic* regime which exists at the heart of society.” This meant that regardless of how the

State changes, it “continues to be shaped by the economic system, of which it is always the expression and, at the same time, the consecration and the sustaining force.”[[92](#)]

Echoing Proudhon’s analysis of property as both theft (exploitation) and despotism (oppression), Kropotkin argued that under capitalism a worker was “forced to sell his work and his liberty to others

who accumulate wealth by the labour of their serfs.”[[93](#)]
Private property, as a result, meant that “individual freedom [has] remained, both in theory and in practice, more illusory than real” and that the “want of development of the personality (leading to herd-psychology) and the lack of individual creative power and initiative are certainly one of the chief defects of our time.

Economical individualism has not kept its promise: it did not result in any striking development of individuality.”[[94](#)] This was for an obvious reason: “For the worker who *must sell* his labour, it is impossible to remain *free*, and it is precisely because it is impossible that we are anarchists and communists.”[[95](#)] Capitalism was rooted in exploitation and

inequality:

The very essence of the present economic system is that the worker can never enjoy the well-being he has produced...

Inevitably, industry is directed... not towards what is needed to satisfy the needs of all, but towards that which, at a given moment, brings in the greatest profit for a

few. Of necessity, the abundance of some will be based on the poverty of others, and the straitened circumstances of the greater number will have to be maintained at all costs, that there may be hands to sell themselves for a part only of that which they are capable of producing; without which private accumulation of

capital is impossible.[[96](#)]

Private property in the means of production ensures that the worker “finds no acre to till, no machine to set in motion, unless he agrees to sell his labour for a sum inferior to its real value” and so “some part of the value of his produce will be unjustly taken by the employer.” Moreover, as production’s “only aim is to increase the profits of the

capitalist” we have “continuous fluctuations of industry, the crisis coming periodically.”[[97](#)] Crisis was caused by over-production, that is “production that is above the purchasing power of the worker” which “remains fatally characteristic of the present capitalist production, because workers cannot buy with their salaries what they have produced and at the

same time copiously nourish the swarm of idlers who live upon their work.”[[98](#)]

Kropotkin also critiqued capitalist economics, arguing that it “has always confined itself to stating facts occurring in society, and justifying them in the interest of the dominant class... Having found [something] profitable to capitalists, it has set it up as a *principle*.”[[99](#)] He dismissed

the “sophisms taught by economists, uttered more to confirm exploiters in their rights than to convert the exploited”[[100](#)] and recognised the role of economists as defenders of the class system:

Political Economy—that pseudo-science of the bourgeoisie—does not cease to give praise in every way to the benefits

of individual property...
[yet] the economists do
not conclude, “The land to
him who cultivates it.” On
the contrary, they hasten
to deduce from the
situation, “The land to the
lord who will get it
cultivated by wage
earners!”[[101](#)]

The State exists to defend this
regime. It is “a society for
mutual insurance between the

landlord, the military commander, the judge, the priest, and later on the capitalist, in order to support each other's authority over the people, and for exploiting the poverty of the masses and getting rich themselves." Such was the "origin of the State; such was its history; and such is its present essence" and the "rich perfectly well know that if the machinery of the State

ceased to protect them, their power over the labouring classes would be gone immediately.”[[102](#)] The “mission of all governments” is “to protect and maintain by force” the “privileges of the possessing classes.”[[103](#)]

A key part of this role has been State intervention to create and support capitalism. The rise of capitalism has always seen the State “tighten

the screw for the worker” and “impose industrial serfdom.” While preaching laissez-faire for itself, the bourgeoisie “was at pains not to sweep away... the power of the State over industry, over the factory serf.”[[104](#)] This has continued to this day and, rhetoric notwithstanding, the State has always intervened to support capitalism:

[W]hile all Governments

have given the capitalists and monopolists full liberty to enrich themselves with the underpaid labour of working men... they have *never, nowhere* given the working men the liberty of opposing that exploitation. Never has any Government applied the 'leave things alone' principle to the exploited masses. It reserved it for

the exploiters only...

What, then, is the use of talking, with Marx, about the ‘primary accumulation’—as if this ‘push’ given to the capitalists were a thing of the past?...

In short, nowhere has the system of ‘non-intervention of the State’ ever existed. Everywhere the State has been, and

still is, the main pillar and the creator, direct and indirect, of Capitalism and its powers over the masses. Nowhere, since States have grown up, have the masses had the freedom of resisting the oppression by capitalists... The State has *always* interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter. It has

always granted him protection in robbery, given aid and support for further enrichment. *And it could not be otherwise.* To do so was one of the functions—the chief mission—of the State.

[[105](#)]

This analysis applied to modern so-called democratic States as “representative democracy” was an “organ of

capitalist domination.”[[106](#)]
This outcome is no accident.
The State has evolved certain
characteristics that ensure it.
The State “not only includes
the existence of a power
situated above society, but also
of a *territorial concentration*
as well as the concentration *in*
the hands of a few of many
functions in the life of
societies.” It “implies some
new relationships between

members of society... in order to subject some classes to the domination of others” and this becomes obvious “when one studies the origins of the State.”[[107](#)]

This centralisation is required to ensure minority rule and so the structure of the State reflected its role as defender of the exploitation of the many by the few:

To attack the central

power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more.[[108](#)]

Using the example of the

French Revolution, Kropotkin showed how the middle classes “now that they had seen and felt the strength of the people” did “all they could to dominate the people, to disarm them and to drive them back into subjection” and “made haste to legislate in such a way that the political power which was slipping out of the hand of the Court should not fall into the hands

of the people.”[[109](#)]
Centralisation took power away from the mass of the people and gave it to the few and so while the “people have tried at different times to become an influence in the State, to control it, to be served by it” they “have never succeeded.” Instead, it has “always ended in the abandonment of this mechanism of hierarchy and

laws to others than the people: to the sovereign after the revolutions of the sixteenth century; to the bourgeois after those of the seventeenth in England and eighteenth in France.”[[110](#)]

The State was not some evil imposed on society from outside, but one which grows out of it and which, while sharing key features, evolves alongside it. “Every economic

phase has a political phase corresponding to it,” he argued. “A society founded on serfdom, is in keeping with absolute monarchy; a society based on the wage system, and the exploitation of the masses by the capitalists finds its political expression in parliamentarianism.” As such, the State form changes and evolves, but its basic function (defender of minority rule)

and structure (delegated power into the hands of a few) remains. Moreover, the State has not always existed and to confuse all forms of social organisation with it would be a mistake made only by those “who cannot visualise Society without a concentration of the State.” To do so “is to overlook the fact that Man lived in Societies for thousands of years before the State had

been heard of” and that “large numbers of people” have “lived in communes and free federations.” The State “is only one of the forms assumed by society in the course of history. Why then make no distinction between what is permanent and what is accidental?”[[111](#)] It was a particular form of social organisation and so “the word ‘State’... should be reserved

for those societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation.”[[112](#)] That is, those where “the people was not governing itself.”[[113](#)]

Based on this evolutionary analysis of the State and its links with capitalism, anarchists drew the conclusion “that the State organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising

their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges.”[[114](#)] It exists “to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the rapine of the people. The proletarian must rely on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder

emancipation at all costs.”[[115](#)] Unsurprisingly, Kropotkin was critical of those socialists who viewed the (capitalist) State as both a means “to save themselves from the horrors of the economic regime created by that very same State” and “to achieve the social revolution through the State by preserving and even extending most of its powers.”[[116](#)]

ON STATE SOCIALISM

Given an analysis of capitalism as an exploitative class system, Kropotkin (like most anarchists) viewed himself as a socialist and insisted that anarchists “constitute the left wing” of the socialist movement.[\[117\]](#) Yet, at the same time, he warned of the dangers of State socialism both in terms of tactics and final goals. So if anarchism was the

“left wing” of the socialist movement, then Marxism was its “right wing”:

It is self-evident that when we speak of a revival of ‘Socialism,’ we don’t mean a revival of ‘Social Democracy.’ The writers of the last school have done all they could to make people believe that Social Democracy *is* Socialism, and Socialism is

nothing but Social
Democracy. But everyone
can easily ascertain for
himself that Social
Democracy is only *one*
fraction of the great
Socialist movement: the
fraction which believes
that all necessary changes
in the Socialist direction
can be accomplished by
Parliamentary reforms
within the present State...

and that when all main branches of production shall be owned by the State, and governed by a Democratic Parliament, and every working man will be a wage worker for the State—this will be Socialism. There remains, however, a very considerable number of Socialists who maintain that Socialism cannot be

limited to such a meek reform; that it implies much deeper changes, economical and political; and that the above reform cannot be realised within the present State by its representative institutions. Many begin thus to see that it is not by acquiring power in Parliament—under the unavoidable penalty of ceasing to be a

Socialist party and gradually becoming a ‘Moderate Radical’ party—that the changes required by *Socialism* can ever be realised. Social Democracy is the right wing of the great Socialist movement not this movement itself. It is, then, a revival of Socialism altogether that we see coming—one of its causes

being precisely the failure of Social Democracy to bring about the great changes which mankind needs and claims at the present moment of its history.[[118](#)]

In terms of tactics, Kropotkin opposed the Marxism of his time (Social Democracy) as it had “moved away from a pure labour movement, in the sense of a direct struggle against

capitalists by means of strikes, unions, and so forth. Strikes repelled them because they diverted the workers' forces from parliamentary agitation." Marxists "recognised the State and pyramidal methods of organisation," which "stifled the revolutionary spirit of the rank-and-file workers" while anarchists "recognised neither the State nor pyramidal organisation" and "rejecting a

narrowly political struggle, inevitably became a more revolutionary party, both in theory and in practice.”[[119](#)]

Social Democrats, because of their electioneering, “are continually driven by the force of circumstances to become tools of the ruling classes in keeping things as they are.”[[120](#)] Anarchists stressed economic class struggle because “it would be desirable

to have no futile political struggle to meddle with it and to obstruct” the revolution: “There should be the workers on the one side, the possessing classes on the other side, and the social economical problem in its purity between the two.”[[121](#)] Thus rather than encourage “the direct action of the Labour Unions,” Marxism turned the labour movement into “an electoral, political,

and Parliamentary movement, which could but waste and destroy their real forces.”[[122](#)]

Echoing Bakunin, he saw that “those who yesterday were considered socialists are today letting go of socialism, by renouncing its mother idea” of “the need to... to abolish individual ownership of... social capital” and “passing over into the camp of the

bourgeoisie, while retaining, so as to hide their turnabout, the label of socialism.”[[123](#)] “As if the bourgeoisie,” he argued, “still holding on to its capital, could allow” the Marxists “to experiment with socialism even if they succeeded in gaining control of power! As if the conquest of the municipalities were possible without the conquest of the factories.” History has proven

Kropotkin correct on the differences in results between direct action and electioneering:

However moderate the war cry—provided it is in the domain of relations between capital and labour—as soon as it proceeds to put it into practice by revolutionary methods, it ends by increasing it and will be led to demand the

overthrow of the regime of property. On the other hand a party which confines itself to parliamentary politics ends up abandoning its programme, however advanced it may have been at the beginning.[[124](#)]

As well as causing the rise of reformism within the labour movement, Marxism also failed to understand that the

modern State could not be utilised to create socialism. As Kropotkin stressed, “one does not make an historical institution follow in the direction to which one points—that is in the opposite direction to the one it has taken over the centuries.” To expect this would be a “a sad and tragic mistake” simply because “the old machine, the old organisation, [was] slowly

developed in the course of history to crush freedom, to crush the individual, to establish oppression on a legal basis, to create monopolists, to lead minds astray by accustoming them to servitude.” It is “the greatest hindrance to the birth of a society based on equality and liberty, as well as the historic means designed to prevent this blossoming.”[[125](#)] A social

revolution needs new, non-statist forms of social organisation to succeed:

To give full scope to socialism entails rebuilding from top to bottom a society dominated by the narrow individualism of the shopkeeper... it is a question of completely reshaping all relationships... In every street, in every hamlet, in

every group of men gathered around a factory or along a section of the railway line, the creative, constructive and organisational spirit must be awakened in order to rebuild life—in the factory, in the village, in the store, in production and in distribution of supplies. All relations between individuals and great

centres of population have to be made all over again, from the very day, from the very moment one alters the existing commercial or administrative organisation.

And they expect this immense task, requiring the free expression of popular genius, to be carried out within the framework of the State

and the pyramidal organisation which is the essence of the State! They expect the State... to become the lever for the accomplishment of this immense transformation. They want to direct the renewal of a society by means of decrees and electoral majorities... How ridiculous! [[126](#)]

Kropotkin's opposition to State

socialism was not focused purely on the negative effects of replacing class struggle on the economic terrain with “political action” within bourgeois States. He also warned of the dangers associated with handing economic decision-making to the State. This would simply be the “mere substitution” of “the State as the universal capitalist for the present

capitalists.”[[127](#)] This was nothing more than the “idea of the State as Capitalist, to which the Social-Democratic fraction of the great Socialist Party is now trying to reduce Socialism.”[[128](#)] However, “a highly complex State machine... leads to the formation of a class especially concerned with State management, which, using its acquired experience, begins to

deceive the rest for its personal advantage.”[[129](#)]
These warnings echoed those of Proudhon and Bakunin and so it was unsurprising that anarchists were quick to recognise the Bolshevik regime as “State capitalist.”[[130](#)] Marxism would simply see the bourgeois replaced by the bureaucracy:

The anarchists consider...

that to hand over to the State all the main sources of economic life—the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on—as also the management of all the main branches of industry... would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy

and capitalism.[[131](#)]

Kropotkin simply did not think that such a regime could function and meet the needs of the people as the “economic changes that will result from the social revolution will be so immense and so profound... that it will be impossible for one or even a number of individuals to elaborate the social forms to which a further society must give birth. The

elaboration of new social forms can only be the collective work of the masses.”[[132](#)] The notion that a “strongly centralised Government” could “*command* that a prescribed quantity” of a good “be sent to such a place on such a day” and be “received on a given day by a specified official and stored in particular warehouses” was not only

“undesirable” but also “wildly Utopian.”[[133](#)] During his discussion of the benefits of free agreement against State tutelage, Kropotkin noted that only the former allowed the utilisation of “the co-operation, the enthusiasm, the local knowledge” of the people.[[134](#)]

Kropotkin’s own experience had shown how the “high functionaries” of the Tsarist

bureaucracy “were simply charming in their innocent ignorance” of the areas they were meant to be administering and how, thanks to Marxism, the socialist ideal had “lost the character of something that had to be worked out by the labour organisations themselves, and became State management of industries... State capitalism.” As an anarchist, he knew that

governments become “isolated from the masses” and so “the very success of socialism” required “the ideas of no-government, of self-reliance, of free initiative of the individual” to be “preached side by side with those of socialised ownership and production.” Thus it was essential that socialism was decentralised, federal and participatory, that the

“structure of the society which we longed for” was “worked out, in theory and practice, from beneath” by “all labour unions” with “a full knowledge of local needs of each trade and each locality.”[[135](#)]

This analysis applies to both Social Democracy and its offspring Leninism. In 1917, while distancing Marxism from the predictable (and predicted, by anarchists)

consequences of working within the bourgeois State, Lenin argued the bourgeois State had to be smashed and replaced by a soviet State modelled on the Paris Commune.[\[136\]](#) However, Bolshevism retained a centralised State structure and so replaced the initiative of all with that of the few at the top of the new social hierarchy—with disastrous results.[\[137\]](#)

As the Russian Revolution degenerated before his eyes, Kropotkin warnings on State socialism were vindicated:

The natural evils of State communism are... increased tenfold under the excuse that all misfortunes of our life are due to the intervention of foreigners... the attempt to build up a communist republic on the lines of

strongly-centralised State communism under the iron rule of the Dictatorship of a party is ending in a failure. We learn in Russia *how Communism cannot be introduced...* so long as a country is governed by the dictatorship of a party, the labour and peasant councils [soviets] evidently lose all their significance... when it comes to building

up quite new forms of life... everything has to be worked out by men on the spot... an all-powerful centralised government... proves absolutely incapable of doing that through its functionaries, no matter how countless they may be—it becomes a nuisance. It develops such a formidable bureaucracy... this is what

you, the working men of the West, can and must avoid by all means...The immense constructive work that is required from a social revolution cannot be accomplished by a central government... It requires the knowledge, the brains, and the willing collaboration of a mass of local and specialised forces, which alone can

cope with the diversity of
economical problems in
their local aspects.[[138](#)]

Like the Russian anarchists in
1905 and 1917, Kropotkin
argued that the soviets
“controlling the political and
economical life of the country
is a grand idea.” However, this
was not what happened in
Russia and they are “reduced”
to a “passive role.” The
“pressure of party

dictatorship... becomes a death sentence on the new construction.”[[139](#)] He stressed that “production and exchange represented an undertaking so complicated that the plans of the State socialists... would prove to be absolutely ineffective as soon as they were applied to life. No government would be able to organise production if the workers themselves through

their unions did not do it in each branch of industry; for in all production there arise daily thousands of difficulties which no government can solve or foresee... Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on the problems can co-operate in the development of a new social system and find the best solutions for the thousands of local needs.”[[140](#)] As he correctly

predicted:

The Communists, with their methods, instead of putting the people on the path to Communism, will finish by making them hate its very name. Perhaps they are sincere, but their system hinders them introducing in practice the least principle of Communism... The saddest thing is that they

recognise nothing, do not wish to acknowledge their errors, and every day take away from the masses a fragment of the conquests of the revolution, to the profit of the centralising State.[[141](#)]

The Bolsheviks “have shown how the Revolution is *not* to be made.”[[142](#)] Creating communism by “a strongly centralised State makes

success absolutely impossible and paralyses the constructive work of the people.”[[143](#)]

Social reconstruction required the “co-operation of the labouring classes of all nations” and “for that purpose the idea of a great International of all working men of the world must be renewed... there must be a Union of all the Trade Unions of the world—of all those who

produce the wealth of the world—united, in order to free the production of the world from its present enslavement to Capital.”[[144](#)]

ON CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE WORKERS’ MOVEMENT

Given that workers were exploited and oppressed by capitalism and that the State exists to defend it, Kropotkin viewed the class struggle as

inherent within capitalism: “a great contest between labour and capital—which constitutes the very essence of modern history.”[[145](#)] The social position of the working class people ensured their key role in the struggle for freedom:

Being exploited today at the bottom of the social ladder, it is to his [the worker's] advantage to demand equality. He has

never ceased demanding it,
he has fought for it and
will fight for it again,
whereas the bourgeois...
thinks it is to his advantage
to maintain inequality.

[[146](#)]

So Kropotkin, like his Marxist
opponents, viewed the popular
masses (workers and
peasants) as the only agents of
social transformation. [[147](#)]
Thus “the Anarchists have

always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the *direct* struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector,—the State.” This struggle “permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and

wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State.”[[148](#)]

Kropotkin was well aware of the importance of popular, mass, struggles as “any popular movement is a step towards the social revolution. It awakens the spirit of revolt, it makes men accustomed to

seeing the established order (or rather the established disorder) as eminently unstable.”[[149](#)] The key popular movement for communist-anarchists was the trade unions and so Kropotkin (like Bakunin before him) saw the necessity of anarchists participating in the labour movement:

Since the enemy on whom we declare war is capital,

it is against capital that we have to direct our efforts, without allowing ourselves to be distracted from our aim by the sham agitation of political parties. Since the great struggle for which we prepare ourselves, is an essentially economic struggle, it is on the economic ground that our agitation has to take place.[[150](#)]

Kropotkin had “always preached active participation in the workers’ movement, in the *revolutionary workers’ movement*.”[[151](#)] This is reflected throughout his anarchist career, from his earliest activism onwards. So in Tsarist Russia in the early 1870s he argued that radical activity had to be made “among the peasantry and urban workers” as “[o]nly

then can [insurrection] count on success.”[[152](#)] He reiterated this position a few months before his death:

[T]he trade-union movement... will become a great power for laying the foundations of an anti-State communist society. If I were in France, where at this moment lies the centre of the industrial movement, and if I were in

better health, I would be the first to rush headlong into this movement in favour of the First International—not the Second or the Third, which only represent the usurpation of the idea of the *workers* ' International for the benefit of a party which is not half composed of workers.

[[153](#)]

This was because in a social revolution “a decisive blow will have to be administered to private property: from the beginning, the workers will have to proceed to take over all social wealth so as to put it into common ownership. This revolution can only be carried out by the workers themselves.” In order to do this, the “great mass of workers will not only have to

constitute itself outside the bourgeoisie... it will have to take action of its own during the period which will precede the revolution... and this sort of action can only be carried out when a strong *workers' organisation* exists.” This meant it was “the mass of workers we have to seek to organise. We... have to submerge ourselves in the organisation of the people...

help them to translate [their] aspirations and hatreds into action. When the mass of workers is organised and we are with it to strengthen its revolutionary idea, to make the spirit of revolt against capital germinate there... then it will be the social revolution.”[[154](#)]

Therefore “to make the revolution, the mass of workers will have to organise

themselves. Resistance and the strike are excellent means of organisation for doing this.” It was “a question of organising societies of resistance for all trades in each town, of creating resistance funds against the exploiters, of giving more solidarity to the workers’ organisations of each town and of putting them in contact with those of other towns, of federating them...Workers’

solidarity must no longer be an empty word but practised each day between all trades and all nations.”[[155](#)] The unions would take over production:

No one can underrate the importance of this labour movement for the coming revolution. It will be those agglomerations of wealth producers which will have to reorganise production on new social bases... to

organise the life of the nation... and means of production. They—the labourers, grouped together—not the politicians.[[156](#)]

Kropotkin was critical of trade unions that limited their goals and argued that anarchists had to work to widen the unions' vision, to get them to go beyond just higher wages and better conditions.[[157](#)] Hence

his often repeated positive comments on the Spanish anarchist movement as well as his praise for the activities of the American anarchists in the early 1880s: “Were not our Chicago Comrades right in despising politics, and saying the struggle against robbery must be carried on in the workshop and the street, by deeds not words?”[[158](#)]

So it must be stressed that

Kropotkin's arguments for anarchist participation in the labour movement was a recurring theme in his works. [\[159\]](#) The early 1880s saw him write numerous articles on the subject in an attempt to counter the ultra-revolutionary posturing that had overtaken the French anarchist movement in the late 1870s. [\[160\]](#) Imprisonment and exile after the Lyon trial hindered

his work but he returned to the task in 1889 after the success of the London Dockers' strike. The May 1st demonstrations saw him reiterating his earlier arguments for anarchist participation in the labour movement.[\[161\]](#) He urged anarchists in France to use the 1891 May Day demonstrations to rejoin popular movements, contributing his immense influence to a growing

tendency in libertarian circles arguing for participation in the labour movement.[[162](#)] Unlike the attempt ten years previously, this call for anarchist participation in the labour movement was more successful. French Anarchists joined the labour movement in increasing numbers, leading to the rise of revolutionary syndicalism in the mid-1890s. [[163](#)]

Thus the anarchist movement “[b]y calling with all its strength for the solidarity of the workers” helped create “a labour movement which has no connection with the parliamentary camp of social democracy.” This was “anti-parliamentary unionism in the tradition of the old-time International Working Men’s Association” and “what in France, Switzerland is called

anti-political
syndicalism.”[[164](#)]

However, Kropotkin did not ignore the need for non-economic (political) rights and struggles. Anarchists “are not asserting, as has sometimes been said, that political rights have *no* value for us.” Rather, political liberties cannot be defended “by way of a law, a scrap of paper that could be torn up at the least whim of

the rulers.” Only direct action can do that, for “it is only by transforming ourselves into a force, capable of imposing our will, that we shall succeed in making our rights respected.” When the masses go “into the streets and take up the defence of our rights” then “nobody will dare dispute those rights, nor any others that we choose to demand. Then, and only then, shall we

have truly gained such rights, for which we might plead to parliament for decades in vain.” Humanity “retains only the rights it has won by hard struggle and is ready to defend at every moment, with arms in hand.” In short: “freedoms are not given, they are taken.”[[165](#)] So while rejecting “politics” and stressing the necessity of workplace struggles, he

recognised the need to consider all aspects of life:

[W]e do not mean by this that we should neglect opportunities of carrying out agitation on all the questions of national life which are raised around us. On the contrary, we think that socialists must take advantage of all opportunities which may lead to an economic

agitation; and we are convinced that each agitation, begun on the basis of the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters, however circumscribed its sphere of action, the ends proposed, and the ideas advanced may be to begin with, may become a fruitful source of socialist agitation... It would therefore be

useful... not to pass proudly by the various questions which concern the workers in their districts, for the sole reason that these questions have only very little to do with socialism. On the contrary, taking part in all questions and taking advantage of the interest which they arouse, we could work to spread

agitation to a wider extent and... seek to enlarge theoretical conceptions and awaken the spirit of independence and rebellion in those who are interested in the agitation which is produced. This participation is all the more necessary because it presents a unique method of fighting the false opinions which are spread

by the bourgeoisie at every opportunity of this kind.

[[166](#)]

Thus basic political liberties were “extorted from parliament by force, by agitations that threatened to become rebellions. It was by establishing trade unions and practising strike action despite the edicts of Parliament and the hangings” that workers “won the right to associate and

strike” in Britain for example.
[[167](#)] “All that was
progressive in the life of the
civilised world,” he argued
was “centred around the
labour movement.”[[168](#)] So it
was “absolutely impossible...
to confine the ideas of the
working mass within the
narrow circle of reductions in
working hours and wage
increases... The social
question compels

attention.”[[169](#)] Thus direct action leads to a wider perspective:

It is not only more wages that labour wants. Not only shorter hours... It agitates for the disappearance of the capitalist system. It wants to expropriate the capitalist, to make all into its own hands—fields, docks, railways, flourmills

and storehouses and to
organise everything in the
interest of those who
produce.[[170](#)]

In this way anarchist
communism “wins more and
more ground among those
working-men who try to get a
clear conception as to the
forthcoming revolutionary
action. The syndicalist and
trade union movements, which
permit the workingmen to

realise their solidarity and to feel the community of their interests better than any election, prepare the way for these conceptions.”[[171](#)]

ON SYNDICALISM AND REVOLUTIONARY MINORITIES

Given the key part working class organisation and struggle played in his politics it should come as no surprise that Kropotkin was very supportive

of syndicalism, arguing that “the current opinions of the French syndicalists are organically linked with the early ideas of the left wing of the International.”[[172](#)] Both syndicalism and communist-anarchism traced their roots to the libertarian wing of the IWMA and supported workers’ direct action against capital.[[173](#)] They are not identical though. There are

three main differences—the need for anarchist groups, the difficulties facing a revolution and the structure of a libertarian society.

First, Kropotkin did not think that syndicalism by itself would automatically become or remain revolutionary. As he explained in a letter to an Italian comrade in 1914:

My opinion is absolutely that which was expressed

by Malatesta... The
syndicate is absolutely
necessary. It is the only
form of worker's
association which allows
the direct struggle against
capital to be carried on
without a plunge into
parliamentarianism. But,
evidently, it does not
achieve this goal
automatically, since in
Germany, in France and in

England, we have the example of syndicates linked to the parliamentary struggle, while in Germany the Catholic syndicates are very powerful, and so on. There is need of the other element which Malatesta speaks of *and which Bakunin always professed.*
[[174](#)]

This “other element” was the anarchist group and

unsurprisingly Kropotkin had been, like Malatesta, a member of Bakunin's Alliance of Social Democracy. Unlike many syndicalists who considered the revolutionary unions as all that was needed to achieve a social revolution, [175] Kropotkin was well aware of the need for anarchists to influence the class struggle in a revolutionary direction and so

“the task we impose ourselves” is to acquire “sufficient influence to induce the workmen to avail themselves of the first opportunity of taking possession of land and the mines, of railways and factories,” to bring working class people “to the conviction that they must rely on themselves to get rid of the oppression of Capital.”[[176](#)]

Kropotkin was
“convinced... that the
formation of an anarchist
party... far from being
prejudicial to the common
revolutionary cause, is
desirable and useful to the
greatest degree.”[[177](#)] Hence
the need “to unite the most
active individuals into one
general organisation.”
Revolutionaries “must not
stand outside the people but

among them, must serve not as a champion of some alien opinions worked out in isolation, but only as a more distinct, more complete expression of the demands of the people themselves.”[[178](#)]

Anarchist groups had to encourage the spirit of revolt within the working classes and before the revolution “affirmed its aspirations openly in the streets, by actions” and so

ensure that they “will get the best hearing.”[[179](#)] As he explained after the 1905 Russian Revolution:

I write with the idea that the paper must become an organ for the foundation of a durable, serious anarchist party in Russia. The current revolutionary period will not last one year or two. It will go on. And in this period there

must develop such an anarchist party, one which will be not only a fighting party of attack (which could be Blanquist as well), but a party which represents the anarchist framework of thought, in its existing theories, in its understanding of the predominant role of the people, in its conception of the progressive life of the

people, etc., a party which must itself experience the Russian revolution.[[180](#)]

Anarchists had to participate within popular movements and struggles so that the “idea of anarchist communism, today represented by feeble minorities, but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people. Spreading everywhere, the anarchist

groups... will take strength from the support they find among the people, and will raise the red flag of the revolution.” When revolution breaks out, “what is now the minority will become the People, the great mass, and that mass rising against property and the State, will march forward towards anarchist communism.”[[181](#)]

Second,

Kropotkin

recognised that capitalism and the State would require a popular insurrection to abolish. So while many syndicalists viewed a general strike with workplace occupations as sufficient for revolution, he disagreed: “although a general strike is a good method of struggle, it does not free the people that use it from the necessity of an armed struggle against the dominating

order.”[[182](#)] As will be discussed below, he, like Bakunin and other communist-anarchists like Malatesta, was well aware of the need for both insurrection and defence of a social revolution.

The publication of *How We Shall Bring about the Revolution* by leading French syndicalists Pataud and Pouget in 1909 showed that many syndicalists had recognised the

validity of the communist-anarchist critique. It discussed how the general strike “very soon changed into an insurrectional strike” and that the unions “sought to arm themselves” into an “organisation of defence, with a Trade Union and Federal basis.”[[183](#)] However, their account of the defeating of the counter-revolutionary forces is extremely short and

remarkably easy, making Kropotkin note in his preface to the English translation that they had “considerably attenuated the resistance that the Social Revolution will probably meet with on its way.”[[184](#)]

Kropotkin took a more realistic position, arguing that “a society in which the workers would have a dominant voice” would require

a revolution to create, “a revolution far more profound than any of the revolutions which history had on record.” In such a rebellion, however, “the workers would have against them, not the rotten generation of aristocrats against whom the French peasants and republicans had to fight in the [eighteenth] century—and even that fight was a desperate one—but the

far more powerful, intellectually and physically, middle-classes, which have at their service all the potent machinery of the modern State.” Thus “each time that such a period of accelerated evolution and reconstruction on a grand scale begins, civil war is liable to break out on a small or large scale.”[[185](#)]
Given the conflicts of both the Russian and Spanish

revolutions, Kropotkin's warnings proved prescient. [[186](#)]

Third, while advocating the idea of unions seizing workplaces and organising production in a free society, Kropotkin did not consider this as all that was required. Workers would become “the managers of production” but in a system “of independent Communes for the territorial

organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions for the organisation of men in accordance with their different functions” as well as “thousands upon thousands of free combines and societies growing up everywhere for the satisfaction of all possible and imaginable needs.” This was the “*concrete* conception of society regenerated by a social revolution.”[[187](#)] As

syndicalism focused on just *one* aspect of this vision, Kropotkin considered it as incomplete.

This is reflected in his preface to Pataud and Pouget. Kropotkin heartily recommends the book and as it shows “how the Trade Unions, groups formed for combat against Capital, could transform themselves, in a time of Revolution, into groups

for production.” He adds “it is not Anarchism that they picture for us” for it is the Trade Union Congress “which discusses” matters “that will be settled on the spot” and which “local life, alone, is in a position to solve.” Be that as it may, the authors had “the life-giving breath of Anarchism in their conceptions of the future” due to the mass action it discusses and, undoubtedly,

because it stresses one key feature of an anarchist society (namely unions organising production).[[188](#)]

So historian James Joll was wrong to assert that “as far as effective action by the Anarchist movement was concerned, it was [the French syndicalist] Monatte rather than Malatesta who was right” in 1907 during their famous exchange on syndicalism at

the International Anarchist Congress.[[189](#)] Anyone familiar with Kropotkin's or Malatesta's ideas and activism would know that communist-anarchists were hardly against anarchists working in unions. Kropotkin's position, like that of Malatesta, was not anti-syndicalism but rather syndicalism-plus.[[190](#)]

So communist-anarchists and the syndicalists held

similar viewpoints. Both advocated working class self-emancipation by means of economic organisation and struggle against both capital and the State. Kropotkin, like other revolutionary anarchists, was arguing for these ideas decades before the term “syndicalism” was coined. This explained “the closest rapport between the left-wing of the International and

present-day syndicalism, the close rapport between anarchism and syndicalism and the ideological contrast between Marxism and the principles of Social Democracy and syndicalism.”[[191](#)] However, he was well aware that a union need not, by its very nature, become or remain revolutionary. It needed the action of anarchists within it to

bring it to its full potential.

ON NATIONAL LIBERATION

Anarchism does not limit itself to just fighting economic and political oppression and exploitation but rather “works to destroy authority in all its aspects” and “refuses all hierarchical organisation.”[[192](#)] This means that as well as statism and capitalism, anarchists also

opposed, for example, patriarchal relationships between the sexes as the “revolution, intoxicated with the beautiful words, Liberty, Equality, Solidarity, would not be a revolution if it maintained slavery at home. Half humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half.”[[193](#)] It also applied between nations and

ethnic groups and, unsurprisingly, Kropotkin was a supporter of national liberation struggles:

True internationalism will never be attained except by the independence of each nationality, little or large, compact or disunited—just as anarchy is in the independence of each individual. If we say no government of man over

man, how can [we] permit
the government of
conquered nationalities by
the conquering
nationalities?[[194](#)]

This meant that anarchists “do not treat questions of nationality lightly, and we are firmly persuaded that as long as there are States, be they called Empires, Kingdoms, bourgeois Republics or even Social Democratic Republics,

the danger of a weak nation being invaded, crushed and exploited by its more powerful neighbours will remain.”[[195](#)]

Kropotkin lived during the time when direct imperialism reached its height. He was well aware that the conquest of colonies by European powers (and so imperialist rivalries) were driven both by reasons of State and economic interest. With the workers

“being unable to purchase with their wages the riches they are producing, industry must search for new markets elsewhere, amidst the middle classes of other nations. It must find markets, in the East, in Africa, anywhere; it must increase, by trade, the number of its serfs in Egypt, in India, on the Congo. But everywhere it finds competitors in other nations which rapidly enter

into the same line of industrial development. And wars, continuous wars, must be fought for the supremacy in the world-market—wars for the possession of the East, wars for getting possession of the seas, wars for the right of imposing heavy duties on foreign merchandise.”[[196](#)]

Capital “knows no fatherland; and if high profits can be derived from the work of

Indian coolies whose wages are only one-half of those of English workmen, or even less, capital will migrate to India, as it has gone to Russia, although its migration may mean starvation for Lancashire.”[[197](#)] This shaped modern warfare:

[M]en no longer fight for the pleasure of kings, they fight for the integrity of revenues and for the

growing wealth... [and]
benefit of the barons of
high finance and
industry... political
preponderance... is quite
simply a matter of
economic preponderance
in international markets.
What Germany, France,
Russia, England, and
Austria are all trying to
win... is not military
preponderance: it is

economic domination. It is the right to impose their goods and their customs tariffs on their neighbours; the right to exploit industrially backward peoples... to appropriate from a neighbour either a port which will activate commerce, or a province where surplus merchandise can be unloaded... When we fight

today, it is to guarantee our great industrialists a profit of 30%, to assure the financial barons their domination at the Bourse, and to provide the shareholders of mines and railways with their incomes.[[198](#)]

Genuine internationalism had to oppose imperialism and to “proclaim the complete liberty of each nation, however small

it might be, and its absolute right to develop along the lines it wished.”[[199](#)] Indeed, “it is very possible that the more internationalist a man becomes, the greater will be his regard for the local individualities which make up the international family, the more he will seek to develop local, individual characteristics.”[[200](#)]

However, while opposing

foreign oppression, Kropotkin was not blind to the limitations of nationalism and its aim to simply create an independent country. Given his stress on change from below, by the oppressed masses themselves, he argued that in order to be successful any national liberation movement had to take up the social question. Hence the “failure of all nationalist movements... lies in

this curse... that the economic question... remains on the side... it seems to me that in each national movement we have a major task: to set forth the question [of nationalism] on an economic basis and carry out agitation against serfdom, etc. at one with the struggle against [oppression by] foreign nationality.”[[201](#)]
This meant that “a national movement which does not

include in its platform the demand for an economical change advantageous to the masses has no chance of success unless supported by foreign aid.”[[202](#)] Anarchists, then, should not ignore national liberation struggles because they lacked a clearly defined socialist politics. Rather, “when revolt breaks out, when men arm themselves against their

exploiters—others who are oppressed should be with them. They should enlarge the meaning of their revolt, raise up among them a flag which represents a superior ideal—without doubt, always!”[[203](#)]

Anarchists, Kropotkin argued, should work within national liberation movements in order to broaden their vision and to turn them into human liberation struggles—from all

forms of oppression, economic, political, social and national. The aim would not be a fragmentation of humanity into isolated peoples but rather the creation of a universal human community sharing the globe based upon a free federation of free peoples no longer divided by classes or hierarchies.

ON MUTUAL AID AND ETHICS

The role of co-operation in animal and human life was the theme of Kropotkin's most famous work, *Mutual Aid*. [204] However, it is primarily a work of popular science, *not* an explicitly anarchist work. This means that it has to be supplemented by his revolutionary writings in order to place its arguments in the correct context. Moreover, the methodology used—the study,

from below, of the evolution of popular institutions—was anarchistic in nature. “You have seen, with *Mutual Aid*,” he wrote, “what a remarkable, powerful *tool of investigation* the anarchist tendency represents.”[[205](#)] In this Kropotkin applied his scientific training:

The inductive-deductive method which we employ in natural sciences has so

well proved its efficacy
that the nineteenth century
has been able to advance
science in a hundred years
more than it had
progressed before during
two thousand years. And
when men of science
began, in the second half
of the century, to apply the
same method to the study
of human societies, never
did they stumble upon an

obstacle which rendered its rejection necessary, or made advisable a return to the mediaeval scholasticism resuscitated by Hegel. Besides, when some naturalists, doing honour to their bourgeois education, and pretending to be followers of the scientific method of Darwin, told us: “Crush whoever is weaker than

yourself: such is the law of Nature!” it was easy for us to prove, first, that this was *not* Darwin’s conclusion, and, using the same scientific method, to show that these scientists were on the wrong path: that such a law does not exist, that Nature teaches us a very different lesson, and that their conclusions were in nowise scientific.[[206](#)]

Kropotkin's ideas on mutual aid have been subject to misunderstanding and, at times, distortion.[[207](#)] Much of this would have been avoided if critics had consulted its sub-title: "A Factor of Evolution." Kropotkin never denied that individual competition existed, stating that the work concentrated on co-operation simply because struggle had "already been

analysed, described, and glorified from time immemorial.” It “was necessary to show, first of all, the immense part which this factor [mutual aid] plays in the evolution of both the animal world and human societies. Only after this has been fully recognised will it be possible to proceed to a comparison between the two factors.” It was “a book on the law of

Mutual Aid, viewed as one of the chief factors of evolution—not of *all* factors of evolution and their respective values.”[[208](#)]

So there is no need to ponder why we have the State and capitalism if we are naturally co-operative. Both have arisen precisely because we are also naturally competitive and, as a result, people exploit and oppress

others—until the oppressed
organise to stop them! [[209](#)]
Relations within a species
“contained elements of both
competition and co-operation,
the relative importance of
which varied according to
circumstances... Although the
relative importance of
competition and co-operation
fluctuated by season and
circumstance, natural selection
generated a historical

tendency toward co-operation... Species that co-operated had a better chance of survival in the struggle for life than did less sociable ones.” This applied to humans too, as history “testified to a constant struggle between tendencies toward competition and co-operation.”[[210](#)]

Rather than idealise nature, Kropotkin simply argued that the notion of life as a constant

struggle between individuals is an “exaggeration” which “is even more unscientific than Rousseau’s idealisation” of nature. Mutual Aid “is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle” and that the question was who is the fittest: those who compete against each other or those who co-operate in the struggle against a harsh environment. He presented extensive evidence

that showed that “those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest” because “life in societies is the most powerful weapon in the struggle for life, taken in its widest sense.” Co-operation provides “more chances to survive” and animals and humans “find in association the best arms for the struggle for life: understood, of course, in its

wide Darwinian sense.”[[211](#)]
This analysis has been
vindicated:

Kropotkin’s ideas, though
unorthodox, were
scientifically respectable,
and indeed the contention
that mutual aid can be a
means of increasing fitness
had become a standard
part of modern
sociobiology.[[212](#)]

Another misunderstanding is

confusing mutual aid with altruism. Kropotkin's "arguments rested, not on the notion... that love was inherent to the natural world, but on an analysis of the dynamics of the struggle for existence." [\[213\]](#) Mutual aid, rather than mutual struggle, between members of the same group or species was the best means of surviving: it is neither love nor sympathy that causes

animals to assist one another, but rather a more hard-nosed recognition that it is in their own interests for survival to do so. This co-operation and group living, however, was the “broad and necessary foundation” upon which “the still higher moral feelings are developed.”[[214](#)] As such, it was “the real foundation of our ethical conceptions.”[[215](#)] So mutual aid helps to *explain*

altruistic actions and sentiments (and why these have evolved), but it is *not* identical. As he explained in a subsequent work, “*Mutual Aid—Justice—Morality* are thus the consecutive steps of an ascending series.” Morality “developed later than the others” and so was “an unstable feeling and the least imperative of the three.” Mutual aid simply ensured

“the ground is prepared for the further and the more general development of more refined relations.”[[216](#)]

Thus mutual aid was the basis of ethical behaviour (including altruism) but not identical. This meant that the moral concepts were subject to change: “Man is a result of both his inherited instincts and his education.”[[217](#)] For Kropotkin, human action was

not genetically predetermined
but rather influenced its
surroundings:

While the fundamental
features of human
characters can only be
mediated by a very slow
evolution, the relative
amount of individualist and
mutual aid spirit are
among the most
changeable features of
man. Both being equally

products of an anterior development, their relative amounts are seen to change in individuals and even societies with a rapidity which would strike the sociologist if only he paid attention to the subject, and analysed the corresponding facts.

[[218](#)]

A hierarchical society will shape people in certain

(negative) ways and produce a “human nature” radically different from a libertarian one. “In a society based on exploitation and servitude,” he stressed, “human nature itself is degraded” and “authority and servility walk ever hand in hand.” Capitalism, religion and government are “the great sources of moral depravity.”[[219](#)] While morality had an evolutionary

basis, it was the most changeable aspect of humanity and his last work, *Ethics*, was a critical overview of how these concepts have developed over the millennia.

Therefore, anarchists recognise that social customs change within and between societies. What was once considered normal or natural may come to be seen as oppressive and hateful. This is

because the “conception of good or evil varies according to the degree of intelligence or of knowledge acquired. There is nothing unchangeable about it.”[[220](#)] The key thing, then, was to “inquire into the substance of those institutions which bred jealousies and of those which diminish them.”[[221](#)] If hierarchy degrades, then freedom can raise. So “when we hear men

saying that Anarchists imagine men much better than they really are, we merely wonder how intelligent people can repeat that nonsense. Do we not say continually that the only means of rendering men less rapacious and egotistic, less ambitious and less slavish at the same time, is to eliminate those conditions which favour the growth of egotism and rapacity, of

slavishness and
ambition?”[[222](#)] Thus we
change ourselves when we
change the world.

Another of the great myths
associated with Kropotkin and
Mutual Aid in particular is the
notion that both ignore class
struggle in favour of some sort
of cross-class co-operation.
Thus we find Paul Avrich
asserting that “the partisans of
syndicalism went beyond

Kropotkin by reconciling the principle of mutual assistance with the Marxian doctrine of class struggle. For the syndicalists, mutual aid did not embrace humanity as a whole, but existed only within the ranks of a single class, the proletariat, enhancing its solidarity in the battle with the manufacturers.”[[223](#)]

This is incorrect on many levels. Kropotkin clearly

embraced the “doctrine of class struggle” as had Bakunin before him and so there is nothing specifically “Marxian” about it: for anarchists, “history is nothing but a struggle between the rulers and the ruled, the oppressors and the oppressed”[[224](#)] and so we seek to “awaken the spirit of revolt in the hearts of the city workers, and to direct it towards the natural enemy

of the wage-earner—the monopolist of the instruments of work and of raw materials.”[[225](#)] Co-operation could not be applied between classes: “What solidarity can exist between the capitalist and the worker he exploits?... Between the governing and the governed?”[[226](#)]

This awareness is reflected in *Mutual Aid* as well, which is hardly silent on social

struggle highlighting as it did trade unions and strikes. Nor was this an accident, as this expressed his desire “to show the incredible... amount of mutual aid support among workers, as manifested during strikes.”[[227](#)] Indeed, a major theme of the book is the evolution of mutual aid institutions in response to social change and class conflict.

Mutual Aid also provides substantial evidence to support the anarchist theory of social change. People have always organised themselves to resist the negative results of mutual struggle (such as the oppression and exploitation resulting from private property, the State and other social hierarchies) and these forms of mutual aid take many forms, including village

folkmoats, neighbourhood forums, unions, strikes, guilds, co-operatives, and so on). Thus the mutual aid tendency “continued to live in the villages and among the poorer classes in the towns” and “in so far as” new “economical and social institutions” were “a creation of the masses” they “have all originated from the same source” of mutual aid. By these means, the

masses “maintained their own social organisation, which was based upon their own conceptions of equity, mutual aid, and mutual support... even when they were submitted to the most ferocious theocracy or autocracy.”[[228](#)]

Thus institutions of mutual aid created by the masses to survive under capitalism become the basis of a free

society. A strike showed “the organising capacities displayed by the working men”[[229](#)] and “trains the participants for a common management of affairs and for distribution of responsibilities, distinguishes the people most talented and devoted to a common cause, and finally, forces the others to get to know these people and strengthens their influence.”[[230](#)]

Unsurprisingly, then, labour unions were “natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future social order.”[[231](#)]

Kropotkin also pointed to “the strikingly independent, freely federated activity of the ‘Sections’ of Paris and all great cities and many small ‘Communes’ during the French Revolution” in 1793.

[[232](#)] The “Revolution began by creating the Commune... and through this institution it gained... immense power” and “[b]y acting in this way—and the libertarians would no doubt do the same today—the districts of Paris laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation.” Thus “the principles of anarchism... already dated from 1789” and “they had their origin, not in

theoretical speculations, but in the *deeds* of the Great French Revolution.”[[233](#)] During the Russian Revolution of 1905, Kropotkin was in favour of joining the soviets as long as they remained “organs of struggle against the bourgeoisie and the State, and not organs of authority.” Anarchists participation in the soviets was “completely right” as they were “not a

government but a place for revolutionary discussion.”[[234](#)] “Without the participation of local forces,” Kropotkin argued in 1920, “without an organisation from below of the peasants and workers themselves, it is impossible to build a new life.” The soviets “served precisely this function of creating an organisation from below.”[[235](#)]

Kropotkin, in summary, was showing how the future was appearing in the present, how we create the new world as we fight against the old.

ON SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Popular struggles and mutual aid institutions like unions, while essential to improve working class conditions under capitalism, were not seen as an end in themselves. Rather,

they were the best means of creating a free society. The class struggle was the link between today and a better tomorrow with “collective revolt—strikes and working-class insurrections—both preparing, in men’s minds as in actions, a revolt of the masses, a revolution.”[[236](#)] Thus economic struggle against exploitation turns into a political struggle against the

State:

There is no serious strike that occurs today without the appearance of troops, the exchange of blows and some acts of revolt. Here they fight with the troops; there they march on the factories... in Pittsburgh in the United States, the strikers found themselves masters of a territory as large as France, and the

strike became the signal for a general revolt against the State; in Ireland the peasants on strike found themselves in open revolt against the State. Thanks to government intervention the rebel against the factory becomes the rebel against the State.[[237](#)]

Social revolution was required to destroy both the State and capitalism—neither could be

reformed away. Working class people had to “rely on themselves to get rid of the oppression of Capital, without expecting that the same thing can be done for them by anybody else. The emancipation of the workmen must be the act of the workmen themselves.”[[238](#)] It was that class “which, alone, will take arms and make the revolution.”[[239](#)]

Social revolution was a “mass rising up against property and the State.”[[240](#)] It would be based on expropriation, “the guiding word of the coming revolution, without which it will fail in its historic mission: the complete expropriation of all those who have the means of exploiting human beings; the return to the community of the nation of everything that in the hands of

anyone can be used to exploit others.”[[241](#)] It was “only through a Social Revolution, made by the workers themselves, that the present exploitation of Labour by Capital can be altered.”[[242](#)]

Kropotkin was not foolish enough to believe that a free society would be created overnight.[[243](#)] For anarchists a social revolution is a *process* and not an event (although, of

course, a process marked by such events as general strikes, uprisings, insurrections and so on). Indeed, he continually stressed that a revolution would face extensive problems, not least economic disruption:

Suppose we have entered a revolutionary period, with or without civil war—it does not matter,—a period when old

institutions are falling into ruins and new ones are growing in their place. The movement may be limited to one State, or spread over the world,—it will have nevertheless the same consequence: an immediate slackening of individual enterprise all over Europe. Capital will conceal itself, and hundreds of capitalists will

prefer to abandon their undertakings and go to watering-places rather than abandon their unfixed capital in industrial production. And we know how a restriction of production in any one branch of industry affects many others, and these in turn spread wider and wider the area of depression.

Already, at this moment, millions of those who have created all riches suffer from want of what must be considered *necessaries* for the life of a civilised man... Let the slightest commotion be felt in the industrial world, and it will take the shape of a general stoppage of work. Let the first attempt at expropriation be made,

and the capitalist
production of our days will
at once come to a stop,
and millions and millions
of ‘unemployed’ will join
the ranks of those who are
already unemployed now.

More than that... The
very first advance towards
a Socialist society will
imply a thorough
reorganisation of industry
as to what we have to

produce. Socialism implies... a transformation of industry so that it may be adapted to the needs of the customer, not those of the profit-maker. Many a branch of industry must disappear, or limits its production; many a new one must develop. We are now producing a great deal for export. But the export trade will be the

first to be reduced as soon as attempts at Social Revolution are made...

All that *can* be, and *will* be reorganised in time—not by the State, of course (why, then, not say by Providence?), but by the workers themselves...

[[244](#)]

So Kropotkin was well aware that a revolution would face many problems, including the

disruption of economic activity, civil war and isolation: “the reconstruction of Society in accordance with more equitable principles *will* necessitate a disturbed period.”[[245](#)] Hence

anarchists “do not believe that in any country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of an eye, as some socialists dream.” A “political revolution

can be accomplished without shaking the foundations of industry, but a revolution where the people lay hands upon property will inevitably paralyse exchange and production... This point cannot be too much insisted upon; the reorganisation of industry on a new basis... cannot be accomplished in a few days.”[[246](#)]

As with many other aspects

of anarchist theory, many Marxists are not aware of Kropotkin's position. Marxist Bertell Ollman's words are typical: "Unlike anarcho-communists, none of us believe that communism will emerge full blown from a socialist revolution. Some kind of transition and period of indeterminate length for it to occur are required."[[247](#)] In reality, Kropotkin held no such

position and recognised revolution as a long process: “It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation.”[[248](#)] The revolution would move towards communism over time:

[W]e know that an

uprising can overthrow and change a government in one day, while a *revolution* needs three or four years of revolutionary convulsion to arrive at tangible results... if we should expect the revolution, from its *earliest* insurrections, to have a communist character, we would have to relinquish the possibility

of a revolution, since in that case there would be need of a strong majority to agree on carrying through a change in the direction of communism.

[[249](#)]

So “the Revolution will take a different character in each of the different European nations; the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the

same.”[[250](#)] It was by its very nature a learning process, and “by degrees, the revolutionary education of the people was being accomplished by the revolution itself.”[[251](#)]

Given this, it is strange to claim that anarchists thought a “full blown” communist society was possible “overnight” given that anarchists had always stressed the difficulties facing a social

revolution. Ironically, while Kropotkin was discussing the problems facing a revolution the Marxists of the time were suggesting the opposite. It took until 1920 and Nikolai Bukharin's (infamous) *The Economics of the Transition Period* for Marxists to recognise this basic point. Bukharin noted four "real costs of revolution" and that "great revolutions were always

accompanied by destructive civil wars.” This “may appear to have been an obvious point, but it apparently came as something of a revelation to many Bolsheviks. It directly opposed the prevailing Social Democratic assumption that the transition to socialism would be relatively painless... Profound or not, Bolsheviks generally came to accept the ‘law’ and to regard it as a

significant discovery by Bukharin.”[[252](#)] The Bolsheviks sought to cope with this inevitable disruption by State coercion and centralism, which made matters much worse.

It was the very problems a revolutionary period would face that recommended the anarchist solution. Socialism could only be built from the bottom up and “the next

revolution” will be
“accomplished outside
Parliament, by the free
initiative of British workmen,
who will take possession for
themselves of capital, land,
houses, and instruments of
labour, and then combine in
order to start life on new lines
of local independence... No
Parliament, however noisy,
will help accomplish the Social
Revolution... it is not to

parliamentary rule that the revolted workmen will look for the economic and political reorganisation of the People.”[[253](#)] Economically, this meant that the “workers, the producers, must become the managers of the producing concern”[[254](#)] and the expropriation of “everything that enables any man—be he financier, mill-owner, or landlord—to appropriate the

product of others' toil." This meant "the property of the great landlords is socialised," housing "taken over by the Commune," industry "communalised" and turned over "to those who work in them." In short: "oust the landowners, and hand over the mills and factories to the worker. [255] Politically, workers "would federate as soon as they would have

broken the capitalist yoke in their own city.”[[256](#)] Like Proudhon and Bakunin, Kropotkin argued this federation would be based on mandated and recallable delegates, not representatives:

The question of true delegation versus representation can be better understood if one imagines a hundred or two hundred men, who meet

each day in their work and share common concerns... who have discussed every aspect of the question that concerns them and have reached a decision. They then choose someone and send him to reach an agreement with other delegates of the same kind... The delegate is not authorised to do more than explain to other delegates

the considerations that have led his colleagues to their conclusion. Not being able to impose anything, he will seek an understanding and will return with a simple proposition which his mandatories can accept or refuse. This is what happens when true delegation comes into being; when the

communes send their delegates to other communes, they need no other kind of mandate.

[[257](#)]

Revolution was an immense work of social transformation. It could not be left to a few leaders, whether local or national. A revolutionary government would result in people “confiding in their governors, entrusted to them

the charge of taking the initiative” rather than “acting for themselves” and “advancing in the direction of the new order of things.” Social change is the product of “the people in action” and “the brain of a few individuals [are] absolutely incapable of finding solutions” to the problems a revolt will face, solutions “which can only spring from the life of the

people.” For anarchists, a revolution “is not a simple change of governors. It is the taking possession by the people of all social wealth” and this cannot be achieved “by decrees emanating from a government.” This “economic change” will be “so immense and so profound” that it is “impossible for one or any individual to elaborate the different social forms which

must spring up in the society of the future. This elaboration of new social forms can only be made by the collective work of the masses” and “[a]ny authority external to it will only be an obstacle,” a “drag on the action of the people.” A revolutionary State, therefore, “becomes the greatest obstacle to the revolution” and to “dislodge it” requires the people “to take up

arms, to make another revolution.”[[258](#)]

This was the lesson of the Paris Commune, a revolt which Kropotkin analysed in detail and discussed many times. Central to his critique was that it retained a government within Paris whilst proclaiming the free federation of communes outwith. This was Bakunin’s position, who praised it as “a bold and

outspoken negation of the State” but also noted that the Communards had set up “a revolutionary government” and so organised “themselves in reactionary Jacobin fashion, forgetting or sacrificing what they themselves knew were the first conditions of revolutionary socialism” rather than “by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in

the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal” organised “solely from the bottom upwards.”[[259](#)]

Kropotkin expanded upon Bakunin’s analysis, arguing that while “proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle” but “they stopped mid-course” and gave

“themselves a Communal Council copied from the old municipal councils.” Thus the Paris Commune did not “break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the

Communes.” Isolated in the town hall, the Commune council became “immobilised... by red tape” and lost “the sensitivity that comes from continued contact with the masses... Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre—the people—they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.”[[260](#)]

The other major flaw in the

Commune was that it “treated the economic question as a secondary one, which would be attended to later on, *after* the triumph of the Commune... But the crushing defeat which soon followed, and the blood-thirsty revenge taken by the middle class, proved once more that the triumph of a popular Commune was materially impossible without a parallel

triumph of the people in the economic field.”[[261](#)]

For Kropotkin, then, the lessons of the Paris Commune were fourfold. Firstly, a decentralised confederation of communities is the necessary political form of a free society, “the point of departure for future revolutions” and “the precise and visible aim of the revolution.”[[262](#)] Secondly, “if no central government was

needed to rule the independent communes, if national government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central *municipal* government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the commune.”[[263](#)]
This meant the need for “a better means of agitating. The revolutionaries amongst the

people appeared to understand that the Council of the Commune ought to be considered a useless show, a tribute paid to the traditions of the past; that the people not only should not disarm, but that they should maintain concurrently with the Council their intimate organisation, their federated groups, and that from these groups and not from the *Hotel de-Ville* should

spring the necessary measures for the triumph of the revolution.”[[264](#)] Any future Commune “must not repeat within itself the error of entrusting a few men with the management of all its affairs... It must organise itself on the principle of ‘no rulers’”[[265](#)] and be based on a confederation of neighbourhood and workplace assemblies freely co-operating.

Thirdly, it is critically important to unify political and economic revolutions into a *social* revolution: “They tried to consolidate the Commune first and put off the social revolution until later, whereas the only way to proceed was *to consolidate the Commune by means of the social revolution!*” Economic revolution had to start immediately for “the insurgent

people will not wait for any old government in its marvellous wisdom to decree economic reforms. They will abolish individual property by themselves taking possession, in the name of the whole people and by violent expropriation of the whole of social wealth... they will take possession and establish their rights of usufruct immediately. They will organise the

workshops so that they will continue production.”[[266](#)]
Fourthly, the rebelled communes needed to federate: “Let each commune free itself first; then the freed communes will be brought to unite their efforts.” Thus “each city, each village, was free to join the movement” and create “great federations of revolted communes.”[[267](#)]

Given this we can see how

false it was of Lenin to assert that “the best of the anarchists” argued that we “must think *only* of destroying the old State machine; it is no use probing into the *concrete* lessons of earlier proletarian revolutions and analysing *what* to put in the place of what has been destroyed, and *how*.”[[268](#)] No anarchist thinker has ever proclaimed such nonsense. Kropotkin

analysed numerous revolutions, particularly the Paris Commune, precisely to learn their lessons. Ironically, while it took Lenin until 1917 to advocate the soviets as the basis of a socialist State, libertarians in Russia saw their potential over a decade before. The syndicalists “regarded the soviets... as admirable versions of the *bourses du travail*, but with a

revolutionary function added to suit Russian conditions. Open to all leftist workers regardless of specific political affiliation, the soviets were to act as nonpartisan labour councils improvised ‘from below’... with the aim of bringing down the old regime.” Kropotkin was associated with the anarchists of *Khleb i Volya* (*Bread and Freedom*) who “also likened

the 1905 Petersburg Soviet—as a non-party mass organisation—to the central committee of the Paris Commune of 1871.”[[269](#)] In 1907 anarchists concluded that the revolution required “the proclamation in villages and towns of workers’ communes with soviets... at their head.”[[270](#)]

So Lenin, typically, reversed the facts—it was Marxists

who were notoriously silent on the nature of socialist revolution while anarchists had written extensively on the subject.[\[271\]](#) This was because “there are periods in human development when a conflict is unavoidable, and civil war breaks out quite independently of the will of particular individuals” and the question was “how to attain the greatest results with the

most limited amount of civil war, the smallest number of victims, and a minimum of mutual embitterment.” To achieve this there was “only one means; namely, that the oppressed part of society should obtain the clearest possible conception of what they intend to achieve, and how, and that they should be imbued with the enthusiasm which is necessary for that

achievement.”[[272](#)]

Needless to say, while trying to learn the lessons of past revolutions Kropotkin was clear that we must not try to repeat the past. Echoing a similar warning made by Proudhon at the start of the 1848 revolution, he stressed the need to look forwards:

Even at the time the revolutionary fever seized the people they did not

seek their ideal in the future. They sought it in the past.

Instead of dreaming of a *new* revolution they sighed for those of the past. In 1793 they dreamed of establishing a Rome or an ancient Sparta. In 1848 they wished to recommence at 1792. In 1848 they admired in secret the Jacobins of

1793. The German revolutionary of our days dreams of reproducing 1848, and the executive committee of Petersburg take Blanqui and Barbès for their ideal.

Even in constructing an Utopia of future life, none dare break through the laws of antiquity. Ancient Rome presses with all its weight on our

century.”[[273](#)]

So while the autonomous federated commune was the basic unit of a free society, how this would be structured would vary according to circumstances. Thus

Kropotkin pointed to both the neighbourhood-based sections of the French Revolution and the workplace soviets of the Russian. The common feature was that they were popular

organisations built and run from below for to “make a revolution it is not... enough that there should be... risings... It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions” that make up society, “which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established.”[[274](#)] These new bodies would not be perfect in

every way and the role of anarchists would be to work within these popular organisations to push them in a libertarian direction:

We do not believe that these Communes will make a full application of our Anarchist principles. But we do believe that while the revolution will be the result of all revolutionary parties, our

ideas, our teachings also will have their effect.

There surely will be less reliance upon authority, and very much more upon our own efforts.

We may be sure that as soon as separate groups of workers are able to alter the present bad system, they will try to do so. If they can take possession of a factory they will. And

from these separate efforts will result the revolution, extending its sphere, co-ordinating and combining the separate acts.[[275](#)]

Lenin is also responsible for many Marxists believing that anarchists have no notion that a revolution needs to be defended.[[276](#)] In reality Kropotkin (like Bakunin before him) recognised that it “is self-evident that” the ruling

classes “will not let themselves be expropriated without opposing resistance.”[[277](#)] This necessitated both insurrection and the defence of the revolution as “only an armed populace” can oppose counter-revolution by means of “the armament of entire unions, the expedient distribution of duties to unions and so on.”[[278](#)] So if “armed brigands attack a people, is not

that same people, armed with good weapons, the surest rampart to oppose to the foreign aggressor?” Invaders can only “be repulsed by a popular rising alone.”[[279](#)]

Kropotkin’s vision of revolution was based on the arming of the people: “the French people will seize the arms, and when the people of Paris is armed it acts. And its act will be the proclamation of

the Commune.”[[280](#)] Freedom had to be defended and a “people who know how to organise the accumulation of wealth and its reproduction in the interest of the whole of society, no longer need to be governed. A people who will itself be the armed force of the country and who will know how to give to armed citizens the necessary cohesion and unity of action will no longer

need to be commanded.”[[281](#)]
This applied to both the
creation and the defence of a
free society:

The only way in which a
state of Anarchy can be
obtained is for each man
who is oppressed to act as
if he were at liberty, in
defiance of all authority to
the contrary... In speaking
of the Revolution, we
signify the aggregate of so

many successful individual and group revolts as will enable every person within the revolutionised territory to act in perfect freedom... without having to constantly dread the prevention or the vengeance of an opposing power upholding the former system... Under these circumstances it is obvious that any visible

reprisal could and would be met by a resumption of the same revolutionary action on the part of the individuals or groups affected, and that the *maintenance* of a state of Anarchy in this manner would be far easier than the gaining of a state of Anarchy by the same methods and in the face of hitherto unshaken

opposition.[[282](#)]

As Kropotkin stressed: “When it comes to a struggle, in every town and in every village, against the forces of the old *régime*, which, after a moment of stupor, reorganise themselves to stop the revolution—it is only the impulse of the revolutionists on the spot which can overcome that powerful resistance.”[[283](#)]

This recognition of the need of violence by the oppressed to end the systemic violence of class society and defend themselves against those seeking to re-enslave them did not mean Kropotkin favoured violence for its own sake. He was very clear that revolutionary terror was not an instrument for liberation: “Very sad would be the future of the revolution if it could

only triumph by terror.”[[284](#)]
This was the lesson of the French Revolution for the “revolutionary tribunal and the guillotine could not make up for the lack of a constructive communist theory.”[[285](#)] His warnings were proven right by the Bolshevik regime, where the Red Terror did not deter the (far worse) White Terror but was also used by the new regime against the workers

and peasants to secure its hold on power.[[286](#)]

In summary, Kropotkin's vision of revolution is a realistic account that squarely faces problems and presents concrete solutions to them. Anarchists, moreover, can point to various revolutionary events that support this conclusion. During the Russian Revolution the Makhnovist movement in the

Ukraine successfully applied anarchist ideas while fighting both White and Red tyranny. While the Bolsheviks disbanded soviets, broke strikes, repressed socialist opposition groups, abolished democracy in the military and imposed “dictatorial” one-man management in the workplace, the Makhnovists protected freedom of speech and organisation, called soviet

congresses, encouraged workers' self-management of production and maintained army democracy.[[287](#)] In the Spanish Revolution, libertarians successfully expropriated workplaces and applied workers' self-management, created rural collectives and a self-managed militia to fight Franco's forces while maintaining extensive freedom for non-fascist

groups.[[288](#)]

ON ANARCHY AND COMMUNISM

While recognising there were different forms of anarchism and the need for free experimentation, Kropotkin also argued that a free society, one that abolished private property, had “to organise itself on the lines of Communistic Anarchy. Anarchy leads to Communism,

and Communism to Anarchy” if you are serious in “the pursuit of equality.”[[289](#)] He spent as much time explaining why communism (distribution according to need rather than deed) was the best economic form to secure the maximum of individual liberty as well he did arguing for anarchy (the necessity for decentralisation, federalism, free agreement and self-management).

Communist-anarchist society would be based on “voluntary associations” which would “represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent—for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange,

communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.”[[290](#)] A free society (by definition) would be created from below, by the masses themselves, and so reflect the wishes of those

who create it:

A question which we are often asked is: “How will you organise the future society on Anarchist principles?” If the question were put to... someone who fancies that a group of men is able to organise society as they like, it would seem natural. But in the ears of an Anarchist, it sounds very strangely, and

the only answer we can give to it is: “We cannot organise you. It will depend upon *you* what sort of organisation you choose.”[[291](#)]

Thus “after a certain period of fumbling a new form of organisation of production and exchange, limited at first but later widespread; and this form will correspond much more to popular aspirations

and to the demands of life and of mutual relations than to any theory—however beautiful it may be—which is worked out either by the thought and imagination of reformers or by the labours of any kind of legislative body.” This, however, did not stop Kropotkin “predicting right now that” in areas influenced by anarchists “the bases of this new organisation” will be “the

free federation of producer groups and the free federation of communes and of groups of independent communes.”[[292](#)]

So while the specifics of a free society would be worked out based on the wishes of those creating it and the objective circumstances they face, a free society had to have some basic features to qualify as such. This included socialisation of wealth, self-

management of production by workers, communal self-government, federalism and free agreement. Without these individual liberty would be reduced, as it was under capitalism, to picking masters. [[293](#)]

Libertarian communism was “the best basis for individual development and freedom; not that individualism which drives men to the war of each against

all” but “that which represents the full expansion of man’s faculties, the superior development of what is original in him, the greatest fruitfulness of intelligence, feeling and will.” This was because the “most powerful development of individuality, of individual originality” can “only be produced when the first needs of food and shelter are satisfied” and “when

man's time is no longer taken up by the meaner side of daily subsistence,—then only, his intelligence, his artistic taste, his inventive spirit, his genius, can develop freely and ever strive to greater achievements.”[[294](#)]

Thus the aim was “a society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their hands and their brains to those who choose to employ them... but

who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest possible well-being for all, while full, free scope will be left for every individual initiative.”[[295](#)] So a revolution “is more than a mere change of the prevailing political system... It is a revolution in the minds of

men, as deep, and deeper still, than in their institutions... the sole fact of having laid hands on middle-class property will imply the necessity of completely re-organising the whole of economic life in the workplaces, the dockyards, the factories.”[[296](#)]

Economically, the aim of communist-anarchism was “the socialisation of wealth and integrated labour

combined with the fullest possible freedom of the individual.”[[297](#)] The commune “shall take possession of all the soil, the dwelling-houses, the manufactures, the mines and the means of communication” and the “free organisations of workers would be able to carry on production on the farm and on the factory, as well [as], and probably much

better, than it is conducted now under the individual ownership of the capitalist.”[[298](#)] A free economy existed only when “associations of men and women who would work on the land, in the factories, in the mines, and so on, became themselves the managers of production.”[[299](#)] As he summarised: “Free workers, on free land, with free

machinery, and freely using all the powers given to man by science.”[[300](#)]

This vision of a socialised economy based on workers’ self-management was similar to that expounded by Proudhon and Bakunin. Kropotkin, however, extended socialisation to the products created by these socialised means of production and while not the first to advocate it, he

was instrumental in winning most anarchists to communism. Given that communism has been advocated by authoritarians before and after Kropotkin, it is important to stress that all that is meant by the term is distribution according to need. [301] It does *not* imply a commitment to central planning (as in the USSR), quite the reverse as

communism “must result from thousands of separate local actions, all directed towards the same aim. It cannot be dictated by a central body: it must result from the numberless local needs and wants.”[[302](#)]

Kropotkin favoured distribution according to a person’s needs rather their deeds for three reasons:

First, because “in the

present state of industry, when everything is interdependent, when each branch of production is knit up with all the rest, the attempt to claim an individualist origin for the products of industry is untenable.” So it “is utterly impossible to draw a distinction between the work of each” and to “estimate the share of each in the riches which *all* contribute to

amass.”[[303](#)] Modern production is collective and each task is as important as another for if one is not done the whole suffers.

Second, there is the logical contradiction of the abolition of property in the means of production and a “system of remuneration for work done” in consumption. It is “evident that a society cannot be based on two absolutely opposed

principles, two principles that contradict one another continually.” How can labour-money be advocated “when we admit that houses, fields, and factories will no longer be private property, and that they will belong to the commune or the nation?”[[304](#)] So the “common possession of the instruments of labour must necessarily bring with it the enjoyment in common of the

fruits of common labour.” Thus a “new form of property requires a new form of remuneration. A new method of production cannot exist side by side with the old forms of consumption, any more than it can adapt itself to the old forms of political organisation.”[[305](#)]

Third, there was the question of justice. It was simply fairer to share

according to need as work done did not take into account the many factors that impact on a person's ability to work. Thus "a man of forty, father of three children, has other needs than a young man of twenty" and "the woman who suckles her infant and spends sleepless nights at its bedside, cannot do as much *work* as the man who has slept peacefully." Moreover, "the needs of the

individual, do not always correspond to his *works*.” This is obviously the case with children, the sick and the elderly and so we should “put the *needs* above the *works*, and first of all to recognise *the right to live*, and later on *the right to well-being* for all those who took their share in production.”[[306](#)] In short, “the labour cheque of the economist acts in the same

way [as wages]; he does not care about the needs of the family, and pays twice as much to the girl who has worked twice as many hours as the mother, in total disregard of the fact that for society as a whole the mother is giving twice as much labour.”[[307](#)]

So modern industry, logic and justice implied communism and a society

where “every member of the community knows that after a few hours of productive toil he will have a right to all the pleasures that civilisation procures, and to those deeper sources of enjoyment which art and science offer to all who seek them.”[[308](#)] Anarchist communism would be based on the following principles:

We undertake to give you
the use of our houses,

stores, streets, means of transport, schools, museums, etc., on condition that, from twenty to forty-five or fifty years of age, you consecrate four or five hours a day to some work recognised as necessary to existence. Choose yourself the producing group which you wish to join, or organise a new group,

provided that it will undertake to produce necessities. And as for the remainder of your time, combine together with whomsoever you like, for recreation, art, or science, according to the bent of your taste... Twelve or fifteen hundred hours of work a year is all we ask of you. For that amount of work we guarantee to you

the free use of all that these groups produce, or will produce.[[309](#)]

Anarchist-Communism would have wider implications. Industry would be transformed and become “airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits.”[[310](#)]
This applied to the structure of

industry as well, for “production, having lost sight of the *needs* of man, has strayed in an absolutely wrong direction” and “its organisation is at fault... let us... reorganise production so as to really satisfy all needs. “[[311](#)] Based on a detailed analysis of current economic statistics and trends, Kropotkin argued that this meant a “scattering of industries over the country—

so as to bring the factory
amidst the fields...
agriculture... combined with
industry... to produce a
combination of industrial with
agricultural work.” This was
“surely the next step to be
made, as soon as a
reorganisation of our present
conditions is possible” and “is
imposed by the very necessity
of *producing for the producers
themselves.*”[[312](#)] Thus:

Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to

satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men... factories and workshops which men, women and children will not be driven by hunger, but will be attracted by the desire of finding an activity suited to their tastes, and where, aided by the motor and the machine, they will choose the branch of activity which best suits

their inclinations.[[313](#)]

This perspective flowed naturally from Kropotkin's awareness that industry, technology and the structure of both were the products of a society and economy marked by classes and hierarchy. This meant that all were shaped by what was considered efficient by the criteria of the owning class. Since the workplace is "a strictly private enterprise,

its owners find it advantageous to have all the branches of a given industry under their own management: they thus cumulate the profits of the successful transformations of the raw material.” However, “from a *technical* point of view the advantages of such an accumulation are trifling and often doubtful.” Thus “the ‘concentration’ so much spoken of is often nothing but

an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of *dominating the market*, not for cheapening the technical process.”[[314](#)]

Thus socialisation necessitated industry being decentralised and integrated with agriculture, both organised at an *appropriate* level. The notion that Kropotkin aimed for small, self-sufficient communes is a misunderstanding of his ideas.

[[315](#)] Industry, he argued, would come to the village “not in its present shape of a capitalist factory” but “in the shape of a socially organised industrial production, with the full aid of machinery and technical knowledge.” This, however, was in the context of advocating the use of appropriate sizes of workplaces based on the technical needs of production:

“if we analyse the modern industries, we soon discover that for some of them the co-operation of hundreds, even thousands, of workers gathered at the same spot is really necessary. The great iron works and mining enterprises decidedly belong to that category; oceanic steamers cannot be built in village factories.”[[316](#)]

Federalism would ensure a

rational decentralisation and co-operation so if an industry or workplace needed to be organised on a large-scale it would continue to be.

So while industry would be expropriated by its workers and managed by them, the revolution did not stop there. Its long-term goal would be to transform the industrial structure, not keep it as it is. Unlike Lenin, Kropotkin

recognised that the structure of industry developed within capitalism could not be simply taken over and ran in the interests of all.[[317](#)] A successful revolution would need to start transforming industry shaped by the necessities of profit-making by the few as this cannot, by definition, be one suitable for meeting the needs of all. A socialist economy cannot have

as its aim *increasing* the centralisation and concentration of technology, industry and industrial structure produced within class society to secure the profits and power of the few. As the Bolshevik revolution showed, this simply placed industry under the control of a new class—the bureaucracy.

[[318](#)]

So a free society would start

to restructure its industry to reflect human needs and, Kropotkin argued, this would see *integration* predominate:

[A] society of integrated, combined labour. A society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works both in the field and

the industrial workshop;
where every aggregation
of individuals, large
enough to dispose of a
certain variety of natural
resources—it may be a
nation, or rather a region
—produces and itself
consumes most of its own
agricultural and
manufactured produce.

[[319](#)]

This did not mean that

individuals or regions would do everything. Some regions simply do not have the necessary conditions for certain industries or agricultural produce and so the “geographical distribution of industries in a given country depends... to a great extent upon a complexus of natural conditions; it is obvious that there are spots which are best suited for the development of

certain industries.” Similarly, people would pick activities that interest them. “It is evident,” noted Kropotkin, “that all men and women cannot equally enjoy the pursuit of scientific work. The variety of inclinations is such that some will find more pleasure in science, some others in art, and others again in some of the numberless branches of the production of

wealth.”[[320](#)]

This indicates a wider point. Liberating work and restructuring industry, however important, was a means to an end, namely to secure the material means by which individuals can express their individuality as they see fit:

we must recognise that
man has other needs
besides food, and as the

strength of Anarchy lies precisely in that it understands *all* human faculties and *all* passions, and ignores none, we shall... contrive to satisfy all his intellectual and artistic needs... He will discharge his task in the field, the factory, and so on, which he owes to society as his contribution to the general production.

And he will employ the second half of his day, his week, or his year, to satisfy his artistic or scientific needs, or his hobbies.[[321](#)]

Associations will be created for all human interests and activities. So as well as meeting basic needs “we expect more from the Revolution,” to provide all with “the higher delights... of

science, and especially of scientific discovery; of art, and especially artistic creation” as well as “to give leisure and the possibility of developing everyone’s intellectual capacities” and so “[a]fter bread has been secured, leisure is the supreme aim.”[[322](#)] These needs would be met by free association:

He who wishes for a grand piano will enter the

association of musical instrument makers. And by giving the association part of his half-days' leisure, he will soon possess the piano of his dreams. If he is fond of astronomical studies he will join the association of astronomers... and he will have the telescope he desires by taking his share of the associated work...

In short, the five or seven hours a day which each will have at his disposal, after having consecrated several hours to the production of necessities, would amply suffice to satisfy all longings for luxury, however varied. Thousands of associations would undertake to supply them.[[323](#)]

This expression of individuality

was key. Communism, for Kropotkin, did *not* imply communal living in the sense of one big family. This was “repugnant to millions of human beings. The most reserved man certainly feels the necessity of meeting his fellows for the purpose of common work... But it is not so for the hours of leisure, reserved for rest and intimacy.” Communal living in

the sense of everyone living under one roof “can please some, and even all at a certain period of their life, but the great mass prefers family life (family life of the future, be it understood). They prefer isolated apartments.” Such a regime (as desired by the so-called Utopian Socialists) “would be hateful, were it the general rule. Isolation, alternating with time spent in

society, is the normal desire of human nature.”[[324](#)] Thus the aim is “Communism, but not the monastic or barrack-room Communism formerly advocated [by utopian or State socialists], but the free Communism which places the products reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own

home.”[[325](#)]

Equally, Kropotkin rejected the idea of people being forced to join communes. An anarchist revolution “would take care not to touch the holding of the peasant who cultivates it himself with his children and without wage labour. But we would expropriate all land that was not cultivated by the hands of those who at present possess

the land.”[[326](#)] So an independent worker would be free to work for themselves as he “exploits nobody, and nobody would have the right to interfere with his work” and so “we see no use in taking the tools... to give to another worker.”[[327](#)]

Anarchy cannot exist without a socialist economic system as “political equality is possible only where there is

economical equality; that the labourer who tills the ground for the landlord never will be the political equal of the landlord, nor the factory worker the equal of his employer, nor the ruled the equal of the ruler.” This meant that “unity within each Commune will not exist as long as there are within that Commune the rich possessor of wealth and the hired

labourer” and so that means “the common possession by the whole of the Commune of all its wealth: houses and gardens, fields and streets, manufactories and railways.” Only then will people “be equal economically and politically. And then they will be *free*.”[[328](#)] Both were inevitably linked:

A new economic phase
demands a new political

phase. A revolution as profound as that dreamed of by the socialists cannot accept the mould of an out-dated political life. A new society based on equality of condition, on the collective possession of the instruments of work, cannot tolerate for a week... the representative system... if we want the social revolution, we must

seek a form of political organisation that will correspond to the new method of economic organisation... The future belongs to the free groupings of interests and not to governmental centralisation; it belongs to freedom and not to authority.[[329](#)]

The social structure of an anarchist society will be the

opposite of the current system. Instead of being centralised and hierarchical as in a State, it will be decentralised and organised from the bottom up. A “new form of political organisation has to be worked out the moment that socialist principles shall enter our life” and this “will have to be *more popular, more decentralised*” and so “socialism must become *more popular*, more

communalistic, and less dependent upon indirect government through elected representatives. It must become more *self-governing*.”[[330](#)] Unity would be achieved by means of federalism and so the commune “cannot admit any higher authority: above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as the other

Communes.”[[331](#)] The nation “of the future will be the federation of these free organisms, economically and politically free. Slaves cannot easily federate; free men can and do.”[[332](#)]

Kropotkin did not think communes would crush individuality, quite the reverse. Anarchism aimed to “rouse the spirit of initiative in individuals and in groups,” to

“create in their mutual relations a movement and a life based on the principles of free understanding” and recognise that “*variety, conflict even, is life and that uniformity is death.*”[[333](#)]

“Nothing is more contrary to the real spirit of Anarchy than uniformity and intolerance,” he argued. “Freedom of development implies difference of development, hence

difference of ideas and actions.” Experience, then, is “the best teacher, and the necessary experience can only be gained by entire freedom of action.”[[334](#)]

Nor was Kropotkin naïve enough to think there would be no anti-social (or “criminal”) acts in a free society. Freedom had to be defended, whether from counter-revolution, individuals

coercing others or someone “drawing from society all that he can, and monopolising from others as much as possible.” If anti-social acts occurred then the rest of the community “have it in their power to apply a prompt check by boycotting such a person and refusing to help him with their labour or to willingly supply him with any articles in their possession. They have it in

their power to use force against him. They have these powers individually as well as collectively. Being either past rebels who have been inspired with the spirit of liberty, or else habituated to enjoy freedom from their infancy, they are hardly to rest passive in view of what they feel to be wrong.”[[335](#)] Solidarity and mutual aid would both create anarchy and preserve it: “No

more laws! No more judges! Liberty, equality, and practical human sympathy are the most effective barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instinct of certain among us.”[[336](#)]

Kropotkin did not think that communist-anarchism would be a perfect society—far from it. It simply aimed for “well-being for all” and “the possibility of living like human

beings” in a “society better than ours.” It is “high time for the worker to assert his right to the common inheritance, and to enter into possession of it.”[[337](#)]

Conclusion

While we anarchists, rightly, reject calling our ideas after individuals we can recognise the contributions of those, like Kropotkin, who helped enrich

the commonwealth of ideas
which is anarchism.
Particularly, as with
Kropotkin, when their analysis
is so powerful and their
conclusions still ring true in
area after area.

Capitalism is still an
exploitative system in which
the labour of the many
enriches the few. It is still
oppressive and based on the
worker selling their liberty to

gain access to the means of production and the land. The State still exists to defend this economic system and any social-democratic reforms simply blunt its worst excesses to keep the system going. Working class people still need to create their own mutual aid institutions (particularly given the onslaught on the welfare State by politicians seeking to appease their wealthy

backers). In terms of current action, Kropotkin's call for anarchists to take part in popular movements to influence them in the libertarian direction is still correct:

We are to organise the workers' forces—not to make them into a fourth party in parliament, but to turn them into a formidable machine for

struggle against capital. We have to group all the trades together under the single aim, ‘war against capitalist exploitation!’ And we have to pursue this war continually each day, by the strike, by agitation, and by *all revolutionary methods*.[\[338\]](#)

In terms of his scientific work, his arguments in *Mutual Aid* that co-operation is an

important factor in evolution are now a standard part of biological theory while the theory that our ethical ideas have an evolutionary basis is now considered cutting-edge research by scientists unaware of Kropotkin's work a hundred years ago. His critique of Marxism has also been vindicated. "Communist organisations," he correctly argued, "must be the work of

all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free.”[[339](#)] Given its descent into reformism, most Marxists deny that Social Democracy was really Marxist in the first place while

Leninism was simply a party dictatorship presiding over a State capitalist economy. It simply swapped one ruling class (the bourgeoisie) for another (the bureaucracy).

Given the accuracy of Bakunin's and Kropotkin's warnings about State socialism, it is understandable that new generations of radicals should turn to libertarian ideas. Particularly

given that Kropotkin's analysis of the problems a social revolution would face and the necessity for decentralisation, local action and federalism to solve them have been confirmed time and again. Unless socialism is rooted in liberty, in self-management, in direct action and solidarity, it will not be *genuinely* socialist. The Makhnovist movement during the Russian Revolution

shows that revolution need not result in swapping one set of bosses for another.

In short, Kropotkin's communist-anarchism has been vindicated. However, he would have been the first to argue that we cannot simply repeat his ideas, parrot-like. Just as Bakunin built upon Proudhon's ideas and Kropotkin developed Bakunin's contributions, we

need to build upon Kropotkin's work. Like him, we need to analyse the society we are in and those movements within it which are resisting its exploitative and oppressive nature—that is, working class struggle and self-organisation in the 21st century. Thanks to Kropotkin we can we build upon firm foundations. We hope that this anthology will inspire more

people will take up his call to action:

The failure of the middle classes is now complete, and you, the workers, must take into your hands the inheritance. Consider all that vast accumulation of cultivable lands, these cities, these railways, these ships, this accumulated knowledge, as *yours*, take hold of them: you are

called upon by history to do so—to undertake the management of all these treasures for the benefit of all.[[340](#)]

We have a choice. “Anarchism,” argued Kropotkin, “is not a mere insight into a remote future. Already now, whatever the sphere of action of the individual, he can act, either in accordance with anarchist

principles or on an opposite line.”[[341](#)] Therefore we can either act for ourselves, build upon the revolutionary ideas of Kropotkin, fight for a better world and taste the joys of freedom or we can remain servants to the few. Which way we go, as he put it, “lies with you!”[[342](#)]

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Kropotkin

A Biographical Sketch

Peter Alexeivich Kropotkin was born in Moscow on the 9th of December 1842 within a royal family that could trace its origins to the founders of the Tsarist regime. As a member of the Russian ruling class, he received the best education his father's exploitation of his serfs could provide. At the age of fifteen,

he entered the Corps of Pages in St. Petersburg, an elite Court institution attached to the imperial household. He was soon recognised as its most brilliant student and became the personal page of the new Tsar, Alexander II. During this time Kropotkin, like Bakunin before him, became interested in politics and social issues as well as science.

In 1862, he was promoted to the army, and utilising his privilege, as a member of the Corps, to choose his regiment, he decided to reject the career expected of him by his family, instead joining a Siberian Cossack regiment in the recently annexed Amur district. This, he thought, would allow him to pursue his scientific interests and to play his part in the reforms he

hoped would follow from the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.

In Siberia, he saw the horrors of the Tsarist penal system at first hand and his attempts at reform were frustrated by the central bureaucracy in St. Petersburg and local corruption. Kropotkin also became aware of anarchist ideas there, when the exiled poet Mikhail

Mikhailov gave him a copy of Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions*.

This made the young army officer "first regard himself as a socialist." [343] Turning to science, he accepted charge of a geographical survey expedition, crossing North Manchuria from Transbaikalia to the Amur and shortly afterwards was attached to another expedition which

proceeded up the Sungari River into the heart of Manchuria. Kropotkin used both expeditions to pursue his scientific interests, yielding valuable geographical results. Looking back at this time, he wrote:

The years I spent in Siberia taught me many lessons... I soon realised the absolute impossibility of doing anything really

useful for the masses of the people by means of the administrative machinery. With this illusion I parted for ever... The constructive work of the unknown masses, which so seldom finds any mention in books, and the importance of that constructive work in the growth of forms of society, appeared before my eyes

in a clear light... The part which the unknown masses play in the accomplishment of all important historical events... became evident to me from direct observation...

Having been brought up in a serf-owner's family, I entered active life, like all young men of my time, with a great deal of

confidence in the necessity of commanding, ordering, scolding, punishing, and the like. But when, at an early stage, I had to manage serious enterprises and to deal with men, and when each mistake would lead at once to heavy consequences, I began to appreciate the difference between acting on the principle of command and

discipline, and acting on the principle of common understanding. The former works admirably in a military parade, but it is worth nothing where real life is concerned, and the aim can be achieved only through the severe effort of many converging wills... I was prepared to become an anarchist.[[344](#)]

So while Kropotkin had gone

to Siberia “full of enthusiasm for the possibilities of national reform,” he left “five years later completely disillusioned.”[[345](#)] Resigning from the army in 1867 because of the bloody repression of a revolt of Polish prisoners, he returned to St. Petersburg. There he began university and, at the same time, became the secretary of the physical geography section

of the Russian Geographical Society. He made his name as a scientist and geographer when he proved that the existing maps of Asia misrepresented its physical formation, the main structural lines being in fact from south-west to north-east, not from north to south or east to west, as had been previously supposed. “There are not many joys in human life,” he

later recounted, “equal to the joy of the sudden birth of a generalisation, illuminating the mind after a long period of patient research.”[[346](#)]

In 1871, while exploring glacial deposits in Finland and Sweden for the Russian Geographical Society, he was asked to be its secretary. However, his growing social consciousness made him refuse the offer, instead

becoming a revolutionary socialist and agitator for social change. “Science is an excellent thing,” he recalled. “I knew its joys and valued them, perhaps more than many of my colleagues did”:

But what right had I to these highest joys, when all around me was nothing but misery and struggle for a mouldy bit of bread; when whatsoever I should

spend to enable me to live in that world of higher emotions must needs be taken from the very mouths of those who grew the wheat and had not bread enough for their children?...

Knowledge is an immense power... What if that knowledge... should become the possession of all? Would not science

itself progress in leaps and
cause mankind to make
strides in production,
invention, and social
creation, of which we are
hardly in a condition now
to measure the speed?

The masses want to
know: they are willing to
learn; they *can* learn...
they are ready to widen
their knowledge, only give
it to them: only give them

the means of getting
leisure. This is the
direction in which, and
these are the kind of
people for whom, I must
work. All those sonorous
phrases about making
mankind progress, while at
the same time the
progress-makers stand
aloof from those whom
they pretend to push
onwards, are mere

sophisms made up by
minds anxious to shake off
a fretting contradiction.

So I sent my negative
reply to the Geographical
Society.[[347](#)]

Using the privileges of his
scientific position, he visited
Switzerland in 1872 and joined
the International
Workingmen's Association
(IWMA). At that time the
Swiss labour movement was

split into two parts, one recognised by Marx and the General Council of the IWMA and the other grouped around Bakunin. This reflected, but predated, the wider split that had occurred in 1871 between the majority (libertarian) and the minority (Marxist) wings. Kropotkin took the opportunity to visit both factions, first to the non-anarchist wing, meeting at the

Temple Unique, a Masonic hall in Geneva, where he was horrified to see its leaders manipulate a mass meeting in order stop a strike they considered as harmful to the electoral chances of their candidate. He then visited the libertarian wing and the “separation between leaders and workers which I had noticed at Geneva in the Temple Unique did not exist in

the Jura Mountains. There were a number of men who were more intelligent, and especially more active than the others; but that was all.” While he did not, much to his later regret, meet Bakunin it was during this visit to the Jura federation that he concluded “my views upon socialism were settled. I was an anarchist.”[[348](#)]

On returning to Russia, he

took an active part in spreading revolutionary propaganda through the Chaikovsky Circle.[[349](#)] He produced his first major libertarian work for this group, “Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System?,” which not only sketched a vision of a free society obviously inspired by Proudhon and Bakunin but

also a strategy of social change based, like theirs, on the workers and peasants. As Chaikovsky later recalled, Kropotkin spoke “in favour of an immediate concentration of all the forces of the organisation in working-class circles without waiting for the perfecting of the propaganda groups recruited from the students.”[[350](#)]

He was arrested in 1874 for

his activities and (like Bakunin before him) imprisoned in the infamous Peter-and-Paul fortress. After two years, his health failed and he was transferred to the prison block of the St. Petersburg military prison. This was the opportunity he and his populist comrades were waiting for, and they organised his escape (as vividly described in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*).

In August 1876, he reached Britain. Contemplating his position, he thought about returning to Russia, but considering himself “too well known to carry on an open propaganda, especially among the workers and the peasants” and rejecting conspiracies in favour of “a popular movement,” he decided to remain in exile and join “the labouring and toiling masses,”

to “aid them to direct their efforts to the best advantage of all the workers,” and to “deepen and to widen the ideals and principles which will underlie the coming social revolution.” He wanted “to awaken their own initiative, now that they were called upon to appear in the historical arena as the builders of a new, equitable mode of organisation of society.” As part of this he

rejected being supported by the movement, becoming a scientific journalist: “A socialist must always rely upon his own work for his living.”[[351](#)]

This proved to be a wise decision. While in exile in Western Europe, he became a leading exponent of the communist anarchism which was then replacing Bakunin’s collectivist anarchism as the

dominant theory in the libertarian movement.[[352](#)] He rejoined the libertarian-wing of the IWMA in Switzerland and started to contribute articles to the Jura Federation's journal, *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne de l'Association Internationale des Travailleurs*. It was there in 1878 that he met and married Sophie Ananieva, daughter of a Polish Jew exiled to Siberia

for revolutionary activities.

In Switzerland, he met and worked with leading anarchist thinkers and activists, including many exiles from the bloody repression of the Paris Commune. He took the opportunity to discuss that revolt and its lessons, using these eyewitness accounts to build a critique of the revolt so that future revolutions would not make the same mistakes.

Politically, he acknowledged that while it raised the vision of a federated France and so denied the national State, internally, it was based on the existing town council. This caused immense problems, as this structure could not handle the many problems facing the revolt, which necessitated a far deeper and wider democratisation and decentralisation *within* the

commune itself: the creation of a free federation of workplaces and communities. Economically, it had not begun to transform the economy in a (libertarian) communist direction.

“It is obvious,” summarised Kropotkin in one of his many articles on the subject, “that if the Commune could have held out against the besiegers for a longer time, the people would

have perceived that its new rulers, however sincere and revolutionary, could not perform the great task of making an economical revolution for the workmen.” This was “[b]ecause a deep revolution—an economical revolution—was necessary; and an economical revolution can be made only by the people itself, not by orders from above. Because, like all

governments, this government was a compromise with the past.”[[353](#)] These criticisms did not diminish his support for the Commune, which he considered as *the* defining revolutionary event of his lifetime, and he concluded that the autonomous federated commune was the starting point for the coming social revolution.

His first important

contribution to anarchist thought was his address at the Jura Federation's 1879 congress, "The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of its Practical Realisation," subsequently published as a pamphlet. It carried forward Bakunin's key ideas concerning "stir[ring] up the economic struggle" as "the best method of shaking" the State, ensuring its "inevitable

downfall,” and “the expropriation... of the large landed estates, of the instruments of labour... by the cultivators, the workers’ organisations, and the... communes.”[[354](#)] He would return repeatedly to these themes over the next four decades.

When the *Bulletin* ceased to appear and its successor was suppressed by the Swiss

authorities, Kropotkin founded *Le Révolté* (*The Rebel*) in 1879. This was “destined to be the most influential anarchist paper since the disappearance of Proudhon’s *Le Peuple* in 1850.”[[355](#)] As well as editing the paper, he also wrote numerous articles with the aim of it being “moderate in tone, but revolutionary in substance, and I did my best to write it in such a style that complex

historical and economic questions should be comprehensible to every intelligent worker.”[[356](#)]

Due to pressure from the Russian ambassador, he was expelled from Switzerland in 1881 after attending an International Anarchist conference in London. Eventually, Kropotkin settled in France, where he continued to contribute to the anarchist

press and movement. As well as damning critiques of the current system and arguments for anarchism, a key aspect of this revolutionary journalism was to encourage French anarchists, like the libertarians in the IWMA, to work within the labour movement. For example, in an article on 12th of November 1881, he urged the French to follow the example of their Spanish

comrades who had remained “[f]aithful to the Anarchist traditions of the International” and brought their “energy to workers’ organisations.” His “advice to the French workers” was “to take up again... the tradition of the International, to organise themselves outside of all political parties by inscribing on their banner solidarity *in the struggle against capital*”

and “build up a force which will crush Capital... the revolutionary trade association.”[[357](#)]

This work quickly made Kropotkin well known to the authorities and he was arrested as part of a general crackdown on the anarchist movement in 1882. After a trial in Lyon in 1883, which was utilised by the 53 defendants to expound their

anarchist ideas, he was given a five-year prison sentence. The Police Correctional Court ostensibly claimed this was for being a member of an illegal organisation, the IWMA (which had been outlawed after the Paris Commune). Kropotkin drafted the defendants' famous statement of principles and, along with the defence speeches, it was published in *Le Révolté* and as

a pamphlet.

It was during this imprisonment that his first anarchist book, *Paroles d'un Révolté* (*Words of a Rebel*), appeared. Edited by friend, comrade and fellow internationally respected geographer Élisée Reclus and published in 1885, it was a collection of articles from *Le Révolté* and contained many of his most famous pieces,

such as “Revolutionary Government,” “The Commune of Paris,” “The Spirit of Revolt” and “Appeal to the Young.” After repeated international campaigns, he was finally released in 1886, and he settled in England, where he helped found the anarchist newspaper, *Freedom*. His second anarchist book, *In Russian and French Prisons*, published in 1887,

contained an account of his experiences as a political prisoner as well as a searing condemnation and critique of the penal system. That year also saw the birth of his and Sophie's only child, Alexandra.

However, his immediate work after release was to continue the elaboration of communist-anarchism and its vision of revolution. Returning

to the theme of the last chapter of *Words of a Rebel* on expropriation, Kropotkin started a series of articles in *Le Révolté*[[358](#)] and *Freedom* indicating what an anarchist social revolution could be like, what issues it had to deal with as well as sketching the outline of a society freeing itself from the evils of the State and capitalism.[[359](#)] Many of the French articles were later

revised and incorporated into *La Conquête du Pain* (*The Conquest of Bread*) in 1892, a work he considered as “the constructive part of an anarchist-communist society” (“so far as it can now be forecast”) in contrast to “the critical part” contained in *Words of a Rebel*.[\[360\]](#) Obviously based on the lessons he had drawn from the Paris Commune, *The*

Conquest of Bread stressed the need for the expropriation of private property, free communism, and the creation of a new social system based on federations of popular social and economic organisations.

During this time Kropotkin also reiterated his arguments from the early 1880s on the necessity of anarchists becoming involved in popular

movements, particularly the labour movement.[[361](#)]

Inspired in part by the success of the London Dockers' strike in the summer of 1889, he returned to this subject in a series of articles starting in September of that year. The following year he urged anarchists to take part in mass movements, arguing for the importance of mobilising on the 1st of May 1891 and

turning it into a general strike against exploitation. This campaign by leading anarchists such as Kropotkin, Malatesta, Pouget, and a host of others bore fruit, and increasing numbers of anarchists joined the unions in France, ultimately leading to the rise of revolutionary syndicalism. The marginalisation of anarchism in France in the 1880s as a

result of ultra-revolutionary posturing (aided by police spies) ended with a return to the successful strategies of the libertarians in the First International:

Revolutionary Anarchist Communist propaganda within the Labour Unions had always been a favourite mode of action in the Federalist or 'Bakunist' section of the International

Working Men's Association. In Spain and in Italy, it had been especially successful. Now it was resorted to, with evident success, in France, and *Freedom* eagerly advocated this sort of propaganda, carefully taking note of its successes all over the world.[[362](#)]

Somewhat ironically, given that the most famous period of

anarchist terrorism in France was from March 1892 to June 1894,[[363](#)] leading anarchists had turned to advocating libertarian involvement in the labour movement over two years previously. As such, the all-too-common notion that anarchists turned to syndicalism in response to the failure of “propaganda by the deed” is untenable—particularly given the

syndicalist ideas championed by Bakunin and other revolutionary anarchists in the First International; more correctly, anarchists *returned* to revolutionary unionism. [364]

During the early 1890s, Kropotkin spent some time critiquing the rise of Social Democracy and the Second International. Correctly predicting that this would lead

to the watering down of socialism, he advocated an International based purely on labour unions committed to “*the direct struggle of Labour against Capital.*”[[365](#)] He also took an active part in urging anarchists to secure mandates to attend the 1896 London Congress of the Second International.[[366](#)] While not attending himself, he took part in the protest

meeting after the anarchists were expelled, stating that “we are all delighted to see that such an enormous mass of workers, by sending delegates to the Congress, expressed their determination to fight against Capital and to take property out of the hands of the monopolists and exploiters of labour.” However, he hoped “that only workers’ associations will be admitted at

future congresses: we want delegates not as Social Democrats nor as Anarchists, but as men who have won the confidence of a workers' association, whatever be their personal opinion." He also denounced "voting by nationalities in an assembly purporting to be a really international one." [[367](#)]

As well as writing for the anarchist press, Kropotkin also

contributed scientific works to a range of leading journals. Many of these later became books, such as *Fields, Factories and Workshops: or, Industry Combined with Agriculture and Brain Work with Manual Work* (1898) and *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902). The former saw him analyse trends within modern economies, arguing that the future socialist society

must integrate agriculture and industrial as well as manual and intellectual labour based on the use of appropriately scaled technology to humanise work. He recognised, unlike many socialists, that the current industrial structure reflected the drive for profits and power of the few and, consequently, had to be transformed in order to make it suitable for humanity. The

latter was based on a series of articles written in response to “The Struggle for Existence in Human Society,” written by Thomas Henry Huxley, Britain’s leading advocate of Darwin’s ideas. Kropotkin considered his speculation on human society as simply “atrocious”[[368](#)] and in direct contradiction to the facts of both nature and history. Kropotkin’s replies to Huxley,

later revised and collected in *Mutual Aid*, first appeared in the journal *The Nineteenth Century* between 1890 and 1896.

Mutual Aid is probably Kropotkin's most famous book, and as its sub-title suggests (“*A Factor of Evolution*”), it did not deny the fact of (individual) competition in animals or human society (nor the class struggle). It was

a work of popular science that aimed to present evidence against the predominant vision of nature as one, like capitalism, rooted in individualistic competition and was highly successful in so doing. As noted Darwinist Stephen Jay Gould concluded: “Kropotkin’s basic argument is correct. Struggle does occur in many modes, and some lead to co-operation among

members of a species as the best pathway to advantage for individuals.”[[369](#)] Kropotkin’s *The State: Its Historic Role*, written in 1897, can “in a way be regarded as the final chapter” of *Mutual Aid*, discussing as it does the evolution of the State and the impossibility of using it for popular social transformation. [[370](#)]

Kropotkin also found time to

serialise his reminiscences for an American magazine the *Atlantic Monthly* under the title “Autobiography of a Revolutionist,” subsequently published as *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* in 1899. This was a lively account of Kropotkin’s first fifty-seven years and the development of his ideas, his transformation from Prince to revolutionary. It presents a vivid picture of

Imperial Russia and the revolutionary movement in both it and Western Europe. Sadly, the twelve years between being exiled in Britain and writing his memoirs are not described in anything like the rich detail of the first forty-five.[[371](#)]

Kropotkin also went on regular speaking tours, giving talks at socialist and trade union events across Britain

and twice visiting North America. His home was regularly visited by anarchists from across the globe seeking to meet and discuss ideas with him. Emma Goldman recounted one such discussion:

“The paper [*Free Society*] is doing splendid work,” he warmly agreed, “but it would do more if it would not waste so much space discussing sex.” I

disagreed, and we became involved in a heated argument about the place of the sex problem in anarchist propaganda. Peter's view was that woman's equality with man had nothing to do with sex; it was a matter of brains. "When she is his equal intellectually and shares in his social ideals," he said, "she will be as

free as he.” We both got somewhat excited, and our voices must have sounded as if we were quarrelling. Sophie, quietly sewing a dress for her daughter, tried several times to direct our talk into less vociferous channels, but in vain. Peter and I paced the room in growing agitation, each strenuously upholding his side of the

question. At last I paused with the remark: “All right, dear comrade, when I have reached your age, the sex question may no longer be of importance to me. But it is now, and it is a tremendous factor for thousands, millions even, of young people.” Peter stopped short, an amused smile lighting up his kindly face. “Fancy, I didn’t think

of that,” he replied.

“Perhaps you are right, after all.” He beamed affectionately upon me, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.[[372](#)]

While having abandoned the possibility of pursuing his promising career as a scientist, he was keen to apply his scientific knowledge and training to the anarchist movement. This produced not

only *Mutual Aid* but also a lengthy anarchist work entitled *Modern Science and Anarchism*. Originally written for the Russian movement in 1901, it was an educational and polemical work aiming to explain the basic ideas and history of anarchism and place it within the social, economic and intellectual tendencies of the times. It was soon translated into other

languages. During that year, Kropotkin also visited America for the second time to talk on the subject of Russian literature, a passion of his. These lectures were subsequently revised and published as the book *Russian Literature* in 1905.

In the early 1900s, he also wrote a series of articles on socialism, subsequently reprinted as the pamphlets

Socialism and Politics and The Coming Revival of Socialism. Real change could only come from below, he argued, by the action of the masses themselves: “Only slaves trust to a goddess that shall bring them freedom, while freemen take it themselves.” This applied to “political action” so beloved by Marxists as well, for “the best fighter in Parliament is

good only as long as there is the clamour of the crowd in the street to spur him on.” Ultimately, the belief in politicians acting for the people was a spell but “the spell has been broken. From beneath—not from above! From the villages, the townships—not from Westminster!”[[373](#)] The net effect of Marxism was to *de-radicalise* the socialist

movement:

And now we find that although parliamentary action has always been represented as the means for obtaining small concessions to the advantage of the worker, these concessions, however insignificant they may be, have been won, all of them, by strikes... and by the standing

menace of still more serious labour wars. The presence of a number of more or less Socialistic deputies in parliament does not... dispense the working man in the least maintaining his trade organisations in full mental and material readiness for war. On the contrary, it is only by the constant menace of a declaration of

war, and by real war—and in proportion to this readiness—that the workers have won any victories; while the tactics of the politicians have always been to weaken the anti-capitalist labour organisations...[[374](#)]

When the long expected and hoped-for Revolution broke out in Russia in 1905, Kropotkin took a keen interest

in it and in helping the nascent libertarian movement to influence it. He wrote many articles on developments in Russia, stressing the necessity for workers and peasants to struggle for both political *and* economic change. He happily pointed out that the “prominent feature of the Russian revolution is the ascendancy which labour has taken in it. It is not social

democrats, or revolutionary socialists, or anarchists, who take the lead in the present revolution. It is labour—the workingmen.” He pointed to the workers’ councils (soviets) being formed and how “the general strike was advocated by the Latin workingmen as a weapon which would be irresistible in the hands of labour for imposing its will. The Russian revolution has

demonstrated that they were right.”[[375](#)] He urged the extension of the political struggle against autocracy into an economic one against capitalism:

The work of demolition can only be accomplished by the direct participation of the whole of the people. And they will only act in the name of their immediate and popular

needs. The land to the peasant; the factory, the workshop, the railway and the rest to the worker.

[[376](#)]

He also worked to influence the Russian anarchist movement, participating in a series of meetings to discuss developments and recommend specific tactics as well as contributing numerous articles to the Russian anarchist

papers *Khleb i Volya* (*Bread and Freedom*) and *Listki "Khleb i Volya"* (*Leaflets from Bread and Freedom*). His aim, as in the 1870s and 1880s, was to produce an anarchism which saw the necessity of working within *popular* movements and organisations, as opposed to the minority insurrectionism that influenced so many of his Russian comrades. The

proceedings of one conference in 1906 were later published as a pamphlet, *The Russian Revolution and Anarchism*. Kropotkin's lectures in this work are, in many ways, a summation of his ideas on the nature and activity of anarchist movement and its role during a revolutionary period.

Kropotkin took an active part in documenting the State repression of the Tsarist

regime, producing *The Terror in Russia* in 1909. That year also saw the publication of *The Great French Revolution*, one of the best accounts of the revolution. The work is a classic example of social history, a history from below which recounts the actions of the masses in the pushing the revolution forward. It aimed to “study the popular current” and “it is to this true fount and

origin of the Revolution—the people's readiness to take up arms—that the historians of the Revolution have not yet done justice—the justice owed to it by the history of civilisation.”[[377](#)]

As a world famous scientist and anarchist, he was ideally situated to produce the entry on Anarchism for the 11th edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1910. Age had

not diminished his hopes or activity, and he still stressed that the task of anarchists was “to aid the people to display in full its creative powers for working out new institutions, leading to free Anarchist-Communism” against the “two enemies” of Capital and the State. The workers “will not be lulled with mere patchwork reforms of present conditions.”[[378](#)] These words

reflected the growing syndicalist revolt in Britain, a labour militancy that was part of a global trend away from parliamentarianism towards Kropotkin's long-advocated ideas on revolutionary workplace class struggle. Unsurprisingly, leading British syndicalist Tom Mann proclaimed Kropotkin "our grand old comrade," and his opinions were sought for a

preface to the 1913 English translation of the classic syndicalist novel, *How We Shall Make the Revolution*. [379] These developments confirmed Kropotkin's hopes of 1907, expressed when writing to the British anarcho-syndicalist *The Voice of Labour* to "tell you why my warmest greetings and hopes go to the new paper":

The free organisation of

labour, independent of all parliamentary parties, and aiming at the *direct* solution—by the working men themselves and working through their own Unions—of the immense social problem which now stands before civilised mankind, such a Labour organisation, wide and powerful, has become the necessity of the moment...

The working men realise the great mistake they committed when they substituted Parliamentary politics for Direct Action of the Labour organisations in enforcing their demands upon the land and capital owning classes...[[380](#)]

Unfortunately, the respect Kropotkin's work and personality had naturally

produced within anarchist circles also created something akin to hero-worship. The problems of this situation were exposed at the outbreak of war in 1914 when Kropotkin betrayed the anarchist principles of anti-militarism and anti-imperialism that he had previously advocated by supporting the Allies. Thus the leading anarchist theoretician of his time became, overnight,

a defender of States and their war effort. As a result he was expelled from the Freedom Group he had helped set up in 1886 and, along with the very few colleagues who shared his opinion, was isolated from the movement.

Alexander Berkman's response can be considered typical:

We could not believe it...
His arguments are weak
and superficial... he lost

sight of the most elemental fact of the situation, namely that the war in Europe is not a war of nations, but a war of capitalist governments for power and markets... it is only the ruling and capitalist cliques that are responsible for the war and alone stand to gain by its result... Kropotkin strangely fails to mention

the *working classes* of the contending powers... Has not Kropotkin always taught us that the solidarity of labour throughout the world is the cornerstone of all true progress and that labour has no interest whatever in the quarrels of their governmental or industrial masters?[[381](#)]

While Kropotkin's position came as a surprise to almost

all of his comrades, glimpses of it could be seen, in passing, in some of his earlier works. In 1899, for example, he had argued that “the triumph of Germany in 1870 has retarded the social revolution for many years” because it was “the triumph of militarism in Europe, of military and political despotism; and at the same time the worship of the State, of authority and of State

Socialism, which is in reality nothing but State Capitalism, triumphed in the ideas of a whole generation.”[[382](#)] So blinded by his love of France as the home of revolution and fear that a German victory would set back the cause of (genuine) socialism and liberty for a generation as they had after 1870, Kropotkin rejected the anarchist and syndicalist position on war. It mattered

little that he was in a tiny minority within the movement and that the Marxists saw almost all of their parties side with their States, the damage was done.

Almost all leading anarchists took an anti-war position, with Kropotkin's old friend and comrade Errico Malatesta using the pages of *Freedom* to attack his anti-anarchist position.[\[383\]](#) Indeed, so at

odds was Kropotkin's position with his previous ideas that his former colleagues published his series of articles on "Wars and Capitalism" which had appeared the previous year in *Freedom* as a pamphlet as part of their anti-war work. In 1915, Berkman and Malatesta joined a host other anarchists to sign an "International Anarchist Manifesto on the War":

The role of the Anarchists . . . is to continue to proclaim that there is only one war of liberation: that which in all countries is waged by the oppressed against the oppressors, by the exploited against the exploiters. Our part is to summon the slaves to revolt against their masters.[[384](#)]

As such, it was misleading of

Lenin to suggest that only a “few anarchists” had “a sense of honour and a conscience” and opposed the war.[[385](#)] Kropotkin, in reality, was one of a very small number of anarchists who supported the war and along with them was rejected by the rest of the movement as a result.

This isolation would have been an inglorious end for such an important rebel if the

Tsar had not been overthrown by a mass revolt in early 1917. Overjoyed to see the end of the hated autocracy, Kropotkin immediately made plans to return to Russia. Leaving in the summer of 1917, he returned to Russia, where his pro-war position ensured that his influence in the developing revolution was minimal. He was completely at odds with the popular mood,

and the Russian libertarians, like the vast majority of anarchists, remained true to their anti-militarist, anti-imperialist, and anti-statist positions.

With the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and the withdrawal of Russia from the slaughter of the war, the main cause of Kropotkin's isolation from the anarchist movement was ended. This meant that he

received a steady stream of visitors as radicals across the world either visited revolutionary Russia, in the case of leading Italian syndicalist Armando Borghi or, in the case of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, were expelled to it. [386] Unsurprisingly, Kropotkin was critical of Lenin's regime, as it confirmed his worst fears concerning

both the tyranny of State socialism and the inability of centralised, hierarchical bodies to solve the many problems a social revolution inevitably encounters. Sadly, his warnings, like the warnings of other libertarian eyewitnesses, were not heeded, and the revolutionary socialist movement was side-tracked for decades, first by the Bolshevik myth and then by

Stalinism.

Kropotkin was, by that time, far too old and frail to actively participate in the revolution, and spent most of his final years working on his unfinished *Ethics*. This was a project he had seen as necessary for some time, and making the best of his situation, he sought to complete it. Revising two articles on the evolution of

morality written in 1904 and 1905 for its first chapters, [387] *Ethics* developed the theme by a systematic analysis of moral ideas from antiquity to the nineteenth century.

Kropotkin died on the 8th of February 1921, and his funeral was used by the Russian anarchist movement as a final public protest against Bolshevik tyranny. His legacy, although damaged by his

support of the Allies in the First World War, is still acknowledged by anarchists to this day, as the power and breadth of his work is staggering, and it remains a rich source of ideas for libertarians.

Further Reading

A great many of Kropotkin's works are available online. In terms of published works,

George Woodcock edited Kropotkin's *Collected Works* shortly before his death in 1995. In 11 volumes, it includes all his major writings as well as numerous important essays and articles.[\[388\]](#) This collection is by no means complete, missing out the articles collated in *Act For Yourself* (Freedom Press, 1988) for example. It is also missing a very large number of

articles in French and Russian anarchist papers which have never been translated as well as many in *Freedom* and other English language papers which have never appeared in book form.

A useful collection of his pamphlets is available in *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (Dover Press, 2002). This was formerly published as

Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets and contains much of his best short work, although some are abridged without indication of the edits. The collection *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) contains the 1913 2nd edition of *The Conquest of Bread*, newly translated material from the Russian editions of Kropotkin's

memoirs as well as shorter articles and letters. A new version of the 1906 1st edition of *The Conquest of Bread* (AK Press, 2008) has also appeared, with a new introduction. Also available is Kropotkin's classic argument for appropriate technology and the integration of agriculture and industry, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (Freedom Press, 1985) edited

by Colin Ward.

Daniel Guérin's essential *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (AK Press, 2005) has a section on Kropotkin while George Woodcock's *The Anarchist Reader* (Fontana Press, 1977) has various extracts from Kropotkin's works. In addition, volume 1 of Robert Graham's *Anarchism: A Documentary History of*

Libertarian Ideas (Black Rose Books, 2005) has numerous extracts from his works. Some articles and talks by Kropotkin are available in *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth* (Counterpoint, 2001).

In terms of Kropotkin's life story, the most obvious starting place must be his own autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, first published

in English in 1899 and reprinted as part of his *Collected Works*. There are three biographies available. The one by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic (*The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin*) has been republished as *From Prince to Rebel* (Black Rose Books, 1989) as a supplement to the *Collected Works* project. As

this dates from 1950, it should be supplemented by Martin A. Miller's biography *Kropotkin* (University of Chicago Press, 1976). *The Anarchist-Geographer: An Introduction to the Life of Peter Kropotkin* (Genge, 2007) by Brian Morris is a useful, if short, work on this matter. Caroline Cahm's *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886*

(Cambridge University Press, 1989) is essential reading, as it covers the development of Kropotkin's communist-anarchist ideas when he was an active militant in the European anarchist movement.

For good introductions to Kropotkin's ideas by anarchists, *Evolution and Revolution: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of*

Peter Kropotkin (Jura Books, 1996) by Graham Purchase and *Kropotkin: The Politics of Community* (Humanity Books, 2004) by Brian Morris should be consulted. Both cover his basic ideas and life, as well as indicating how modern research has confirmed them. Nicholas Walter's *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays* (Five Leaves Publications, 2007) contains

many useful articles on Kropotkin or related subjects (for example, the Lyon trial of 1883, the Paris Commune and Russian Anarchism). Harry Cleaver's "Kropotkin, Self-valorization and the Crisis of Marxism" essay (*Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2) is an excellent introduction to Kropotkin's ideas written from a libertarian Marxist perspective.

The two standard general histories of anarchism, George Woodcock's *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Penguin Books, 1986) and Peter Marshall's *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Fontana, 1993), both have chapters on Kropotkin's life and ideas. Paul Avrich's *The Russian Anarchists* (AK Press, 2005)

and the anthology *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton University Press, 1988) both contain useful accounts of Kropotkin's ideas and life.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Paul Sharkey, James Bar Bowen, Will Firth, Josephien van Kessel and Thomas Swann for their kindness in translating texts. Without their work, this

anthology would be impoverished. I would also like to thank David Berry and Lucien van de Walt for their useful comments on my Introduction as well as Brian Morris for his thoughts on an early draft of my Biographical Sketch.

I would also like to thank the staff of Senate House Library (London) and the International Institute of Social History for

their help in supplying articles from *Freedom*, *The Voice of Labour*, *Le Révolté*, *La Révolte* and *Les Temps Nouveaux*.

The on-line *Anarchy Archives* maintained by Dana Ward was particularly useful as it has electronic versions of Kropotkin's books. Thanks to Robert Graham's *Anarchism Weblog* for Nicholas Walter's translations of the 1904

preface and 1919 postscript of *Words of a Rebel*.

Many thanks to Axel Barenboim for providing me with copies of key articles from *Le Révolté* which were not in the International Institute of Social History; Alex Prichard for getting me a copy of *The Coming Revival of Socialism*; and Lucien van der Walt for finding a copy of Kropotkin's 1892 preface to

Bakunin's *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State* and ensuring its translation.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner for her support as well as her knowledge, experience and patience in answering my numerous questions on issues related to translating from French. She also kindly volunteered, without being asked, to

transcribe many of
Kropotkin's articles from
Freedom into electronic
format.

A Note on the Texts

The texts are grouped together
in themes and, with one
exception, organised
chronologically in terms of
publication within each section
(although some sections are
prefaced with extracts from

Kropotkin's memoirs). The one exception is the section "Revolutions" which, because it covers previous revolutions, is organised in chronological order of when the revolutions took place.

The original text of articles originally written in English has been reproduced, barring a few minor grammatical and spelling changes. Kropotkin (like many foreigners and, to

be fair, English people) used England and English when it is clear that he is referring to all of Britain or the British rather than just the largest part. Similarly, he sometimes used the term “Scotch” which is simply not used these days (Scottish having long replaced it when referring to people from Scotland).

All the texts have been translated in British English

rather than American English. I have revised and edited all the translations and, as a consequence, I take full responsibility for any errors that may occur in the texts.

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[1\[\]](#) *Living My Life* (New York: Dover

Publications, 1970) 2, 509.

2[] “Peter Kropotkin: Recollections and Criticisms of an Old Friend,” *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* (London: Freedom Press, 1993), 257.

3[] *The London Years* (Nottingham/Oakland: Five Leaves Publications/AK Press, 2005), 146, 77.

4[] “The Writer’s Dilemma,” *The Observer Years* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), 227.

5[] Sadly, it is necessary to explain what we mean by “libertarian” as this term has been appropriated by the free-market capitalist right. Socialist use of libertarian dates from 1858 when it was first used by communist-anarchist

Joseph Déjacque as a synonym for anarchist for his paper *Le Libertaire, Journal du Mouvement Social*. This usage became more commonplace in the 1880s and 1895 saw leading anarchists Sébastien Faure and Louise Michel publish *Le Libertaire* in France. (Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* [London: Freedom Press, 1995], 75–76, 145, 162). By the end of the 19th century libertarian was used as an alternative for anarchist internationally. The right-wing appropriation of the term dates from the 1950s and, in wider society, from the 1970s. Given that property is at its root and, significantly, property always trumps

liberty in that ideology, anarchists suggest a far more accurate term would be “propertarian” (See my “150 Years of Libertarian,” *Freedom* 69: 23–24 [2008]). We will use the term *libertarian* in its original, correct, usage as an alternative for anti-State socialist.

[6](#)[] Brian Morris, *Kropotkin: The Politics of Community* (New York: Humanity Books, 2004), 13.

[7](#)[] “Kropotkin’s Anarchist Communism,” *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2007), 114–15.

[8](#)[] Quoted in G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: a biographical study of Peter*

Kropotkin (London: Boardman, 1950), 294–95.

[9](#)[] “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (New York: Dover Press, 2002), Roger N. Baldwin (ed.), 48–49.

[10](#)[] The essential work on this aspect of Kropotkin’s ideas is Caroline Cahm’s excellent *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[11](#)[] Quoted in Walter, *The Anarchist Past and other essays*, 112.

[12](#)[] “Anarchists and Trade Unions,” *Freedom*, June, 1907.

[13](#)[] So we find a supporter of

Cromwell complaining about “Switzerizing Anarchists” during the English Revolution (George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986], 2nd Edition, 41) while Brissot dismissed the extreme radicals as “anarchists” during the French Revolution (*The Great French Revolution, 1789–1793* [London: Orbach and Chambers Ltd, 1971] 353).

[14](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” *Environment and Evolution* (Montreal/New York: Black Rose, 1995), 62, 26.

[15](#)[] “Anarchism,” *Anarchism: A*

Collection of Revolutionary Writings, 294.

[16](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 58, 57.

[17](#)[] There was “close similarity between the associational ideal of Proudhon . . . and the program of the Lyon Mutualists” and “it is likely that Proudhon was able to articulate his positive program more coherently because of the example of the silk workers of Lyon. The socialist ideal that he championed was already being realised, to a certain extent, by such workers.” (K. Steven Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press,

1984], 164).

[18](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,”
19, 16, 19, 57.

[19](#)[] *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*
(Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2011), Iain McKay (ed.), 87, 133, 91.

[20](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 132, 117, 134, 135, 133, 135, 118, 105, 119. By “collective force” Proudhon meant the combined power of workers co-operating together. As the employer pays nothing for this extra labour-power produced by collective activity and co-operation, workers are exploited by capital: “A force of one thousand men working twenty

days has been paid the same wages that one would be paid for working fifty-five years; but this force of one thousand has done in twenty days what a single man could not have accomplished, though he had laboured for a million centuries. Is the exchange an equitable one? Once more, no; when you have paid all the individual forces, the collective force still remains to be paid” (117).

[21](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 190, 192, 195.

[22](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 212, 253, 77, 215, 213, 202, 170.

[23](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 377–78.

“Proudhon was not hostile to large industry. Clearly, he objected to many aspects of what these large

enterprises had introduced into society... But he was not opposed in principle to large-scale production. What he desired was to humanise such production, to socialise it so that the worker would not be the mere appendage to a machine. Such a humanisation of large industries would result... from the introduction of strong workers' associations. These associations would enable the workers to determine jointly by election how the enterprise was to be directed and operated on a day-to-day basis" (Vincent, 156).

[24](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 568, 596, 562, 571, 596, 584, 578, 576.

[25](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 595.

[26](#)[] Kropotkin, *The Coming Revival of Socialism* (London: Freedom Press, 1904), 9.

[27](#)[] *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (London: MacMillan, 1969), Stewart Edwards (ed.), 116–17.

[28](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 711–12, 709.

[29](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 273, 378.

[30](#)[] It is ironic to see Lenin asserting that anarchists “dismissed the question of political forms altogether” while repeating Proudhon’s ideas on mandated and recallable delegates and the fusion of executive and legislative functions as “the form... under which the economic emancipation of labour can take

place”! (“The State and Revolution,” *Collected Works* 25: 431–32) To be fair to Lenin, Marx did not mention that these ideas were originally raised by someone whom he had spent considerable time attacking, often in extremely dishonest ways (see my introduction to *Property is Theft!*).

[31](#)[] *The Paris Commune of 1871: The View From the Left* (London: Cape, 1972), Eugene Schulkind (ed.), 191.

[32](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 296, 500.

[33](#)[] *System of Economical Contradictions*, 128.

[34](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 308.

[35](#)[] Quoted in George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* (Montréal: Black Rose,

1987), 64.

[36](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 225–26, 321–22, 407. Proudhon, unlike later anarchists, did not view the *labour movement* as the basis for this “combination.” He opposed strikes: “It is not by such methods that the workers will attain to wealth and—what is a thousand times more precious than wealth—liberty” (*System of Economical Contradictions* [Boston: Benjamin Tucker, 1888], 149).

[37](#)[] “Communist-Anarchism,” *Act For Yourself: Articles from FREEDOM 1886–1907* (London: Freedom Press, 1988), 97.

[38](#)[] “Edward Bellamy,” *Freedom*, July

1898.

[39](#)[] Quoted in *Freedom*, March-April, 1925.

[40](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 75.

[41](#)[] “Communist-Anarchism,” *Act For Yourself*, 97.

[42](#)[] Marx fortuitously turned up to the founding meeting in 1864 after being invited by some German socialist exiles.

[43](#)[] Julian P. W. Archer, *The First International in France, 1864–1872: Its Origins, Theories, and Impact* (Lanham/Oxford: University Press of America, Inc, 1997), xxi.

[44](#)[] Archer, xxi, 69.

[45](#)[] Archer, 128.

[46](#)[] Quoted in Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 47.

[47](#)[] Guérin, *Anarchism*, 47.

[48](#)[] Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 46–7, 54.

[49](#)[] *Revolution from 1789 to 1906* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), P.W. Postgate (ed.), 393–94.

[50](#)[] 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 Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), 1: 293–95.

[51](#)[] *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, 394.

[52](#)[] *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), Daniel Guérin (ed.), 218.

[53](#)[] Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 73.

[54](#)[] Quoted in Nettlau, 121.

[55](#)[] Quoted in Archer, 196.

[56](#)[] “Letter to the Bakunin Centenary Celebration,” *Freedom*, June 1914.

[57](#)[] *Michael Bakunin: Selected*

Writings (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), Arthur Lehning (ed.), 170–72.

[58](#)[] *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, 197–98.

[59](#)[] Quoted in Kenafick, 120–21.

[60](#)[] *Bakunin on Anarchism* 2nd Edition (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), Sam Dolgoff (ed.), 255.

[61](#)[] *The Basic Bakunin* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994), Robert M. Cutler (ed.), 110.

[62](#)[] *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 212.

[63](#)[] *The Basic Bakunin*, 97–103.

[64](#)[] Quoted in Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886*, 216–17.

[65](#)[] *The Basic Bakunin*, 149–50.

[66](#)[] *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), G.P. Maximov (ed.), 384–85, 313.

[67](#)[] quoted in K.J. Kenafick, *Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx* (Melbourne: A. Maller, 1948), 254.

[68](#)[] *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 179.

[69](#)[] *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 157.

[70](#)[] *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, 191.

[71](#)[] *The Basic Bakunin*, 108.

[72](#)[] *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 317–8, 318, 217.

[73](#)[] See section H.6 of *An Anarchist FAQ Vol 2* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK

Press, 2012) for a discussion of the interplay of subjective (e.g., Bolshevik ideology) and objective factors (e.g., civil war, economic collapse, etc.) as well as how the former made the latter worse.

[74](#)[] *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 338.

[75](#)[] *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, 237.

[76](#)[] *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Montreal/New York: Black Rose, 1989), 261.

[77](#)[] Kropotkin, “Bakunin,” *Freedom*, June–July 1905.

[78](#)[] “In its struggle against the collective power of the propertied classes the proletariat cannot act as a class except by constituting itself a

political party, distinct from and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes... The conquest of political power has therefore become the great duty of the working class” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works* 23: 243).

[79](#)[] Robert Graham (Ed.), *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* (Montréal/New York/London: Black Rose Books, 2005) 1: 99–100.

[80](#)[] *The Coming Revival of Socialism*, 8.

[81](#)[] “Bakunin,” *Freedom*, June–July 1905.

[82](#)[] “Anarchism,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary*

Writings, 287.

[83](#)[] “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 46.

[84](#)[] *Property is Theft!*, 496, 535, 503, 506.

[85](#)[] Ignoring his explicit statements explaining how the modern Commune was *not* like the medieval one, Paul Avrich asserted “what Kropotkin yearned for was the decentralised society of medieval Europe, with a few up-to-date trappings.” This “nostalgic desire for a simpler and richer life led him to idealise the autonomous social units of a bygone age”; machines placed “in small

voluntary workshops” would “rescue human beings from the monotony and toil of large-scale capitalist enterprise” (“Kropotkin’s Ethical Anarchism,” *Anarchist Portraits* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988], 62–63).

[86](#)[] See, for example, “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles.”

[87](#)[] *Revolutionary Studies* (London: Office of the “Commonwealth,” 1892), 12.

[88](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 61.

[89](#)[] “Political Rights,” *Words of a Rebel* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 43.

[90](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 10.

[91](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,”
94.

[92](#)[] “Representative Government,”
Words of a Rebel, 118.

[93](#)[] “Expropriation,” *Words of a Rebel*,
208.

[94](#)[] *Ethics: Origin and Development*
(New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968),
27, 28.

[95](#)[] “Letter to Max Nettlau,” *Selected
Writings on Anarchism and
Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press,
1970), Martin A. Miller (ed.), 305.

[96](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and
Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of
Revolutionary Writings*, 128.

[97](#)[] “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis

and Principles,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 55, 69, 55.

[98](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 127–28.

[99](#)[] “The Division of Labour,” *The Conquest of Bread* (Catania: Elephant Editions, 1985), 181.

[100](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 126.

[101](#)[] “Expropriation,” *Words of a Rebel*, 209–10.

[102](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 94, 97.

[103](#)[] “Law and Authority,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary*

Writings, 214.

[104](#)[] *The State: Its Historic Role* (London: Freedom Press, 1987), 52–53.

[105](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 96–7. As can be seen Kropotkin took umbrage at Marx’s account of “primitive accumulation” in volume 1 of *Capital* as it suggested that State intervention was an early and past historical phase which had created capitalism. This produced an “erroneous division between the primary accumulation of capital and its present-day formation” and the “minimising of the role of the contemporary State in the process of capital accumulation” leads to “a

harmful practical application” (“Western Europe,” *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 221).

[106](#)[] “Representative Government,” *Words of a Rebel*, 127. Even if, by some unlikely occurrence, the State *did* limit itself and refused to actively intervene in society (as desired by classical liberals like Herbert Spencer and modern propertarians), this would be no great improvement as it left private hierarchies intact and so “its practical solution of the social problem is miserable—so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of ‘No force’ be merely an excuse for

supporting landlord and capitalist domination” (“Communist-Anarchism,” *Act For Yourself*, 98).

[107](#)[] *The State: Its Historic Role*, 10.

[108](#)[] “Representative Government,” *Words of a Rebel*, 143.

[109](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 159, 163.

[110](#)[] *Revolutionary Studies*, 18–19.
Kropotkin would surely have added the bureaucracy after the Russian Revolution if he had revised this article before his death.

[111](#)[] *The State: Its Historic Role*, 9–10.

[112](#)[] *Ethics*, 317fn.

[113](#)[] “Representative Government,” *Words of a Rebel*, 120.

[114](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,”
82.

[115](#)[] “The Breakdown of the State,”
Words of a Rebel, 27.

[116](#)[] *The State: Its Historic Role*, 55,
9.

[117](#)[] “Anarchism,” *Anarchism: A
Collection of Revolutionary
Writings*, 285.

[118](#)[] *The Coming Revival of Socialism*,
1.

[119](#)[] “Western Europe,” *The Conquest
of Bread and Other Writings*, 207–
08, 212, 209.

[120](#)[] “The Chicago Anniversary,”
Freedom, December 1891.

[121](#)[] “Past and Future,” *Freedom*, April
1889.

[122](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 57.

[123](#)[] “All of us Socialists,” *Words of a Rebel*, 181, 180.

[124](#)[] Quoted in Cahm, 252.

[125](#)[] *The State: Its Historic Role*, 57–58, 9.

[126](#)[] *The State: Its Historic Role*, 58–59.

[127](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 106.

[128](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 11.

[129](#)[] “Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System?,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 61.

[130](#)[] This, it must be noted, cannot be said for most Marxists, who had great

difficulty recognising the exploitative nature of the Bolshevik regime. Trotsky, while recognising that the bureaucracy enriched itself at the expense of the workers, refused to describe Stalinism as State capitalism (unsurprisingly, as any *serious* analysis of social relationships under Stalin would recognise the continuity when he and Lenin were in power). Tony Cliff of the British SWP did argue that Stalinism was State capitalist in the 1940s (two decades after anarchists had) but his analysis was deeply flawed and failed to draw the obvious links to Lenin's regime. See section H.3.13 of *An Anarchist FAQ, Volume 2*.

[131](#)[] *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 286.

[132](#)[] “Revolutionary Government,” *Words of a Rebel*, 175.

[133](#)[] “Food,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 82–83.

[134](#)[] “Free Agreement,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 137.

[135](#)[] *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 184, 360, 374–75, 376.

[136](#)[] Space precludes a discussion of whether Lenin’s account of Marxism was correct or how genuine his desire for soviet rather than party power was. These issues and many more are discussed in section H of *An Anarchist FAQ, Volume 2*. Section H.1.7 compares Bolshevism in power

to Lenin's *The State and Revolution* while section H.3.10 shows how Marx and Engels repeatedly argued that the workers had to seize the bourgeois republic and use it to create socialism. This can be seen, to quote just one example, when Engels stated in 1894 that a “republic, in relation to the proletariat, differs from a monarchy only in that it is the *ready-made* political form for the future rule of the proletariat. You [in France] have the advantage of us in that it is already in being; we, for our part, shall have to waste 24 hours creating it...” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works* 50: 276).

[137](#)[] See section H.6 of *An Anarchist*

FAQ, Volume 2.

[138](#)[] “Message to the Workers of the Western World,” *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, 250–52.

[139](#)[] “Message to the Workers of the Western World,” *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, 251–52.

[140](#)[] “Extract from the Postscript of ‘Words of a Rebel’,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 76–77.

[141](#)[] Quoted in G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, 417.

[142](#)[] Quoted in Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 75.

[143](#)[] “Letter to Brandes,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and*

Revolution, 320.

[144](#)[] “Message to the Workers of the Western World,” *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, 253–54.

[145](#)[] Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 350.

[146](#)[] “Letter to Nettlau,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 300.

[147](#)[] What Davide Turcato calls “labour-orientated anarchism” which has “a link with a tradition of working-class anarchism that goes back to the origin of anarchism as a movement: Bakunin’s federalist international.” This includes

syndicalism and communist-anarchism (“The 1896 London Congress: Epilogue or Prologue?,” *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: the Individual, the National and the Transnational* [Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010], David Berry and Constance Bantman (eds.), 110–11). In anarchist circles, this is usually referred to as “class struggle anarchism.” In another important article, Turcato stresses that the usual way of categorising anarchism (in terms of favoured economic system) is flawed as the key issues within the movement were, and are, to do with tactics and

strategy, specifically anarchist approaches to the labour movement (“European Anarchism in the 1890s: Why Labor Matters in Categorising Anarchism,” *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labour and Society*, vol. 12, September 2009).

[148](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 82–83.

[149](#)[] “Theory and Practice,” *Words of a Rebel*, 203.

[150](#)[] Quoted in Cahm, 255.

[151](#)[] “Letter to Nettlau,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 304.

[152](#)[] “Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System?,” *Selected Writings*

on *Anarchism and Revolution*, 85–88.

[153](#)[] Quoted in Woodcock and Avakumovic, 419.

[154](#)[] Quoted in Cahm, 153–54.

[155](#)[] Quoted in Cahm, 255–56.

[156](#)[] “Commemoration of the Chicago Martyrs,” *Freedom*, December 1892.

[157](#)[] See, for example, “The Development of Trade Unionism,” *Freedom*, March 1898.

[158](#)[] “The Chicago Anniversary,” *Freedom*, December 1891.

[159](#)[] Kropotkin has often been presented as an early advocate of “propaganda by the deed.” Daniel Guérin, for example, mistakenly attributes “L’Action” (*Le Révolté*,

25th December 1880) to Kropotkin before stating he “deserves credit being one of the first to confess his errors and to recognise the sterility” of individual action and “proposed a return to mass trade unionism like... the First International” (*Anarchism*, 74–75, 78). Carlo Cafiero, however, wrote this article, while Kropotkin, at this time, “was anxious to revive the International as an organisation for aggressive strike action to counteract the influence of parliamentary socialists on the labour movement” (Cahm, 139–40, 257). As he later recounted: “*I have always been against... this idea of propaganda by deed... which I have always found*

false” (quoted in Cahm, 160).

[160](#)[] Without much success, as shown when he asked a prosecution witness at the Lyon trial whether he had succeeded in having “the International reconstituted” and received the reply: “No. They did not find it revolutionary enough” (*Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 420).

[161](#)[] Anarchists across Europe shared this desire to use the May Day demonstrations for workers’ direct action and libertarian propaganda. Malatesta’s involvement in May First events in France (1890), Italy (1891) and Spain (1892) are explored in an important article by Davide Turcato entitled “Collective Action, Opacity,

and the ‘Problem of Irrationality’: Anarchism and the First of May, 1890–1892” (*Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 5:1, Spring 2011).

[162](#)[] In these articles “Kropotkin developed his ideas about the need for anarchist involvement in the new militant unionism and the May Day movement, both to counteract the influence of reformists and social democrats and to give these popular movements a revolutionary character: he also explained how anarchists could propagandise the people through active involvement in their struggles without betraying one word of their anarchist principles” (Cahm, 267–68). As Michelle Perrot

summarises:

Two courses of action had been proposed to the workers [...] the [Marxist] Guesdists called for a peaceful holiday [...] marked only by deputations to the authorities, carrying petitions [...] The anarchists wanted mass rallies in the street, a popular, lively and violent demonstration directed against the class enemy, the bosses and their factories, a revolt by the “slave-labourers” against their “slave-drivers” [...] [Anarchists] did their best to guide it into their own preferred channels: not deferential appeals to the public authorities, which they regarded as

a form of acceptance of and submission to a State they challenged, but direct action on a massive scale at grass-roots level [...] in order to provoke a spectacular incident which would lend itself to propaganda and the affirmation of more widespread solidarity. Above all, it was to be directed against the employers [...] Hatred for the “exploiters” was the crucible of consciousness and the ferment of the workers’ struggle. (“The First of May 1890 in France: the birth of a working-class ritual,” 143–171, *The Power of the Past: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* [Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1984], Pat Thane, Geoffrey Crossick and Roderick Floud (eds.), 155, 159–60).

[163](#)[] Constance Bantman, “From Trade Unionism to Syndicalisme Révolutionnaire to Syndicalism: The British Origins of French Syndicalism,” *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism*, 126–140.

[164](#)[] Letter to Kōtoku Shūsui, quoted in John Crump, *Hatta Shūzō and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan*, 23–4.

[165](#)[] “Political Rights,” *Words of a Rebel*, 39, 43, 42, 43.

[166](#)[] “The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of its Practical Realisation,” *Freedom*, 25th February

1967.

[167](#)[] “Representative Government,” *Words of a Rebel*, 123–24.

[168](#)[] “Letter on Repression of Workers in Russia,” *Freedom*, July 1901.

[169](#)[] Quoted in Cahm, 241.

[170](#)[] *The Coming Revival of Socialism*, 7–8.

[171](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 85.

[172](#)[] Quoted in Nettlau, 279.

[173](#)[] The notion, usually advanced by Leninists, that revolutionary anarchism rejects class struggle or is significantly different to syndicalism is untenable, for reasons explored in sections H.2.2, H.2.7 and H.2.8 of *An Anarchist FAQ, Volume 2*. A similar

analysis can be found in the excellent account provided by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2009).

[174](#)[] Quoted in Nettleau, 280–81.

[175](#)[] As French Syndicalist Pierre Monatte put it in 1907: “the syndicat [is] the organ and the general strike the instrument of social transformation... syndicalism is sufficient unto itself” (*The International Anarchist Congress (1907)* [Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009], Maurizio Antonioli (ed.), 112–15).

[176](#)[] “Act for Yourselves,” *Act for Yourselves*, 32.

[177](#)[] Predislovie k rabote Mikhaila Bakunina *Parizhskaia kommuna i poniatie o gosudarstvennosti* (Geneva: Anarkhicheskaya Biblioteka, 1892), 2 (Translation: Will Firth). Thanks to Lucien van der Walt for providing a copy of this rare pamphlet and ensuring its translation.

[178](#)[] “Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System?,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 95, 86.

[179](#)[] “The Spirit of Revolt,” *Words of a Rebel*, 189.

[180](#)[] Quoted in Martin A. Miller,

Kropotkin (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 207–08.

[181](#)[] “Revolutionary Minorities,” *Words of a Rebel*, 75.

[182](#)[] “Zakliucheniia s’ezda,” *Russkaia Revoliuciia i Anarkhizm: Doklady i Zakliucheniia 1906 g.* (London: Kleb i Volia, 1907), P. A. Kropotkin, (ed.), 10 (Translation: Josephien van Kessel).

[183](#)[] Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget, *How We Shall Bring about the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 94, 158.

[184](#)[] Preface, Pataud and Pouget, xxxvi.

[185](#)[] *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 270–

[186](#)[] Significantly, the “Declaration of the Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism” endorsed at the founding of the syndicalist International Workers Association in 1922 states that it recognised “violence as a means of defence against the violent methods of the ruling classes” and so “defence of the revolution” must “be entrusted to the masses themselves and their economic organisations” (quoted in Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 198). This was applied by the CNT in the Spanish Revolution when it organised workers militias to fight Franco’s forces.

[187](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 78–79.

[188](#)[] Preface, Pataud and Pouget, xxxiv–xxxv.

[189](#)[] *The Anarchists* 2nd Edition (London: Methuen, 1979), 188. Joll clearly misunderstands Malatesta’s critique, presenting him as being opposed to syndicalism and anarchist participation in the workers’ movement. However, Malatesta explicitly states his support of the latter and that he was arguing against those libertarians who “take this means [unions] as an end” and allowed themselves “to be absorbed” by the labour movement. He agreed that the syndicates are “organisations

fighting in the class war for amelioration of the conditions of labour, and as unions of productive workers which can help in the transformation of capitalist society into Anarchist Communist society” and that it is “the duty of Anarchists to constitute the revolutionary element in those organisations.” The Syndicalist movement is “a powerful means of revolution, but not... a substitute for revolution... armed insurrection and expropriation by force” (*The International Anarchist Congress (1907)*, 122, 126, 132–32).

[190](#)[] At the 1907 Congress, Malatesta “made it clear that he would only address his disagreements with the

syndicalists, being confident that an audience of comrades would not exchange that for a rejection of organisation and labour activism. On these points... Malatesta was in complete agreement with the syndicalists” (Davide Turcato, “European Anarchism in the 1890s: Why Labor Matters in Categorising Anarchism,” *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labour and Society* 12, September 2009, 462).

[191](#)[] Kropotkin, quoted in Nettlau, 279–80.

[192](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 137.

[193](#)[] “Agreeable Work,” *The Conquest*

of *Bread*, 128. It should be noted that while Kropotkin was a committed advocate of women's equality, he wrote very little about it. As was the case with many male radicals of his time, opposing patriarchy was not considered as important as, say, fighting capitalism or the State.

[194](#)[] Quoted in Miller, 231.

[195](#)[] "Caesarism," *Freedom*, June 1899.

[196](#)[] "Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles," *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 55–56.

[197](#)[] *Fields, Factories and Workshops: or, Industry combined with agriculture and brain work with*

manual work (London: T. Nelson, 1912), 57.

[198](#)[] “War,” *Words of a Rebel*, 65–66.

[199](#)[] Quoted in Jean Caroline Cahm, “Kropotkin and the Anarchist Movement,” Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fisera (eds.), *Socialism and Nationalism*, 1, 57.

[200](#)[] Quoted in Jean Caroline Cahm, 53.

[201](#)[] Quoted in Miller, 230.

[202](#)[] Quoted in Jean Caroline Cahm, 56.

[203](#)[] Ibid.

[204](#)[] As with communist-anarchism, while Kropotkin is its best known advocate he did not invent the idea of mutual aid. As Daniel P. Todes has

shown, in the nineteenth century “mutual aid remained an uncontroversial element in Russian evolutionary thought” (*Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 31). Also see his “Darwin’s Malthusian Metaphor and Russian Evolutionary Thought, 1859–1917” (*Isis* 78: 294), an important essay which was reprinted as “The Scientific Background of Kropotkin’s Mutual Aid” in *The Raven* (6: 4). Todes’s work places Kropotkin into the context of Russian Darwinism.

[205](#)[] Quoted in Ruth Kinna, “Kropotkin’s theory of Mutual Aid in

Historical Context,” *International Review of Social History* 40, 279.

[206](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 54.

[207](#)[] For a detailed discussion of *Mutual Aid* and modern scientific theory as well as refutation of the many myths associated with it, see my *Mutual Aid: An Introduction and Evaluation* 2nd Edition, (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010).

[208](#)[] *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (London: Freedom Press: 2009), 230–31, 26.

[209](#)[] Some reject anarchism because, they claim, it does not recognise that people are basically nasty and will abuse freedom. If that were the case,

it makes little sense to give such terrible people power! As Kropotkin noted, “while our opponents seem to admit there is a kind of salt of the earth—the rulers, the employers, the leaders—who, happily enough, prevent those bad men—the ruled, the exploited, the led—from becoming still worse than they are” we anarchists “maintain that *both* rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority” and “*both* exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation.” So “there is [a] difference, and a very important one. *We* admit the imperfections of human nature, but we make no exception for the rulers. *They* make it, although sometimes

unconsciously, and because we make no such exception, they say that we are dreamers” (“Are We Good Enough?,” *Act for Yourself*, 83).

[210](#)[] Todes, *Darwin Without Malthus*, 134, 135.

[211](#)[] *Mutual Aid*, 104, 32, 33, 68, 33, 229.

[212](#)[] Douglas H. Boucher, “The Idea of Mutualism, Past and Future,” *The Biology of Mutualism: Biology and Evolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), Douglas H. Boucher (ed.), 17.

[213](#)[] Todes, 132.

[214](#)[] *Mutual Aid*, 24.

[215](#)[] *Mutual Aid*, 233. Kropotkin, it should be noted, had been discussing the evolutionary base for ethics since

the early 1880s (see “Law and Authority” in *Words of a Rebel*, for example).

[216](#)[] *Ethics*, 30–31. Like Kropotkin’s arguments on mutual aid, this analysis is also becoming part of evolutionary science. Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006) has a useful discussion of “Does our moral sense have a Darwinian Origin?” This echoes Kropotkin, for if “the only lesson Nature gives to man is one of evil” then one “necessarily has to admit the existence of some other, extra-natural, or super-natural influence which inspires man with conceptions of the ‘supreme good’” which “nullifies”

attempts “at explaining evolution by the action of natural forces only.” (*Ethics*, 13).

[217](#)[] *Mutual Aid*, 217.

[218](#)[] “Proposed Communist Settlement: A New Colony for Tyneside or Wearside,” *The Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 20th February 1895.

[219](#)[] “Anarchist Morality,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 104, 81, 106.

[220](#)[] “Anarchist Morality,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 92.

[221](#)[] “Co-operation: A Reply to Herbert Spencer,” *Freedom*, January 1897.

[222](#)[] “Are We Good Enough?,” *Act for*

Yourselves, 83.

[223](#)[] *The Russian Anarchists*, 80.

[224](#)[] “Are We Good Enough?,” *Act for Yourselves*, 85.

[225](#)[] “The Spirit of Revolt,” *Words of a Rebel*, 190.

[226](#)[] “The Inevitability of Revolution,” *Words of a Rebel*, 30.

[227](#)[] Quoted in Ruth Kinna, “Kropotkin’s theory of Mutual Aid in Historical Context,” *International Review of Social History* 40: 2, 279. Trade unionism expressed the “worker’s need of mutual support” and they formed “vigorous federal organisations... to support the branches during strikes and prosecutions.” Every year “there are

thousands of strikes... the most severe and protracted contests being, as a rule, the so-called ‘sympathy strikes,’ which are entered upon to support locked-out comrades or to maintain the rights of the unions.” Anyone (like Kropotkin) who had “lived among strikers speaks with admiration of the mutual aid and support which are constantly practised by them” (*Mutual Aid*, 209–12).

[228](#)[] *Mutual Aid*, 181, 107.

[229](#)[] *The Coming Revival of Socialism*, 19.

[230](#)[] “Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System?,” *Selected Writings*

on Anarchism and Revolution, 113.

[231](#)[] Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 81.

[232](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 158–9.

[233](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 180, 186, 184.

[234](#)[] Quoted in Miller, 212, 213.

[235](#)[] “Two Letters to Lenin,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 337.

[236](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 144.

[237](#)[] Quoted in Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of*

Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886, 256.

[238](#)[] “Act for Yourselves,” *Act for Yourselves*, 32.

[239](#)[] “Letter to Nettlau,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 304.

[240](#)[] “Revolutionary Minorities,” *Words of a Rebel*, 75.

[241](#)[] “Expropriation,” *Words of a Rebel*, 207–08.

[242](#)[] “Municipal Socialism,” *Act for Yourselves*, 95–96. *Freedom* reported that Kropotkin “mocked... the doubts as to the abilities of the workers for self-organisation. In his opinion, every step of progress has come from the masses of the great unknown and

not from the writers of books” (“The Commune Celebrations,” *Freedom*, April 1890).

[243](#)[] As he put to those infatuated with propaganda by the deed: “A structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives” (quoted in Miller, *Kropotkin*, 174).

[244](#)[] “The First Work of the Revolution,” *Act for Yourself*, 57–59. See also “Food” in *The Conquest of Bread* and “Rocks Ahead” in *Act For Yourself*.

[245](#)[] “Revolution and Famine,” *Act For Yourself*, 67.

[246](#)[] “Food,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 72–73, 81.

[247](#)[] *Market Socialism: The Debate among Socialists* (New York: Routledge, 1998), Bertell Ollman (ed.), 177.

[248](#)[] “Revolutionary Minorities,” *Words of a Rebel*, 72.

[249](#)[] Quoted in Nettlau, 282–83.

[250](#)[] “Food,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 81–82.

[251](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 241.

[252](#)[] Stephan F. Cohen, “In Praise of War Communism: Bukharin’s The Economics of the Transition Period,” *Revolution and politics in Russia: essays in memory of B.I. Nicolaevsky* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press for the International Affairs

Center, 1973), Alexander and Janet Rabinowitch with Ladis K.D. Kristof (eds.), 195–96.

[253](#)[] “Parliamentary Rule,” *Act For Yourself*, 41.

[254](#)[] *Freedom*, July 1917. The importance of workers’ management of production was proven during the Russian Revolution. As Maurice Brinton proved in “The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control” (*For Workers’ Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* [Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004], David Goodway (ed.)), Lenin had at best a vision of worker *supervision* of capitalists in transition towards socialism. This was quickly

replaced by “dictatorial” one-man management so effectively placing industry (and the workers!) under the management (and so exploitation) of the State bureaucracy.

[255](#)[] “Expropriation,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 61–63.

[256](#)[] “Municipal Socialism,” *Act For Yourself*, 92.

[257](#)[] “Representative Government,” *Words of a Rebel*, 133. This applies to all forms of social and economic organisation as the commune “no longer means a territorial agglomeration; it is rather a generic name, a synonym for the grouping of equals which knows neither frontiers nor walls” (“The Commune,” *Words*

of a Rebel, 88).

[258](#)[] “Revolutionary Government,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 240, 241, 247–48, 248, 249, 241, 242.

[259](#)[] *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, 199, 202, 206. While many Marxists think of the Paris Commune as a soviet-like body, in fact, as Marx recorded, it was “formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal [male] suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms” (“The Civil War in France,” *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 22: 331).

[260](#)[] “The Paris Commune,” *Words of a*

Rebel, 97, 93, 97. As Leninist Donny Gluckstein notes, the Commune “founded a new focus of power” but admits that it was “overwhelmed” by suggestions from other bodies, the “sheer volume” of which “created difficulties” and it “found it hard to cope with the stream of people who crammed into the offices” (*The Paris Commune: A Revolutionary Democracy* [London: Bookmarks, 2006], 185, 47–48). Sadly he fails to discuss the implications of this or draw any conclusions, unlike Kropotkin who noted that this “power” was simply not up to the task at hand. Unsurprisingly, Gluckstein’s account of the anarchist critique of the

Commune is just as superficial as well as being confused and factually incorrect (see my “The Paris Commune, Marxism and Anarchism,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* no. 50).

[261](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 74.

[262](#)[] “The Paris Commune,” *Words of a Rebel*, 90.

[263](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 163–64.

[264](#)[] *Revolutionary Studies*, 29–30. The Council “appeared increasingly incompetent or insufficiently revolutionary, clubs and committees became the vehicles for the assertion of direct sovereignty by means of association... Had the Commune

managed to last longer it is certain that Leftist factions of the clubs and committees and the National Guard would have posed serious, organised opposition to the Communal Council” (Martin Phillip Johnson, *The paradise of association: political culture and popular organizations in the Paris Commune of 1871* [Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996], 162–63). Before and during the Commune, there were attempts to federate various clubs and assemblies (such as the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements). These would have, eventually, produced a federal structure within the commune itself as the limitations of the Council

became clear.

[265](#)[] “A General View,” *Act For Yourself*, 80.

[266](#)[] “The Paris Commune,” *Words of a Rebel*, 94. 97, 99.

[267](#)[] “The Paris Commune,” *Freedom*, April 1887.

[268](#)[] “The State and Revolution,” *Collected Works* 25: 488.

[269](#)[] Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, 80–81.

[270](#)[] Quoted in Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organisation from Proudhon to May 1968* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2002), 77.

[271](#)[] This was, in part, caused by

Marx's stated unwillingness to write the "recipes... for the cook-shops of the future" ("Postface to the Second Edition," *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* [London: Penguin Books, 1976] 1: 99). Another reason was the poverty of their visions. Lenin, for example, suggested that the postal service, in which workers are usually employed by the State under capitalism, was "an example of the socialist economic system" and argued that we needed to "organise the *whole* economy on the lines of the postal service" ("The State and Revolution," *Collected Works* 25: 426–27). Kropotkin, in contrast, argued that working class bodies like

trade unions taking into their “hands the management of production” and co-operatives “for production and for distribution, both in industry and agriculture” were “partial experiments” expressing aspects of “communist society.” This was because “Socialist forms of life could find a much easier realisation” by means of these bodies “than by a State organisation” (“Preface,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 22–23).

[272](#)[] *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 270–71.

[273](#)[] *Revolutionary Studies*, 11.

[274](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 180.

[275](#)[] “Past and Future,” *Freedom*, April

1889.

[276](#)[] See section H.2.1 of *An Anarchist FAQ* (volume 2) for a discussion of anarchist ideas on defending a revolution and why a federation of communes and their voluntary militias are not a State.

[277](#)[] “Municipal Socialism,” *Act for Yourself*, 95.

[278](#)[] “Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System?,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 65.

[279](#)[] *The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution: Address delivered in Paris* (London: William Reeves, 1887), 10.

[280](#)[] “Past and Future,” *Freedom*, April

1889.

[281](#)[] *Revolutionary Studies*, 30. While not explicitly stating so, it is clear that Kropotkin had in mind the popular volunteer armies of the French Revolution which were based on “the system of the election of officers by the soldiers themselves.” This ensured the “reorganising” of the Republic’s “army on a democratic basis.” These “*sans-culotte* armies” needed “all the genius of the Revolution and all the youthful audacity of a people awakened from its long sleep, all the faith of the revolutionists in a future of equality, to persist, in the Titanic struggle which the *sans-culottes* had to carry

on against the invaders and the traitors” (*The Great French Revolution*, 380, 462).

[282](#)[] “The Permanence of Society After the Revolution,” *Act for Yourself*, 87–88.

[283](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 247.

[284](#)[] “The people do not reign by terror,” Kropotkin continued. Terror “serves, above all, the governing classes. It prepares the ground for the less scrupulous of them” and “serves no other end... than to forge chains for the people. It kills individual initiative, which is the soul of revolutions; it perpetuates the idea of obedience to a strong government. It

prepares the dictatorship which throttles the revolutionary tribunal” (*Revolutionary Studies*, 16–17).

[285](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 499.

[286](#)[] As Lenin expounded to a conference of his 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 employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves” (*Collected Works* 42: 170). Details of

the Bolshevik repression of working class protest from early 1918 to 1921 can be found in section H.6.3 of *An Anarchist FAQ, Volume 2*.

[287](#)[] See Peter Arshinov's *The History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918–1921* (London: Freedom Press, 2005) or Alexandre Skirda's *Nestor Makhno, Anarchy's Cossack: The Struggle for Free Soviets in the Ukraine 1917–1921* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004) for details.

[288](#)[] See section I.8 of *An Anarchist FAQ* (volume 2) for details. Space precludes a discussion of the Spanish anarchists beyond noting that the revolution failed because they did not

apply all their ideas (due to fears of isolation and the threat of Franco). In contrast, the Russian Revolution failed precisely because the Bolsheviks *did* apply their theories.

[289](#)[] “Anarchist Communism,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 45.

[290](#)[] “Anarchism,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 284.

[291](#)[] “Act for Yourselves,” *Act for Yourselves*, 32.

[292](#)[] “The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of its Practical Realisation,” *Freedom*, 25th February 1967.

[293](#)[] Space excludes covering all aspects of a libertarian communist

society. Section I of *An Anarchist FAQ, Volume 2* discusses many of the issues in more detail.

[294](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 141.

[295](#)[] *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 372.

[296](#)[] “The Decentralisation of Industry,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 192.

[297](#)[] “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 54.

[298](#)[] “Communism and the Wage System: Expropriation,” *Act for Yourself*, 104, 103.

[299](#)[] “Modern Science and

Anarchism,” 78.

[300](#)[] “Communist-Anarchism,” *Act for Yourself*, 102.

[301](#)[] As Kropotkin noted, “before and in 1848, the theory was put forward in such a shape as to fully account for Proudhon’s distrust as to its effect upon liberty. The old idea of Communism was the idea of monastic communities under the severe rule of elders or of men of science for directing priests. The last vestiges of liberty and of individual energy would be destroyed, if humanity ever had to go through such a communism” (“Communist-Anarchism,” *Act for Yourself*, 98).

[302](#)[] “Practical Questions,” *Act for*

Yourselves, 54.

[303](#)[] “The Collectivist Wages System,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 170.

[304](#)[] Ibid., 161.

[305](#)[] “Anarchist Communism,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 46.

[306](#)[] “The Collectivist Wages System,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 170, 171.

[307](#)[] “Communism and the Wage System—The New Wage-System: or Payment by Results,” *Act for Yourselves*, 108–09.

[308](#)[] “Expropriation,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 61. As indicated above, Kropotkin was well aware that it may not be possible to introduce full communism immediately after a social revolution although he was

sure that “some sort of partial Communism” and “this first step towards Communism will compel” the workers “to go further in the same direction” (“Communism and the Wage System—The New Wage-System: or Payment by Results,” *Act For Yourself*, 113).

[309](#)[] “Objections,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 153–54.

[310](#)[] *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 417.

[311](#)[] “Consumption and Production,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 176.

[312](#)[] *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 361.

[313](#)[] *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 417.

[314](#)[] Ibid., 353–54.

[315](#)[] According to Leninist Paul Stack, Kropotkin wanted a society based on “small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production” and “looked backwards for change.” Showing his grasp of the subject, Stack also proclaimed that for the Russian, “class conflict is not the motor of change, the working class is not the agent and collective struggle not the means”! (“Anarchy in the UK?,” *Socialist Review*, No. 246).

[316](#)[] *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 349, 352.

[317](#)[] State capitalism, Lenin wrote in May 1917, “is a complete *material* preparation for socialism, the

threshold of socialism.” Socialism “is nothing but the next step forward from State capitalist monopoly” and 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.” When “the separate establishments are amalgamated into a single syndicate, this economy [of production] can attain tremendous proportions, as economic science teaches us” (“The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it,” *Collected Works* 25: 358–59, 344). However, the growth of large-scale industry within capitalism is based on a *capitalist* criterion of economy and

the structures it creates reflect this. “Are the means now in use for satisfying human needs, under... production for profit, really *economical*?” asked Kropotkin. They have “never took into consideration the economical and social value of the human being” and so do they “really lead to economy in the expenditure of human forces?” (*Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 410–11).

[318](#)[] The Bolsheviks created the Supreme Economic Council (*Vesenka*) in December of 1917, which “was widely acknowledged by them as a move towards ‘statisation’ (*ogosudarstvleniye*) of economic

authority.” It began “to build, from the top, its ‘unified administration’ of particular industries. The pattern is informative” as it “gradually took over” the Tsarist State agencies “and converted them... into administrative organs subject to [its] direction and control.” The Bolsheviks “clearly opted” for the taking over of “the institutions of bourgeois economic power and use them to their own ends.” This system “necessarily implies the perpetuation of hierarchical relations within production itself, and therefore the perpetuation of class society” (Maurice Brinton, “The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control,” *For Workers’*

Power, 323, 335, 324). As discussed in section H.6.2 of *An Anarchist FAQ, Volume 2*, this centralised economic regime completely mismanaged the economy and made the problems facing the revolution much worse. In short, the problems Kropotkin had identified in the Paris Commune were repeated on a far greater scale, both economically and politically.

[319](#)[] *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 23.

[320](#)[] *Ibid.*, 355, 406. Anarchists “fully recognise the necessity of specialisation of knowledge, but we maintain that specialisation must follow general education, and that general education must be given in

science and handicraft alike. To the division of society into brain workers and manual workers we oppose the combination of both kinds of activities.” So “while a *temporary* division of functions remains the surest guarantee of success in each separate undertaking, the *permanent* division is doomed to disappear, and to be substituted by a variety of pursuits—intellectual, industrial, and agricultural—corresponding to the different capacities of the individual, as well as to the variety of capacities within every human aggregate” (369, 22).

[321](#)[] “The Need for Luxury,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 110–11.

[322](#)[] Ibid., 108.

[323](#)[] Ibid., 120.

[324](#)[] “Agreeable Work,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 123–24.

[325](#)[] *The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution*, 7.

[326](#)[] “Expropriation,” *Words of a Rebel*, 214.

[327](#)[] “Communism and the Wage System: Expropriation,” *Act for Yourself*, 104–05.

[328](#)[] “A General View,” *Act for Yourself*, 78, 79, 80.

[329](#)[] “Representative Government,” *Words of a Rebel*, 143–44.

[330](#)[] “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 184, 185.

[331](#)[] “The Commune,” *Words of a*

Rebel, 83.

[332](#)[] “A General View,” *Act for Yourself*s, 80.

[333](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 143.

[334](#)[] Quoted in Ruth Kinna, “Fields of Vision: Kropotkin and Revolutionary Change,” *SubStance* 36: 2, 81.

[335](#)[] “The Permanence of Society After the Revolution,” *Act for Yourself*s, 88.

[336](#)[] “Law and Authority,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 218. Also see “Prisons and Their Moral Influence on Prisoners,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 218–35.

[337](#)[] “Well-Being for All,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 44. Kropotkin, incidentally, stated that in *News From Nowhere* William Morris had “produced perhaps the most thoroughly and deeply Anarchistic conception of future society that has ever been written” (“In Memory of William Morris,” *Freedom*, November 1896).

[338](#)[] Quoted in Cahm, 250.

[339](#)[] “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 140.

[340](#)[] “The Eleventh of November,” *Freedom*, December, 1898.

[341](#)[] “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,” *Anarchism: A*

Collection of Revolutionary Writings, 75.

[342](#)[] *The State: Its Historic Role*, 60.

[343](#)[] Woodcock and Avakumovic, 57–58.

[344](#)[] *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 201–02.

[345](#)[] Miller, 70.

[346](#)[] *Memoirs of Revolutionist*, 211.

[347](#)[] *Memoirs of Revolutionist*, 223–24.

[348](#)[] Ibid., 262, 267.

[349](#)[] This was associated with the student Nikolai Chaikovsky and was part of the populist “To the People” movement (*narodniks*). Kropotkin joined as the group was discussing whether their direction would be

further socialist propaganda among the educated youth or to make contact with the workers and peasants. Kropotkin, obviously, advocated the latter. (Woodcock and Avakumovic, 122–25).

[350](#)[] Chaikovsky, quoted in Woodcock and Avakumovic, 124–25.

[351](#)[] *Memoirs of Revolutionist*, 353–54.

[352](#)[] Communist-anarchism can be seen as a natural evolution from Bakunin's ideas, the fundamental difference being on how quickly distribution according to need could be achieved after a revolution. While some communist-anarchists, unlike Bakunin, were hostile to reforms and

working within the labour movement, this is not a fundamental communist-anarchist position as can be seen from Kropotkin's support for militant unionism and sympathies with anarcho-syndicalism. Caroline Cahm covers this period well in her book *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886*.

[353](#)[] “The Paris Commune,” *Freedom*, April 1887.

[354](#)[] *Freedom*, 25th February, 1967. Kropotkin still used the term “collectivism” to describe these ideas rather than communism.

[355](#)[] Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 164.

[356](#)[] *Memoirs of Revolutionist*, 389–

90.

[357](#)[] Quoted in Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1975), 31.

[358](#)[] It became *La Révolte* (*Revolt*) in 1887 after being prosecuted for anti-militarist propaganda.

[359](#)[] His last article in *Le Révolté* before his arrest in 1882 was the second part of “L’Expropriation” (December 23rd) while his first one upon release in 1886 was “L’Expropriation” (February 14th).

[360](#)[] *Memoirs of Revolutionist*, 463. The equivalent articles from *Freedom* were finally combined into a book with the publication of *Act For*

Yourselves in 1988.

[361](#)[] It should be stressed that anarchists in Spain, Cuba, Mexico, Chicago and elsewhere had continued their involvement in the labour movement in the 1880s while Errico Malatesta took a leading role in organising labour unions during his time in Argentina in the mid-1880s.

[362](#)[] “1886–1907: Glimpses into the Labour Movement in this Country,” *Act for Yourselves*, 119–20.

[363](#)[] Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 253.

[364](#)[] See my “Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism,” *Anarchist Studies* 20: 1.

[365](#)[] “Kropotkin’s Letter [to French and British trade union delegates],”

Freedom, September 1901.

[366](#)[] Davide Turcato, “The 1896 London Congress: Epilogue or Prologue?,” *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism*, 110–25.

[367](#)[] Report, *Freedom*, August–September, 1896.

[368](#)[] *Memoirs of Revolutionist*, 464.

[369](#)[] “Kropotkin Was No Crackpot,” *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History* (London: Penguin, 1991), 338.

[370](#)[] Woodcock and Avakumovic, 338.

[371](#)[] Kropotkin wrote two versions of his memoirs, one in English and one in Russian. While very similar, the Russian text had rewritten passages

as well as two additional chapters. *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* contains a chapter entitled “Western Europe” which is newly translated from the Russian edition.

[372](#)[] *Living My Life, Volume 1*, 253.

[373](#)[] *The Coming Revival of Socialism*, 23.

[374](#)[] *Politics and Socialism* (London: Freedom Group, 1903), 15.

[375](#)[] “The Russian Revolution,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 287–88.

[376](#)[] Quoted in Woodcock and Avakumovic, 369.

[377](#)[] *The Great French Revolution*, 15.

[378](#)[] Letter, *Freedom*, January 1913.

[379](#)[] Foreword, Pataud and Pouget,

XXX.

[380](#)[] Quoted in John Taylor Caldwell, *Come Dungeons Dark: The Life and Times of Guy Aldred*, Glasgow Anarchist (Bar, Ayrshire: Luath Press Ltd, 1988), 63.

[381](#)[] “In Reply to Kropotkin,” *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth* (Washington: Counterpoint, 2001), 380–81.

[382](#)[] “Caesarism,” *Freedom*, June 1899.

[383](#)[] “Anarchists have forgotten their Principles” (*Freedom*, November 1914) and “Pro-Government Anarchists” (*Freedom*, April 1916). The pro-war anarchists were “not numerous, it is true, but amongst them

[are] comrades whom we love and respect most.” However, “almost all” of the anarchists “have remained faithful to their convictions” namely “to awaken a consciousness of the antagonism of interests between dominators and dominated, between exploiters and workers, and to develop the class struggle inside each country, and solidarity among all workers across the frontiers.” (Malatesta, *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, 243, 248, 244).

[384](#)[] “International Anarchist Manifesto on the War,” *Anarchy!*, 387.

[385](#)[] “The State and Revolution,” *Collected Works* 25: 470–71.

[386](#)[] Goldman recounted her visits to

the ailing Kropotkin in *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003) and *Living My Life* while Berkman's account can be found in *The Bolshevik Myth* (London: Pluto Press, 1989) and "Reminiscences of Kropotkin" (*Freedom*, March 1922).

[387](#)[] "The Ethical Need of the Present Day," *The Nineteenth Century*, August 1904 and "The Morality of Nature," *The Nineteenth Century*, March 1905.

[388](#)[] Published by Black Rose, it includes *The Conquest of Bread*; *Ethics*; *Fugitive Writings*; *Evolution and Environment*; *Fields, Factories and Workshops*; *In Russian and*

French Prisons; Great French Revolution; Memoirs of a Revolutionist; Mutual Aid; Russian Literature; and Words of a Rebel.

Anarchism and Anarchists

“Anarchism, the no-government system of socialism, has a double origin. It is an outgrowth of the two great movements of thought in the economic and the political fields which characterise the nineteenth century, and especially its second part. In common with all socialists, the anarchists

hold that the private ownership of land, capital, and machinery has had its time; that it is condemned to disappear; and that all requisites for production must, and will, become the common property of society, and be managed in common by the producers of wealth. And in common with the most advanced representatives of political radicalism, they

maintain that the ideal of the political organisation of society is a condition of things where the functions of government are reduced to a minimum, and the individual recovers his full liberty of initiative and action for satisfying, by means of free groups and federations—freely constituted—all the infinitely varied needs of the human being.

“As regards socialism, most of the anarchists arrive at its ultimate conclusion, that is, at a complete negation of the wage-system and at communism. And with reference to political organisation, by giving a further development to the above-mentioned part of the radical program, they arrive at the conclusion that the ultimate aim of society is the

reduction of the functions of government to nil—that is, to a society without government, to anarchy. The anarchists maintain, moreover, that such being the ideal of social and political organisation, they must not remit it to future centuries, but that only those changes in our social organisation which are in accordance with the above double ideal, and constitute

*an approach to it, will have a
chance of life and be
beneficial for the
commonwealth.”*

*—Anarchist-Communism: Its
Basis and Principles*

From *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*

These extracts from Kropotkin's Memoirs indicate why he became an anarchist as well as summarising his thoughts on anarchism and what he thought his contribution to libertarian movement was.

St. Petersburg-First

Journey to Western Europe

[...]

I went first to Neuchâtel, and then spent a week or so among the watchmakers in the Jura Mountains. I thus made my first acquaintance with that famous Jura Federation which played for the next few years an important part in the development of socialism, introducing into it the no-

government, or anarchist, tendency.

In 1872 the Jura Federation was becoming a rebel against the authority of the general council of the International Workingmen's Association. The association was essentially a working-men's organisation, the workers understanding it as a labour movement and not as a political party. In East

Belgium, for instance, they had introduced into the statutes a clause in virtue of which no one could be a member of a section unless employed in a manual trade; even foremen were excluded.

The workers were moreover federalist in principle. Each nation, each separate region, and even each local section had to be left free to develop on its own lines. But the

middle-class revolutionists of the old school who had entered the International, imbued as they were with the notions of the centralised, pyramidal secret organisations of earlier times, had introduced the same notions into the Workingmen's Association. Beside the federal and national councils, a general council was nominated at London, to act as a sort of

intermediary between councils of the different nations. Marx and Engels were its leading spirits. It soon appeared, however, that the mere fact of having such a central body became a source of substantial inconvenience. The general council was not satisfied with playing the part of a correspondence bureau; it strove to govern the movement, to approve or to

censure the action of the local federations and sections, and even of individual members.[[1](#)]

When the Commune insurrection began in Paris—and “the leaders had only to follow,” without being able to say whereto they would be led within the next twenty-four hours—the general council insisted upon directing the insurrection from London. It required daily reports about

the events, gave orders, favoured this and hampered that, and thus put in evidence the disadvantage of having a governing body, even within the association. The disadvantage became still more evident when, at a secret conference held in [September] 1871, the general council, supported by a few delegates, decided to direct the forces of the association

toward electoral agitation.[2]
It set people thinking about the
evils of any government,
however democratic its origin.
This was the first spark of
anarchism. The Jura
Federation became the centre
of opposition to the general
council.

[...]

From Neuchâtel I went to
Sonvilliers. In a little valley in
the Jura hills there is a

succession of small towns and villages, of which the French-speaking population was at that time entirely employed in the various branches of watch-making; whole families used to work in small workshops. In one of them I found another leader, Adhémar Schwitzguébel, with whom, also, I afterward became very closely connected. He sat among a dozen young men

who were engraving lids of gold and silver watches. I was asked to take a seat on a bench, or table, and soon we were all engaged in a lively conversation upon socialism, government or no government, and the coming congresses.

In the evening a heavy snowstorm raged; it blinded us and froze the blood in our veins, as we struggled to the next village. But,

notwithstanding the storm, about fifty watchmakers, chiefly old people, came from the neighbouring towns and villages—some of them as far as seven miles distant—to join a small informal meeting that was called for that evening.

The very organisation of the watch trade, which permits men to know one another thoroughly and to work in their own houses, where they

are free to talk, explains why the level of intellectual development in this population is higher than that of workers who spend all their life from early childhood in the factories. There is more independence and more originality among the petty trades' workers. But the absence of a division between the leaders and the masses in the Jura Federation was also

the reason why there was not a question upon which every member of the federation would not strive to form his own independent opinion. Here I saw that the workers were not a mass that was being led and made subservient to the political ends of a few men; their leaders were simply their more active comrades—initiators rather than leaders. The

clearness of insight, the soundness of judgement, the capacity for disentangling complex social questions, which I noticed amongst these workers, especially the middle-aged ones, deeply impressed me; and I am firmly persuaded that if the Jura Federation has played a prominent part in the development of socialism, it is not only on account of the

importance of the no-government and federalist ideas of which it was the champion, but also on account of the expression which was given to these ideas by the good sense of the Jura watchmakers. Without their aid, these conceptions might have remained mere attractions for a long time.

The theoretical aspects of anarchism, as they were then

beginning to be expressed in the Jura Federation, especially by [Mikhail] Bakunin; the criticisms of State socialism—the fear of an economic despotism, far more dangerous than the merely political despotism—which I heard formulated there; and the revolutionary character of the agitation, appealed strongly to my mind. But the egalitarian relations which I found in the

Jura Mountains, the independence of thought and expression which I saw developing in the workers, and their unlimited devotion to the cause appealed far more strongly to my feelings; and when I came away from the mountains, after a week's stay with the watchmakers, my views upon socialism were settled. I was an anarchist.

[...]

Bakunin was at that time at Locarno. I did not see him, and now regret it very much, because he was dead when I returned four years later to Switzerland. It was he who had helped the Jura friends to clear up their ideas and to formulate their aspirations; he who had inspired them with his powerful, burning, irresistible revolutionary enthusiasm. As soon as he saw

that a small newspaper, which [James] Guillaume began to edit in the Jura hills (at Locle) was sounding a new note of independent thought in the socialist movement, he came to Locle, talked for whole days and whole nights long to his new friends about the historical necessity of a new move in the anarchist direction; he wrote for that paper a series of profound and

brilliant articles on the historical progress of mankind towards freedom; he infused enthusiasm into his new friends, and he created that centre of propaganda, from which anarchism spread later on to other parts of Europe.

After he had moved to Locarno—from whence he started a similar movement in Italy and, through his sympathetic and gifted

emissary, Fanelli, also in Spain—the work that he had begun in the Jura hills was continued independently by the Jurassians themselves. The name of “Michael” often recurred in their conversations—not, however, as that of an absent chief whose opinions would make law, but as that of a personal friend of whom everyone spoke with love, in a spirit of comradeship. What

struck me most was that Bakunin's influence was felt much less as the influence of an intellectual authority than as the influence of a moral personality. In conversations about anarchism, or about the attitude of the federation, I never heard it said, "Bakunin had said so," or "Bakunin thinks so," as if it clenched the discussion. His writings and his sayings were not a text that

one had to obey—as is often unfortunately the case in political parties. In all such matters, in which intellect is the supreme judge, everyone in discussion used his own arguments. Their general drift and tenor might have been suggested by Bakunin, or Bakunin might have borrowed them from his Jura friends—at any rate, in each individual the arguments retained their own

individual character. I only once heard Bakunin's name invoked as an authority in itself, and that struck me so much that I even now remember the spot where the conversation took place and all the surroundings. The young men began once in the presence of women some young men's talk, not very respectful toward the other sex, when one of the women

present put a sudden stop to it by exclaiming: “Pity that Michael is not here: he would put you in your place!” The colossal figure of the revolutionist who had given up everything for the sake of the revolution, and lived for it alone, borrowing from his conception of it the highest and the purest views of life, continued to inspire them.

[...]

Western Europe

[...]

Our main activity, however, was in working out the practical and theoretic aspects of anarchist socialism, and in this direction the [Jura] federation has undoubtedly accomplished something that will last.

We saw that a new form of society is germinating in the civilised nations, and must take

the place of the old one: a society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their hands and brains to those who choose to employ them in a haphazard way, but who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest sum possible of well-being for all, while full, free

scope will be left for every individual initiative. This society will be composed of a multitude of associations, federated for all the purposes which require federation: trade federations for production of all sorts,—agricultural, industrial, intellectual, artistic; communes for consumption, making provision for dwellings, gas works, supplies of food, sanitary

arrangements, etc.; federations of communes among themselves, and federations of communes with trade organisations; and finally, wider groups covering all the country, or several countries, composed of men who collaborate for the satisfaction of such economic, intellectual, artistic, and moral needs as are not limited to a given territory. All these will

combine directly, by means of free agreements between them, just as the railway companies or the postal departments of different countries co-operate now, without having a central railway or postal government, even though the former are actuated by merely egotistic aims, and the latter belong to different and often hostile States; or as the

meteorologists, the Alpine clubs, the lifeboat stations in Great Britain, the cyclists, the teachers, and so on, combine for all sorts of work in common, for intellectual pursuits, or simply for pleasure. There will be full freedom for the development of new forms of production, invention, and organisation; individual initiative will be encouraged, and the tendency

toward uniformity and
centralisation will be
discouraged.

Moreover, this society will
not be crystallised into certain
unchangeable forms, but will
continually modify its aspect,
because it will be a living,
evolving organism; no need of
government will be felt,
because free agreement and
federation take its place in all
those functions which

governments consider as theirs at the present time, and because, the causes of conflict being reduced in number, those conflicts which may still arise can be submitted to arbitration.

None of us minimised the importance and depth of the change which we looked for. We understood that the current opinions upon the necessity of private ownership

in land, factories, mines, dwelling houses, and so on, as a means of securing industrial progress, and of the wage-system as the means of compelling men to work, would not soon give way to higher conceptions of socialised ownership and production. We knew that a tedious propaganda and a long succession of struggles, of individual and collective revolts

against the now prevailing forms of property, of individual self-sacrifice, of partial attempts at reconstruction and partial revolutions, would have to be lived through, before the current ideas upon private ownership would be modified. And we understood also that the now current ideas concerning the necessity of authority—in which all of us have been bred—would not

and could not be abandoned by civilised mankind all at once. Long years of propaganda and a long succession of partial acts of revolt against authority, as well as a complete revision of the teachings now derived from history, would be required before men would perceive that they had been mistaken in attributing to their rulers and their laws what was derived in

reality from their own sociable feelings and habits. We knew all that. But we also knew that in preaching change in both these directions, we should be working with the tide of human progress.

When I made a closer acquaintance with the working population and their sympathisers from the better educated classes, I soon realised that they valued their

personal freedom even more than they valued their personal well-being. Fifty years ago the workers were ready to sell their personal liberty to all sorts of rulers, and even to a Caesar, in exchange for a promise of material well-being, but now this was no longer the case. I saw that the blind faith in elected rulers, even if they were taken from amongst the best leaders of the

labour movement, was dying away amongst the Latin workers. “We must know first what we want, and then we can do it best ourselves,” was an idea which I found widely spread among them—far more widely than is generally believed. The sentence which was put in the statutes of the International [Working Men’s] Association “The emancipation of the workers

must be accomplished by the workers themselves,” had met with general sympathy and had taken root in minds. The sad experience of the Paris Commune only confirmed it.

When the insurrection broke out, a considerable number of men belonging to the middle classes themselves were prepared to make, or at least to accept, a new start in the social direction. “When my

brother and myself, coming out of our little room, went out into the streets,” Élisée Reclus said to me once, “we were asked on all sides by people belonging to the wealthier classes: ‘Tell us what is to be done? We are ready to try a new start,’ but *we* were not prepared yet to make the suggestions.”

Never before had a government been as fairly

representative of all the advanced parties as the Council of the Commune, elected on 25th March 1871. All shades of revolutionary opinion—Blanquists, Jacobinists, Internationalists—were represented in it in a true proportion. And yet the workers themselves, having no distinct ideas of social reform to impress upon their representatives, the Commune

Government did nothing in that direction. The very fact of having been isolated from the masses and shut up in the Hôtel de Ville paralysed them. For the success of socialism, the ideas of no-government, of self-reliance, of free initiative of the individual—of anarchism, in a word—had thus to be preached side by side with those of socialised ownership and production.

We certainly foresaw that if full freedom were left to the individual for the expression of his ideas and for action, we should have to face a certain amount of extravagant exaggeration of our principles. I had seen it in the Nihilist movement in Russia. But we trusted—and experience has proved that we were right—that social life itself, supported by a frank, open-minded

criticism of opinions and actions, would be the most effective means for threshing out opinions and for divesting them of the unavoidable exaggerations. We acted, in fact, in accordance with the old saying that freedom remains still the wisest cure for freedom's temporary inconveniences.[[3](#)] There is, in mankind, a nucleus of social habits, an inheritance from the

past, not yet duly appreciated, which is *not* maintained by coercion and is superior to coercion. Upon it all the progress of mankind is based, and so long as mankind does not begin to deteriorate physically and mentally, it will not be destroyed by any amount of criticism or of occasional revolt against it. These were the opinions in which I grew confirmed more

and more in proportion as my experience of men and things increased.

We understood at the same time, that such a change cannot be produced by the conjectures of one man of genius, that it will not be one man's discovery, but that it must result from the constructive work of the masses, just as the forms of judicial procedure which were

elaborated in the early medieval ages, the village community, the guild, the medieval city, or the foundations of international law, were worked out by the people.

Many of our predecessors had undertaken to picture ideal commonwealths, basing them upon the principle of authority, or on some rare occasions, upon the principle

of freedom. Robert Owen and Fourier had given the world their ideals of a free, organically developing society, in opposition to the pyramidal ideals which had been copied from the Roman Empire or from the Roman Church. [Pierre-Joseph] Proudhon had continued their work, and Bakunin, applying his wide and clear understanding of the philosophy of history to the

criticism of present institutions, “built up while he was demolishing.” But all that was only preparatory work.[4]

The International Workingmen’s Association inaugurated a new method of solving the problems of practical sociology by appealing to the workers themselves. The educated men who had joined the association undertook only to enlighten

the workers as to what was going on in different countries of the world, to analyse the obtained results, and, later on, to aid the workers in formulating their conclusions. We did not pretend to evolve an ideal commonwealth out of our theoretical views as to what a society *ought to be*, but we invited the workers to investigate the causes of the present evils, and in their

discussions and congresses to consider the practical aspects of a better social organisation than the one we live in. A question raised at an international congress was recommended as a subject of study to all labour unions. In the course of the year it was discussed all over Europe, in the small meetings of the sections, with a full knowledge of the local needs of each

trade and each locality; then the work of the sections was brought before the next congress of each federation, and finally it was submitted in a more elaborate form to the next international congress. The structure of the society which we longed for was thus worked out, in theory and practice, from beneath, and the Jura Federation took a large part in the elaboration of

the anarchist ideal.

For myself, placed as I was in such favourable conditions, I gradually came to realise that anarchism represents more than a mere mode of action and a mere conception of a free society; that it is part of a philosophy, natural and social, which must be developed in a quite different way from the metaphysical or dialectic methods which have been

employed in sciences dealing with man. I saw that it must be treated by the same methods as natural sciences; not, however, on the slippery ground of mere analogies such as Herbert Spencer accepts, but on the solid basis of induction applied to human institutions. And I did my best to accomplish what I could in that direction.

[...]

[1](#)[] As Marx wrote to Engels on the 11th

of September 1867: “And when the next revolution comes, and that will perhaps be sooner than might appear, we (i.e., you and I) will have this mighty ENGINE *at our disposal*” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 42, p. 424). (Editor)

2[] The Marxist-inspired resolution of 1871 stated: “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] is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution... The lords of land and the lords of

capital will 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 has therefore become the great duty of the working class.” This was clarified in 1893 at the Zurich Conference of the Second International: “All Trade Unions shall be admitted to the Congress: also those Socialist Parties and Organisations which recognise the necessity of the organisation of the workers and of political action. By “political action” it meant that “the working-class organisations seek, in as far as possible, to use or conquer

political rights and the machinery of legislation for the furthering of the interests of the proletariat and the conquest of political power.” (Editor)

3[] As expressed, for example, by Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who argued: “If one accepts this assumption [that people are not ready for freedom], freedom will never be achieved; for one can not arrive at the maturity for freedom without having already acquired it; one must be free to learn how to make use of one’s powers freely and usefully. The first attempts will surely be brutal and will lead to a state of affairs more painful and dangerous than the former condition under the

dominance but also the protection of an external authority. However, one can achieve reason only through one's own experiences and one must be free to be able to undertake them... To accept the principle that freedom is worthless for those under one's control and that one has the right to refuse it to them forever, is an infringement on the rights of God himself, who has created man to be free" (Quoted by Noam Chomsky, "Language and Freedom," *Chomsky on Anarchism* (AK Press, 2005), p. 105).

[4](#)[] Kropotkin is referencing the motto "I shall destroy and I shall build" (*Destruam et ædificabo*) placed by

Proudhon on title page of his 1846 work *System of Economic Contradictions* as well as Bakunin's famous (pre-anarchist) maxim that "the urge to destroy is a creative urge." (Editor)

The Lyon anarchist trial of 1883

Translation by
Nicholas Walter[[5](#)]

This speech and declaration were produced during the trial of over 60 anarchists in Lyon, France in 1883. Like the others, Kropotkin was charged with belonging to the International Working Men's

*Association which had been
banned following the crushing
of the Paris Commune in
1871. The declaration was
drafted by Kropotkin.*

From Kropotkin's Defence Speech

I think, gentlemen, that like
me you must have been struck
by the weakness of the case
brought against us. Are you in
the presence of an

international organisation? I may be excused from giving a reply, for the hearing is already well advanced, and the proof for this is still lacking. Anyway, it seems to me that the case fell at the same time that these words fell from the lips of the public prosecutor: "As long as there is a single anarchist in Lyon, I shall proceed against him with every law at my disposal."

These are enough to show that the trial brought against us is a political trial, a class trial.

I said this trial was a class trial. I shall add that the people of a single country are divided by the establishment of the side of the bourgeoisie and the side of the workers. For the former—all rights, all privileges. For the latter—no freedom, no justice. The Law of 1872[[6](#)] indeed divides

society into two classes, since it is aimed only at the International Working Men's Association. Is this not proved further by the right of the bourgeoisie to associate freely with foreigners without being prevented by law? Thus a number of French deputies were recently present at the unveiling of a monument raised to the Italian revolutionary Mazzini, who

spent his whole life plotting against Austrian, French and Italian rulers. Have they been prosecuted? Have there not been meetings of Italian and French republicans in Paris for some time?

I have hesitated to defend myself before this trial which serves the interests of politics, of the moment, of a class. But there is someone above us who judges us: public opinion.

That is who I am speaking to.

It would really be a very good thing if we could come and tell you that we belonged to the International. But we cannot, for that great workers' organisation has not existed in France since it was destroyed by the iniquitous Law of 1872. For my part, I should have been proud to tell you that I had joined this organisation, and I should have said so if

this would have led to the release of the other accused. I shall never consider it a crime to say to workers of two continents: “Workers, when the bourgeoisie drive you to poverty, put aside your hatred, hold your hands out across the frontiers, be brothers!”

Ah, says the public prosecutor, we have no patriotism. Do you think my heart does not beat more

quickly when a Russian song comes to my ears than when I hear a French one? But I love France, because I see this beautiful country as the home of revolutions, because I know that when it is conquered it is reaction which raises its head and freedom which is driven out. The public prosecutor has spoken to you of his patriotic sorrow when he saw his country invaded by the

Prussian army. Let me remind him that at the time when France was devastated by war, there were some people who protested—they were German socialists.

[...]

A society which is divided into two distinct classes, one which produces but possesses nothing, the other which does not produce but possesses everything, is a society without

morality, which is condemned by itself. A worker's labour represents an average of several thousand francs a year but his annual wage is often not a thousand francs. Next to this poverty is displayed the mad wastefulness of the bourgeois class. In what way can this shameful injustice of society be reformed? Science is powerless, and its work always benefits the leisured

class. It was after all as a result of a violent expropriation that the bourgeoisie stripped land and wealth from the nobility and clergy.

I have been accused of being the father of anarchism. That is too much of an honour. It was Proudhon who first stated it in 1848, and Bakunin and other socialists who popularised it. We never stop

working and studying in our groups but instead of coming and arguing with us you imprison and condemn us, because we defend those utopias—as you call our ideas—which will be realities tomorrow. The idea of anarchism has been stated and despite everything, despite the persecutions, has developed with astonishing speed. You can be sure that our conviction

and imprisonment will bring us many more converts.

[...]

I believe the workers of two continents have their eyes on you, waiting with as much emotion as impatience for the judgement you are going to pronounce. If it is a conviction, they will say that the International was an excuse and that what you wanted to attack was the freedom to

think and say what one thinks.

Do not stir up hatred. Repression has never achieved anything. Twice persecuted under the Empire, the international rose again in 1870 more glorious and more powerful than before. Crushed in the streets of Paris beneath 35,000 corpses, after the Commune, socialism drew new life from the blood of its followers. Its ideas about

property have been given an enormous circulation.

Believe me, gentlemen, the social revolution is near. It will break out within ten years. I live among the workers, and I am sure of it. Take inspiration from their ideas, join their ranks, and you will see that I am right. Let me tell you what I think. Do not stir up the hatred of the workers, for you will bring new misfortunes.

You know that persecution is the best way to spread an idea. Is that what you want? Do you want a future of massacres for France? For, I repeat, ten years will not pass without a social revolution. What should you do in the presence of this revolution? Should you shrink from it and close your eyes, not wishing to hear or know anything about it? No, you should study the

movement fairly, and look fairly to see whether by any chance we might be right.

I tell you, all of you who are listening, that the question is serious and inescapable. Perhaps you think it is rather bold to use such language in court. But if only two or three people are struck by the truth of my words and consider them as a salutary warning, I shall not have paid too much

with a few years in prison for the satisfaction of having done my duty. If, by advising you to consider the certainty of a social revolution, I may prevent a few drops of blood from being spilt, I could die in prison and die happy.

However, if you persist in not listening, and if the bourgeoisie continues to subjugate, persecute and oppress the workers, the duty

of every man of feeling is laid down in advance. I shall not fail in mine.

Defence Declaration

What anarchism is, and what anarchists are, we shall try to explain:

Anarchists, gentlemen, are citizens who, in an age when freedom of opinion is preached everywhere, have believed it to be their duty to call for

unlimited freedom.

Yes, gentlemen, we are some thousand, some millions of workers, all over the world, who demand absolute freedom, nothing but freedom, the whole of freedom!

We want freedom—that is to say, we claim for every human being the right and the means to do whatever he pleases and only what he pleases, and to satisfy all his needs without

any limit other than natural impossibilities and the needs of his neighbours, to be respected equally.

We want freedom, and we believe its existence to be incompatible with the existence of any kind of authority, whatever its origin and form may be, whether it is elected or imposed, monarchist or republican, whether it is inspired by divine

right or by popular right, by holy oil[7] or by universal suffrage.

History is there to teach us that all governments are alike and equal. The best are the worst. There is more cynicism in some, more hypocrisy in others. In the end there is always the same behaviour, always the same intolerance. Even the most apparently liberal have in reserve, beneath

the dust of legislative files, some nice little law on the International for use against troublesome opponents.

The evil, in other words, in the eyes of anarchists does not lie in one form of government rather than another. It lies in the governmental idea itself, it lies in the principle of authority.

In short, the substitution in human relationships of a free

contract which can be revised or cancelled in perpetuity, for administrative and legal tutelage, for imposed discipline—that is our ideal.

Anarchists therefore intend to teach the people to do without government, just as they are beginning to learn to do without God.

The people will similarly learn to do without property owners. The worst of tyrants,

after all, is not the one who imprisons you but the one who starves you, not the one who holds on to your collar but the one who tightens up your belt.

There can be no liberty without equality. There is no liberty in a society where capital is monopolised in the hands of a minority which is growing smaller every day, and where nothing is shared equally—not even public

education, although it is paid for by the contributions of all.

We believe that capital—the common inheritance of mankind, since it is the fruit of the co-operation of past and present generations—must be at the disposal of all in such a way that none may be excluded, and that in turn no one may get possession of a part to the detriment of the rest.

In a word, we want equality—real equality, as a corollary or rather as a prior condition of liberty. From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs—that is what we sincerely and strenuously desire. That is what will come about, for no regulation can prevail against claims which are at the same time legitimate and necessary. That is why you want to

condemn us to all kinds of hardship.

Scoundrels that we are, we demand bread for everyone, work for everyone, and for everyone independence and justice too!

[5](#)[] *Freedom*, Vol. 28, No. 13. (Editor)

[6](#)[] Desiring to crush the anarchist movement around Lyon, the republican government invoked an old law against membership in the International Working Men's Association passed by the reactionary regime after the crushing of the Paris Commune. This allowed the

politicians to secure a heavy sentence against the accused without needing to tie them to any specific act. Given that the monarchists had been defeated in the elections of 1878 and civil liberties had gradually been restored, the application of this old law was a deeply cynical piece of realpolitik. (Editor)

[7](#)[[] Literally, the Holy Ampule (*Sainte-Ampoule*). This was a glass vial which held the anointing oil for the coronation of the kings of France. Its first recorded use was by Pope Innocent II for the anointing of Louis VII in 1131. (Editor)

The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution

*This speech was delivered in
Paris in 1886 and
subsequently printed as
“L’Anarchie dans l’évolution
socialiste” in Le Révolté
between 28th March and 9th
May in 1886. It summarises
the core ideas of anarchism,
placing it firmly in the*

*socialist tradition. Kropotkin
indicates why anarchism is
the logical position for
socialists to take based on an
account of how socialism
developed in the 19th century.
It was translated by Henry
Glasse in 1887.*

I

You must often have asked
yourselves what is the cause of
Anarchism, and why, since

there are already so many Socialist schools, it is necessary to found an additional one—that of Anarchism. In order to answer this question I will go back to the close of last century.

You all know the characteristics which marked that epoch: there was an expansion of intelligence, a prodigious development of the natural sciences, a pitiless

examination of accepted prejudices, the formation of a theory of Nature based on a truly scientific foundation, observation and reasoning. In addition to these there was criticism of the political institutions bequeathed to Humanity by preceding ages, and a movement towards that ideal of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity which has in all times been the ideal of the

popular masses. Fettered in its free development by despotism and by the narrow selfishness of the privileged classes, this movement, being at the same time favoured by an explosion of popular indignation, engendered the Great [French] Revolution which had to force its way through the midst of a thousand obstacles both without and within.

The Revolution was vanquished, but its ideas remained. Though at first persecuted and derided, they became the watchword for a whole century of slow evolution. The history of the nineteenth century is summed up in an effort to put in practice the principles elaborated at the end of last century; this is the lot of revolutions: though vanquished

they establish the course of the evolution which follows them. In the domain of politics these ideas are abolition of aristocratic privileges, abolition of personal government, and equality before the law. In the economic order the Revolution proclaimed freedom of business transactions; it said —“Sell and buy freely. Sell, all of you, your products, if you can produce, and if you do not

possess the implements necessary for that purpose but have only your arms to sell, sell them, sell your labour to the highest bidder, the State will not interfere! Compete among yourselves, contractors! No favour shall be shown, the law of natural selection will take upon itself the function of killing off those who do not keep pace with the progress of industry, and will

reward those who take the lead.”

The above is at least the *theory* of the Revolution of 1789, and if the State intervenes in the struggle to favour some to the detriment of others, as we have lately seen when the monopolies of mining and railway companies have been under discussion, such action is regarded by the liberal school as a lamentable

deviation from the grand principles of the Revolution.

What has been the result? You, the women and men gathered in this hall, know only too well: idle opulence for a few and uncertainty for the morrow and misery for the greater number; crisis and wars for the conquest of markets, and a lavish expenditure of public money to find openings for industrial

speculators. All this is because in proclaiming liberty of contract, an essential point was neglected by our fathers. Though some of them caught sight of it, the best of them earnestly desired but did not dare to realise it. While liberty of transactions, that is to say a conflict between the members of society, was proclaimed, the contending parties were not equally matched, and the

powerful, armed for the contest by the means inherited from their fathers, have gained the upper hand over the weak. Under such conditions, the millions of poor ranged against a few rich could not do otherwise than give in.

Comrades! you have often asked yourselves—"Whence comes the wealth of the rich? Is it from their labour?" It would be a mockery to say

that it was so. Let us suppose that M. Rothschild has worked all his life: well, you also, every one of you working men have also laboured; then why should the fortune of M. Rothschild be measured by hundreds of millions while your possessions are so small? The reason is simple: you have exerted yourselves to produce by your own labour, while M. Rothschild has devoted himself

to accumulating the product of the labour of others—the whole matter lies in that.

But some one may say to me;—“How comes it that millions of men thus allow the Rothschilds and the Mackays to appropriate the fruit of their labour?” Alas, they cannot help themselves under the existing social system! But let us picture to our minds a city all of whose inhabitants find

their lodging, clothing, food and occupation secured to them, on condition of producing things useful to the community, and let us suppose a Rothschild to enter this city bringing with him a cask full of gold. If he spends his gold, it will diminish rapidly; if he locks it up, it will not increase, because gold does not grow like seed, and after the lapse of a twelvemonth he will not

find £110 in his drawer if he only put £100 into it. If he sets up a factory and proposes to the inhabitants of the town that they should work in it for four shillings a day while producing to the value of eight shillings a day, they reply—"Among us you'll find no one willing to work on those terms. Go elsewhere and settle in some town where the unfortunate people have neither clothing,

bread, nor work assured to them, and where they will consent to give up to you the lion's share of the result of their labour in return for the barest necessities of life. Go where men starve! There you will make your fortune!"

The origin of the wealth of the rich is your misery. Let there be no poor, then we shall have no millionaires.

The facts I have just stated

were such as the Revolution of last century did not comprehend or else could not act upon. That Revolution placed face to face two opposing ranks, the one consisting of a hungry, ill-clad army of former serfs, the other of men well provided with means. It then said to these two arrays—"Fight out your battle." The unfortunate were vanquished. They possessed

no fortunes, but they had something more precious than all the gold in the world—their arms; and these arms, the source of all wealth, were monopolised by the wealthy. Thus we have seen those immense fortunes which are the characteristic feature of our age spring up on all sides. A king of the last century, “the great Louis the Fourteenth” of mercenary historians, would

never have dreamed of possessing a fortune such as are held by those kings of the nineteenth century, the Vanderbilts and the Mackays.

On the other hand, we have seen the poor reduced still more and more to toil for others, and while those who produced on their own account have rapidly disappeared, we find ourselves compelled under an ever

increasing pressure to labour more and more to enrich the rich. Attempts have been made to remove these evils. Some have said—"Let us give equal instruction to all," and forthwith education has been spread abroad. Better human machines have been turned out, but these educated machines still labour to enrich others. This illustrious scientist, that renowned

novelist, despite their education are still beasts of burden to the capitalist. Instruction improves the cattle to be exploited but the exploitation remains. Next, there was great talk about association, but the workers soon learned that they could not get the better of capital by associating their miseries, and those who cherished this illusion most earnestly were

compelled to turn to Socialism.

Timid at the outset, Socialism spoke at first in the name of Christian sentiment and morality: men profoundly imbued with the moral principles of Christianity—principles which it possesses in common with all other religions—came forward and said—“A Christian has no right to exploit his brethren!” But the ruling classes laughed

in their faces with the reply —“Teach the people Christian resignation, tell them in the name of Christ that they should offer their left cheek to whosoever smites them on the right, then you will be welcome; as for the dreams of equality which you find in Christianity, go and meditate on your discoveries in prison.”

Later on Socialism spoke in the name of Governmentalism;

it said—"Since it is the special mission of the State to protect the weak against the strong, it is its duty to aid working men's associations; the State alone can enable working men to fight against capital and to oppose to capitalistic exploitation the free workshop of workers pocketing the entire value of the produce of their labour." To this the Bourgeoisie replied with

grapeshot in 1848.

It was not until between twenty to thirty years later, at a time when the popular masses were invited to express their mind in the International Working Men's Association, that Socialism spoke in the name of the people, and formulating itself little by little in the Congresses of the great Association and later on among its successors, arrived

at some such conclusion as the following:

All accumulated wealth is the product of the labour of all—of the present and of all preceding generations. This hall in which we are now assembled derives its value from the fact that it is situated in Paris—this magnificent city built by the labours of twenty successive generations. If this same hall were conveyed amid

the snows of Siberia, its value would be next to nothing. The machinery which you have invented and patented bears within itself the intelligence of five or six generations and is only possessed of value because it forms part of that immense whole that we call the progress of the nineteenth century. If you send your lace-making machine among the natives of New Guinea, it will

become valueless. We defy any man of genius of our times to tell us what share his intellect has had in the magnificent deductions of the book, the work of talent which he has produced! Generations have toiled to accumulate facts for him; his ideas have perhaps been suggested to him by a locomotive crossing the plains; as for elegance of design, he has grasped it while admiring

the Venus de Milo or the work of Murillo[[8](#)]; and finally, if his book exercises any influence over us, it does so thanks to all the circumstances of our civilisation.

Everything belongs to all! We defy anyone so-ever to tell us what share of the general wealth is due to each individual. See the enormous mass of appliances which the nineteenth century has

created; behold those millions of iron slaves which we call machines, and which plane and saw, weave and spin for us, separate and combine the raw materials, and work the miracles of our times. No one has the right to monopolise any one of these machines and to say to others—"This is mine; if you wish to make use of it, you must pay me a tax on each article you produce,"

any more than the feudal lord of the middle ages had the right to say to the cultivator —“This hill and this meadow are mine, and you must pay me tribute for every sheaf of barley you bind and on each haycock you heap up.”

All belongs to everyone! And provided each man and woman contributes his and her share of labour for the production of necessary

objects, they have a right to share in all that is produced by everybody.

II

“All things belong to all, and provided that men and women contribute their share of labour for the production of necessary objects, they are entitled to their share of all that is produced by the community at large.”

“But this is Communism,” you may say. Yes, it is Communism, but it is the Communism which no longer speaks in the name of religion or of the State, but in the name of the people.

During the past fifty years a great awakening of the working class has taken place! The prejudice in favour of private property is passing away. The worker grows more

and more accustomed to regard the factory, the railway, or the mine, not as a feudal castle belonging to a lord, but as an institution of public utility which the public has the right to control. The idea of possession in common has not been worked out from the slow deductions of some thinker buried in his private study; it is a thought which is germinating in the brains of

the working masses, and when the revolution, which the close of this century has in store for us, shall have hurled confusion into the camp of our exploiters, you will see that the mass of the people will demand Expropriation, and will proclaim its right to the factory, the locomotive, and the steamship.

Just as the sentiment of the inviolability of the home has

developed during the latter half of our century, so also the sentiment of collective right to all that serves for the production of wealth has developed among the masses. It is a fact, and he who, like ourselves, wishes to share the popular life and follow its development, must acknowledge that this affirmation is a faithful summary of the people's

aspirations. The tendency of this closing century is towards Communism, not the monastic or barrack-room Communism formerly advocated, but the free Communism which places the products reaped or manufactured in common at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home.

This is the solution of which

the mass of the people can most readily take hold, and it is the solution which the people demand at the most solemn epochs. In 1848 the formula "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" was the one which went straight to the heart of the masses, and if they acclaimed the Republic and universal suffrage, it was because they hoped to attain

to Communism through them. In 1871, also, when the people besieged in Paris desired to make a supreme effort to resist the invader, what was their demand?—That free rations should be served out to everyone. Let all articles be put into one common stock and let them be distributed according to the requirements of each. Let each one take freely of all that is abundant

and let those objects which are less plentiful be distributed more sparingly and in due proportions—this is the solution which the mass of the workers understand best. This is also the system which is commonly practised in the rural districts [of France]. So long as the common lands afford abundant pasture, what Commune seeks to restrict their use? When brush-wood

and chestnuts are plentiful, what Commune forbids its members to take as much as they want? And when the larger wood begins to grow scarce, what course does the peasant adopt?—The allowancing of individuals.

Let us take from the common stock the articles which are abundant, and let those objects whose production is more restricted

be served out in allowances according to requirements, giving preference to children and old persons, that is to say, to the weak. And, moreover, let all be consumed, not in public, but at home, according to individual tastes and in company with one's family and friends. This is the ideal of the masses.

But it is not enough to argue about “Communism” and

“Expropriation”; it is furthermore necessary to know who should have the management of the common patrimony, and it is especially on this question that different schools of Socialists are opposed to one another, some desiring authoritarian Communism, and others, like ourselves, declaring unreservedly in favour of anarchist Communism. In

order to judge between these two, let us return once again to our starting point, the Revolution of last century.

In overturning royalty, the Revolution proclaimed the sovereignty of the people, but by an inconsistency which was very natural at that time, it proclaimed, not a permanent sovereignty, but an intermittent one, to be exercised at certain intervals only, for the

nomination of deputies
supposed to represent the
people. In reality, it copied its
institutions from the
representative government of
England. The Revolution was
drowned in blood, and
nevertheless, representative
government became the
watchword of Europe. All
Europe, with the exception of
Russia, has tried it, under all
possible forms, from

government based on a property qualification to the direct government of the little Swiss republics. But, strange to say, just in proportion as we have approached nearer to the ideal of a representative government, elected by a perfectly free universal suffrage, in that same proportion have its essential vices become manifest to us, till we have clearly seen that

this mode of government is radically defective. Is it not indeed absurd to take a certain number of men from out the mass, and to entrust them with the management of all public affairs, saying to them, “Attend to these matters, we exonerate ourselves from the task by laying it upon you: it is for you to make laws on all manner of subjects—armaments and mad dogs,

observatories and chimneys, instruction and street-sweeping: arrange these things as you please and make laws about them, since you are the chosen ones whom the people has voted capable of doing everything!” It appears to me that if a thoughtful and honest man were offered such a post, he would answer somewhat in this fashion:

“You entrust me with a task

which I am unable to fulfil. I am unacquainted with most of the questions upon which I shall be called on to legislate. I shall either have to work to some extent in the dark, which will not be to your advantage, or I shall appeal to you and summon meetings in which you will yourselves seek to come to an understanding on the questions at issue, in which case my office will be

unnecessary. If you have formed an opinion and have formulated it, and if you are anxious to come to an understanding with others who have also formed an opinion on the same subject, then all you need do is to communicate with your neighbours and send a delegate to come to an understanding with other delegates on this specific

question, but you will certainly reserve to yourselves the right of taking an ultimate decision; you will not entrust your delegate with the making of laws for you. This is how scientists and business men act each time that they have to come to an agreement.”

But the above reply would be a repudiation of the representative system, and nevertheless it is a faithful

expression of the idea which is growing everywhere since the vices of representative government have been exposed in all their nakedness. Our age, however, has gone still further, for it has begun to discuss the rights of the State and of Society in relation to the individual; people now ask to what point the interference of the State is necessary in the multitudinous functions of

society.

Do we require a government to educate our children? Only let the worker have leisure to instruct himself, and you will see that, through the free initiative of parents and of persons fond of tuition, thousands of educational societies and schools of all kinds will spring up, rivalling one another in the excellence of their teaching. If we were

not crushed by taxation and exploited by employers, as we now are, could we not ourselves do much better than is now done for us? The great centres would initiate progress and set the example, and you may be sure that the progress realised would be incomparably superior to what we now attain through our ministries.—Is the State even necessary for the defence of a

territory? If armed brigands attack a people, is not that same people, armed with good weapons, the surest rampart to oppose to the foreign aggressor? Standing armies are always beaten by invaders, and history teaches that the latter are to be repulsed by a popular rising alone.—While Government is an excellent machine to protect monopoly, has it ever been able to protect

us against ill-disposed persons? Does it not, by creating misery, increase the number of crimes instead of diminishing them? In establishing prisons into which multitudes of men, women, and children are thrown for a time in order to come forth infinitely worse than when they went in, does not the State maintain nurseries of vice at the expense of the tax-

payers? In obliging us to commit to others the care of our affairs, does it not create the most terrible vice of societies—indifference to public matters?

On the other hand, if we analyse all the great advances made in this century—our international traffic, our industrial discoveries, our means of communication—do we find that we owe them to

the State or to private enterprise? Look at the network of railways which cover Europe. At Madrid, for example, you take a ticket for St. Petersburg direct. You travel along railroads which have been constructed by millions of workers, set in motion by dozens of companies; your carriage is attached in turn to Spanish, French, Bavarian, and Russian

locomotives: you travel without losing twenty minutes anywhere, and the two hundred francs which you paid in Madrid will be divided to a nicety among the companies which have combined to forward you to your destination. This line from Madrid to St. Petersburg has been constructed in small isolated branches which have been gradually connected, and

direct trains are the result of an understanding which has been arrived at between twenty different companies. Of course there has been considerable friction at the outset, and at times some companies, influenced by an unenlightened egotism have been unwilling to come to terms with the others, but, I ask, was it better to put up with this occasional friction, or

to wait until some Bismarck, Napoleon, or Genghis Khan should have conquered Europe, traced the lines with a pair of compasses, and regulated the despatch of the trains? If the latter course had been adopted, we should still be in the days of stage-coaches.

The network of railways is the work of the human mind proceeding from the simple to

the complex by the spontaneous efforts of the parties interested, and it is thus that all the great enterprises of our age have been undertaken. It is quite true, indeed, that we pay too much to the managers of these enterprises; this is an additional reason for suppressing their incomes, but not for confiding the management of European railways to a central European

government.

What thousands of examples one could cite in support of his same idea! Take all great enterprises such as the Suez Canal, the lines of Atlantic steamers, the telegraph which connects us with North and South America. Consider also that commercial organisation which enables you on rising in the morning to find bread at the baker's—that is, if you

have the money to pay for it, which is not always the case now-a-days—meat at the butcher's, and all other things that you want at other shops. Is this the work of the State? It is true that we pay abominably dearly for middlemen; this is, however, an additional reason for suppressing them, but not for believing that we must entrust government with the care of providing for our

feeding and clothing. If we closely scan the development of the human mind in our times, we are struck by the number of associations which spring up to meet the varied requirement of the individual of our age—societies for study, for commerce, for pleasure and recreation; some of them, very small, for the propagation of a universal language or a certain method

of short-hand writing; others with large arms, such as that which has recently been established for the defence of the English coast, or for the avoidance of lawsuits, and so on. To make a list of the associations which exist in Europe, volumes would be necessary, and it would be seen that there is not a single branch of human activity with which one or other does not

concern itself. The State itself appeals to them in the discharge of its most important function—war; it says, “We undertake to slaughter, but we cannot take care of our victims; form a Red Cross Society to gather up the wounded on the battle-field and to take care of them.”

Let others, if they will, advocate industrial barracks or the monastery of Authoritarian

Communism, we declare that the tendency of society is in an opposite direction. We foresee millions and millions of groups freely constituting themselves for the satisfaction of all the varied needs of human beings—some of these groups organised by quarter, street, and house; others extending hands across the walls of cities, over frontiers and oceans. All of these will be

composed of human beings who will combine freely, and after having performed their share of productive labour will meet together, either for the purpose of consumption, or to produce objects of art or luxury, or to advance science in a new direction. This is the tendency of the nineteenth century, and we follow it; we only ask to develop it freely, without any governmental

interference. Individual liberty! “Take pebbles,” said [Charles] Fourier, “put them into a box and shake them, and they will arrange themselves in a mosaic that you could never get by entrusting to anyone the work of arranging them harmoniously.”

III

Now let me pass to the third part of my subject—the most

important with respect to the future.

There is no more room for doubting that religions are going; the nineteenth century has given them their death blow. But religions—all religions—have a double composition. They contain in the first place a primitive cosmogony, a rude attempt at explaining nature, and they furthermore contain a

statement of the public morality born and developed within the mass of the people. But when we throw religions overboard or store them among our public records as historical curiosities, shall we also relegate to museums the moral principles which they contain? This has sometimes been done, and we have seen people declare that as they no longer believed in the various

religions, so they despised morality and boldly proclaimed the maxim of bourgeois selfishness, "Everyone for himself." But a Society, human or animal, cannot exist without certain rules and moral habits springing up within it; religion may go, morality remains. If we were to come to consider that a man did well in lying, deceiving his neighbours, or

plundering them when possible (this is the middle-class business morality), we should come to such a pass that we could no longer live together. You might assure me of your friendship, but perhaps you might only do so in order to rob me more easily; you might promise to do a certain thing for me, only to deceive me; you might promise to forward a letter for me, and you might

steal it just like an ordinary governor of a jail. Under such conditions society would become impossible, and this is so generally understood that the repudiation of religions in no way prevents public morality from being maintained, developed, and raised to a higher and ever higher standard. This fact is so striking that philosophers seek to explain it by the principles

of utilitarianism, and recently [Herbert] Spencer sought to base the morality which exists among us upon physiological causes and the needs connected with the preservation of the race.

Let me give you an example in order to explain to you what we think on the matter.

A child is drowning, and four men who stand upon the bank see it struggling in the water.

One of them does not stir, he is a partisan of “Each one for himself,” the maxim of the commercial middle class; this one is a brute and we need not speak of him further. The next one reasons thus: “If I save the child, a good report of my action will be made to the ruler of heaven, and the Creator will reward me by increasing my flocks and my serfs,” and thereupon he

plunges into the water. Is he therefore a moral man? Clearly not! He is a shrewd calculator, that is all. The third, who is an utilitarian, reflects thus (or at least utilitarian philosophers represent him as so reasoning): “Pleasures can be classed in two categories, inferior pleasures and higher ones. To save the life of anyone is a superior pleasure

infinitely more intense and more durable than others; therefore I will save the child.”

Admitting that any man ever reasoned thus, would he not be a terrible egotist? And, moreover, could we ever be sure that his sophistical brain would not at some given moment cause his will to incline toward an inferior pleasure, that is to say, towards refraining from

troubling himself? There remains the fourth individual. This man has been brought up from his childhood to feel himself one with the rest of humanity: from his childhood he has always regarded men as possessing interests in common: he has accustomed himself to suffer when his neighbours suffer, and to feel happy when everyone around him is happy. Directly he

hears the heart-rending cry of the mother, he leaps into the water, not through reflection but by instinct, and when she thanks him for saving her child, he says, “What have I done to deserve thanks, my good woman? I am happy to see you happy; I have acted from natural impulse and could not do otherwise!”

You recognise in this case the truly moral man, and feel

that the others are only egotists in comparison with him. The whole anarchist morality is represented in this example. It is the morality of a people which does not look for the sun at midnight—a morality without compulsion or authority, a morality of habit. Let us create circumstances in which man shall not be led to deceive nor exploit others, and then by the

very force of things the moral level of humanity will rise to a height hitherto unknown. Men are certainly not to be moralised by teaching them a moral catechism: tribunals and prisons do not diminish vice; they pour it over society in floods. Men are to be moralised only by placing them in a position which shall contribute to develop in them those habits which are social,

and to weaken those which are not so. A morality which has become instinctive is the true morality, the only morality which endures while religions and systems of philosophy pass away.

Let us now combine the three preceding elements, and we shall have Anarchy and its place in Socialist Evolution.

Emancipation of the producer from the yoke of

capital: production in common and free consumption of all the products of the common labour.

Emancipation from the governmental yoke: free development of individuals in groups and federations; free organisation ascending from the simple to the complex, according to mutual needs and tendencies.

Emancipation from religious

morality: free morality, without compulsion or authority, developing itself from social life and becoming habitual.

The above is no dream of students, it is a conclusion which results from an analysis of the tendencies of modern society:

Anarchist Communism is the union of the two fundamental tendencies of our society—a tendency towards economic

equality, and a tendency towards political liberty. So long as Communism presented itself under an authoritarian form, which necessarily implies government, armed with much greater power than that which it possesses today, inasmuch as it implies economic in addition to political power—so long as this was the case, Communism met with no sufficient

response. Before 1848 it could, indeed, sometimes excite for a moment the enthusiasm of the worker who was prepared to submit to any all-powerful government, provided it would release him from the terrible situation in which he was placed, but it left the true friends of liberty indifferent.

Anarchist Communism
maintains that most valuable of

all conquests—individual liberty—and moreover extends it and gives it a solid basis—economic liberty—without which political liberty is delusive; it does not ask the individual who has rejected god, the universal tyrant, god, the king, and god, the parliament, to give unto himself a god more terrible than any of the preceding—god, the Community, or to

abdicate upon its altar his independence, his will, his tastes, and to renew the vow of asceticism which he formerly made before the crucified god. It says to him, on the contrary, "No society is free so long as the individual is not so! Do not seek to modify society by imposing upon it an authority which shall make everything right; if you do, you will fail as popes and emperors

have failed. Modify society so that your fellows may not be any longer your enemies by the force of circumstances: abolish the conditions which allow some to monopolise the fruit of the labour of others; and instead of attempting to construct society from top to bottom, or from the centre to the circumference, let it develop itself freely from the simple to the composite, by

the free union of free groups. This course, which is so much obstructed at present, is the true forward march of society: do not seek to hinder it, do not turn your back on progress, but march along with it! Then the sentiment of sociability which is common to human beings, as it is to all animals living in society, will be able to develop itself freely, because our fellows will no longer be

our enemies, and we shall thus arrive at a state of things in which each individual will be able to give free rein to his inclinations, and even to his passions, without any other restraint than the love and respect of those who surround him.”

This is our ideal, and it is the ideal which lies deep in the hearts of people—of all peoples. We know full well

that this ideal will not be attained without violent shocks; the close of this century has a formidable revolution in store for us: whether it begins in France, Germany, Spain, or Russia, it will be an European one, and spreading with the same rapidity as that of our fathers, the heroes of 1848, it will set all Europe in a blaze. This coming Revolution will not aim

at a mere change of government, but will have a social character; the work of expropriation will commence, and exploiters will be driven out. Whether we like it or not, this will be done independently of the will of individuals, and when hands are laid on private property we shall arrive at Communism, because we shall be forced [by necessity] to do so. Communism, however,

cannot be either authoritarian or parliamentary, it must either be anarchist or non-existent; the mass of the people does not desire to trust itself again to any saviour, but will seek to organise itself by itself.

We do not advocate Communism and Anarchy because we imagine men to be better than they really are; if we had angels among us, we might be tempted to entrust to

them the task of organising us, though doubtless even *they* would show the cloven foot very soon. But it is just because we take men as they are that we say: “Do not entrust them with the governing of you. This or that despicable minister might have been an excellent man if power had not been given to him. The only way of arriving at harmony of interests is by a

society without exploiters and without rulers.” It is precisely because men are not angels that we say, “Let us arrange matters so that each man may see his interest bound up with the interests of others, then you will no longer have to fear his evil passions.”[[9](#)]

Anarchist Communism being the inevitable result of existing tendencies, it is towards this ideal that we must direct our

steps, instead of saying, “Yes, Anarchy is an excellent ideal,” and then turning our backs upon it. Should the approaching revolution not succeed in realising the whole of this ideal, still all that shall have been effected in the direction of it will remain, but all that shall have been done in a contrary direction will be doomed to disappear. It is a general rule that a popular

revolution may be vanquished, but that, nevertheless, it furnishes a motto for the evolution of the succeeding century. France expired under the heel of the allies in 1815, and yet the action of France had rendered serfdom impossible of continuance all over Europe, and representative government inevitable; universal suffrage was drowned in blood, and yet

universal suffrage is the watchword of the century. In 1871 the Commune expired under volleys of grapeshot, and yet the watchword in France today is “the Free Commune.” And if Anarchist Communism is vanquished in the coming revolution, after having asserted itself in the light of day, not only will it leave behind it the abolition of private property, not only will

the working man have learned his true place in society, not only will the landed and mercantile aristocracy have received a mortal blow, but Communist Anarchism will be the goal of the evolution of the twentieth century.

Anarchist Communism sums up all that is most beautiful and most durable in the progress of humanity: the sentiment of justice, the

sentiment of liberty, and solidarity or community of interest. It guarantees the free evolution both of the individual and of society. Therefore, it will triumph.

[8](#)[] Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–82) was a Spanish Baroque painter. Best known for his religious works, he also produced a considerable number of lively, realist portraits of contemporary working class women and children. (Editor)

[9](#)[] Note Kropotkin's emphasis here, which contrasts sharply with interpretations of Kropotkin as a

moral naturalist, i.e., a believer in the intrinsic goodness of “human nature.”
(Editor)

Preface to
**Bakunin's *The Paris
Commune and the
Idea of the State***
Translation by Will
Firth

*This preface to the 1892
Russian edition of Bakunin's
famous article on the Paris
Commune sees Kropotkin*

*summarise anarchism for
Russian radicals. It is
significant for his clear
support for anarchists to
organise as anarchists to
influence social struggle as
well urging them to apply
their libertarian ideas now.*

Dear Comrades,

I cannot but relate with the
fullest sympathy to the series
of pamphlets in Russian which
you have proposed under the

overall title “Anarchist Library.”

Upon seeing the “Library,” some of our comrades might think, “Why, when the Russian revolutionary party is split into so many factions, create yet another—an anarchist one? [[10](#)] Is it not better to unite all our efforts in the struggle against autocracy under one, common banner?” After an attentive discussion,

however, they themselves will probably agree that the question is redundant.

Since an anarchist current of thought exists in western Europe, and since it has been acquiring more and more supporters and making inroads, especially in recent years, even into countries where it has hitherto been inconspicuous, there is no reason to think that it could

not strike root and find supporters in Russia too—a country which, both in its history and the mentality of its thinkers, presents so many elements for the development of precisely the anarchist form of socialism. Therefore, the one thing to be desired is that the teachings of anarchy be set forth as clearly as possible in Russian, and that Russian revolutionaries arrive at clear

and definite opinions on this question—so that the teachings of anarchy be expressed in the most definite and concrete form.

The experience of life in western Europe teaches us that groups and associations of people with heterogeneous and often contradictory convictions are of no great benefit to the common cause. Differences of opinion or even

divergent sympathies remain and only hinder each other, often paralysing the energy of individuals. Conversely, when parties with very definite views are created, made up of people whom one can really consider like-minded—they can later unite among each other much more easily when it is necessary to act in concert against the common enemy. Every party attacks in its own

way, in accordance with its views, inclinations and sympathies.

There is nothing to fear in disunity as long as it is not caused by submission to particular personalities or by the intrigues of self-proclaimed leaders, but [rather] by different views on the course of history and the tasks of the revolution.

We are convinced, therefore,

that the formation of an anarchist party in Russia, far from being prejudicial to the common revolutionary cause, is desirable and useful to the greatest degree.

What is anarchy? The publications of the “Library” will have to be able to answer this question. But here I would like to draw Russian comrades’ attention to one objection addressed to

anarchists, which arises from a rather serious misunderstanding regarding the course of development of humanity in general.

The ultimate aspirations of the anarchists are twofold. On the one hand, they strive for the abolition of private property and the transfer of everything necessary for production (land, the tools of labour, and all the wealth

accumulated by humanity) into the hands of the people—and here their aspirations are identical to those of other socialists. But at the same time they strive for the abolition of the State—and here they are at variance with the State socialists. Anarchists are convinced that no substantial progress on the economic road can be achieved without the simultaneous destruction of

State organisation, which developed historically so as to uphold the rights to the land, the tools of labour and the labour of the people on behalf of those who now constitute the ruling and propertied classes.

State socialists strive to seize the existing power structures and to retain and strengthen their control over them; in place of all of today's ruling

classes (landlords,[\[11\]](#) industrialists, merchants, bankers, etc.) they strive to create one single proprietor—the State—to rule over all land, all works and factories, all accumulated wealth, and to be run by a Parliament.[\[12\]](#) Anarchists, however, are of the opinion that such a plan is simply unrealisable and that humanity will not be reconciled with such a colossal

government machine if it seizes control of both the political and economic life of the country. Anarchists ultimately believe that representative government itself, which was born merely so as to constrain monarchist power, has had its day and that the new, socialist life must create its own forms of political association. A new economic system will call for a

new political system.

Anarchists therefore strive not to strengthen State power but to undermine and fragment it, both territorially and functionally, and in the end to abolish it completely. Instead of a State union based on the subjugation of the people to rulers, be they usurpatory, hereditary or elected, anarchists work for the realisation of a society based

on the mutual agreement of producers and consumers—a society in which State power retains none of the prerogatives it has today, and where the life of individuals and their associations takes certain forms not because the law or Parliament orders it, but on the strength of their mutual understanding, their habits formed in a certain system and their

comprehension of the benefits of a free life.

What are anarchist views based on, what are their historical foundations, and why do anarchists conclude that contemporary life already contains a current leading to such free association? The answer takes more than a few words! For good reason a whole body of literature dealing with these questions

has been created. But there is one thing to which we should draw the attention of the Russian reader. “All this is very interesting—,” we often hear people say; “Anarchy is a fine ideal which might perhaps be attained one day. But for us, people of the late nineteenth century living under the lash of tsarism, there is no point wasting time on such discussions. We need to fight

against autocracy. When we overcome it, we will begin to put socialism into practice, and then the time will come to think about anarchist and statist forms of socialism.'

Here, if I am not mistaken, lies the fundamental error which leaves its imprint on the whole Russian movement.

The English revolutionaries of 1648 and the French of 1789–1793 understood

perfectly that autocratic royal rule was not upheld by just a handful of people. They knew that it had its roots in the history and the entire life of the people—it was the fruit of the system of serfdom in its full or mitigated form, which continued to exist (in practice, if not by law) among the peasants of England in the 17th century and among the French peasants in the 18th.

Therefore, when attacking royal power, they first sought support in the peasant movement. They did not dream of overthrowing the king by the strength of the intelligentsia alone. To a significant degree, they were socialists, and their writings, imbued with socialist views, aroused the people and called on them to rise up. They strove, in any case, to liberate

the peasants from the economic oppression of the landlords, and they understood that it would only be possible to overthrow and suppress royal power if a peasant uprising swept across the country like a mighty wave. They did not treat the peasants as mute animals, incapable of staging a rebellion, but aided them, through concentrated propaganda and especially

agitation, to broaden their usually small-scale uprisings and merge them into one. They understood that striking a blow at the land-ownership of the landlords and undermining royal power were two inseparable sides of the same coin. It is interesting to note that, even in this century, the Second Republic of 1848 and the constitutional concessions in Germany in the

same year were not the result of palace conspiracies but of a broad social movement, whose scale and depth we only appreciate now when we begin to study the exceedingly extensive literature of the time.

To move towards socialism or even rural revolution via a political coup is pure utopia, since we see throughout history that political changes result from the major

economic revolutions which are taking place, and not vice versa. That is why the liberation of the Russian peasants from the yoke of serfdom, which has oppressed them to this day, becomes the prime task of the Russian revolutionary. In working towards this end, he is firstly working directly and immediately for the benefit of the people and it is in the

direct benefit for the people that he sees the supreme goal of his efforts; and secondly, he is preparing for the undermining and constraining of centralised State power.

But if this is so, the revolutionary first of all has to make clear to himself what he wants. In what form can an economic revolution be accomplished which would take away the land and the

rights of its current owners derived from land-ownership? Should he strive for the goal of the State taking control of all the land and distributing it to the peasants, or not? This question has to be resolved, not in two hundred years' time, but now. Indeed, if humanity's development is towards creating State-like forms of land-ownership; if such a form of land-ownership

is possible and desirable; and if, finally, one can predict that the transfer of land to the people could really be carried out by the State, i.e. by the Parliament or the Assembly of the Land,[[13](#)] then one could just as well become a statist socialist, a social democrat.

If, however—and we adhere to this opinion—there is no relying on the Assembly of the Land or the Parliament to take

the land away from the landlords and to create a new system of land-ownership; if Parliaments can at best legalise revolutionary facts already accomplished and are unable to accomplish them actively themselves; if there is no reason to think that the Russian people will carry out a rural revolution in some utterly unique way unheard of in history; and if, on the contrary,

one should think that in Russia, like everywhere else, only a peasant uprising can take the land away from the kulaks and landlords, and that the revolution will be all the more comprehensive, the more personal initiative and activity emerges from the peasantry and the less they wait for any alleged saviours; [\[14\]](#) and if, finally, new State centralisation can only impede

the strength and depth of the movement, one must give up the ideal of the State. One must then take up the standpoint of the anarchists and act with a view to constraining not only tsarist power but all functions of the State in general; one must strive to arouse personal initiative in the worker and peasant masses; in a word, one must accept the anarchist

programme.

We do not thrust our programme on anyone, but we urge Russian revolutionaries to seriously consider these questions, to think them over independently and finally resolve them. A mistake in the choice between the two programmes of socialism—statist or anti-statist—will undoubtedly affect the success of the movement as a whole

and could delay it or set it on an erroneous path for decades.

As regards the popular view that the anarchist ideal is distant, that the people are not prepared for it, and that it will never be realised, such assertions again reveal a major misunderstanding concerning the role of the ideal in history.

The point is that humanity is not a unified entity and that it harbours several different

ideals at every stage of its development—the ideals of serfdom, constitutionalism, socialism, anarchy, etc. But none of these ideals is ever fully achieved because, long before they can be realised, new ideals arise, or rather [existing ones] gather strength, under the new conditions of life, and these new ideals modify the old.

Every progress of humanity

is the result of different currents of thought developing in society at a given moment in time; so to claim that one ideal will be realised first, and the other later, is simply to falsely interpret the facts of history as a whole.

The republicans of the last century dreamed of a worldwide republic modelled on those of the ancient world. They fought for it, perished in

the snows of the Alps, on the plains of Belgium, in the fields of Italy and Germany. But were they able to realise it? Of course not! Moreover, when the worldwide union of peoples, in whose name they died, is indeed realised, it will be incomparably fuller, broader and more socialistic than everything our grandfathers dreamed of one hundred years ago. It will be

replenished and modified under the influence of all the ideals which developed later, in the course of the nineteenth century. The deeds of our fathers and grandfathers did not pass without trace, of course. Thanks to them, these fundamental principles of the First French Republic—the abolition of serfdom, the abolition of dependence, the abolition of autocratic royal power and the

equality of all before the law
—went on to become the
slogan for the whole
development of Europe in the
course of our century. But
their ideals were also much
deeper than this and will only
be implemented in reality
through socialism.

In exactly the same way, the
socialists of the 1830s and
1840s strove for a system of
Christian communism

managed by a rigid State hierarchy strictly subordinate to an elected body of scholars and elders. But they were unable to realise their ideal, nor will it ever be realised. If communism develops out of the coming revolution, it will be neither Christian nor statist: it will be free communism based not on the teachings of Christ but on the mutual understanding of human rights

and responsibilities. It will be more anarchistic because while those people, whose thoughts found expression in Louis Blanc, strove to create a Jacobin socialist State, new and broader ideals were emerging under the pen of Proudhon and Max Stirner, who already then laid the foundations for the anarchist current of thought.

The same applies to the

social-democratic ideal. It grew up in Jacobin soil and inherited from its predecessors the belief in the principle of the State. It still believes in representative government. But long before it even came close to its realisation, a new ideal was able to develop: the anarchist ideal, which does not believe in representative government and does not trust the State, but strives to arouse

the initiative of individuals and their free association through mutual agreement.

Whatever kind of system is realised in the near future, it will certainly bear the imprint of our anarchist views. The number of anarchists is constantly growing, and thinkers are constantly arising (quite outside our party), such as [Jean-Marie] Guyau, who implement these same

principles in the philosophy of life, and our party is constantly winning over intellectuals, who elaborate various aspects of our teachings. Therefore, in western Europe, at this very moment, anarchist teachings are laying their imprint on contemporary thought—just as the statist socialism of the 1860s laid its imprint on European thought, even then, when the number of conscious

socialists was very small.

Social democracy now has to reckon with the criticism, and also with the energy of the followers of anarchism, and there can be no doubt that anarchists have played their part in the transformation of society—especially seeing as our teachings are not the fruit of an abstract premise, not a utopia which has emerged from theoretical

considerations, but a generalisation of the currents of thought and activity we already observe in contemporary life. Just how great a contribution our party will make to the development of the European revolution—time will tell. But one thing is for sure: this contribution will depend directly on the number of anarchists, the depth of their thought and their energy.

Thus, in order to be an anarchist and act as an anarchist, there is no need to wait one or two hundred years. Not only can one come together on any issue right now and organise on the basis of equality—or a pyramidal hierarchy; not only can one decide in all individual activities to be an anarchist—or an authoritarian; but also on the incomparably more

important question of goals, aspirations and means of revolutionary action, and of the most immediate tasks, one can already be guided by either the anarchist principle—or that of the State.

A person who believes in the miraculous power of the law, courts, police, prisons and gendarmes, even if they be socialist ones, and a person who believes in neither the law

nor its representatives, and who seeks allies among people in their enlightened self-interest, in their “worldly” habits and customs, and strives for the elimination of obstacles to the manifestation of these social habits—these two people will inevitably look in contrary ways at every fact of social life, at every fact and tenet of political economy, history and sociology in

general, and they will therefore act completely differently at any given moment.[\[15\]](#)

As to which of them more truly understands the tasks of contemporary life and the aspirations of human societies in general—everyone actively involved in social life will ultimately decide for themselves. I hope the “Library” will aid in that

process in publishing the series of pamphlets devoted to elaborating the theory and principles of Anarchy.

P. Kropotkin

London, 21st April 1892

[10](#)[] Kropotkin uses the term *partii* (literally “party”) in a broad sense, as was common at the time, to mean a dedicated, organised force or movement, etc. (Translator)

[11](#)[] The *Pomeshchiki* were the feudal landlords in Russia from the late 15th century to the early 20th. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, members of the *dvorianstvo* (nobility or gentry)

who owned land were usually called *pomeshchiki* and were the bulwark of the autocracy. (Editor)

[12](#)[] Kropotkin uses the term *Palata*, or chamber, in a broad sense to mean parliament. (Translator)

[13](#)[] The *Zemsky Sobor* roughly means Assembly of the Land and was a body similar to that of the French Estates General. It assembled three categories of population: the nobility and high bureaucracy, the Orthodox clergy, and representatives of merchants and townspeople (the third estate). (Editor)

[14](#)[] The *kulaks* were relatively affluent farmers in the Russian Empire. Unlike most of the rural peasant population,

kulaks had enough land to allow them to hire labour to work it. They often lent money to others in their community. The word is derived from the Russian for “fist” (by extension, “tight-fisted”). (Editor)

[15](#)[] Here, as in some of his other writings, Kropotkin uses the adjective *mirskoi* (“worldly”) to refer to a combination of two characteristics, both derived from meanings of the noun *mir*: on the one hand, it refers to the “world,” and on the other to the traditional Russian village community, the “mir”; i.e. he means people who are outward-looking and also have both feet on the ground. This amounts to a play on words and

is presumably the reason for the quotation marks. (Translator)

Letter to Maria Isidine Goldsmith Translation by Paul Sharkey

This letter addresses anarchist involvement in both national liberation and the labour movements. During the Greco-Turkish War (February–December 1897), a group with anarchist

*tendencies, the
Internationalist Revolutionary
Socialist Students (Étudiants
Socialistes Révolutionnaires
Internationalistes, or ESRI)
had been contacted by anti-
semitic students about
mounting a joint campaign in
support of Cretan
independence from Turkey.
The group publicly refused the
offer (in **Le Temps
Nouveaux**, 6th March, 1897)*

*and asked Kropotkin's opinion
about national liberation
struggles and other issues.
The response was this letter,
addressed to the student
Maria Isidine Goldsmith, a
Russian member of the ESRI.*

11th May 1897

Dear comrade, [[16](#)]

Please forgive me for leaving
your extremely interesting
letter unanswered for such a
long time. I was still unwell, so

much so that I was obliged to abandon a very pressing task and seek care in town. I have pretty much recovered, although not entirely.

I am now going to write to a comrade in Geneva about matters in Paris. I see that in *Les Temps Nouveaux* [Jean] Grave and [André] Girard[[17](#)] have declared that they have only the friendliest feelings towards your group—which is

what I was expecting—and nothing more. Polemic in the press is normal practice among us. I mean to say that when I read the article signed “Kroujok,” the thought that immediately occurred to me was “that is not the way to put it” and I deplored the fact that in polemics people never stick to the essential point; quite the opposite.[\[18\]](#) That’s human nature, unfortunately. Had you

forwarded your letter—in which everything is laid out to perfection (as all three of us, [Warlaam] Tcherkesoff, my wife Sophie and I, having read it, unanimously agreed) in its entirety, the controversy would immediately have been steered in the present direction.

(I have just been re-reading the “Kroujok” letter. Plainly it was written in anger, in a rather too provocative, overly

personal tone that does not get to the nub of things). Well, none of that is serious and it is all in the past. Let me now move on to the nub, which is to say, your letter and your very fine way of posing the problem with regard to the future.

As far as the matter of Crete goes, your position strikes me as having been perfectly correct. Indeed, [Errico]

Malatesta endorses all activities of the sort, but even [his newspaper] *L'Agitazione* has been obliged to pour cold water on the heads of those who were setting off as volunteers. It would take too long to write about this subject, too long because of a mass of political intrigues and complications.

But all of this relates only to one single instance, Crete,

rather than to the national question overall.

In the phrasing of your rejection, Points 1 and 3 are perfect: you want no truck with anti-semites or other scum and have no wish to look to government (naturally! That's all it would need!). But with regard to Point 2 you *“fail to see the point of joining in with demonstrations that are purely national in*

character”; that is more debatable, as formulated, at any rate.

It seems to me that the “purely nationalist character” of national movements is a fiction. There is an economic basis everywhere, or some basis for freedom and respect for the individual. There was an economic basis to be found in the national movements of Serbia and Bulgaria. What

happened was that after the war, the Turks (which is to say, not just the Turks but the Turkish members of the government and aristocratic officialdom, pro-Turkish Bulgars, Greeks, etc.) were big landowners enforcing serfdom. There was serfdom in Bulgaria right up until the 1878 war.[\[19\]](#) Lavellye [Laveleye], who, it seems, was on the ground there, offers a

very fine explanation of this. The Bulgarian government entered into a commitment to pay an indemnity to the big Turkish landowners as a means of doing away with serfdom. That was what lay at the root of the Russians' intrigues in Bulgaria: "Look what your princes are up to. You earned your freedom in battle, yet they force you to pay indemnities."

It seems to me that the same situation exists in Crete, where the peasants are Greek but the town dwellers Turks, and where, in particular, the Sultan himself (in accordance with feudal law) is the largest landowner and—I believe—representative of serfdom.

Our task should be to raise the economic question. I even reckon, after much thought on the subject, that the failures of

all national movements (Polish, Finnish, Irish, etc., and even, I reckon, Georgian, even though Tcherkesoff denies this, albeit “mildly”), have this feature common to all national movements, namely, that the economic question—always an agrarian issue—is left to one side. In Finland, the Russian government relies upon the Finnish campaign against the

big Swedish landlords. Once Russia was beaten, Shamil set about abolishing the serfdom and slavery to which the mullahs and the like clung (Tcherkesoff has explained this very well).[[20](#)] In Ireland, the greatest blight derives from the fact that the leaders (Parnell, for one[[21](#)]) are also landowners, like the English, and then there is the power of Catholicism and the priests.

In short, it seems to me that in the nationalist movement we have a huge task ahead of us in setting the question [of national liberation] on an economic footing and in waging a campaign against serfdom whilst combating [oppression by] foreign nationality.

Furthermore, there are plenty of other considerations. I despise the Russian

government in Poland not merely because it underpins economic inequality (such as for the liberal Polish nobles who were crushed during the 1863 insurrection), but because it stifles the individual (the Polish tongue, Polish song, etc.) and I despise anyone who is an oppressor. The same thing is going on in Ireland where certain friends of mine have been taken into

protective custody for having sung “Green Erin” and wearing green scarves.[[22](#)] In those lands under the sway of the Turks, the situation is even worse. Obviously, the workers are suffering everywhere: they are of course decimated by childhood diseases in the factories: it is all ghastliness over there, to be sure. But the difference resides in that oppression and in the mothers

raped and the children sabred to death. If ten women workers were to suffer the Armenians' fate in Paris tomorrow, if two children were to be killed by factory-owners, Paris would rise up and sweep the factories from the face of the earth.

Wherever people have not risen up against the exploitation of an individual, exploitation by the economy,

the government and even religion, and more especially the nation, we must stand by them [the exploited]. [Those who say] “No rebels they,” take note. Which is why all my sympathies lie with the blacks in America, the Armenians in Turkey, the Finns and the Poles in Russia, etc.

Note, further, my dear friend, that all of these

movements march in step. You did not live through the years 1859 to 1860. But let me assure you that Garibaldi's brave campaigns did more to spread the liberal, radical spirit of revolt and socialism right across Europe than anything else.[\[23\]](#)

The Russian peasants were waiting for Garibaldi. "There'll be no freedom until Garibaldi comes," I have heard with my

own ears. And you know, but for rebellious peasants in Russia there would be no freedom there. And their past achievements deserve recounting.

In relation to the Cretan issue, we should do nothing. (The movement has been moulded from above, by the State, and, besides, the issue is complicated by British capital or insurrectionary activities of

the peasants). But do not shun national movements. The times are not yet ripe, but it falls to us to play our part. Just one more thing—until such time as the national question is resolved—it engages every force in the land. Or else lots of activities hinge upon the national issue, as in, say, Serbia or Ireland.

In relation to national questions as in everything, we

should play our part. You will be aware that a party has been formed within the Irish movement (with a great friend of mine and a comrade of his, [Michael] Davitt) which has set out, in addition to the take-over of the land, a social programme and, more especially, a workers' programme. You will be aware of Tom Mann's campaign on behalf of the "dock

labourers.” But did you know that it was launched by the Glasgow Irish?[[24](#)] There was a plan by some Irishmen, too few in number, to cripple England’s trade by means of a big dock strike. To which end delegates were despatched to the Irish national groups in America. Tom Mann has taken up the baton but I am well aware of the Irish origins of this campaign. That, it

seems to me, is how in each nationalist movement we should raise the people's issues alongside nationalist ones. But in order to do that, we need to have a foothold in all the national movements. In short, our relations should go something like this: "You want to shrug off the yoke of the Russians, Turks, British? Excellent! Set to it! Tackle the issue of the people and then

you'll have the national problem resolved. We too hate your oppressors, but we look deeper and we see the oppressed people. We are not going to amalgamate with you and we will not be distanced from you, but we shall raise the question of the people. And the more honest among you will be with us!"

(Doesn't it strike you—this has only just occurred to me—

that there is an analogy with our dealings with radical politicians? “You seek political freedom? Make it a people’s issue!” That is our stance on Russia for sure. We too hate autocracy, but we go beyond that and raise the [social] problem as a whole). There you have it, my dear friend: a hurried answer to your first question about whether anarchism should whole-

heartedly support the nationalist movement and the one in Crete in particular.

Your second point “regarding feelings” and your third regarding polemics require no response. Sure, polemics can be engaged in without insult and never in a personalised way, but people never stay within those boundaries. Which is why I prefer to keep well clear of

polemics and speak for myself. Comments and replies will follow. What is my position on such-and-such a matter? In which case I look to the opinions not of a given person or group, but the general consensus, and following the example of our beloved Darwin, I strive to bolster the school of thought that I intend to criticise, by means of a range of arguments

that could be raised or that are not cited in certain cases, but that could be used. Whether that is a good example to follow, I do not know. Maybe it would be better to engage in direct polemic. Be that as it may, we should do so dispassionately. And neither Girard nor the Circle has demonstrated such calm in this specific instance. You write that there is “a very striking

show of contempt for theory” and you cite the examples of [*Le Père*] *Peinard*, “Le Pain Gratuit,”[[25](#)] etc. Your group reckons that these schools of thought need opposing, and so do I. But try to grasp this very important, crucial point. Crucial in that this is a very marked tendency. Only very recently I heard a similar remark from one “theoretician”! Now we have

to wait for anarchists to cast their votes: Merlino, for one. [26] Why not? These are what are described as practical folk.

It is an issue terrifying for all of us without exception, for every party and individual, an issue to which each of us must provide an actual answer so that some response or other on this matter can definitively encapsulate the ethical and political stance of individuals

and parties. Of the two extreme answers, “steer well clear” and “get involved in everything,” neither suits. As a general rule, compromises are unproductive, so we have to look for a different tack.

What “get involved in everything” leads to, we know. We have a ready-made example in the social democrats. Back in 1869 Liebknecht wrote: “*Wer*

parlamentiert, parlamentelt:
wer parlamentelt, paktiert"
(He who goes to parliament
becomes a parliamentarian,
and he who becomes a
parliamentarian makes
compromises). His prediction
came true, but annoyingly,
there is no trace of socialism
left in social democracy these
days. And if anarchists were
to succumb to the spell of [*Le*
Père] *Peinard*—echoing many

other members of that tendency—before ten years were out, there would be nothing left of the anarchist party.[[27](#)] We would have to conjure up another one and the very idea would be sunk. And in need of reviving. Then again, “steer well clear” is not suitable either. The outsider stays there and has no influence over the course of history. Others, rogues for the

most part, go with the trend and turn into leaders for their own benefit or that of their class. And after a political change-over, the people would find themselves as bewildered and unhappy as ever. In the life of any party there comes a time spent wandering in the desert. As for us, we have been through this already when we had only three-, five- or ten-man groups to thrash out

our theory, our theoretical foundations and their practical implementation. One stands apart in order to do so. True, each of us has to take his turn at this before we can arrive at our personal view. But lo and behold, the notion of the party is starting to bounce back, winning over broader and broader swathes of people, and it looks as if it offers an answer—not theoretically, but

through deeds—to the crucial question: how are we to go about it? The vast majority of people, and thus of parties, trade in compromises, and between one compromise and the next, they slip down the slope of utter depersonalisation. But why? It is because their personality is inadequately defined, so that, on arriving in a new environment, they bring no

influence to bear or find only a partial acceptance, since they lack dynamism.

There is a significant band of folk, publishers of a journal or the core of a party, who keep faith with themselves and with their ideals. They do not confine themselves in a monastery but operate in the public arena, taking a hand in the course of history, in the collectivity or alongside other

people. This handful of resolute battlers sustain the ideal, the principle, in the huddle of those who stand ready to swap their ideals for a toy rattle or anything that lets them express themselves noisily. Unfortunately, such resolute militants are generally few, all too few in number. Some drift away, others cloister themselves away and are soon waxing wrathful over

some trifle, or indeed give it all up. Not for a second do I doubt where your sympathy lies. You are not tempted by any of these escape routes. So you should remain in the ranks of the fighters, the resolute militants.

So much for the broader framework; now for the detail. You mention co-operators, so let me seize upon that point. Is there anything worse! These

days they are bourgeois. But the idea that gave rise to that movement was not bourgeois. And at present that idea which has inspired lots of militants in their ranks is not quite bourgeois either. One could declare: I want no truck with them; they are bourgeois. And that is what we did. Back when we numbered a hundred and ten people and when there was no hope of the co-

operator community espousing communist ideas, much less anarchist ideas. But thanks to the spirit of the times, those ideas have cropped up among them too. Furthermore, the essence, the very idea of that movement is to set up producer and consumer groups that exchange products and the fruits of their labours. But for that hidden idea their movement would long since

have evaporated. To set your cap at converting Rothschild would be pointless, but spreading the communist ideal to co-operators, that is feasible. Indeed, if a determined individual comes along who thinks and lives the principles of anarchism and throws himself into anarchist or communist propaganda in co-operator ranks, let him set to it. As a surety against loss

of heart, all he needs is to feel the support of a compact band of friends not disposed to compromise and who fly their colours. At present the English co-operators and I are on good terms. State socialism is not to their taste. They asked me to write an article on agriculture for their *Annual* and I did so. Just recently they asked me for an article on nationalisation of the railways for the

forthcoming *Annual*. I know that they want no truck with “Bismarck-and-Liebknecht-or-Plekhanov-style”

nationalisation and I wonder: how can the railways be wrested from the hands of capitalists and placed in the people’s service? State nationalisation disgusts them and they are searching for an anarchist course. And had I known that and thought so,

and above all, had I lived among railwaymen down the years, I would have written about the subject. I would have written, and others who cannot or will not write because they do not associate with us, why not nudge them in the direction of socialism and enlighten them as to the anarchist viewpoint?

Note that if we decline to even consider such cases, to

look for formulas or to help these people in their quest, what is going to happen? Seeing as they get no help from us, they will embrace the appropriate statist formula and will embrace statist socialism, the narrow path of social democracy and politicking. Look at what happened in 1878 with the Bulgars who have thrown themselves into the Russian embrace because

they could find no help anywhere else. Out of this came the kingdom of Bulgaria, a pathetic construct, given the absence of any republican, socialist or anarchist forces which might help them out. Take Russia. There is a strong workers' movement (and, as one Englishman who lived in Russia for several years recently declared, "Two years does not a worker make").

Nobody bothered with the workers, nobody but the social democrats. And now they have the workers' movement in their grip, and they are steering it towards their goals, towards catastrophe. And is that not what has happened in Western Europe as well? The entire workers' movement has fallen into the hands of the politicians who smother it, just as they already have done to

the revolutionary 1st of May, and why? Because we anarchists are very few in number, and what happens is that we steer clear of the workers' movement (when the workers are not steering clear of us), instead of going to it. And even during strikes, some people find it "very anarchistic" not to side with the strikers and to carry on working.

They cling to purity of principle in remaining aloof and not engaging with any social matter, and there is no merit in that and it brings no advantage. We have to cling to our principles while working with others, among others. I note, by the way, with great bitterness, that in practice it is constantly the case that some people, die-hard supporters of the repudiation of everything

—strikes, labour agitation, etc.
—having turned forty, make
an abrupt about-face.

Our party is—right now—at
a critical juncture. Our
sympathisers are many and
people are coming over to us
from every direction, signing
up to one point in our
programme. There are
bourgeois under [Herbert]
Spencer's spell, bourgeois
economists, the religious-

minded, Tolstoyans, etc. Certain anarchists would have us turn them all away whilst others would have us welcome them all. Both those approaches are wrong. We must not turn them all away nor welcome them all in. We need to build up a group of determined people who will go out on strike and stay anarchists. They will join the Poles, but as I once told a

gathering of Poles, the first bullet must be for the Polish dictator and the first noose for the Polish lord and estate-owner. They will pour into the workers' movement in order to bring our principles into it and hold out against the politicians, but lots of them will leave and will become turncoats like Merlino or Costa.[\[28\]](#) “Bon voyage!” Those we do not need. Better that they should

go to hell right now than later, when the movement has grown and taken to the streets, when their leaving would be tantamount to treachery. Ultimately, nothing human ought to be beyond our influence. We can have our say, offer our fresh and fruitful ideas. We have to anticipate what is going to happen all around us in hundreds of movements. We cannot

convert everyone to
anarchism, and, being
anarchists, we know that not
everyone is of the same mind.
For every movement has its
cause and its rationale. But we
are duty-bound to examine
our view in all these
movements with the candour
of a Bazarov, and, if possible,
bring our influence to bear on
them.

For us there is only one

prohibition: we will never be in the ranks of the exploiters, the bosses and the religious leaders. We shall never allow ourselves to be chosen as or turn into exploiters, bosses, leaders. That is a lot—more than it may seem at first glance, and it is enough. As for everything else, we can and should dabble. We shall never have any truck with the building of some pyramidal

organisation, be it economic, governmental or educational-religious (even be it a revolutionary one). We shall never have any hand in conjuring up man's governance of his fellow man in the realm of production and distribution, political organisation, leadership, revolutionary organisation, etc. As for the rest, it strikes me that we ought to get involved

and put our criticisms and propositions everywhere. Should somebody cave in along the way and embrace other people's views instead of ours, we shall cope without him, and that's that! Just as Bazarov would do, we need to tell them bluntly: "*Farewell Costa, farewell Brousse, farewell Barrucand, farewell Merlino: do as you please. We shall press on with our work*

and come the day of the great battle we shall find ourselves in opposite camps.”

There is a danger, of course. But only one: how could such a group selflessly applying its principles in their full extent and bravely flying its red flag during strikes or national uprisings disappear? And it is my belief that just such a group will emerge. Which is why we at *Les Temps*

Nouveaux have not thrown in our lot with [*Le Père*] *Peinard* or *Le Libertaire*, for our view was that the priority was to widen the circle of our friends and sympathisers so as to found that group. That M. P. (who is that, actually?) should have raised the issue of becoming outsiders is a good thing. That he may have overstated it, well, what can we do about that? We need to

understand this question. In fact, we must not abandon the entire workers' movement to the mercy of the politicians, and the latter must not capture the reins of every social agitation. In every social upheaval we have to have our own say, and (if possible) must demonstrate with deeds what we are capable of.

And once that band of "determined militants" comes

into existence, there will be no threat to us: contrary to what has been the case, the threat will be facing socialism which is today precisely as I described it in “All of us Socialists.”[[29](#)] Bismarck, Alexander II, the lawmaker who gave us the 8-hour day and the prosecutor who acknowledged that in a couple of hundred years’ time anarchy would be genuinely

desirable, but, in the meanwhile, off to jail!, might say: “All of us anarchists!” That really is a dangerous reef. But it exists, it has not been done away with and it simply remains for the ship of anarchism not to run aground the way the social democrat vessel has, to the extent that there are no more socialists left.

One more thing: each

movement should be evaluated separately on its merits. For instance, Crete where (even though no uprising has taken place) it struck me from the outset that we have nothing to say. Or indeed “Boulangism,” where, again right from the outset, it was plain “that this was Boulangism’s last card.” Needless to say, we want no part of a movement in favour of dictatorship. In addition to

what I have set down above, I see no general yardstick. But there is something better than written prescriptions. There is the sentiment and intuition accrued by every politicised militant and which enable him to get the measure of a movement and divine its secret recesses.

But that will do for today. I got your notes this morning and I started this letter

yesterday evening. Write me, please, if I am slow in answering you: do not think twice about writing down your criticisms, as you now do. In the throes of work we must sometimes take a breather and a little reflection always does one good. It always pleases me greatly to answer your letters. Let me close with a big handshake and cordial best wishes. Give my best wishes to

your mother.

Sincerely yours,
P. Kropotkin

[P.S.] I can see that there is still much to be said, particularly about crucial activity to be done by a band of determined people among the workers. The same might well be as true of a vast anarchist movement as of the group in question. But this letter is not the last.

[16](#)[] Maria Isidine Goldsmith (1873–1933) was an anarchist and scientist of Russian and French decent. She became a close friend of Kropotkin, and a prolific contributor to the French and Russian anarchist press of her day. (Editor)

[17](#)[] André Girard (a.k.a. Max Buhr, 1860–1942) was a French anarchist, later a syndicalist. (Editor)

[18](#)[] In the pages of *Les Temps Nouveaux*, following the ESRI's declaration, a debate had ensued; when the ESRI were accused of “intolerance” and “sectarianism,” a member, Marc Pierrot, wrote in defense of the group, drawing a polemical reply signed by “Kroujok”

(10th April, 1897).

[19](#)[] The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 was fought between the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Orthodox coalition led by the Russian Empire and composed of several Balkan countries. It reflected both emerging 19th-century Balkan nationalism and Russian hopes of recovering territorial losses suffered during the Crimean War, including access to the Black Sea. Russia succeeded in claiming several provinces in the Caucasus, the principalities of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro formally proclaimed independence from the Ottoman Empire and, after almost five centuries of Ottoman

domination, the Bulgarian state was re-established as the Principality of Bulgaria. The Congress of Berlin also allowed Austria-Hungary to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina and the United Kingdom to take over Cyprus. (Editor)

[20](#)[] Imam Shamil (1797–1871) was an Avar political and religious leader of the Muslim tribes of the Northern Caucasus. He was a leader of anti-Russian resistance in the Caucasian War, defeating them in 1843 and 1845. He was caught by the Russians in 1859 and forced to swear allegiance to the Tsar and move to live in Central Russia. (Editor)

[21](#)[] Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–

1891) was an Irish landlord, nationalist political leader, land reform agitator, and the founder and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. He led the Irish Parliamentary Party as Member of Parliament through the period of Parliamentary nationalism in Ireland between 1875 and his death in 1891. He was revered by many subsequent Irish parliamentary republicans and nationalists. (Editor)

[22](#)[] From 1536, Henry VIII of England decided to conquer Ireland and bring it under his control although this was finally completed during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I after several brutal conflicts. From the mid-16th to

the early 17th century, crown governments carried out a policy of land confiscation and colonisation known as Plantations using Scottish and English Protestants. This produced Irish nationalist movements and continuing attempts to regain independence, including numerous rebellions. Kropotkin is referring to repression by the British state against expressions of Irish culture and nationalism used to combat struggle for independence. (Editor)

[23](#)[] Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882) was an Italian general and politician. He is considered as one of Italy's "fathers of the fatherland." He was a central figure in the Italian

Risorgimento, personally commanding and fighting in many military campaigns that led eventually to the formation of a unified Italy. While Garibaldi himself was a well known socialist, his men were of different political leanings and banded together in the name of national freedom and unity. (Editor)

[24](#)[] Tom Mann (1856–1941) was a British trade unionist, a successful organiser and a popular public speaker in the labour movement. Initially a Social Democrat, his experiences in the Australia with the Labour Party saw him move to a syndicalist position. Returning to Britain in 1910, he founded the

Industrial Syndicalist Education League and led the 1911 Liverpool General Transport Strike. In 1917, he returned to Marxist-Socialism and became active in the Communist Party. (Editor)

[25](#)[] Victor Barrucand (1866–1934) was a prolific and respected journalist who wrote on many subjects (history, politics, forgotten texts, poetry). He was an anarchist for a period, producing a book in 1896 entitled and conducted propaganda in Paris in favour of *Free Bread* (*Le Pain Gratuit*). (Editor).

[26](#)[] Francesco Saverio Merlino (1856–1930) was an Italian lawyer and leading anarchist activist and thinker

between the 1870s and 1890s. He moved away from anarchism to a reformist socialist position in the late 1890s but remained close to his former colleagues, successfully defending Malatesta and other anarchists in 1921 when they had been arrested on spurious charges during the near-revolutionary *biennio rosso* (the “two red years” of 1919 and 1920) in Italy. (Editor)

[27](#)[] A reference to those anarchists like Pouget who argued that syndicalism was sufficient in itself and that the anarchist movement should merge into the unions, rejecting the need for specific anarchist organisations. While Kropotkin was in favour of

anarchist participation in the labour movement, he opposed those libertarians who failed to see the necessity for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence it. (Editor)

[28](#)[] Andrea Costa (1851–1910) was originally an Italian anarchist, before becoming a Social Democrat in 1879. He co-founded the *Partito dei Lavoratori Italiani* in 1892. He became an active politician, being the mayor of Imola and a representative in the Italian Parliament. (Editor)

[29](#)[] “Tous socialistes” was published in *Le Révolté*, 17th September 1881 and included as a chapter in *Words of a Rebel*. (Editor)

Letter to Max Nettlau

Translation by Paul
Sharkey

*This lengthy letter to
anarchist historian Max
Nettlau discusses Kropotkin's
thoughts on both
individualism/individuality
and the labour movement
within communist-anarchism,*

reiterating his long-held position that anarchists had to be part of the working class and its organisations and struggles in order to be both effective and true to anarchist principles.

Viola, Bromley, Kent

1st March 1902

My dear friend,[[30](#)]

I read your letter with much interest—personal as well as general—and I should like to

reply to it at some length as well as discuss its core points. Perhaps I shall some day, in the form of articles on the subject of individualism. In any event, let me try to answer you now without getting bogged down in over-long detail.

Let me tackle the central point of your letter—where you ask why the younger generation are no longer with

us as once they were back in 1890–1894. “Back then,” you say, “we were part of a whole wave of libertarian art and literature.”

Well, we still are. Except that they want nothing more to do with us, and having provided us with a few comrades, they are now what they always have been: epicureans, highly bourgeois individualists who apparently

find Nietzsche (much as their predecessors did Darwin) more to their taste, or rather, a better excuse, than anarchy. [\[31\]](#)

In my view, the 1890–1894 wave can be explained like this: working class youth had believed (Boulangist agitation having stirred up a climate of restlessness) that all it took to trigger the revolution was a few heroic feats. Some

serious, educated folk from the bourgeoisie thought likewise. We have realised since that this was an illusion and in France and elsewhere we have been forced to fall back on the slow work of organisation and preparatory propaganda among the working masses. Which is the phase we find ourselves in at the moment.

As to the bourgeois youth, in

France—between the ages of 19 and 30—it has always had a fondness for bold and shocking assertions. They were caught up in anarchy's negation and “nihilism.” Besides, the commitment of young workers and their spirit of self-sacrifice left its mark on them. And in the end, a trend akin to the nihilism of Bazarov—a trend in *morals*, a *Kulturbewegung* [cultural

movement]—striving to slough off certain conventional lies—had ripened in France. And came to pass. With this difference, that in Russia the movement in nihilist morals (1859–1869), was followed by the populist movement, *v narod*—whereas in France nothing of the sort transpired. [32] Which is why the revolutionary movement has reaped no direct benefit from

it. Where are the Mirabeaus?
[[33](#)] Where are the writers of
paeans to Ravachol?[[34](#)] Who
has put his shoulder to the
wheel of revolution? Has this
younger generation produced
so much as one person to
replace the elders? *Nihil*.

These days, that youth is
Nietzschean because—as you
phrase it so well—
Nietzscheanism is one of a
number of *spurious*

individualisms. It is the individualism of the bourgeois that can only survive as long as there is oppression for the masses and—note this well—lackeyism, slavishness towards tradition, *obliteration of the individuality* of the oppressor himself, as well as among the down-trodden masses. At bottom, the “*handsome blond beast*” is a *slave*—slave to king, priest, law and tradition

—a member of the herd of oppressors, bereft of personality.[[35](#)]

It is not on account of our having become *trade unionists* that such youngsters have deserted us. Lured by the picturesque, they have had their fill of it, once the picturesque and the dramatic ground to a halt and once they had to settle for the slow, daily grind. “I came over to you

because I thought the revolution was just around the corner: but I see now that a protracted effort to educate is called for.” How many times have I heard that said these past 25 years!!! They were tickled by the picturesque aspects of Ravachol, Vaillant and de Pauwels—and retreated back into their humdrum routine as soon as they realised that they were

being asked to prove their thirst for *freedom* with sacrifices.[[36](#)] Not that I ask acts of individual revolt of them: epicureans do not go in for that sort of thing. But even when it comes down to championing the cause of the downtrodden (take [Jean] Grave's most recent appeal), or libertarian schooling, or the piddling little affairs of day-to-day propaganda—where are

they? It will still be necessary to find workers! Do you know of any trend, any call to arms, that has produced so few men for the subsequent movement?

How come?—Because narrowly selfish individualism—the sort that has been on offer since Mandeville (*The Fable of the Bees*) through to Nietzsche and the young French anarchists—*does not have it in it to inspire*

anybody. It contains nothing of grandeur, nothing stirring.[[37](#)]

I will even go further—and this seems to me to be of great importance (a fresh philosophy to be explored): What has heretofore been described as “individualism” has been naught but a silly egoism that leads on to the diminishment of the individual. Silly, in that it was no individualism at all. It did not

lead on to what had been
posited as the goal: the
comprehensive, expansive,
greatest perfection of
individuality *attainable*. It
seems to me that no one, apart
from Ibsen, has managed to
live up to the concept of a real
individualism; and even he,
having glimpsed it in an
inspired vision, has not
managed to articulate it in
such a way as to make himself

understood. For all that, in Ibsen there is a certain vision of the individualism to come, which I have glimpsed, and which will be the higher affirmation of individuality—as starkly different from misanthropic bourgeois individualism as from Christian communism and equally hostile to both of those, since each of them represents an impediment to the unfettered

development of individuality.

The individualism that, I believe, will become the ideal of the philosophy soon to come will not seek its expression in displeasure at the appropriation of anything *more* than each one's fair portion of the common patrimony of production (the only point that the bourgeoisie has grasped); not to the conjuring up around the world

of a mob of slaves in the service of some chosen nation (*individualismus* or *pro sibi Darwinianum* or rather *Huxleianum*[[38](#)]); not to some pleasure-loving individualism and the “liberation from good and evil” preached by a few French anarchists—not a patch on our forebears, the “aesthetes” and “lovers of beauty,” the Don Juan-esque poets who also peddled this—

not to the oppression of one's
neighbour (*individualismus*
Nietzscheanum) which
reduces "the handsome blond
beast" to the condition of just
one ox in the herd of oxen—
but to a brand of
individualismus or
personalismus or *pro sibi*
communisticum, that I see
coming, and which I would try
to define, had I but the time to
spend on that.

What had hitherto been portrayed as individualism was wretched, trivial and petty—and, worse still, carries within itself the negation of its purpose, the impoverishment of the individual, or at any rate the negation of what is needed if the most comprehensive blossoming of the individual is to be achieved. We have seen kings who were rich and who ate as a means of killing time,

and there was a rush to portray individualism as the wish to become as rich as any king, be surrounded by slaves like a king, pursued by women (and what women? who would want them?) like a king, dining on nightingales' tongues (served cold and always in the same sauce!) served on gold or silver plates like a king! And yet, is there anything in this world so banally bourgeois as

a king! And, worse still, more a *slave* than a king?

I find Nietzsche's blond beast risible. And yet, thanks to a whole perverse turn of phrase that has been laid down by literature, back in the days (in the 1820s or 1830s) when these aesthete gents would have us believe that they embodied a higher specimen of humanity—the naive belief persists that these gents were

asking to be left to indulge in their pleasures (“Pleasure for me!” after the fashion of Gounod’s “Faust”[[39](#)]), and stood for a higher stage of individuality, a step forward, a *desideratum*—the very pearls of the human race!

To date, such standard-bearers of individualism have met no opposition other than from the Christian preacher who preached annihilation of

the personality to them. So they have had things their own way. When it comes to taking Christianity apart, Nietzsche, following in Fourier's footsteps, is superb. It is the same when one contrasts the *egoist* to the *altruist*; the latter had it easy, showing that the altruist was also prompted by egoism, while the stupid egoist was incapable of understanding where his own

interests lie and, like the Zulu king, thought he was “affirming his personality” by devouring a quarter of an ox per day. It needed the counter-example of the *perfect egoist* (such as Chernyshevsky posited him)—Pisarev’s “thoughtful realist”—becoming capable of doing society infinitely more good than the mightiest of Christian or Comtean altruists—whilst

proclaiming and knowing that he is never prompted by anything other than egoism.
[[40](#)]

Given these few cursory remarks, you will most likely have grasped what I mean by *personalismus* or *pro sibi communisticum*: individuality attaining to the ultimate possible individual growth through practice as regards its few essential needs, and to the

highest degree of communist sociability in its dealings with others generally. The bourgeois had asserted that if his personality were to flourish he needed slaves and needed to sacrifice others (not himself, etc...) and the result of that was the stunted individuality on display in modern bourgeois society. And that's individualism?!!... How Goethe would have laughed at

such “individuality”! But take the very same Goethe with his very pronounced individuality. Would he have grumbled if there was a concerted effort to be made? No. He would have looked to the happiness of his fellow-workers! He would have brought with him so much joy of life, cheerfulness, wit, communist gusto, sociability. And, at the same time, he would have lost

nothing of his immense personal poetry and philosophy; indeed, he would, by learning of a new aspect of human ingenuity (witness his delight on discovering mutual support!) have gained in terms of the delights of enjoying nature in some communal *work*. His person, his individuality, expanding thus in this new direction (nothing human was foreign to him)

would have amounted to a new string added to his bow. And in Russian village life I encountered personalities which, whilst being what the Russians term *mirskoi tchelovek* (village folk) in the highest degree, were also *personalities* who had broken with all the prejudices of their villages and were striding alone and isolated along *their own* path, either out of an

individual political revolt, a personal moral revolt, an anti-religious revolt, [falling] in love, etc.[[41](#)]

Which is why I find the individualism of which the young French anarchists once spoke to us trivial, petty and false, *since it fails to achieve its chosen goal*. And that note jars all the more in my ears because of the fact that elsewhere there were men

who, at that very same moment, were knowingly going to the gallows for the sake of the common cause, having loudly asserted their individuality. It is only because of the muddle that envelops the notion of individualism that others, styling themselves individualists, have reckoned that they belonged in the same intellectual and political camp as such self-sacrificing types.

Those who styled themselves “individualists” (in the bourgeois sense) were as little entitled to number them among “their own” as the Christians were. They belonged to a type that I can see coming and that Ibsen has sought to incorporate into his plays.

This letter is becoming so lengthy that I am obliged to skim very swiftly over the very

important points of your letter. Let me say again that whilst the movement has slowed down in France, this is because the overall situation is no longer as revolutionary as it was prior to 1894–1895, and because we have realised that a revolution cannot be *provoked* by ten or a hundred. In vain had it been imagined that a sharp push by a few might successfully spark

revolution: there was not a word of truth in that and attention had to shift to the *preparatory* activity that prefaces all revolutions. Besides, one has to have a revolutionary ideal, and *could bourgeois individualism fit that bill?* No! And as for *anarchist communism*, *is it sufficiently clearly developed*, not among the millions but, let us say, *among the ranks of the*

anarchists themselves? No! (Only by grappling with the practicalities of life is this to be developed). For the past 5 or 6 years we have reverted to such preparatory endeavours, the absence of irksome issues such as Boulangism and Dreyfus opening up fresh opportunities (albeit for a few years only) for such efforts. [[42](#)]

If only we had managed to

capitalise upon this lull to explain our thinking, as you say! But we find ourselves faced with a hitherto unprecedented problem: *the ethic of a society of utterly free equals*. The Christian ethic had merely to ape the Buddhist ethic, the ethic of Lao-Tse, etc., diluting these and trimming them back. We have to come up with a *new* ethic for the socialist society of

the future. *The anarchist labour milieu is working to create this ethic.* Work is under way on a thousand points. The general idea is beginning to emerge. But due either to want of *inspiration* on our part or to the unfinished state of such efforts precluding it as yet—all we have is inklings. Yes, we have to rebuild the connection, not just with the few

“individualists” of 1890, but also with the Greeks of ancient Greece. It is a long way away, as you can see!

As to your observations on the—past and present—role of workers, here I must largely confess to the exaggeration of which you speak—the sort of exaggeration that short—hand always renders inevitable. My only fear is that even whilst acknowledging the very large

part played by such inevitable exaggeration, there is still a substratum on which it will be difficult for us to agree. You have pointed to the lack of solidarity between workers. Very well. And? Speaking for myself, and I believe my position is the same here as thousands of anarchists and 100,000 socialists, I have never felt impelled to overstate the virtues of workers in

order to embrace the cause of a predominantly workers' social revolution. But it was in order to forge, piece-meal, just such solidarity between different trades and, later, different nations, so as to broaden the notion of solidarity to the extent that you can widen it further today just as you have, that the International was launched. [43] It is precisely in order to

arouse such solidarity—in the absence of which progress would be difficult—that we must strive to ensure that the syndicates and the *trade unions* are not hijacked by bourgeois who, having failed as moderates, are out to achieve power as radicals [*avancés*].

For me it does not boil down to knowing “who is better—the bourgeois or the worker?”

I have no more interest in that than in finding out “who is better—man or woman?”—an issue that very amusingly preoccupied the heroes of one Russian novel. What I know is that the worker is at least used to carrying out a measure of disagreeable work—*work*, rather than simple amusement—which is a significant point as far as the future is concerned: and, being used to

manual labour, he is not out, in his dreams of the future, to carve out a place for himself among those in government, the way the social democrats do; and that, being exploited and at the bottom of the social ladder today, he has an interest in demanding equality: that he has fought for that and will fight for it again; whereas the bourgeois, greedy and stupid, believes that it is in his

interest to preserve inequality. That is the motive behind the *bourgeois's* pursuit of science and politics and power. And on every occasion when there has been a fight for equality, the bourgeois held out for inequality, for the right to govern, whereas the people were on the opposite side. No amount of rationalisation and no statistics will alter that, and as I mentioned to you

previously in my last letter, it was again *the people, the workers* who fought during the last recourse to arms you were able to cite to me (1871): and I see no reason for it to be any different next time around than it was in 1871 in Milan, Barcelona, Trieste—everywhere! [[44](#)]

As to the tolerance of which you speak, I can only reiterate to you that, as I see it,

tolerance has been overly displayed by the side that had right on its side. I am for the *aggressive good* and I believe that peddling the *passive good*, as Christianity has done and as you seem to be asking (just in time I remember the caution about every short letter being an exaggeration), is tantamount to obstructing progress. Sure, there are throw-backs in current society

dating back to cannibalism, to the savage days of the Stone Age, to the Bronze Age, to the abominations of oriental despotism—everything, dating right back to the beginning of history. (You will see a fine spectacle of such a throw-back if you come to England this June: that of Huxley on his knees before the queen to be invested with the G.C.[Grand Cross]—that is already a sight

to behold. But we shall see far more splendid ones in the reversion to more savage and cannibalistic times such as is to be played out around [the coronation of] Edward VII). So, who knows? That I should gaze upon it all with a condescending eye? No, no, dear friend, eclecticism is death, the worst of deaths, intellectual death.

Your understanding of

revolutions strikes me as *utterly* wrong-headed. No doubt you are speaking *in line with* the historians when you say: “On the morrow (of the overthrow of the government in Russia), the peasants will burn down the chateaux, etc.” But I reckon I have proved that that idea is *utterly wrong*.

Had the chateaux not been burning since May 1789, there would have been no storming

of the Bastille that July, and no night of 4th August. And in saying that, I have the benefit of [Hippolyte] Taine on my side—the only person, except for Kareeff,[[45](#)] in part (he being of the same mind), a student of the upheavals *prior* to the revolution on 14 July. (“I am aware of 300 disturbances prior to 14 July,” says Taine, who, of necessity, is aware of only a small

fraction, most “feudal records” having been put to the torch). The Jacqueries *launched as early as 1788* and lingering into 1793, the six *jacqueries* of which Taine speaks, were the foundations from which the Revolution sprouted and *without which there would have been no revolution.*

Individuals? Do you think that Bakunin was not the equal

of Danton, and [James] Guillaume not the equal of Robespierre? The thing that prevented them from becoming towering historical figures like their predecessors was the lack of that backdrop of peasant and worker *jacquerie* in every large city in the North-east.

Your notion of the [Paris] Commune is the very opposite of everything that I have heard

from the lips of the communards. On 18th March, it was the whole of Paris. Between the elections—let us say between 1st April and 21st May, the latter being the date the Versaillaise marched in—the figures for those defending the Commune were shrinking and *in April and May* the Commune *never had more than 10,000 men with which to defend Paris.* (I questioned

Lefrançais and Pindy etc., on this point specifically and they were very emphatic.[[46](#)]) On 21st May, with the news that the Versaillaise had entered, the people rose up in answer to Delescluze's exhortation: "*Assez de galons!*, etc."[[47](#)] And since the lowest estimate has 35,000 executed, there must have been a good 50,000 manning the barricades.

To this day, everywhere, *all*

revolutions, intellectual and practical, are made by minorities. The only thing is: where do these minorities spring from? Who makes the first move to the streets? Not the bourgeois, and that's for sure! Always the workers—and that includes Barcelona. [[48](#)]

This is natural. I assumed it was familiar territory for any socialist, any anarchist. You

have me thinking that perhaps it is a story yet to be written.

Moving on to a different topic, I see no reason for your pessimism. Like

industrialisation, the revolution has, since 1648, been moving from west to east: England, then France... Now it is the turn of Germany as she nears her own 1848, just as Russia is nearing her own (rather more far-reaching) 1789.

Meanwhile, England and France benefit from the fruits of revolution in the countries which come after them in terms of revolution in order to make a few more steps forward.

Meanwhile, in the 19th century, a fresh element has intervened: the advances in transportation that have allowed world trade, formidable internal commerce

(in America, France and Russia), and the taking of millions of slaves from the black and yellow continent[s].

Besides, France's defeat, with Metz on Paris's doorstep, has turned France militarist. All of this delays the revolution.

That the times we are going through here in England incline one to pessimism, I know. But do you know, our

sadness, our pessimism at *England's failure* is merely the result of our ignorance? Élisée [Reclus] should not see in modern England only what he has long since anticipated back when he predicted her demise, as he did Spain's. Out of ignorance, I protested when he said as much to me back in 1881. But that was my ignorance. So when has England ever had a less

abominable stance in her foreign policy than she does at present? The Ionian islands (Gladstone) and Pretoria (the *same* Gladstone) are the only exceptions.[[49](#)] However, Pitt paying Russia, Prussia, and Austria to fight Napoleon; the shelling of Copenhagen and of Alexandria; England paying Poland to rise in revolt and Turkey to fight Russia and letting them crush one another,

etc., etc.; Pitt, Palmerston, Disraeli, Chamberlain[[50](#)]—how is the fourth of this quartet any worse than the other three? Wherein lies the decadence?[[51](#)]

England *must* perish, unless she makes “the revolution of communes” = the disintegration of the State—and seizes the initiative (or follows France) in repeating the revolution of the 17th

century.

As for America—pay her a visit: it is worth the trouble and you will, I reckon, change your mind completely. “America—land of the dollar” is a claim as false as saying that the “Pont Neuf” is the oldest of Paris’s bridges. Once, Élie Reclus[[52](#)] said to me: “If everybody says that is the way things are, rest assured that it is absolutely

wrong!”—Land of the dollar?
The land of *cranks*, rather!
And *cranks*, I mean you and
me—all of us, the rebels.
Libraries and paintings can be
bought, but they are in need of
a few models for their arts
which are already, despite her
youth, so powerful in
sculpture and architecture.
Nowhere in Europe, if you
took 100 men at random,
would you encounter so many

enthusiasts ready to march ahead down quite virgin trails as in America. Nowhere is so *little store* put by the dollar: dollar earned—dollar wasted. In England, the pound is revered and *worshipped*, but that is assuredly not the case in America. That's the way America is. *The Oregon commune is closer than the commune of the tiniest hamlet in Germany.*

But, to return to the subject of your letter, you say that there was a change of method [within the anarchist movement] in 1894? Is that actually so?

True, the *tone* is certainly calmer than it was then—just as the tone in 1884–1890 was calmer than it had been in 1881–1882. This is one of those ups and down to be found in any development.

The very same tone (albeit deeper and reaching right to the bottom of things) will be rediscovered once we re-enter more troubled times. In terms of change, I do not detect much.

For my part, I have always been a communist and I have always—from the Jura *Bulletin* to *La Révolte*—preached active participation in the workers' movement, *the*

revolutionary workers' movement. I was just recently leafing through my collection of *La Révolte*. Well, in every issue I found one and, often, two articles by me talking about the revolutionary workers' movement. So, as far as *La Révolte* is concerned at any rate, it cannot be argued that we have changed. Are you referring to [Émile] Pouget putting out *La Voix du*

Peuple[[53](#)] instead of [*Le Père*] *Peinard*? Well, he is perfectly well within his rights if, having worked on the *fleshing-out of the idea*, he is now working to *spread* it and introduce anarchist revolutionary ideas into the milieu which, alone, will one day take up arms to make the revolution. As to the younger generation, which has produced some very anarchist

articles on occasion, whilst staying outside of the day-to-day movement—some of them continue to help us with their pens and pencils in the newspapers and in the schools: others, it would appear, mean to run as candidates—the object being, I suppose, to bring their individuality to some “perfect” point of maturation—I wish them bon voyage!

To be sure, our aim must always be never to make any concession to the bourgeois, authoritarian principle. But to argue that any Tom, Dick or Harry can remain a prouder libertarian by restricting himself to scribbling or blathering about individualist anarchy than by participating in the trade union movement is, my dear friend, merely an optical illusion. True, staying

free is, for the working man who *has to sell* his labour, an impossibility and it is precisely on account of that impossibility that we are anarchists and communists. Nietzsche might have remained very free—and yet!—had he the serfs to keep him alive and he lived off the backs of their labours. And yet! For that very reason he understood nothing of labour's economic

revolt. The great Nietzsche, for he was great in terms of a certain rebelliousness, remained a *slave* to bourgeois prejudice. What a frightful irony! As for the bourgeois who claims to be free and to keep his full independence, when he sells his mind, his brush or his pen to fellow bourgeois, he finishes up some day selling out body and soul to Rhodes or Waldeck,[[54](#)]

and even as he pens touching articles about Ravachol and the right of theft, he is even then *more* a slave (in spirit and in fact) than the Barcelona cooper enrolled in an organisation that signs itself “*Salud y Anarquía*” and numbers 100,000 workers among its membership.

Your utopia is all very fine. We may well pass through just such a period. But *in order to*

get there it will take the making of a revolution, just as it took the Anabaptist and Lutheran revolution in the 16th century, the Cromwellian revolution in 1648 and the approaching of revolution in France to bring about the tolerance that prevailed in the days of the Encyclopaedists. Your main mistake, I reckon, is to chalk up to an evolution on the part of the elite that

which was actually extracted through the force of popular revolution. A *hundred thousand men* (the lowest estimate), *Anabaptists beheaded* in Holland and North Germany (the figures come from recent historians of the Reformation), almost 100,000 peasants killed in the 1525 upheavals—that is a far cry from any evolution on the part of the elite! That the latter

may have profited from the gains made by the peasant and worker upheavals—that they may have been clever enough to get Europe to make the next move forward—nothing could be truer. But in order to pull it off, it took mass uprisings. But for which they would have been locked up.

Yes, in order to arrive at your idyll, *revolution is still required*—and the issue is to

find out *what it is that will allow its preparation?* That is the whole issue and you will agree that Barcelona, Trieste and Milan prepare the way: introducing the factor that was missing back in 1890–94—the people.

Which is why I find your comparison of the unionist anarchist movement with the social democratic movement very unfair. Plainly, the

Spanish or French trade union movement represents a curtailment of the ideal, not in terms of theory but in terms of their being embodied by such-and-such men on such-and-such a date. Obviously, *any* practical achievement falls short of the ideal from which it springs (this letter, for instance, falls short of the ideal that prompted me to write it). But that is where the

resemblance ends. One of these two movements is, in theory and in practice, revolutionary; the other, in theory and practice, is, as far as the vestiges of the past are concerned, the very opposite of revolutionary, not to say [counter-]revolutionary, which would be overstating it. One is out to speed the course of events, the other to thwart it!

Where we can set our sights,

given our ideal, is on ensuring that everything we do bears the imprint of that ideal and is inspired by it. In the absence of that connection, we have no basis upon which to take the Barcelona disturbances to task and may not take any activity in 1890–1894 to task: including the publication of individualist articles in newspapers or, indeed, individual deeds. (And this

without even harking back to the notion spelled out at the beginning of this letter, that the individualism being peddled then was, as the result of a whole series of misunderstandings, not sufficiently distinct from the pseudo-individualism of the bourgeois which leads on to the diminishment of the individual.)

As for Tolstoy, had he not

been a *Christian* as well as a communist and anarchist, he would not have met with any more success than the anarchists—not to mention his redoubtable talent which ensures that what would never have been welcomed coming from us (the negation of Justice, for instance) is acceptable as long as it comes from him.

But enough! This letter has

to have an end and I am breaking it off abruptly. Tomorrow I have to begin a work [task] and I won't be able to write you further.

Best wishes from us all,

Peter

[30](#)[] Max Heinrich Hermann Reinhardt Nettelau (1865–1944) was a German anarchist and a prolific historian of the anarchist movement. He wrote numerous books on the history of anarchism as well as many biographical works on famous anarchists. (Editor)

[31](#)[] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

(1844–1900) was a German philosopher who attacked religion, morality and contemporary culture. His philosophy was based on the idea of “life-affirmation,” questioning all doctrines that hamper the development of the individual. Morality was particularly attacked as it had a negative impact on the flourishing of what Nietzsche called “higher men” (as it allowed the “weak” to take power over the “strong”). The “higher man” (*Übermensch*) is solitary and deals with others only instrumentally, as means to an end. While denouncing the State, he wrote negatively of anarchists. In spite of this, Nietzsche

was read with interest by a number of anarchists for his critique of conventional morality—also inspired by Guyau. (Editor)

[32](#)[] Russian for “Going to the people,” a reference to the *Narodniks*, a socially-conscious movement of the Russian middle class in the 1860s and 1870s. Their ideas and actions were known as *Narodnichestvo* (populism), which derives from *narod*. The *Narodnik* position was held by intellectuals who read the works of Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Chernyshevsky. The movement was also influenced by Bakunin. Kropotkin worked in Populist circles before his arrest and

subsequent escape from Russia. They helped prepare the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, directly influencing the Socialist-Revolutionary party (which pursued similar ideas and tactics). Kropotkin remained close to many populist leaders and was respected in Russian Populist circles. (Editor)

[33](#)[] Referring to Honoré, comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791), a famous orator of the French Revolution (see the Glossary). (Editor)

[34](#)[] François Claudius Koenigstein (1859–1892), known as Ravachol, was a French anarchist and usually associated with “propaganda of the deed.” He conducted three dynamite

attacks against representatives of the judiciary in response to the repression of workers' demonstrations on 1st May 1891 at Fourmies (where police opened fire on the crowd, killing nine) and the brutal interrogation of three anarchists at Clichy. Ravachol was publicly guillotined for his actions, becoming a romanticised symbol of desperate revolt, with a number of French songs composed in his honour. On 9th December 1893, Auguste Vaillant threw a bomb into the French Chamber of Deputies to avenge Ravachol. (Editor)

[35](#)[[] Referring to Nietzsche's controversial assertion, in *On the*

Genealogy of Morals (1887), that “noble races” display the characteristics of “the beast of prey, the splendid *blond beast* prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory” (*On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter A. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter A. Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Books, 1989], 40–41).

[36](#)[] Pauwels was an anarchist killed in the explosion at the Madeleine church in Paris when a bomb that he was carrying detonated prematurely. (Editor)

[37](#)[] Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) was a philosopher, economist and satirist. He became famous for *The*

Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits in which he described a bee community thriving until the bees are suddenly made honest and virtuous. Without their desire for personal gain their economy collapses, thus implying that without private vices there is no public benefit. It is an early defence of competitive free market capitalism in which private self-interest is maintained to produce gains for everyone. (Editor)

[38](#)[] A reference to Britain's leading advocate of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, Professor Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895). Known as “Darwin's Bulldog,” Huxley's essay

“The Struggle for Existence in Human Society” provoked Kropotkin to produce *Mutual Aid*. (Editor)

[39](#)[] Charles-François Gounod (1818–1893) was a French composer, known for his *Ave Maria* (based on a work by Bach) as well as his operas *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*. His *Faust* (1859) was derived from Goethe. (Editor)

[40](#)[] Dmitry Ivanovich Pisarev (1840–1868) was a radical Russian writer and social critic. He aimed for the end of poverty and misery, influencing subsequent generations of Russian left-wing radicals (including Lenin). (Editor)

[41](#)[] The Russian word *mirskoi*, which

can mean “of or pertaining to the village [*mir*],” also carries the sense of “worldly,” “ordinary,” “of or belonging to the people,” etc. See the footnotes to Kropotkin’s “Preface to Bakunin’s *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*” in this volume. (Editor)

[42](#)[] The Dreyfus Affair was a political scandal that divided France at the turn of the nineteenth century. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, an artillery officer of Alsatian Jewish descent, was convicted for treason in 1894. In 1896, evidence came to light that a French Army major was the real culprit, but high-ranking military officials suppressed the new evidence

and swiftly acquitted the major. Writer Émile Zola, a leading supporter of Dreyfus, promptly published in 1898 an open letter (*J'Accuse*) to the president of the French republic in protest. Progressive activists put pressure on the government to reopen the case, which became a major political issue, pitting anti-semitic, royalist, militarist, and nationalist elements against republican, socialist, and anticlerical elements. In 1906, Dreyfus was exonerated and reinstated as a major in the French Army. (Editor)

[43](#)[] Kropotkin is referring to Nettlau's article "Responsibility and Solidarity

in the Labour Struggle,” published in *Freedom* in 1900 and subsequently issued as a pamphlet the same year. (Editor)

[44](#)[] Barcelona saw a general strike in February 1902 for the eight-hour day and the right to strike called by the anarchist-influenced unions. Milan saw the climax of a series of “bread and work” riots which broke out across Italy in 1898, with a general strike and street fighting in May. The army proclaimed martial law, opened fire on strikers, and killed 118 civilians (according to official figures). Trieste, then the principal seaport of the Austrian Empire, saw a general strike in February 1902, with

troops firing on strikers, killing eight and wounding many others. (Editor)

[45](#)[] A Russian historian who researched the origins of the French revolution using the archival documents in Paris. (Editor)

[46](#)[] Gustave Adolphe Lefrançais (1826–1901) and Jean-Louis Pindy (1840–1917) were both libertarian militants, members of both the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA) and the Paris Commune. After the commune, both became active members of the Jura Federation. (Editor)

[47](#)[] “Enough of galloons!” That is: “Enough of gold embroidered military caps [*galons*]!” (Editor)

[48](#)[] Kropotkin inserted the following two paragraphs later in the margin:

Maybe this is inviting misunderstanding. My thinking is this: The *uprisings* always emanate from the oppressed, from the people. A point comes when the people's unhappiness (ready to become active) melds with the unhappiness of the "intelligentsia," of the bourgeoisie (never ready to become active), whereupon one has revolution.

The *Jacqueries*, the Peasants' War, Stenka Razin, Pugachev, as well as Milan, Trieste, Lyon in 1830, etc.—those were the great upheavals. All that, plus the thrust

from bourgeois malcontents—and you have the revolution of 1789.

He alludes quickly to a number of important events and figures in the history of rural popular rebellions, for example, the German Peasants' War (1524–1525), the charismatic Russian rebel Stenka Razin (1630–1671), Yemelyan Ivanovich Pugachev's Cossack Rebellion (1773–1775), then to various urban labour revolts and, finally, to the Great French Revolution. (Editor)

[49](#)[] William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898) was a British Liberal politician who was Prime Minister four times. Between 1858 and 1859, he served as

Lord High Commissioner
Extraordinary of the United States of
the Ionian Islands, a British
protectorate off the coast of Greece.
He negotiated their political future,
ensuring that the Islands be ceded to
Greece. While in opposition
Gladstone spoke out against
Disraeli's aggressive imperialism,
opposing expanding the British
Empire and denouncing the
annexation of the Transvaal (the South
African Republic) by the British.
After winning his second term as
Prime Minister in 1880, he initially
opposed Transvaal self-government.
The Boers rebelled, defeating the
British in February 1881. Gladstone

implemented the Pretoria Convention later in August which ended the First Boer War by giving the Transvaal self-government. (Editor)

[50](#)[] Four British politicians associated with imperialist policies. William Pitt the Younger (1759–1806) was British Prime Minister between 1783 and 1801 and is best known for leading Britain in the great wars against France and Napoleon; Henry John Temple, Lord Palmerston (1784–1865), was a British statesman who served twice as Prime Minister and who pursued an aggressive British foreign policy; Benjamin Disraeli, first Earl of Beaconsfield (see glossary) was a British Conservative

Prime Minister and politician who advocated aggressive imperialist policies; Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) held the post of Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1895 to 1903, during which he sought to expand the British Empire. He sanctioned the conquest of the Ashanti, occupying Kumasi and annexing the territory to the Gold Coast as well as presiding over the Second Boer War. (Editor)

[51](#)[] Kropotkin added a note here: “And we have the rise of the Stock Exchange, as in 16th century Genoa, or Venice, or Rome, or Carthage!”

[52](#)[] Jean-Pierre-Michel Élie Reclus (1827–1904) was the elder brother of

Élisée Reclus. An anthropologist, he was an associate of Bakunin and Communard like his brother. (Editor)

[53](#)[] The weekly paper of *General Confederation of Labour* (CGT), a French revolutionary syndicalist union federation within which anarchists were very active. (Editor).

[54](#)[] Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau (1846–1904), Prime Minister of France at the time of the letter; Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902), British colonialist and diamond magnate. (Editor)

Anarchism

This is Kropotkin's entry on Anarchism for the 11th Edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica (1910). It is a succinct account of the history and tendencies of anarchism.

Kropotkin also contributed many other entries on geography and naturalism, as befitted his status as one of Russia's greatest scientists.

ANARCHISM (from the Gr. *άν-* [*an-*], and *ἀρχή* [*archos*], contrary to authority), the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government—harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups,

territorial and professional,
freely constituted for the sake
of production and
consumption, as also for the
satisfaction of the infinite
variety of needs and
aspirations of a civilised being.
In a society developed on
these lines, the voluntary
associations which already
now begin to cover all the
fields of human activity would
take a still greater extension so

as to substitute themselves for the State in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international—temporary or more or less permanent—for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications,

sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs. Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary—as is seen in organic life at large—harmony would (it is contended) result from an

ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the State.

If, it is contended, society were organised on these principles, man would not be limited in the free exercise of his powers in productive work

by a capitalist monopoly, maintained by the State; nor would he be limited in the exercise of his will by a fear of punishment, or by obedience towards individuals or metaphysical entities, which both lead to depression of initiative and servility of mind. He would be guided in his actions by his own understanding, which necessarily would bear the

impression of a free action and reaction between his own self and the ethical conceptions of his surroundings. Man would thus be enabled to obtain the full development of all his faculties, intellectual, artistic and moral, without being hampered by overwork for the monopolists, or by the servility and inertia of mind of the great number. He would thus be able to reach full

individualisation, which is not possible either under the present system of *individualism*, or under any system of State socialism in the so-called *Volkstaat* (popular State).

The anarchist writers consider, moreover, that their conception is not a utopia, constructed on the *a priori* method, after a few desiderata have been taken as postulates.

It is derived, they maintain, from an *analysis of tendencies* that are at work already, even though State socialism may find a temporary favour with the reformers. The progress of modern technics, which wonderfully simplifies the production of all the necessaries of life; the growing spirit of independence, and the rapid spread of free initiative and free understanding in all

branches of activity—including those which formerly were considered as the proper attribution of church and State—are steadily reinforcing the no-government tendency.

As to their economical conceptions, the anarchists, in common with all socialists, of whom they constitute the left wing, maintain that the now prevailing system of private ownership in land, and our

capitalist production for the sake of profits, represent a monopoly which runs against both the principles of justice and the dictates of utility. They are the main obstacle which prevents the successes of modern technics from being brought into the service of all, so as to produce general well-being. The anarchists consider the wage-system and capitalist production altogether as an

obstacle to progress. But they point out also that the State was, and continues to be, the chief instrument for permitting the few to monopolise the land, and the capitalists to appropriate for themselves a quite disproportionate share of the yearly accumulated surplus of production. Consequently, while combating the present monopolisation of land, and

capitalism altogether, the anarchists combat with the same energy the State, as the main support of that system. Not this or that special form, but the State altogether, whether it be a monarchy or even a republic governed by means of the *referendum*.

The State organisation, having always been, both in ancient and modern history (Macedonian Empire, Roman

Empire, modern European States grown up on the ruins of the autonomous cities), the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of the ruling minorities, cannot be made to work for the destruction of these monopolies. The anarchists consider, therefore, that to hand over to the State all the main sources of economical life—the land, the mines, the

railways, banking, insurance, and so on—as also the management of all the main branches of industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands (education, State-supported religions, defence of the territory, etc.), would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy

and capitalism. True progress lies in the direction of decentralisation, both *territorial* and *functional*, in the development of the spirit of local and personal initiative, and of free federation from the simple to the compound, in lieu of the present hierarchy from the centre to the periphery.

In common with most socialists, the anarchists

recognise that, like all evolution in nature, the slow evolution of society is followed from time to time by periods of accelerated evolution which are called revolutions; and they think that the era of revolutions is not yet closed. Periods of rapid changes will follow the periods of slow evolution, and these periods must be taken advantage of—not for increasing and

widening the powers of the State, but for reducing them, through the organisation in every township or commune of the local groups of producers and consumers, as also the regional, and eventually the international, federations of these groups.

In virtue of the above principles the anarchists refuse to be party to the present State organisation and to support it

by infusing fresh blood into it. They do not seek to constitute, and invite the working men not to constitute, political parties in the parliaments. Accordingly, since the foundation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864–1866, they have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct

struggle against capital,
without placing their faith in
parliamentary legislation.

The Historical Development of Anarchism

The conception of society just
sketched, and the tendency
which is its dynamic
expression, have always
existed in mankind, in

opposition to the governing hierarchic conception and tendency—now the one and now the other taking the upper hand at different periods of history. To the former tendency we owe the evolution, by the masses themselves, of those institutions—the clan, the village community, the guild, the free medieval city—by means of which the masses

resisted the encroachments of the conquerors and the power-seeking minorities. The same tendency asserted itself with great energy in the great religious movements of medieval times, especially in the early movements of the reform and its forerunners. At the same time it evidently found its expression in the writings of some thinkers, since the times of Lao-tsze,

although, owing to its non-scholastic and popular origin, it obviously found less sympathy among the scholars than the opposed tendency.

As has been pointed out by Prof. Adler in his *Geschichte des Sozialismus und Kommunismus*, Aristippus (b.c. 430 BC), one of the founders of the Cyrenaic school, already taught that the wise must not give up their

liberty to the State, and in reply to a question by Socrates he said that he did not desire to belong either to the governing or the governed class. Such an attitude, however, seems to have been dictated merely by an Epicurean attitude towards the life of the masses.

The best exponent of anarchist philosophy in ancient Greece was Zeno (342–267 or

270 BC), from Crete, the founder of the Stoic philosophy, who distinctly opposed his conception of a free community without government to the State-utopia of Plato. He repudiated the omnipotence of the State, its intervention and regimentation, and proclaimed the sovereignty of the moral law of the individual—remarking already that, while the

necessary instinct of self-preservation leads man to egotism, nature has supplied a corrective to it by providing man with another instinct—that of sociability. When men are reasonable enough to follow their natural instincts, they will unite across the frontiers and constitute the cosmos. They will have no need of law-courts or police, will have no temples and no

public worship, and use no money—free gifts taking the place of the exchanges. Unfortunately, the writings of Zeno have not reached us and are only known through fragmentary quotations. However, the fact that his very wording is similar to the wording now in use, shows how deeply is laid the tendency of human nature of which he was the mouthpiece.

In medieval times we find the same views on the State expressed by the illustrious bishop of Alba, Marco Girolamo Vida, in his first dialogue *De dignitate reipublicae* (Ferd. Cavalli, in *Mem. dell'Istituto Veneto*, xiii.; Dr E. Nys, *Researches in the History of Economics*). But it is especially in several early Christian movements, beginning with the ninth

century in Armenia, and in the preachings of the early Hussites, particularly Chojecki, and the early Anabaptists, especially Hans Denk (cf. Keller, *Ein Apostel der Wiedertauffer*), that one finds the same ideas forcibly expressed—special stress being laid of course on their moral aspects.

Rabelais and Fénelon, in their utopias, have also

expressed similar ideas, and they were also current in the eighteenth century amongst the French Encyclopaedists, as may be concluded from separate expressions occasionally met with in the writings of Rousseau, from Diderot's *Preface* to the *Voyage* of Bougainville, and so on. However, in all probability such ideas could not be developed then, owing to the

rigorous censorship of the Roman Catholic Church.

These ideas found their expression later during the great French Revolution. While the Jacobins did all in their power to centralise everything in the hands of the government, it appears now, from recently published documents, that the masses of the people, in their municipalities and “sections,”

accomplished a considerable constructive work. They appropriated for themselves the election of the judges, the organisation of supplies and equipment for the army, as also for the large cities, work for the unemployed, the management of charities, and so on. They even tried to establish a direct correspondence between the 36,000 communes of France

through the intermediary of a special board, outside the National Assembly (cf. Sigismund Lacroix, *Actes de la commune de Paris*).

It was Godwin, in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (2 vols., 1793), who was the first to formulate the political and economical conceptions of anarchism, even though he did not give that name to the ideas

developed in his remarkable work. Laws, he wrote, are not a product of the wisdom of our ancestors: they are the product of their passions, their timidity, their jealousies and their ambition. The remedy they offer is worse than the evils they pretend to cure. If and only if all laws and courts were abolished, and the decisions in the arising contests were left to

reasonable men chosen for that purpose, real justice would gradually be evolved. As to the State, Godwin frankly claimed its abolition. A society, he wrote, can perfectly well exist without any government: only the communities should be small and perfectly autonomous. Speaking of property, he stated that the rights of every one “to every substance

capable of contributing to the benefit of a human being” must be regulated by justice alone: the substance must go “to him who most wants it.” His conclusion was communism. Godwin, however, had not the courage to maintain his opinions. He entirely rewrote later on his chapter on property and mitigated his communist views in the second edition of

Political Justice (8vo, 1796).

Proudhon was the first to use, in 1840 (*Qu'est-ce que la propriete?* first memoir), the name of anarchy with application to the no-government state of society. The name of “anarchists” had been freely applied during the French Revolution by the Girondists to those revolutionaries who did not consider that the task of the

Revolution was accomplished with the overthrow of Louis XVI, and insisted upon a series of economical measures being taken (the abolition of feudal rights without redemption, the return to the village communities of the communal lands enclosed since 1669, the limitation of landed property to 120 acres, progressive income-tax, the national organisation of

exchanges on a just value basis, which already received a beginning of practical realisation, and so on).

Now Proudhon advocated a society without government, and used the word anarchy to describe it. Proudhon repudiated, as is known, all schemes of communism, according to which mankind would be driven into communistic monasteries or

barracks, as also all the schemes of State or State-aided socialism which were advocated by Louis Blanc and the collectivists. When he proclaimed in his first memoir on property that "Property is theft," he meant only property in its present, Roman-law, sense of "right of use and abuse"; in property-rights, on the other hand, understood in the limited sense of

possession, he saw the best protection against the encroachments of the State. At the same time he did not want violently to dispossess the present owners of land, dwelling-houses, mines, factories and so on. He preferred to attain the same end by rendering capital incapable of earning interest; and this he proposed to obtain by means of a national bank,

based on the mutual confidence of all those who are engaged in production, who would agree to exchange among themselves their produces at cost-value, by means of labour cheques representing the hours of labour required to produce every given commodity. Under such a system, which Proudhon described as “*Mutuellisme*,” all the

exchanges of services would be strictly equivalent. Besides, such a bank would be enabled to lend money without interest, levying only something like 1%, or even less, for covering the cost of administration. Everyone being thus enabled to borrow the money that would be required to buy a house, nobody would agree to pay any more a yearly rent for the use of it. A

general “social liquidation” would thus be rendered easy, without violent expropriation. The same applied to mines, railways, factories and so on.

In a society of this type the State would be useless. The chief relations between citizens would be based on free agreement and regulated by mere account keeping. The contests might be settled by arbitration. A penetrating

criticism of the State and all possible forms of government, and a deep insight into all economic problems, were well-known characteristics of Proudhon's work.

It is worth noticing that French mutualism had its precursor in England, in William Thompson, who began by mutualism before he became a communist, and in his followers John Gray (*A*

Lecture on Human Happiness, 1825; *The Social System*, 1831) and J. F. Bray (*Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy*, 1839). It had also its precursor in America. Josiah Warren, who was born in 1798 (cf. W. Bailie, *Josiah Warren, the First American Anarchist*, Boston, 1900), and belonged to Owen's "New Harmony," considered that the failure of this enterprise was chiefly due

to the suppression of individuality and the lack of initiative and responsibility. These defects, he taught, were inherent to every scheme based upon authority and the community of goods. He advocated, therefore, complete individual liberty. In 1827 he opened in Cincinnati a little country store which was the first "Equity Store," and which the people called "Time

Store,” because it was based on labour being exchanged hour for hour in all sorts of produce. “Cost—the limit of price,” and consequently “no interest,” was the motto of his store, and later on of his “Equity Village,” near New York, which was still in existence in 1865. Mr. Keith’s “House of Equity” at Boston, founded in 1855, is also worthy of notice.

While the economical, and especially the mutual-banking, ideas of Proudhon found supporters and even a practical application in the United States, his political conception of anarchy found but little echo in France, where the Christian socialism of Lamennais and the Fourierists, and the State socialism of Louis Blanc and the followers of Saint-Simon,

were dominating. These ideas found, however, some temporary support among the left-wing Hegelians in Germany, Moses Hess in 1843, and Karl Grün in 1845, who advocated anarchism. Besides, the authoritarian communism of Wilhelm Weitling having given origin to opposition amongst the Swiss working men, Wilhelm Marr gave expression to it in the

forties.

On the other side, individualist anarchism found, also in Germany, its fullest expression in Max Stirner (Kaspar Schmidt), whose remarkable works (*Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum* and articles contributed to the *Rheinische Zeitung*) remained quite overlooked until they were brought into prominence by John Henry Mackay.

Prof. V. Basch, in a very able introduction to his interesting book, *L'individualisme anarchiste: Max Stirner* (1904), has shown how the development of the German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, and “the absolute” of Schelling and the *Geist* of Hegel, necessarily provoked, when the anti-Hegelian revolt began, the preaching of the same

“absolute” in the camp of the rebels. This was done by Stirner, who advocated, not only a complete revolt against the State and against the servitude which authoritarian communism would impose upon men, but also the full liberation of the individual from all social and moral bonds—the rehabilitation of the “I,” the supremacy of the individual, complete

“amoralism,” and the
“association of the egotists.”
The final conclusion of that
sort of individual anarchism
has been indicated by Prof.
Basch. It maintains that the
aim of all superior civilisation
is, not to permit *all* members
of the community to develop
in a normal way, but to permit
certain better endowed
individuals “fully to develop,”
even at the cost of the

happiness and the very existence of the mass of mankind. It is thus a return towards the most common individualism, advocated by all the would-be superior minorities, to which indeed man owes in his history precisely the State and the rest, which these individualists combat. Their individualism goes so far as to end in a negation of their own starting-

point—to say nothing of the impossibility for the individual to attain a really full development in the conditions of oppression of the masses by the “beautiful aristocracies.” His development would remain unilateral. This is why this direction of thought, notwithstanding its undoubtedly correct and useful advocacy of the full development of each

individuality, finds a hearing only in limited artistic and literary circles.

Anarchism in the International Working Men's Association

A general depression in the propaganda of all fractions of socialism followed, as is known, after the defeat of the uprising of the Paris working

men in June 1848 and the fall of the Republic. All the socialist press was gagged during the reaction period, which lasted fully twenty years. Nevertheless, even anarchist thought began to make some progress, namely in the writings of Bellegarrique (Caeurderoy), and especially Joseph Déjacque (*Les Lazaréennes*, *L'Humanisphère*, an

anarchist-communist utopia, lately discovered and reprinted). The socialist movement revived only after 1864, when some French working men, all “mutualists,” meeting in London during the Universal Exhibition with English followers of Robert Owen, founded the International Working Men’s Association. This association developed very rapidly and

adopted a policy of direct economical struggle against capitalism, without interfering in the political parliamentary agitation, and this policy was followed until 1871. However, after the Franco-German War, when the International Association was prohibited in France after the uprising of the Commune, the German working men, who had received manhood suffrage for

elections to the newly constituted imperial parliament, insisted upon modifying the tactics of the International, and began to build up a Social Democratic political party. This soon led to a division in the Working Men's Association, and the Latin federations, Spanish, Italian, Belgian and Jurassic (France could not be represented), constituted

among themselves a Federal union which broke entirely with the Marxist general council of the International. Within these federations developed now what may be described as *modern anarchism*. After the names of “Federalists” and “Anti-authoritarians” had been used for some time by these federations the name of “anarchists,” which their

adversaries insisted upon applying to them, prevailed, and finally it was revindicated.

Bakunin soon became the leading spirit among these Latin federations for the development of the principles of anarchism, which he did in a number of writings, pamphlets and letters. He demanded the complete abolition of the State, which—he wrote—is a product of

religion, belongs to a lower state of civilisation, represents the negation of liberty, and spoils even that which it undertakes to do for the sake of general well-being. The State was an historically necessary evil, but its complete extinction will be, sooner or later, equally necessary. Repudiating all legislation, even when issuing from universal suffrage,

Bakunin claimed for each nation, each region and each commune, full autonomy, so long as it is not a menace to its neighbours, and full independence for the individual, adding that one becomes really free only when, and in proportion as, all others are free. Free federations of the communes would constitute free nations.

As to his economical

conceptions, Bakunin described himself, in common with his Federalist comrades of the International (César de Paepe, James Guillaume, [Adhémar] Schwitzguébel), a “collectivist anarchist”—not in the sense of Vidal and Pecqueur in the 1840s, or of their modern Social Democratic followers, but to express a state of things in which all necessities for

production are owned in common by the labour groups and the free communes, while the ways of retribution of labour, communist or otherwise, would be settled by each group for itself. Social revolution, the near approach of which was foretold at that time by all socialists, would be the means of bringing into life the new conditions.

The Jurassic, the Spanish

and the Italian federations and sections of the International Working Men's Association, as also the French, the German and the American anarchist groups, were for the next years the chief centres of anarchist thought and propaganda. They refrained from any participation in parliamentary politics, and always kept in close contact with the labour organisations.

However, in the second half of the eighties and the early nineties of the nineteenth century, when the influence of the anarchists began to be felt in strikes, in the 1st of May demonstrations, where they promoted the idea of a general strike for an eight hours' day, and in the anti-militarist propaganda in the army, violent prosecutions were directed against them,

especially in the Latin countries (including physical torture in the Barcelona Castle) and the United States (the execution of five Chicago anarchists in 1887). Against these prosecutions the anarchists retaliated by acts of violence which in their turn were followed by more executions from above, and new acts of revenge from below. This created in the

general public the impression that violence is the substance of anarchism, a view repudiated by its supporters, who hold that in reality violence is resorted to by all parties in proportion as their open action is obstructed by repression, and exceptional laws render them outlaws. (Cf. *Anarchism and Outrage*, by C. M. Wilson, and *Report of the Spanish Atrocities*

Committee, in “Freedom Pamphlets”; *A Concise History of the Great Trial of the Chicago Anarchists*, by Dyer Lum (New York, 1886); *The Chicago Martyrs: Speeches*, etc.).

Anarchism continued to develop, partly in the direction of Proudhonian “mutuellisme,” but chiefly as communist-anarchism, to which a third direction,

Christian-anarchism, was added by Leo Tolstoy, and a fourth, which might be ascribed as literary-anarchism, began amongst some prominent modern writers.

The ideas of Proudhon, especially as regards mutual banking, corresponding with those of Josiah Warren, found a considerable following in the United States, creating quite a school, of which the main

writers are Stephen Pearl Andrews, William Greene, Lysander Spooner (who began to write in 1850, and whose unfinished work, *Natural Law*, was full of promise), and several others, whose names will be found in Dr. Nettlau's *Bibliographie de l'anarchie*.

A prominent position among the individualist anarchists in America has been occupied by Benjamin R. Tucker, whose

journal *Liberty* was started in 1881 and whose conceptions are a combination of those of Proudhon with those of Herbert Spencer. Starting from the statement that anarchists are egotists, strictly speaking, and that every group of individuals, be it a secret league of a few persons, or the Congress of the United States, has the right to oppress all mankind, provided it has the

power to do so, that equal liberty for all and absolute equality ought to be the law, and “mind every one your own business” is the unique moral law of anarchism, Tucker goes on to prove that a general and thorough application of these principles would be beneficial and would offer no danger, because the powers of every individual would be limited by the

exercise of the equal rights of all others. He further indicated (following H. Spencer) the difference which exists between the encroachment on somebody's rights and resistance to such an encroachment; between domination and defence: the former being equally condemnable, whether it be encroachment of a criminal upon an individual, or the

encroachment of one upon all others, or of all others upon one; while resistance to encroachment is defensible and necessary. For their self-defence, both the citizen and the group have the right to any violence, including capital punishment. Violence is also justified for enforcing the duty of keeping an agreement. Tucker thus follows Spencer, and, like him, opens (in the

present writer's opinion) the way for reconstituting under the heading of "defence" all the functions of the State. His criticism of the present State is very searching, and his defence of the rights of the individual very powerful. As regards his economical views, B. R. Tucker follows Proudhon.[\[55\]](#)

The individualist anarchism of the American Proudhonians

finds, however, but little sympathy amongst the working masses. Those who profess it—they are chiefly “intellectuals”—soon realise that the *individualisation* they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts, and either abandon the ranks of the anarchists, and are driven into the liberal individualism of the classical economist or they retire into a

sort of Epicurean amoralism, or superman theory, similar to that of Stirner and Nietzsche. The great bulk of the anarchist working men prefer the anarchist-communist ideas which have gradually evolved out of the anarchist collectivism of the International Working Men's Association. To this direction belong—to name only the better known exponents of

anarchism—Élisée Reclus, Jean Grave, Sébastien Faure, Émile Pouget in France; Errico Malatesta and Covelli in Italy; R. Mella, A. Lorenzo, and the mostly unknown authors of many excellent manifestos in Spain; John Most amongst the Germans; Spies, Parsons and their followers in the United States, and so on; while Domela Nieuwenhuis occupies an intermediate position in

Holland. The chief anarchist papers which have been published since 1880 also belong to that direction; while a number of anarchists of this direction have joined the so-called syndicalist movement—the French name for the non-political labour movement, devoted to direct struggle with capitalism, which has lately become so prominent in Europe.

As one of the anarchist-communist direction, the present writer for many years endeavoured to develop the following ideas: to show the intimate, logical connection which exists between the modern philosophy of natural sciences and anarchism; to put anarchism on a scientific basis by the study of the tendencies that are apparent now in society and may indicate its

further evolution; and to work out the basis of anarchist ethics. As regards the substance of anarchism itself, it was Kropotkin's aim to prove that communism—at least partial—has more chances of being established than collectivism, especially in communes taking the lead, and that free, or anarchist-communism is the only form of communism that has any

chance of being accepted in civilised societies; communism and anarchy are therefore two terms of evolution which complete each other, the one rendering the other possible and acceptable. He has tried, moreover, to indicate how, during a revolutionary period, a large city—if its inhabitants have accepted the idea—could organise itself on the lines of free communism; the city

guaranteeing to every inhabitant dwelling, food and clothing to an extent corresponding to the comfort now available to the middle classes only, in exchange for a half-day's, or five-hours' work; and how all those things which would be considered as luxuries might be obtained by everyone if he joins for the other half of the day all sorts of free associations pursuing

all possible aims—educational, literary, scientific, artistic, sports and so on. In order to prove the first of these assertions he has analysed the possibilities of agriculture and industrial work, both being combined with brain work. And in order to elucidate the main factors of human evolution, he has analysed the part played in history by the popular constructive agencies

of mutual aid and the historical role of the State.

Without naming himself an anarchist, Leo Tolstoy, like his predecessors in the popular religious movements of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Chojecki, Denk and many others, took the anarchist position as regards the State and property rights, deducing his conclusions from the general spirit of the

teachings of the Christ and from the necessary dictates of reason. With all the might of his talent he made (especially in *The Kingdom of God in Yourselves*[[56](#)]) a powerful criticism of the church, the State and law altogether, and especially of the present property laws. He describes the State as the domination of the wicked ones, supported by brutal force. Robbers, he says,

are far less dangerous than a well-organised government. He makes a searching criticism of the prejudices which are current now concerning the benefits conferred upon men by the church, the State and the existing distribution of property, and from the teachings of the Christ he deduces the rule of non-resistance and the absolute

condemnation of all wars. His religious arguments are, however, so well combined with arguments borrowed from a dispassionate observation of the present evils, that the anarchist portions of his works appeal to the religious and the non-religious reader alike.

It would be impossible to represent here, in a short sketch, the penetration, on the

one hand, of anarchist ideas into modern literature, and the influence, on the other hand, which the libertarian ideas of the best contemporary writers have exercised upon the development of anarchism. One ought to consult the ten big volumes of the *Supplément Littéraire* to the paper *La Révolte* and later the *Temps Nouveaux*, which contain reproductions from the works

of hundreds of modern authors expressing anarchist ideas, in order to realise how closely anarchism is connected with all the intellectual movement of our own times. J. S. Mill's *Liberty*, Spencer's *Individual versus the State*, [Jean-Marie] Guyau's *Morality without Obligation or Sanction*, and Fouillée's *La Morale, l'Art et la Religion*, the works of Multatuli (E. Douwes

Dekker), Richard Wagner's *Art and Revolution*, the works of Nietzsche, Emerson, W. Lloyd Garrison, Thoreau, Alexander Herzen, Edward Carpenter and so on; and in the domain of fiction, the dramas of Ibsen, the poetry of Walt Whitman, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Zola's *Paris* and *Le Travail*, the latest works of Merezhkovsky, and an infinity of works of less known

authors, are full of ideas which show how closely anarchism is interwoven with the work that is going on in modern thought in the same direction of enfranchisement of man from the bonds of the State as well as from those of capitalism.

[55](#)[] While Tucker repeatedly linked his ideas to Proudhon's and translated many of his works into English, in reality there were many differences between the two. While Tucker also advocated economic reform by means of mutual banking, Proudhon's

socialisation of property, economic federalism, workers' associations and self-management find no echo in his work. Similarly, Proudhon's ideas on federations of communes are ignored by Tucker. As discussed in the introduction to *Property is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (AK Press, 2011), Proudhon was far closer to Kropotkin than Tucker on most issues except means (reform against revolution) and distribution of goods (deeds against needs). (Editor)

[56](#)[] Translated into English as *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1894). (Editor)

From *Modern Science and Anarchism*

While covering some of the same ground as Kropotkin's justly famous Encyclopaedia Britannica entry on Anarchism, these extracts from Modern Science and Anarchism place far more stress upon the class struggle origins of anarchism, the birth

*of revolutionary anarchism in
the First International and its
role in the labour movement.*

*These excerpts are from the
revised edition published by
Freedom Press in 1912.*

The Origin of Anarchism

Anarchy does not draw its
origin from any scientific
researches, or from any
system of philosophy.

Sociological sciences are still far from having acquired the same degree of accuracy as physics or chemistry. Even in the study of climate and weather (in Meteorology), we are not yet able to predict a month or even a week beforehand what weather we are going to have; consequently, it would be foolish to pretend that with the aid of such a young science as

Sociology is, dealing moreover with infinitely more complicated things than wind and rain, *we* could scientifically predict events. We must not forget either that scientific men are but ordinary men, and that the majority of them belong to the leisured class, and consequently share the prejudices of this class; most of them are even in the pay of the State. It is,

therefore, quite evident that Anarchy does not come from universities.

Like Socialism in general, and like all other social movements, Anarchism originated among the people, and it will preserve its vitality and creative force so long only as it remains a movement of the people.

From all times, two currents of thought and action have

been in conflict in the midst of human societies. On the one hand, the masses, the people, worked out, by their way of life, a number of necessary institutions in order to make social existence possible, to maintain peace, to settle quarrels, and to practise mutual aid in all circumstances that required combined effort. Tribal customs among savages, the village communities, later

on industrial guilds in the cities of the Middle Ages, the first elements of international law that these cities elaborated to settle their mutual relations; these and many other institutions were developed and worked out, not by legislation, but by the creative spirit of the masses.

On the other hand, there have always flourished among men, magi, shamans, wizards,

rain-makers, oracles, and priests, who were the founders and the keepers of a rudimentary knowledge of Nature, and of the first elements of worship (worship of the sun, the moon, the forces of Nature, ancestor worship). Knowledge and superstition went then hand in hand—the first rudiments of science and the beginnings of all arts and crafts being

thoroughly interwoven with magic, the formulae and rites of which were carefully concealed from the uninitiated. By the side of these earliest representatives of religion and science, there were also the experts in ancient customs—those men, like the *brehons* of Ireland, who kept in their memories the precedents of law. And there were also the chiefs of the military bands,

who were supposed to possess the magic secrets of success in warfare.

These three groups of men formed among themselves secret societies for the keeping and transmission (after a long and painful initiation) of the secrets of their knowledge and crafts, and if, at times, they opposed each other, they generally agreed in the long run; they leagued together and

upheld one another in different ways, in order to be able to command the masses, to reduce them to obedience, to govern them, and to make them work for them.

It is evident that Anarchy represents the first of these two currents, that is to say, the creative, constructive force of the masses, who elaborated common-law institutions in order to defend themselves

against a domineering minority. It is also by the creative and constructive force of the people, aided by the whole strength of modern science and technique, that today Anarchy strives to set up institutions that are indispensable to the free development of society, in opposition to those who put their hope in laws made by governing minorities.

We can therefore say that from all times there have been Anarchists and Statists.

Moreover, we always find that institutions, even the best of them, that were built up to maintain equality, peace, and mutual aid, become petrified as they grow old. They lose their original purpose, they fall under the domination of an ambitious minority, and gradually they become an

obstacle to the ulterior development of society. Then individuals, more or less isolated, rebel against these institutions. But while some of these discontented, who rebel against an institution that has become irksome, strive to modify it for the common welfare, and above all to overthrow the guilds, etc., others strive only to set themselves outside and above

the social institutions altogether, in order to dominate the other members of society and to enrich themselves at society's expense.

All really serious political, religious, economic reformers have belonged to the first of the two categories; and among them there have always been individuals who, without waiting for all their fellow

citizens, or even a minority of them, to be imbued with similar ideas, strove to incite more or less numerous groups against oppression, or advanced alone if they had no following. There were Revolutionists in all times known to history.

However, these Revolutionists appeared under two different aspects. Some of them, while rebelling against

the authority that oppressed society, in nowise tried to destroy this authority; they simply strove to secure it for themselves. Instead of a power that had grown oppressive, they sought to constitute a new power, of which they would be the holders, and they promised, often in good faith, that the new authority, handed over to them, would have the welfare of the people at heart

and would be their true representative—a promise that later on was inevitably forgotten or betrayed. Thus were constituted Imperial authority in the Rome of the Caesars, ecclesiastical authority in the first centuries of our era, dictatorial power in the decaying cities of the Middle Ages, and so forth. The same line of thought brought about royal authority

in Europe at the end of feudal times. Faith in an emperor “for the people,” a Caesar, is not yet dead, even in the present day.

But side by side with this authoritarian current, another current asserted itself, every time the necessity was felt of revising the established institutions. At all times, from ancient Greece till nowadays, there were individuals and

currents of thought and action that sought, not to replace any particular authority by another, but to destroy the authority that had grafted itself on popular institutions, without creating a new one to take its place. They proclaimed the sovereignty of both the individual and the people, and they tried to free the popular institutions from authoritarian overgrowths; they worked to

give back full liberty to the collective spirit of the masses, so that popular genius might freely reconstruct institutions of mutual aid and protection, in harmony with new needs and conditions of existence. In the cities of ancient Greece, and especially in those of the Middle Ages—Florence, Pskov, etc.—we find many examples of this kind of conflict.

We may therefore say that Jacobins and Anarchists have existed at all times among reformers and Revolutionists.

Formidable popular movements, stamped with the character of Anarchism, took place several times in the past. Villages and cities rose against the principle of government, against the supporters of the State, its tribunals, its laws, and they proclaimed the

sovereignty of the rights of man. They denied all written law, and asserted that every man should govern himself according to his conscience. They thus tried to found a new society, based on the principles of equality, full liberty, and work. In the Christian movement in Judea, under Augustus, against the Roman law, the Roman State, and the morality, or rather the

immorality, of that epoch, there was unquestionably much Anarchism. Little by little this movement degenerated into a Church movement, fashioned after the Hebrew Church and Imperial Rome itself, which naturally killed all that Christianity possessed of Anarchism at its outset, gave the Christian teachings a Roman form, and soon made of it the mainstay

of authority, State, slavery, and oppression. The first seeds of “Opportunism” introduced into Christianity are already strong in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles—or, at least, in the versions of the same that are incorporated in the New Testament.

The Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, which in the main inaugurated and brought about the

Reformation, also had an Anarchist basis, but crushed by those Reformers who, under Luther's rule, leagued with princes against the rebellious peasants, the movement was suppressed by a great massacre of peasants and the poorer citizens of the towns. Then the right wing of the Reformers degenerated little by little, till it became the compromise between its own

conscience and the State which exists today under the name of Protestantism.

Thus, to summarise: Anarchism had its origin in the same creative, constructive activity of the masses which has worked out in times past all the social institutions of mankind—and in the revolts of both the individuals and the nations against the representatives of force,

external to these social institutions, who had laid their hands upon these institutions and used them for their own advantage. Those of the rebels whose aim was to restore to the creative genius of the masses the necessary freedom for its creative activity. so that it work out the required new institutions, were imbued with the Anarchist spirit.

In our times, Anarchy was

brought forth by the same critical and revolutionary protest which gave rise to Socialism in general. However, one portion of the Socialists, after having reached the negation of Capitalism and of society based on the subjection of labour to capital, stopped in its development at this point. They did not declare themselves against what constitutes the real

strength of Capitalism: the State and its principal supports—centralisation of authority, law, always made by a minority for its own profit, and a form of justice whose chief aim is to protect Authority and Capitalism. As to Anarchism, it did not stop in its criticism before these institutions. It lifted its sacrilegious arm, not only against Capitalism, but also against these pillars of

Capitalism: Law, Authority,
and the State.

The Anarchist Ideal and the Preceding Revolutions

Anarchism, as we have
already said, arises from the
course taken by practical life.

Godwin, contemporary of
the Great Revolution of 1789–
93, had seen with his own

eyes how the authority of the Government, created during the Revolution and by the Revolution itself, had in its turn become an obstacle to the development of the revolutionary movement. He was also aware of what went on in England under cover of Parliament: the pillage of communal lands, the sale of advantageous posts, the hunting of the children of the

poor and their removal from workhouses, by agents who travelled all over England for the purpose, to the factories of Lancashire, where masses of them soon perished. And Godwin soon understood that a Government, were it even that of the Jacobin “One and Indivisible Republic,” would never be able to accomplish the necessary Social, Communistic Revolution; that

a Revolutionary Government, by virtue of its being a guardian of the State, and of the privileges every State has to defend, soon becomes a hindrance to the Revolution. He understood and openly proclaimed the idea that for the triumph of the Revolution men must first get rid of their faith in Law, Authority, Unity, Order, Property, and other institutions inherited from past

times when their forefathers were slaves.

The second Anarchist theorist, Proudhon, who came after Godwin, lived through the Revolution of 1848. He was able to see with his own eyes the crimes committed by the Republican Government, and at the same time convince himself of the impotence of Louis Blanc's State Socialism. Under the recent impression of

what he had seen during the Revolution of 1848, he wrote his powerful work, *General Idea on the Revolution*, in which he boldly proclaimed Anarchism and the abolition of the State.

And lastly, in the International Working Men's Association the Anarchist conception also asserted itself after a Revolution—that is, after the Paris Commune of

1871. The complete revolutionary impotence of the Council of the Commune, although it contained, in a very just proportion, representatives of all the revolutionary parties of that time: Jacobins, Blanquists, and Internationalists; and the incapacity of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, which was sitting in London,

and its silly, harmful pretensions to govern the Parisian movement by orders issued from England; both these lessons opened the eyes of a great number. They led several Federations of the International, and several of its prominent members, including Bakunin, to meditate on the harmfulness of every kind of authority, even when it is elected with as much freedom

as that of the Commune or that of the Workers' International.

Some months later, the decision taken by the General Council of the International at a private meeting convened in London in 1871, instead of an annual Congress, made the dangers of a Government in the International still more evident. By this baneful resolution the forces of the

Association, which up till then gathered together for an economic, revolutionary struggle, for the direct action of the Labour Unions against the Capitalism of employers, were to engage in an electoral, political, and Parliamentary movement, which could but waste and destroy their real forces.

This resolution brought about open rebellion among

the Latin Federations of the Association—Spanish, Italian, Jurassic, and partly Belgian—against the General Council; and from this rebellion dates the Anarchist movement which we see going on.

We thus see that the Anarchist movement was renewed each time it received an impression from some great practical lesson: it derived its origin from the teachings of

life itself. But no sooner had it sprung up than it began to work out a general expression of its principles, and the theoretical and scientific basis of its teachings. Scientific—not in the sense of adopting an incomprehensible slang, or clinging to ancient metaphysics, but in the sense of finding a basis for its principles in the natural sciences of the time, and of

becoming one of their departments.

At the same time it worked out its own ideal.

No struggle can be successful if it is unconscious, if it has no definite and concrete aim. No destruction of existing things is possible if men have not already settled for themselves, during the struggles leading to the destruction, and during the

period of destruction itself, what is going to take the place of that which is to be destroyed. Even a theoretical criticism of what exists is not possible without one picturing to oneself a more or less exact image of that which he desires to see in its place. Consciously or unconsciously, the *ideal*, the conception of something better, always grows in the mind of whoever criticises

existing institutions.

It is the more so with men of action. To tell men: “Let us first destroy Capitalism and Autocracy, and then we shall see what we shall put in their stead,” is but to deceive oneself and to deceive others. *Never has a real force been created by deception.* In fact, even the one who deprecates ideals and sneers at them always has, nevertheless,

some conception of what he would like to see in lieu of what he is attacking. For example, while working to destroy Autocracy, some imagine an English or a German Constitution in the near future; others dream of a Republic, subject perhaps to a powerful dictatorship of their party, or a Monarchical Republic as in France, or a Federative Republic as in the

United States; while there is now a third party which conceives a still greater limitation of State power, a still greater liberty for the cities, for the Communes, for the workers' Unions, and for all sorts of groups united among themselves by free, temporary federation, than can be obtained in any Republic.

And when people attack Capitalism, they always have a

certain conception, a vague or definite idea, of what they hope to see in the place of Capitalism: State Capitalism, or some sort of State Communism, or a federation of free Communist associations for the production, the exchange, and the consumption of commodities.

Each party has thus its own conception of the future—its

ideal which enables it to pronounce its own judgement on all facts occurring in the political and economic life of nations, and inspires it in its search for suitable means of action, in order the better to march towards its aim. It is, therefore, natural that Anarchism, although it has originated in every-day struggles, has also worked to elaborate its ideal. And this

ideal, this aim, these plans, soon separated the Anarchists, in their means of action, from all political parties, as also, in a very great measure, from the Socialist parties which have thought it possible to keep the ancient Roman and Canonical idea of the State and to transport it into the future society of their dreams.

Anarchism

It is seen from the foregoing that a variety of considerations, historical, ethnological, and economical, have brought the Anarchists to conceive a society, very different from what is considered as its ideal by the authoritarian political parties. The Anarchists conceive a society in which all the mutual relations of its members are regulated, not by laws, not by

authorities, whether self-imposed or elected, but by mutual agreements between the members of that society, and by a sum of social customs and habits—not petrified by law, routine, or superstition, but continually developing and continually readjusted, in accordance with the ever-growing requirements of a free life, stimulated by the progress of science, invention,

and the steady growth of higher ideals.

No ruling authorities, then. No government of man by man; no crystallisation and immobility, but a continual evolution—such as we see in Nature. Free play for the individual, for the full development of his individual gifts—for *his individualisation*. In other words, no actions are *imposed*

upon the individual by a fear of punishment; none is required from him by society, but those which receive his free acceptance. *In a society of equals* this would be quite sufficient for preventing those unsociable actions that might be harmful to other individuals and to society itself, and for favouring the steady moral growth of that society.

This is the conception

developed and advocated by the Anarchists.

[...]

When we look into the origin of the Anarchist conception of society, we see that it has had a double origin: the criticism, on the one side, of the hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society; and on the other side, the analysis of the tendencies that are seen in the

progressive movements of mankind, both in the past, and still more so at the present time.

From the remotest, Stone-Age antiquity, men must have realised the evils that resulted from letting some of them acquire personal authority—even if they were the most intelligent, the bravest, or the wisest. Consequently, they developed, in the primitive

clan, the village community, the medieval guild (neighbours' guilds, arts and crafts' guilds, traders', hunters', and so on), and finally in the free medieval city, such institutions as enabled them to resist the encroachments upon their life and fortunes both of those strangers who conquered them, and those clansmen of their own who endeavoured to

establish their personal authority. The same popular tendency was self-evident in the religious movements of the masses in Europe during the earlier portions of the Reform movement and its Hussite and Anabaptist forerunners. At a much later period, namely, in 1793, the same current of thought and of action found its expression in the strikingly independent, freely federated

activity of the “Sections” of Paris and all great cities and many small “Communes” during the French Revolution. [57] And later still, the Labour combinations which developed in England and France, notwithstanding Draconic laws, as soon as the factory system began to grow up, were all outcome of the same popular resistance to the growing power of the few—

the capitalists in this case.

These were the main popular Anarchist currents which we know of in history, and it is self-evident that these movements could not but find their expression in literature. So they did, beginning with Lao-tse in China, and some of the earliest Greek philosophers (Aristippus and the Cynics; Zeno and some of the Stoics). However, being born in the

masses, and not in any centres of learning, these popular movements, both when they were revolutionary and when they were deeply constructive, found little sympathy among the learned men—far less than the authoritarian hierarchical tendencies.

The Greek Stoic, Zeno, already advocated a free community, without any government, which he

opposed to the State Utopia of Plato. He already brought into evidence the instinct of sociability, which Nature had developed in opposition to the egotism of the self-preservation instinct. He foresaw a time when men would unite across the frontiers and constitute the Cosmos, and would have no need of laws, law-courts, or temples—and no need either

of money for their exchanges of mutual services. His very wording seems to have been strikingly similar to that now in use amongst Anarchists.[[58](#)]

The Bishop of Alba, Marco Girolamo Vida, developed, in 1553, similar ideas against the State, its laws, and its “supreme injustice,” as also did the early precursors of Rationalism in Armenia (in the ninth century), the Hussites

(especially Chojecki, in the fifteenth century), and the early Anabaptists.

Rabelais in the first half of the sixteenth century, Fénelon at the end of it, and especially the Encyclopaedist Diderot at the end of the eighteenth century, developed the same ideas, which found, as has just been mentioned, some practical expression during the French Revolution.

But it was Godwin, in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, who stated in 1793 in a quite definite form the political and economic principles of Anarchism. He did not use the word “Anarchy” itself, but he very forcibly laid down its principles, boldly attacking the laws, proving the uselessness of the State, and maintaining that only with the abolition of

Courts true *Justice*—the only real foundation of all society—would become possible. As regards property, he openly advocated Communism.[[59](#)]

Proudhon was the first to use the word “An-archy” (No-Government) and to submit to a powerful criticism the fruitless efforts of men to give themselves such a Government as would prevent the rich ones from dominating the poor, and

at the same time always remain under the control of the governed ones.[[60](#)] The repeated attempts of France, since 1793, at giving herself such a Constitution, and the failure of the Revolution of 1848, gave him rich material for his criticism.

Being an enemy of all forms of State Socialism, of which the Communists of those years (the “forties” and “fifties” of

the nineteenth century) represented a mere subdivision, Proudhon fiercely attacked all such attempts, and taking Robert Owen's system of labour cheques representing hours of labour, he developed a conception of *Mutualism*, in which any sort of political Government would be useless.

The values of all the commodities being measured by the amount of labour

necessary to produce them, all the exchanges between the producers could be carried on by means of a national bank, which would accept payment in labour cheques—a Clearing House establishing the daily balance of exchanges between the thousands of branches of this bank.

The services exchanged by different men would thus be *equivalent*, and as the bank

would be able to lend the labour cheques' money without interest, and every association would be able to borrow it on payment of only 1 per cent. or less to cover the administration costs, capital would lose its pernicious power; it could be used no more as an instrument of exploitation.

Proudhon gave to the system of Mutualism a very full

development in connection with his anti-Government and anti-State ideas; but it must be said that the Mutualist portion of his programme had been developed in England already by William Thompson (he was a Mutualist prior to his becoming a Communist) and the English followers of Thompson—John Gray (1825, 1831) and J. F. Bray (1839).

[...]

Such was the growth of Anarchist ideas, from the French Revolution and Godwin to Proudhon. The next step was made within the great “International Working Men’s Association,” which so much inspired the working classes with hope, and the middle classes with terror, in the years 1868–1870—just before the Franco-German War.

That this Association was not founded by Marx, or any other personality, as the hero-worshippers would like us to believe, is self-evident. It was the outcome of the meeting, at London, in 1862, of a delegation of French working men, who had come to visit the Second International Exhibition, with representatives of British Trade Unions and Radicals,

who received that delegation.

[...]

The Association began to spread rapidly in the Latin countries. Its fighting power soon became menacing, while at the same time its Federations and its yearly Congresses offered to the working men the opportunity of discussing and bringing into shape the ideas of a Social Revolution.

The near approach of such a Revolution was generally expected at that time, but no definite ideas as to its possible form and its immediate steps were forthcoming. On the contrary, several conflicting currents of Socialist thought met together in the International.

The main idea of the Association was a direct struggle of Labour against

Capital in the economic field —i.e., the emancipation of Labour, not by middle-class legislation, but by the working men themselves.

[...]

And now came the terrible Franco-German War, into which Napoleon III and his advisers madly rushed, in order to save the Empire from the rapidly advancing revolution; and with it came

the crushing defeat of France, the Provisory Government of Gambetta and Thiers, and the Commune of Paris, followed by similar attempts at Saint-Étienne in France [1871], and at Barcelona and Carthagenia in Spain [1873]. And these popular insurrections brought into evidence what the *political* aspect of a Social Revolution ought to be.

Not a Democratic Republic,

as was said in 1848, but *the free, independent Communist Commune*.

Of course, the Paris Commune itself suffered from the confusion of ideas as to the economic and political steps to be taken by the Revolution, which prevailed, as we saw, in the International. Both the Jacobinists and the Communalists—i.e., the centralists and the federalists

—were represented in the uprising, and necessarily they came into conflict with each other. The most warlike elements were the Jacobinists and the Blanquists, but the economic, Communist ideals of Babeuf had already faded among their middle-class leaders. They treated the economic question as a secondary one, which would be attended to later on, *after*

the triumph of the Commune, and this idea prevailed. But the crushing defeat which soon followed, and the bloodthirsty revenge taken by the middle classes, proved once more that the triumph of a popular Commune was materially impossible without a parallel triumph of the people in the economic field.

For the Latin nations, the Commune of Paris, followed

by similar attempts at Carthagenan and Barcelona, settled the ideas of the revolutionary proletariat.

This was the form that the Social Revolution must take—the independent Commune. Let all the country and all the world be against it but once its inhabitants have decided that they *will* communalise the consumption of commodities, their exchange, and their

production, *they must realise it among themselves.* And in so doing, will find such forces as never could be called into life and to the service of a great cause, if they attempted to take in the sway of the Revolution the whole country: including its most backward or indifferent regions. Better openly to fight such strongholds of reaction than to drag them as so many chains

riveted to the feet of the fighter.

More than that. We made one step more. We understood that if no central Government was needed to rule the independent Communes, if the national Government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central *municipal* Government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same

federative principle would do within the Commune.

The uprising of the Paris Commune thus brought with it the solution of a question which tormented every true Revolutionist. Twice had France tried to bring about some sort of a Socialist revolution, by imposing it through a Central Government, more or less disposed to accept it: in 1793–94, when

she tried to introduce *l'égalité de fait*—real, economic equality—by means of strong Jacobinist measures; and in 1848, when she tried to impose a “Democratic Socialist Republic.” And each time she failed. But, now a solution was indicated: the free Commune do it on its own territory, and with this grew up a new ideal—Anarchy.

We understood then that at

the bottom of Proudhon's *Idée Générale [de] la Revolution au Dix-neuvième Siècle* (unfortunately, not yet translated into English[[61](#)]) lay a deeply *practical* idea—that of Anarchy. And in the Latin countries the thought of the more advanced men began to work in this direction.

Alas! in Latin countries only: in France, in Spain, in Italy, in the French-speaking part of

Switzerland, and the Wallonic part of Belgium. The Germans, on the contrary, drew from their victory over France quite another lesson and quite different ideals—the worship of the centralised State.

The centralised State, hostile even to national tendencies of independence; the power of centralisation and a strong central authority—these were

the lessons they drew from the victories of the German Empire, and to these lessons they cling even now, without limit, that this was only a victory of a military mass, of the universal obligatory military service of the Germans, over the recruiting system of the French and over the rottenness of the second Napoleonic Empire approaching a revolution

which would have benefited mankind, if it were not hindered by the German invasion.

In the Latin countries, then, the lesson of the Paris and the Carthagenia Communes laid the foundation for the development of Anarchy. And the authoritarian tendencies of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, which soon

became evident and worked fatally against the unity of action of the great Association, still more reinforced the Anarchist current of thought. The more so as that Council, led by Marx, Engels, and some French Blanquist refugees—all pure Jacobinists—used its powers to make a *coup d'état* in the International. It substituted in the programme of the

Association Parliamentary
political action *in lieu* of the
economic struggle of Labour
against Capital, which hitherto
had been the essence of the
International. And in this way
it provoked an open revolt
against its authority in the
Spanish, Italian, Jurassic, and
East Belgian Federations, and
among a certain section of the
English Internationalists.

In Mikhail Bakunin, the

Anarchist tendency, now
growing within the
International, found a
powerful, gifted, and inspired
exponent; while round
Bakunin and his Jura friends
gathered a small circle of
talented young Italians and
Spaniards, who further
developed his ideas. Largely
drawing upon his wide
knowledge of history and
philosophy, Bakunin

established in a series of powerful pamphlets and letters the leading principles of modern Anarchism.

The complete abolition of the State, with all its organisation and ideals, was the watchword he boldly proclaimed. The State has been in the past a historical necessity, which grew out of the authority won by the religious castes. But its

complete extinction is now, in its turn, a historical necessity, because the State represents the negation of liberty, and spoils even what it undertakes to do for the sake of general well-being. All legislation made within the State, even when it issues from the so-called universal suffrage, has to be repudiated, because it always has been made with regard to the interests of the

privileged classes. Every nation, every region, every commune must be absolutely free to organise itself, politically and economically, as it likes, so long as it is not a menace to its neighbours. “Federalism” and “autonomy” are not enough. These are only words, used to mask the State authority. Full independence of the Communes, their free

federation, and the Social Revolution within the Communes—this was, he proved, the ideal now rising before our civilisation from the mists of the past. The individual understands that he will be really free in proportion only as all the others round him become free.

As to his economic conceptions, Bakunin was at heart a Communist; but, in

common with his Federalist comrades of the International, and as a concession to the antagonism to Communism that the authoritarian Communists had inspired in France, he described himself as a “Collectivist Anarchist.” But, of course, he was not a “Collectivist” in the sense of Vidal or Pecqueur, or of their modern followers, who simply aim at “State Capitalism”; he

understood it in the above-mentioned sense of *not* determining in advance what form of distribution the producers should adopt in their different groups—whether the Communist solution, or the labour cheques, or equal salaries, or any other method. And with these views, he was an ardent preacher of the Social Revolution, the near approach

of which was foreseen then by all Socialists, and which he foretold in fiery words.[[62](#)]

[...]

In proportion as the workers of Europe and America began to know each other directly, without the intermediary of Governments, they grew more and more convinced of their own forces and of their capacity for rebuilding society on new bases. They saw that

if the people resumed possession of the land and of all that is required for producing all sorts of necessaries of life, and if the associations of men and who would work on the land, in the factories, in the mines, and so on, became themselves the managers of production, they would be able, in such conditions, to produce with the greatest ease all that is

necessary for the life of society, so as to guarantee well-being for all, and also some leisure for all. The recent progress in science and technics rendered this point more and more evident. Besides, in a vast international organisation of producers and consumers, the exchange of produce could be organised with the same ease—once it would not be done for the

enrichment of the few.

At the same time, the ever-growing thinking portion of the workers saw that the State, with its traditions, its hierarchy, and its narrow nationalism, would always stand in the way of the development of such an organisation; and the experiments made in different countries with the view of partially alleviating the social

evils within the present middle-class State proved more and more the fallacy of such tactics.

The wider the sphere of those experiments, the more evident it was that the machinery of the State could not be utilised as an instrument of emancipation. The State is an institution which was developed for the very purpose of establishing monopolies in

favour of the slave and serf owners, the landed proprietors, canonic and laic, the merchant guilds and the moneylenders, the kings, the military commanders, the “noble-men,” and finally, in the nineteenth century, the industrial capitalists, whom the State supplied with “hands” driven away from the land. Consequently the State would be, to say the least, a useless

institution, once these monopolies ceased to exist. *Life would be simplified*, once the mechanism created for the exploitation of the poor by the rich would have been done away with.

The idea of independent Communes for the territorial organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions for the organisation of men in accordance with their different

functions, gave a *concrete* conception of society regenerated by a social revolution. There remained only to add to these two modes of organisation a third, which we saw rapidly developing during the last fifty years, since a little liberty was conquered in this direction: the thousands upon thousands of free combines and societies growing up everywhere for the

satisfaction of all possible and imaginable needs, economic, sanitary, and educational; for mutual protection, for the propaganda of ideas, for art, for amusement, and so on. All of them covering each other, and all of them always ready to meet the new needs by new organisations and adjustments.

[...]

Passing now to the economic views of Anarchists,

three different conceptions must be distinguished.

So long as Socialism was understood in its wide, generic, and true sense—as an effort to *abolish* the exploitation of Labour by Capital—the Anarchists were marching hand-in-hand with the Socialists of that time. But they were compelled to separate from them when the Socialists began to say that

there is no possibility of *abolishing* capitalist exploitation within the lifetime of our generation: that *during that phase of economic evolution which we are now living through* we have only *to mitigate* the exploitation, and to impose upon the capitalists certain legal limitations.

Contrarily to this tendency of the present-day Socialists, we maintain that already now,

without waiting for the coming of new phases and forms of the capitalist exploitation of Labour, we must work for its *abolition*. We must, already now, tend to transfer all that is needed for production—the soil, the mines, the factories, the means of communication, and *the means of existence, too*—from the hands of the individual capitalist into those of the communities of

producers and consumers.

As for the *political* organisation—i.e., the forms of the commonwealth in the midst of which an economic revolution could be accomplished—we entirely differ from all the sections of State Socialists in that we do not see in the system of *State Capitalism*, which is now preached under the name of Collectivism, a solution of the

social question. We see in the organisation of the posts and telegraphs, in the State railways, and the like—which are represented as illustrations of a society without capitalists—nothing but a new, perhaps improved, but still undesirable form of the Wage System. We even think that such a solution of the social problem would so much run against the present libertarian tendencies of

civilised mankind, that it simply would be unrealisable.

We maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges. The lessons of history tell us that a new form of economic life always calls forth a new form of political

organisation; and a Socialist society (whether Communist or Collectivist) cannot be an exception to this rule. Just as the Churches cannot be utilised for freeing man from his old superstitions, and just as the feeling of human solidarity will have to find other channels for its expression besides the Churches, so also the economic and political

liberation of man will have to create new forms for its expression in life, instead of those established by the State.

Consequently, the chief aim of Anarchism is to awaken those constructive powers of the labouring masses of the people which at all great moments of history came forward to accomplish the necessary changes, and which, aided by the now accumulated

knowledge, will accomplish the change that is called forth by all the best men of our own time.

This is also why the Anarchists refuse to accept the functions of legislators or servants of the State. We know that the social revolution will not be accomplished by means of *laws*. Laws can only *follow* the accomplished facts; and even if they honestly do follow

them—which usually is *not* the case—a law remains a dead letter so long as there are not on the spot the living forces required for making of the *tendencies* expressed in the law an accomplished *fact*.

On the other hand, since the times of the International Working Men's Association, the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations

which carry on the *direct* struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector,—the State.

Such a struggle, they say, better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and

wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State.

The opinions of the Anarchists concerning the form which *the remuneration of labour* may take in a society freed from the yoke of Capital and State still remain divided.

To begin with, all are agreed in repudiating the new form of the Wage System which would be established if the State became the owner of all the land, the mines, the factories, the railways, and so on, and the great organiser and manager of agriculture and all the industries. If these powers were added to those which the State already possesses (taxes, defence of the territory,

subsidised religions, etc.), we should create a new tyranny, even more terrible than the old one.

The greater number of Anarchists accept the Communist solution. They see that the only form of Communism that would be acceptable in a civilised society is one which would exist without the continual interference of Government,

i.e., the Anarchist form. And they realise also that an Anarchist society of a large size would be impossible, unless it would begin by guaranteeing to all its members a certain minimum of well-being produced in common. Communism and Anarchy thus complete each other.

[...]

As to Anarchist

Communism, it is certain that this solution wins more and more ground nowadays among those working men who try to get a clear conception as to the forthcoming revolutionary action. The Syndicalist and Trade Union movements, which permit the working men to realise their solidarity and to feel the community of their interests, much better than any elections, prepare the way for

these conceptions. And it is hardly too much to hope that when some serious movement for the emancipation of Labour begins in Europe and America, attempts will be made, at least in the Latin countries, in the Anarchist Communist direction—much deeper than anything that was done by the French nation in 1793–94.

A Few Conclusions of Anarchism

[...]

All Political Economy takes, in an Anarchist's view, an aspect quite different from the aspect given to it by the economists, who, being unaccustomed to use the scientific, inductive method, even do not realise what a "natural law" is, although they very much like

to use this expression. They even do not notice the *conditional* character of all so-called natural “laws.”

In fact, every natural law always means this:—“*If* such and such conditions are at work, the result will be this and that.—*If* a straight line crosses another line, so as to make equal angles on both its sides at the crossing point, the consequences will be such and

such.—*If* those movements only which go on in the interstellar space act upon two bodies, and there is not, at a distance which is not infinitely great, a third, or a fourth body acting upon the two, then the centres of gravity of these two bodies will begin to move towards each other at such a speed” (this is the law of gravitation). And so on.

Always, there is an *if*—a

condition to be fulfilled.

Consequently, all the so-called *laws* and theories of political economy are nothing but assertions of the following kind:

“Supposing that there always are in a given country a considerable number of people who cannot exist one month, or even one fortnight, without earning a salary and accepting for that purpose the

conditions which the State will impose upon them (in the shape of taxes, land-rent, and so on), or those which will be offered to them by those whom the State recognises as owners of the soil, the factories, the railways, etc.—such and such consequences will follow.”

Up till now, the academic economists have always simply enumerated what

happens under such conditions, without specifying and analysing the conditions themselves. Even if they were mentioned, they were forgotten immediately, to be spoken of no more.

This is bad enough, but there is in their teachings something worse than that. The economists represent *the facts which result from these conditions as laws—as fatal,*

immutable laws. And they call that Science.

[...]

On the other side, the State, considered as a political power, State-Justice, the Church, and Capitalism are facts and conceptions which *we* cannot separate from each other. In the course of history these institutions have developed, supporting and reinforcing each other.

They are connected with each other—not as mere accidental coincidences. They are linked together by the links of cause and effect.

The State is, for us, a society of mutual insurance between the landlord, the military commander, the judge, the priest, and later on the capitalist, in order to support each other's authority over the people, and for exploiting the

poverty of the masses and getting rich themselves.

Such was the origin of the State; such was its history; and such is its present essence.

Consequently, to imagine that Capitalism may be abolished while the State is maintained, and with the aid of the State—while the latter was founded for forwarding the development of Capitalism and was always growing in power

and solidity, in proportion as the power of Capitalism grew up—to cherish such an illusion is as unreasonable, in our opinion, as it was to expect the emancipation of Labour from the Church, or from Caesarism or Imperialism. Certainly, in the first half of the nineteenth century, there have been many Socialists who had such dreams; but to live in the same dreamland

now that we enter in the twentieth century, is really too childish.

A new form of economic organisation will necessarily require a new form of political structure. And, whether the change be accomplished suddenly, by a revolution, or slowly, by the way of a gradual evolution, the two changes, political and economic, must go on abreast,

band in hand.

Each step towards economic freedom, each victory won over Capitalism will be at the same time a step towards political liberty—towards liberation from yoke of the State by means of free agreement, territorial, professional, and functional. And each step made towards taking from the State any one of its powers and attributes

will be helping the masses to win a victory over Capitalism.

The Means of Action

It is self-evident that if the Anarchists differ so much in their methods of investigation and in their fundamental principles, both from the academic men of science and from their Social Democratic colleagues, they must equally differ from them in their

means of action.

Holding the opinions we do about Law and the State, we evidently cannot see a source of Progress, and still less an approach to the required social changes, in an ever-growing submission of the individual to the State.

We cannot either go on saying, as superficial critics of present society often say when they require the State

management of industries, that modern Capitalism has its origin in an “anarchy of production” due to the “non intervention of the State” and to the Liberal doctrine of “let things alone” (*laissez faire, laissez passer*). This would amount to saying, that the State *has* practised this doctrine, while in reality it never has practised it. We know, on the contrary, that

while all Governments have given the capitalists and monopolists full liberty to enrich themselves with the underpaid labour of working men reduced to misery, they have never, nowhere given the working men the liberty of opposing that exploitation. Never has any Government applied the “leave things alone” principle to the exploited masses. It reserved it

for the exploiters only.

In France, even under the terrible “revolutionary” (i.e., Jacobinist) Convention, strikes were treated as a “coalition”—as “a conspiracy to form a State within the State”—and punished with death. So we need not speak after that of the anti-Labour legislation of the Napoleonic Empire, the monarchic Restoration, even the present

middle-class Republic.

In England, working men were hanged for striking, under the pretext of “intimidation,” as late as in 1813; and in 1834 working men were transported to Australia for having dared to found, with Robert Owen, a “National Trades’ Union.” In the “sixties” strikers were sent to hard labour for picketing, under the pretext of thus

defending “freedom of labour”; and not further back than 1903, as a result of the Taff Vale decision, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants had to pay £26,000 to a railway company for having declared a strike.

Need we speak after that of France, where the right of constituting Labour Unions and peasant Syndicates was obtained only in 1884, after

the Anarchist agitation which broke out at Lyon and among the miners in 1883; or of Switzerland, where strikers were shot at Airolo during the boring of the St. Gothard tunnel [in 1875]; to say nothing of Germany, Spain, Russia, and the United States, where State intervention in favour of capitalist misrule was still worse?

On the other side, we have

only to remember how every State reduces the peasants and the industrial workers to a life of misery, by means of taxes, and through the monopolies it creates in favour of the landlords, the cotton lords, the railway magnates, the publicans, and the like. We have only to think how the communal possession of the land was destroyed in this country by Enclosure Acts, or

how at this *very* moment it is destroyed in Russia, in order to supply “hands” to the landlords and the great factories.

And we need only to look round, to see how everywhere in Europe and America the States are constituting monopolies in favour of capitalists at home, and still more in conquered lands, such as Egypt, Tonkin, the

Transvaal, and so on.

What, then, is the use of talking, with Marx, about the “primitive accumulation”—as if this “push” given to capitalists were a thing of the past? In reality, new monopolies have been granted every year till now by the Parliaments of all nations to railway, tramway, gas, water, and maritime transport companies, schools,

institutions, and so on. The State's "push" is, and has ever been, the first foundation of all great capitalist fortunes.

In short, nowhere has the system of "non-intervention of the State" ever existed. Everywhere the State has been, and is, the main pillar and the creator, direct and indirect, of Capitalism and its powers over the masses. Nowhere, since States have

grown up, have the masses had the freedom of resisting the oppression by capitalists. The few rights they have now they have gained only by determination and endless sacrifice.

To speak therefore of non-intervention of the State may be all right for middle-class economists, who try to persuade the workers that their misery is “a law of

Nature.” But—how can Socialists use such language? The State has *always* interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter. It has always granted him protection in robbery, given aid and support for further enrichment. *And it could not be otherwise.* To do so was one of the functions—the chief mission—of the State.

The State was established for the precise purpose of imposing the rule of the landowners, the employers of industry, the warrior class, and the clergy upon the peasants on the land and the artisans in the city. And the rich perfectly well know that if the machinery of the State ceased to protect them, their power over the labouring classes would be gone immediately.

Socialism, we have said—whatever form it may take in its evolution towards Communism—must find its *own form* of political organisation. Serfdom and Absolute Monarchy have always marched hand-in-hand. The one rendered the other a necessity. The same is true of Capitalist rule, whose political form is Representative Government, either in a

Republic or in a Monarchy. This is why Socialism *cannot* utilise Representative Government as a weapon for liberating Labour, just as it cannot utilise the Church and its theory of divine right, or Imperialism and Caesarism, with its theory of hierarchy of functionaries, for the same purpose.

A new form of political organisation has to be worked

out the moment that Socialist principles shall enter into our life. And it is self-evident that this new form will have to be *popular, more decentralised, and nearer to the folk-mote self-government* than representative government can ever be.

[...]

Finally, being a revolutionary party, what we study in history is chiefly the genesis and the

gradual development of previous revolutions. In these studies we try to free history from the State interpretation which has been given to it by State historians. We try to reconstitute in it the true role of the people, the advantages it obtained from a revolution, the ideas it launched into circulation, and the faults of tactics it committed.

[...]

Without entering here into an analysis of the different revolutionary movements, it is sufficient to say that our conception of the coming social revolution is quite different from that of a Jacobin dictatorship, or the transformation of social institutions effected by a Convention, a Parliament, or a dictator. Never has a revolution been brought about

on those lines; and if the present working-class movement takes this form, it will be doomed to have no lasting result.

On the contrary, we believe that if a revolution begins, it must take the form of a widely spread popular movement, during which movement, in every town and village invaded by the insurrectionary spirit, the masses set themselves to

the work of reconstructing society on new lines. The people—both the peasants and the town workers—must themselves begin the constructive work, on more or less Communist principles, without waiting for schemes and orders from above. From the very beginning of the movement they must contrive to house and to feed every one, and then set to work to

produce what is necessary to feed, house, and clothe all of them.

They may not be—they are sure not to be—the *majority* of the nation. But if they are a respectably numerous minority of cities and villages scattered over the country, starting life on their own new Socialist lines, they will be able to win the right to pursue their own course. In all probability they

will draw towards them a notable portion of the land, as was the case in France in 1793–94.

As to the Government, whether it be constituted by force, only or by election; be it “the dictatorship of the proletariat,” as they used to say in France in the “forties,” and as they still say in Germany, or else an elected “Provisional Government,” or

a “Convention”; we put no faith in it. We know beforehand that it will be able to do nothing to accomplish the revolution, so long as the people themselves do not accomplish the change by working out on the spot the necessary new institutions.

We say so, not because we have a personal dislike of Governments, but because the whole of history shows us that

men thrown into a Government by a revolutionary wave have never been able to accomplish what was expected from them. And this is *unavoidable*. Because in the task of reconstructing society on new principles, separate men, however intelligent and devoted they may be, are sure to fail. The collective spirit of the masses is necessary for this purpose. Isolated men can

some times find the legal expression to sum up the destruction of old social forms—when the destruction is already proceeding. At the utmost, they may widen, perhaps, the sphere of the reconstructive work, extending what is being done in a part of the country, over a larger part of the territory. But to impose the reconstruction by law is absolutely impossible, as was

proved, among other examples, by the whole history of the French Revolution. Many thousands of the *laws* passed by the revolutionary Convention had not even been put into force when reaction came and flung those laws into the waste paper basket.

During a revolution new forms of life will always germinate on the ruins of the

old forms, but no Government will ever be able to find their expression *so long as these forms will not have taken a definite shape during the work itself of reconstruction* which must be going on in thousands of spots at the same time. Who guessed—who, in fact, could have guessed—before 1789 the role that was going to be played by the Municipalities and the Commune of Paris in

the revolutionary events of 1789–1793? It is impossible to legislate for *the future*. All we can do is to vaguely guess its essential tendencies and clear the road for it.

It is evident that in understanding the problem of the Social Revolution in this way, Anarchism cannot let itself be seduced by a programme that offers as its aim: “The conquest of the

power now in the hands of the State.”

We know that this conquest is not possible by peaceful means. The middle class will not give up its power without a struggle. It will resist. And in proportion as Socialists will become part of the Government, and share power with the middle class, their Socialism will grow paler and paler. This is, indeed, what

Socialism is rapidly doing. Were this not so, the middle classes, who are very much more powerful numerically and intellectually than most Socialists imagine them to be, would not share their power with the Socialists.

On the other hand, we also know that if an insurrection succeeded in giving to France, to England, or to Germany a provisional Socialist

Government, such a Government, without the spontaneous constructive activity of the people, would be absolutely powerless; and it would soon become a hindrance and a check to the revolution.

In studying the preparatory periods of revolutions, we come to the conclusion that no revolution has had its origin in the power of resistance or the

power of attack of a
Parliament or any other
representative body. *All
revolutions began among the
people.* None has ever
appeared armed from head to
foot, like Minerva rising from
the brain of Jupiter. All had,
besides their period of
incubation, their period of
evolution, during which the
masses, after having
formulated very modest

demands in the beginning, gradually began to conceive the necessity of more and more thorough and deeper changes: they grew more bold and daring in their conceptions of the problems of the moment, they gained confidence, and, having emerged from the lethargy of despair, they widened their programme. The “humble remonstrances” they

formulated at the outset grew step by step to be truly revolutionary demands.

In fact, it took France four years, from 1789 to 1793, to create a Republican minority which would be strong enough to impose itself.

As to the period of incubation, this is how we understand it.

To begin with, isolated individuals, profoundly

disgusted by what they saw around them, rebelled separately. Many of them perished without any apparent result; but the indifference of society was shaken. Even those who were satisfied with existing conditions and the most ignorant were brought *by* these separate acts of rebellion to ask themselves: “For what cause did these people, honest and full of energy, rebel and

prove ready to give their lives?" Gradually it became impossible to remain indifferent: people were compelled to declare themselves for or against the aims pursued by these individuals. Social thought woke up.

Little by little, small groups of men were imbued with the same spirit of revolt. They also with the hope of a partial

success; for example, that of winning a strike and if obtaining bread for their children, or of getting rid of some hated functionary; but very often also without any hope of success: they broke into revolt simply because they could not remain patient any longer. Not one or two such revolts, but hundreds of small insurrections in France and in England preceded the

Revolution. *This again was unavoidable.* Without such insurrections, no revolution has ever broken out. Without the menace contained in such revolts, no serious concession has ever been wrung by the people from the governing classes. Without such risings, the social mind was never able to get rid of its deep-rooted prejudices, nor to embolden itself sufficiently to

conceive *hope*. And *hope*—the hope of an improvement—was always the mainspring of revolutions.

[...]

The same has occurred whenever a revolution drew near, and we can safely say that as a general rule the character of each revolution was determined by the character and the purpose of the insurrections that preceded

it.

Consequently, to expect a *Social* Revolution to come like a Christmas-box, without being heralded by small acts of revolt and insurrections, is to cherish a vain hope. It would be shutting one's eyes to what is going on all round, in Europe and America, and taking no notice of the hundreds of strikes and small uprisings occurring

everywhere, and gradually assuming a more widespread and a deeper character.

[57](#)[] See *The Great French Revolution* (London: Heinemann, 1909).

[58](#)[] See article, "Anarchism," in the forthcoming (eleventh) edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [included in this volume (Editor)].

[59](#)[] It is all in the first edition of 1793, made in two quarto volumes. In the second edition, published in two octavo volumes in 1796, after the prosecution of his Republican friends, he withdrew his views on Communism, and mitigated his views on government.

[60](#)[] Proudhon proclaimed himself an anarchist in the first memoir on property, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (first and second memoirs translated by Benjamin Tucker in 1876). Extracts included in *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (AK Press, 2011). (Editor)

[61](#)[] Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* was translated in 1923 by John Beverly Robinson and published by Freedom Press. It was reprinted with an introduction by Graham Purchase by Pluto Press in 1989. Extracts are included in *Property is*

Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology (AK Press, 2011). (Editor)

[62](#)[] A number of Bakunin's co-workers and friends—namely, Varlin, Guillaume, and the Italians—had already in 1869 described themselves as Communist Anarchists, but, forced to fight bitterly later on for the independence of their respective Federations, they gave only a secondary attention to this question, leaving it to be decided in the future by the Communes and Labour organisations themselves.

The Anarchist Principle

Translation by James
Bar Bowen

*First published in Les Temps
Nouveaux (No. 67) and
subsequently released as a
pamphlet in 1913, this article
discusses the core ideas of
anarchism and how its
apparently negative*

*principles of anti-statism and
anti-capitalism hide an
extremely positive and
constructive conclusion.*

Originally, Anarchy was
presented as a simple
negation: it was a negation of
the State and of the personal
accumulation of capital; a
negation of all forms of
authority; a negation too of the
established structures of
society, based on injustice,

absurd egoism and oppression, as well as of the prevailing morality, derived from Roman Law, adopted and sanctified by the Christian church. As a result of this struggle against authority, and born at the very heart of the International [Working Men's Association], the anarchist position developed as a distinct revolutionary party.

Of course great intellects

such as Godwin, Proudhon and Bakunin would not limit themselves to a simple negation: the affirmation—the conception of a free society, without authority, marching toward the conquest of material, intellectual and moral well-being—followed on from the negation; this was its inevitable and logical complement. In the writings of Bakunin as well as those of

Proudhon and also of Stirner, there are profound insights into the historical roots of the anti-authoritarian principle, the part that it has played in history, and the role that it is going to be called on to play in the future development of humanity.

“No State,” or “No Authority,” in spite of its negative formulation, had a deeply affirmative meaning

when spoken by them. It was both a philosophical and a practical principle which signified that the whole of the life of human societies, everything, from daily individual relationships between people to broader relationships between races across oceans, could and should be reformulated; and they would be reformulated sooner or later, according to

the principles of Anarchy, namely with complete and total liberty in individual relationships, with natural and temporary associations, and with social solidarity as a guiding principle.

In sum, it was a philosophical concept.

Today, philosophy has become a laughing stock. However, it was no joke when Voltaire's *Philosophical*

Dictionary [[63](#)] was first published, putting philosophy within everyone's reach, inviting everyone to consider the meaning of everything. This was a revolutionary work whose influence can be traced through the uprisings [across France] in both the countryside and the city in 1793 as well as in the passionate engagement of the volunteers of the Revolution.

At that time, the bosses, architects of poverty and hunger, regarded philosophy with a sense of dread.

However, the clerics and the businessmen, ably assisted by the German academic philosophers and their incomprehensible jargon, succeeded in rendering philosophy useless, even ridiculous. The clerics and their followers asserted so

vehemently that philosophy was so much foolishness that the atheists eventually came to believe it. And the bourgeois businessmen—the red, white and blue opportunists—ridiculed philosophy so much that even the sincerest of people became convinced. Which stock-market speculator, which Thiers, which Napoleon, which Gambetta did they not parrot,

the better to pursue their business interests? As a consequence, philosophy has become a most mistrusted subject these days.

Well, no matter what the clergy, the businessmen, and the parrots say, Anarchy was understood by its founders as a great philosophical idea. It is, indeed, more than a mere motive for this or that action; it is a general philosophical

principle. It is a global perspective derived from a true understanding of social phenomena, of human history, and of the true causes of progress, both ancient and modern. It is a concept that we can only adopt if we alter all of our assessments, both great and small, of the major social phenomena as well as of the intimate relationships between us in our daily lives.

It is a principle of the daily struggle. And if it is a powerful principle in this struggle, this is because it encompasses the deep aspirations of the masses; it is a principle distorted by statist science and trampled underfoot by the oppressors; but it remains vital and active, always forging new progress in spite of and in opposition to all oppressors.

It expresses an idea that, for

as long as there have been human societies, has sought to change relationships between people, and that will one day transform them, both those that are established between people living under a single roof and those that may be established in international associations.

It is, in sum, a principle that demands a complete reconstruction of all of the

sciences, whether physical, natural, or social.

This positive and reconstructive aspect of Anarchy has been developing ceaselessly. Today, Anarchy has to carry an equally great burden upon its shoulders as it did at its inception.

It is no longer simply a struggle against fellow workers who arrogate some authority to themselves within a

workers' organisation. It is no longer simply a struggle against rulers, as was once the case, nor is it simply a struggle against an employer, a judge or a police officer.

It is all these things, of course, for without the everyday struggle—why call oneself a revolutionary? Ideas and action are inseparable, if ideas are to become central to an individual's existence:

without action, these ideas are meaningless.

But it is also more than that. It is the struggle between two great principles that, from time immemorial, have been at war with one another within society: the principle of liberty, and the principle of coercion. These two principles are once more engaged in a monumental struggle which must, of necessity, result in a

new triumph of the libertarian principle.

Look around yourself! What remains of all those political currents that once trumpeted themselves as explicitly revolutionary? Only two positions remain: the authoritarian current and the libertarian current—that is to say, the Anarchists and, in direct opposition to them, all the other political movements,

whatever name they give themselves.

In contrast to all these other parties, the Anarchists are the only ones to defend the principle of liberty. All the others boast of creating human happiness by changing or softening the form of the whip. If they cry, “Down with the hemp rope on the gibbet!” it is simply to replace it with a silken cord with which to lash

our backs. They are unable to conceive of society without the whip, without coercion of this sort or that—without the whip of wages or hunger, without the whip of judges or policemen, without the whip of punishment in one form or another. Only we dare state that punishment, policemen, judges, hunger and wages have never been and never will be a part of progress, and that

under a regime that uses these instruments of coercion, if progress is achieved, it is achieved in spite of and not because of these instruments.

This is our struggle. And what honest young heart would not beat faster with the idea that it too can become part of the struggle? Who would not assert, in contradiction to those oppressive minorities, the most

beautiful aspect of humanity, that which has created all of the progress around us, and which has flowered in spite of the efforts of many to trample it underfoot?

But that is not all!

As the division between the libertarian and the authoritarian position becomes more and more stark, the latter clings increasingly to the moribund ways of the past.

It knows that it faces a powerful principle, which, if understood fully by the masses, is capable of imparting an irresistible strength to the revolution. And yet it works to obstruct each of the currents that join to form the great revolutionary torrent. It seeks to control the communalist strand of thought which is increasingly visible in both France and England, and

it seeks to obstruct the workers' revolt against the bosses that is on the rise the world over.

Instead of finding allies in the less advanced socialists, we find them, in both these areas, cunning adversaries: they push themselves with all the strength of their learned prejudices, causing socialism to deviate from its direct path. This will end with the

obliteration of any socialist current within the workers' movement, unless the workers realise in time and turn away from those who currently shape their opinions.

Anarchists are thus forced to work without respite and without delay in all these areas.

They must reaffirm the main philosophical cornerstones of Anarchy. They must

incorporate scientific methods, for these will help to reshape ideas: the myths of history will be debunked, along with those of social economy and philosophy; they will provide support to those who, out of a desire for scientific truth, are already, often unwittingly, setting an anarchist stamp on contemporary thought.

They must participate in the daily struggle against

oppression and prejudice in order to maintain a spirit of revolt everywhere people feel oppressed and possess the courage to rise up.

They must thwart the clever machinations of all those parties who were once allies but who now are hostile, who seek now to divert onto authoritarian paths those movements which were originally spawned in revolt

against the oppression of Capital and State.

And finally, in all of these areas, they have to find, within the practice of life itself and indeed working through their own experiences, new ways in which social formations can be organised, be they centred on work, community or region, and how these might emerge in a liberated society, freed from the authority of

governments and those who would subject us to poverty and hunger.

Is not the very magnitude of the task before us the greatest inspiration for those of us who feel that we have within us the strength to fight? Is it not vital that we recognise each separate act which occurs during the course of the great struggle that we have to sustain?

philosophique (*Philosophical Dictionary*) is an encyclopaedic dictionary, first published in 1764. The alphabetically arranged articles often criticised the Roman Catholic Church and other institutions. Voltaire sought to create a text which would fit in one's pocket and be affordable because "revolutionary material must be small enough for people to carry with them." His text aimed to educate and amuse at the same time. (Editor)

A Few Thoughts about the Essence of Anarchism

*Published in Freedom
(January 1914), this article
sees Kropotkin discussing the
core aspects of anarchism. He
stresses that anarchism has to
be socialistic to be consistent
and ties it into popular
movements resisting
authoritarian social,*

*economic, and political
relationships. It was
originally a letter sent to a
French Anarchist Congress
held in August the previous
year.*

So far as we know anything about the history of human society, there has always been found in it two currents of thought and action—two different tendencies. There has been the *authoritarian*

tendency, represented by the wizards (the scientists of olden times), the priests, the military chiefs, and so on—who maintained that society must be organised by a central authority, and that this authority must make laws and be obeyed. And in opposition to this authoritarian current there has always been the *popular* current, which worked at organising society,

not from above downwards,
but on a basis of equality,
without authority, from the
simple to the complex, by the
free consent of the individuals
in the clan and the tribe, and
later on in the village
community and the
confederation.

From the earliest times these
two currents were found
struggling against each other.
They continue to do so, and

the history of mankind is the history of their struggles.

This second current is represented now by the Anarchists. Whilst those who ignore—willingly or not—the constructive work that has been accomplished by the popular current in the savage tribe, the village community, the urban commune, the federations of communes, and, till our own days, in the

working men's organisations,
open and secret, as well as in
the thousands of free societies
now formed for all sorts of
purposes—those who ignore
this work and consider
themselves predestined to
organise the masses are the
representatives of the
dominating, governing
tendency that found its
expression in the Church, the
State, and authoritarian

Socialism.

Since its first steps the popular current has been working at developing among men those *institutions* which render possible man's life *in society*. The savages, when they were hardly emerging from the ordeal of the Glacial period, must have noticed that there were among them dominating tendencies, and

that in order to combat them, or at least to bridle them, the revolt of isolated individuals would not be sufficient. Something else was necessary.

As the representatives of the dominating tendency must have already preached then—as they do now—the necessity of stopping “disorder” by establishing an *authority*, by transforming *custom* into *law* and mutual agreements into

obligations, and by developing a *religion*, so also the representatives of the popular libertarian tendency evidently understood since then that they would not be able to combat this tendency otherwise than by *opposing to it some sort of voluntary organisation of society*. Their words were different from those we use now, but this idea must have already been

born then. And we see, indeed, that while they were developing such an organisation they based themselves upon a very large *liberty of the individual* and upon the *equal rights* of every individual of the tribe, the stem, or the clan to a share of the land occupied by the tribe, the stem, or the clan. They thus recognised equal rights to the land, which was at that

time (together with the plundering of enemies) the chief source of income.

What we describe now as *political and economic equality* was thus aimed at since those times by the primitive builders of society. More than that. To the *dominating* spirit of the minorities of warriors and wizards, they were opposing the *constructive* spirit of the

masses. To the spirit of obedience and submission they opposed the spirit of *independence of the individual*, and at the same time the spirit of *voluntary co-operation*, so as to constitute society without subduing every one to authority.

Nowadays, in the struggle of the exploited ones against the exploiters, the same constructive activity has fallen

to the Anarchists. Their aim is *the free individual*. But they understand that it is not by *robbery*, nor by *seizing upon and monopolising* all sorts of natural wealth (lands, mines, roads, rivers, seaports, etc.), nor by *exploiting* the labour of other men fallen (forcibly or willingly) into servitude, that they shall succeed in freeing the individual.

They understand that, as

they live amidst *sociable* creatures, such as men are, they never would free themselves if they tried to free *themselves alone*, individually, without taking the others into account. To have the individual free, they must strive to constitute *a society of equals*, wherein *every one* would be possessed of *equal rights* to the treasures of knowledge and to the immense wealth

accumulated by mankind and its civilisation, *wherein nobody should be compelled to sell his labour* (and consequently, to a certain degree, his personality) to those who intend to exploit him.

This is why Anarchy necessarily is *Communist*, why it was born amidst the international Socialist movement, and why an Individualist, if he intends to

remain Individualist, cannot be an Anarchist.

He who intends to retain *for himself* the monopoly of any piece of land or property, or any other portion of the social wealth, *will be bound to look for some authority* which could guarantee to him possession of this piece of land, or this portion of the modern machinery—so as to enable him to compel others to

work for him.

Either the individual will join a society of which all the members own, all together, such a territory, such machinery, such roads, and so on, and utilise them for the life of all—*and then he will be a Communist*; or he will apply to some sort of authority, placed above society, and obtain from it the right of taking, for his *own exclusive and permanent*

use, such a portion of the territory or the social wealth. And then he will NOT be an Anarchist: he will be an authoritarian.

This last has already been done by the bourgeois—by the present exploiters of the human herd. There is no new social experiment to be made that way, as it has already been made on a large scale for several centuries in

succession. The middle classes of the present times *have* tried, and succeeded in dividing among themselves the territory and the social wealth, so as to make them the property of separate individuals and their heirs. And they succeeded in this legal appropriation by creating the State, especially the modern State with a representative Parliamentary Government. And they have

taken full advantage of this appropriation of the land to exploit those who had had no share in the robbery and the partition. They *have* constituted modern society on that basis.

They imagined that in this way they would conquer full liberty for themselves, or, at least, *freedom for their own individual development*. And they discover now that they

are, with their children, *the serfs of the State*—of that same State for the growth of which they have worked so energetically, in the hope that, while guaranteeing them their individual properties and protecting them from the proletarians, it would never attack the freedom of the monopolists.

But they see now—those of them, at least, who are

intelligent enough to understand what is going on today—that it becomes impossible to maintain this privileged position any longer. They play their last cards to retain it, but they realise that this is impossible. This is why some of them—the clever ones—make an offer to some of the exploited to associate themselves with the middle-classes, by constituting out of

them a Fourth Class of monopolists, to exploit the rest of the nation, as well as all the nations that are backward in industry.

However, Labour begins to see through this trick, and after having allowed themselves to be fooled during the last forty or fifty years by the promise of a “conquest of political power,” the mass of the workers begin to see that

they have lost their time, that they have been the tools of the politicians, and now they are giving them the cold shoulder.

What the Anarchists had foreseen and foretold forty years ago—*i.e.*, the inevitable failure of Parliamentarism as a means of attaining the emancipation of Labour and preparing the advent of a Socialist society—becomes now evident to every one. And

this failure, in proportion as it becomes more and more evident, is bound to produce a new awakening of the working classes.

The more necessary is it, therefore, to find a short and precise expression of our aims, and to indicate in which directions we intend to work so as TO BUILD UP THE FUTURE AS WELL AS TO DESTROY THE PAST.

Letter to the Bakunin Centenary Celebration

In this letter to a meeting marking the one hundredth anniversary of Bakunin's birth, Kropotkin summarises his life, ideas and influence. It is notable for its stress on the International Working Men's Association as the place Bakunin's ideas

*flourished. It was published in
Freedom in June 1914.*

Dear Comrades,
I am sorry that I cannot be
with you for the
commemoration of the
birthday of our great teacher,
Mikhail Bakunin. There are
few names which ought to be
as dear to the revolutionary
working men of the world as
the name of this apostle of the
mass revolt of the proletarians

of all nations.

Surely, none of us will ever think of minimising the importance of that labour of thought which precedes every Revolution. It is the conscience of the wrongs of society, which gives to the downtrodden and oppressed ones the vigour that is required to revolt against those wrongs.

But with immense numbers of mankind, quite an abyss lies

between the *comprehension* of the evils, and the *action* that is needed to get rid of these evils.

To move people to cross this abyss, and to pass from grumbling to action, was Bakunin's chief work.

In his youth, like most educated men of his times, he paid a tribute to the vagaries of abstruse philosophy. But he soon found his way at the approach of the Revolution of

1848. A wave of social revolt was rising then in France, and he flung himself heart and soul into the turmoil. Not with those politicians who already prepared to seize the reins of power as soon as monarchy would fall under the blows of the revolted proletarians. He foresaw, he knew already, that the new rulers would be *against* the proletarians the moment they would be at the

head of the Republic.

He was with the lowest masses of the Paris proletarians—with those men and women whose vague hopes were already directed towards a Social, Communistic Commonwealth. Here he represented the so-much-needed link between the advanced parties of the Great Revolution of 1793 and the new generation of Socialists, a

giant trying to inspire the generous but much too pacific Socialist proletarians of Paris with the stern daring of the *sans-culottes* of 1793 and 1794.

Of course, the politicians soon saw how dangerous such a man was for them, and they expelled him from Paris before the first barricades of February 1848, had been built. He was quite right, that

bourgeois Republican
Cassidière,[[64](#)] when he said
of Bakunin: “Such men are
invaluable *before* the
Revolution. But when a
Revolution has begun—they
must be shot.” Of course they
must! They will *not* be
satisfied with the first victories
of the middle classes. Like our
Portuguese worker friends,
[[65](#)] they will want some
immediate practical results *for*

the people. They will want that every one of the downtrodden masses should feel that a new era has come for the ragged proletarian.

Of course, the bourgeois must shoot such men, as they shot the Paris workers in 1871. In Paris, they took the precaution of expelling him before the Revolution began.

Expelled from Paris, Bakunin took his revenge at

Dresden, in the Revolution of 1849, and here his worse enemies had to recognise his powers in inspiring the masses in a fight, and his organising capacities. Then came the years of imprisonment in the fortress of Olmütz, where he was chained to the wall of his cell, and in the deep casemates of the St. Petersburg and Schlüsselburg fortresses, followed by years

of exile in Siberia. But in 1862 he ran away from Siberia to the United States, and then to London, where he joined the friends of his youth—Herzen and Ogarev.[[66](#)]

Heart and soul he threw himself into supporting the Polish uprising of 1863. But it was not until four years later that he found the proper surroundings and ground for his revolutionary agitation in

the International Working Men's Association. Here he saw masses of workers of all nations joining hands across frontiers, and striving to become strong enough in their Unions to throw off the yoke of Capitalism. And at once he understood what was the chief stronghold the workers had to storm, in order to be successful in their struggle against Capital—*the State*.

And while the political Socialists spoke of getting hold of power in the State and reforming it, “Destroy the State!” became the war-cry of the Latin Federations, where Bakunin found his best friends.

The State is the chief stronghold of Capital—once its father, and now its chief ally and support. Consequently, *Down with Capitalism and*

down with the State!

All his previous experience and a close friendly intercourse with the Latin workers made of Bakunin the powerful adversary of the State and the fierce revolutionary Anarchist Communist fighter he became in the last ten years of his life.

Here Bakunin displayed all the powers of his revolutionary genius. One cannot read his

writings during those years—mostly pamphlets dealing with questions of the day, and yet full of profound views of society—without being fired by the force of his revolutionary convictions. In reading these writings and in following his life, one understands why he so much inspired his friends with the sacred fire of revolt.

Down to his last days, even

amidst the pangs of a mortal disease, even in his last writings, which he considered his testament, he remained the same firmly convinced revolutionary Anarchist and the same fighter, ready to join the masses anywhere in their revolt against Capital and the State.

Let us, then, follow his example. Let us continue his work, never forgetting that two

things are necessary to be successful in a revolution—two things, as one of my comrades said in the trial at Lyon: an idea in the head, and a bullet in the rifle! The force of action—guided by the force of Anarchist thought.

P. Kropotkin

[64](#)[] Marc Caussidière (1808–1861) was a leading member of the French republican movement of the first half of the nineteenth century. During the French revolution of 1848, he fought on the barricades and seized the

police headquarters. After the crushing of the June Days uprising, he was forced into exile. (Editor)

[65](#)[] Some anarchist militants had participated in Portugal's 1910 revolution. (Editor)

[66](#)[] Nikolay Platonovich Ogarev (1813–1877) was a Russian poet, historian and political activist. He was deeply critical of the limitations of the Emancipation reform of 1861, claiming that the serfs were not free but had simply exchanged one form of serfdom for another. He worked with Alexander Herzen on the *Kolokol* newspaper, which was printed in Britain and smuggled into Russia. (Editor)

From *Ethics: Origin and Development*

These extracts from are from Kropotkin's posthumously published work on the evolution of ethics, Ètika: Proikhozhdenie i razvitie nravstvennosti (1922), translated into English by Louis S. Friedland and Joseph R. Piroshnikoff, which complements Mutual Aid. This

*is the only place where
Kropotkin discuss Proudhon's
ideas in depth, indicating how
his ideas on justice and
equality represent an
important development as
they explicitly link both
concepts, particularly
economically.*

[...]

After the [French] Revolution,
in the beginning of the
nineteenth century, ideas of

economic justice and
economic equality were
advanced in the teaching
which received the name of
Socialism. The fathers of this
teaching in France were Saint-
Simon and Charles Fourier,
and in England, Robert Owen.
Already, among these early
founders of socialism, we find
two different points of view as
to the methods by which they
proposed to establish social

and economic justice in society. Saint-Simon taught that a just social system can be organised only with the aid of the ruling power, whereas Fourier, and to some extent Robert Owen, held that social justice may be attained without the interference of the State. Thus Saint-Simon's interpretation of socialism is authoritarian, whereas that of Fourier is libertarian.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, socialistic ideas began to be developed by numerous thinkers, among whom should be noted—in France: Considérant, Pierre Leroux, Louis Blanc, Cabet, Vidal, and Pecqueur, and later Proudhon; in Germany: Karl Marx, Engels, Rodbertus, and Schäffle; in Russia: Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, Lavrov, etc. All these thinkers and their

followers bent their efforts either to the spreading of the socialistic ideas in understandable form, or to putting them upon a scientific basis.

The ideas of the first theorists of socialism, as they began to take a more definite form, gave rise to the two principal socialistic movements: authoritarian communism and anarchistic

(non-authoritarian)

communism, as well as to a few intermediate forms. Such are the schools of State capitalism (State ownership of all the means of production), collectivism, co-operationism, municipal socialism (semi-socialistic institutions established by cities), and many others.

At the same time, these very thoughts of the founders of

socialism (especially of Robert Owen) helped to originate among the working masses themselves a vast labour movement, which is economic in form, but is, in fact, deeply ethical. This movement aims to unite all the workingmen into unions according to trades, for the purpose of direct struggle with capitalism. In 1864–1879 this movement gave origin to the

International, or the
International Workers
Association, which
endeavoured to establish
international co-operation
among the united trades.

Three fundamental
principles were established by
this intellectual and
revolutionary movement:

1. Abolition of the wage
system, which is nothing
but a modern form of the

ancient slavery and serfdom.

2. Abolition of private ownership of all that is necessary for production and for social organisation of the exchange of products.

3. The liberation of the individual and of society from that form of political enslavement—the State—which serves to support

and to preserve economic slavery.

The realisation of these three objects is necessary for the establishment of a social justice in consonance with the moral demands of our time. For the last thirty years the consciousness of this necessity has penetrated deeply into the minds not only of working-men, but also progressive men of all classes.

Among the socialists, [Pierre-Joseph] Proudhon (1809–1865) approached nearer than any other the interpretation of justice as the basis of morality. Proudhon's importance in the history of the development of ethics passes unnoticed, like the importance of Darwin in the same field. However, the historian of Ethics, Jodl,[\[67\]](#) did not hesitate to place this

peasant-compositor—a self-taught man who underwent great hardships to educate himself, and who was also a thinker, and an original one—side by side with the profound and learned philosophers who had been elaborating the theory of morality.

Of course, in advancing justice as the fundamental principle of morality, Proudhon was influenced on

one side by Hume, Adam Smith, Montesquieu, Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists, and by the Great French Revolution, and on the other side by German philosophy, as well as by Auguste Comte[[68](#)] and the entire socialistic movement of the 'forties. A few years later this movement took the form of the International Brotherhood of Workers,[[69](#)] which put

forward as one of its mottoes the Masonic formula: “*There are no rights without obligations; there are no obligations without rights.*”

But Proudhon’s merit lies in his indicating clearly the fundamental principle following from the heritage of the Great Revolution—the *conception of equity*, and consequently of *justice*, and in showing that this conception

has been always at the basis of social life, and consequently of all ethics, in spite of the fact that philosophers passed it by as if it were non-existent, or were simply unwilling to ascribe to it a predominating importance.

Already in his early work, *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?* [*What Is Property?*], Proudhon identified justice with equality (more correctly

—equity), referring to the ancient definition of justice: “Justum aequale est, injustum inaequale” (The equitable is just, the inequitable—unjust). Later he repeatedly returned to this question in his works, [*Système des*] *Contradictions économiques* [*System of Economical Contradictions: or, The Philosophy of Poverty*] and *Philosophie du Progrès* [*Philosophy of Progress*]; but

the complete elaboration of the great importance of this conception of justice he gave in his three-volume work, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* [*On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*], which appeared in 1858.[[70](#)]

It is true that this work does not contain a strictly systematic exposition of Proudhon's ethical views, but

such views are expressed with sufficient clearness in various passages of the work. An attempt to determine to what an extent these passages are Proudhon's own ideas, and how far they are adaptations from earlier thinkers, would be difficult and at the same time useless. I shall, therefore, simply outline their main contentions.

Proudhon regards moral

teaching as a part of the general science of law; the problem of the investigator lies in determining the bases of this teaching: its essence, its origin, and its sanction, i.e., that which imparts to law and to morality an obligatory character, and that which has educational value. Moreover, Proudhon, like Comte and the encyclopaedists, categorically refuses to build his philosophy

of law and of morality on a religious or a metaphysical basis. It is necessary, he says, to study the life of societies and to learn from it what it is that serves society as a guiding principle.[\[71\]](#)

Up to this time all ethical systems were constructed more or less under the influence of religion, and not a single teaching dared to advance the *equity* of men and

the *equality of economic rights* as the basis of ethics. Proudhon attempted to do this as far as was possible in the days of Napoleonic censorship, always on guard against socialism and atheism. Proudhon wished to create, as he expressed it, a *philosophy of the people*, based on knowledge. He regards his book, *On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*,

as an attempt made in that direction. And the object of this philosophy, as of all knowledge, is foresight, so that the path of social life may be indicated before it is actually laid out.

Proudhon considers the *sense of personal dignity* as the true essence of justice and the fundamental principle of all morality. If this sense is developed in an individual, it

becomes with reference to all men—*regardless of whether they are friends or enemies*—a sense of human dignity. *The right* is an ability, inherent in all, to demand from all others that they respect human dignity in their own person; and *duty* is the demand that everyone should recognise this dignity in others. *We cannot love everybody*, but we must respect each man's personal

dignity. We cannot demand the love of others, but we unquestionably have a right to demand respect for our personality. It is impossible to build a new society on mutual love, but it can and should be built on the demand of mutual respect.

“To feel and to assert human dignity first in all that pertains to us, and then in the personality of our fellow-men,

without falling into egoism, as well as not paying attention either to deity or to society—this is right. To be ready under all circumstances to rise energetically in defence of this dignity—this is justice.”

It would seem that at this point Proudhon should have declared quite definitely that a free society can be built only on equity. But he did not so declare, perhaps because of

the Napoleonic censorship; in reading his “Justice” this conclusion (equity) seems almost inevitable, and in a few passages it is more than implied.

The question of the origin of the sense of justice was answered by Proudhon in the same manner as by Comte and by modern science, that it represents the *product of the development of human*

societies.

In order to explain the origin of the moral element Proudhon endeavoured to find for morality, i.e., for justice, [\[72\]](#) *an organic base in the psychic structure of man.*[\[73\]](#) Justice, he says, *does not come from above* nor is it a product of the *calculation* of one's interests, for no social order can be built on such a basis. This faculty, moreover,

is something different from the *natural kindness* in man, the *feeling of sympathy*, or the instinct of sociality upon which the Positivists endeavour to base ethics. A man is possessed of a special feeling, one that is higher than the feeling of sociality—namely, the *sense of righteousness*, the consciousness of the equal right of all men to a mutual regard for personality.[[74](#)]

“Thus,” Jodl remarks, “after his most vigorous protests against transcendentalism, Proudhon turns, after all, to the old heritage of intuitionist ethics—conscience.”

(*Geschichte der Ethik*, ch. 11, p. 267.) This remark, however, is not quite correct. Proudhon merely meant to say that the conception of justice cannot be a simple inborn tendency, because if it were it

would be difficult to account for the preponderance it acquires in the struggle with other tendencies continually urging man to be unjust to others. The tendency to protect the interests of others at the expense of our own cannot be solely an *inborn feeling*, although its rudiments were always present in man, but these rudiments must be developed.[[75](#)] And this

feeling could develop in society only through experience, and such was actually the case.

In considering the contradictions furnished by the history of human societies, between the conception of “justice native to man and social injustice (supported by the ruling powers and even by the churches), Proudhon came to the conclusion that although

the conception of justice is inborn in man, thousands of years had to elapse before the idea of justice entered as a fundamental conception into legislation—at the time of the French Revolution in the “Declaration of the Rights of Man.”

Like Comte, Proudhon very well realised the progress that was taking place in the development of mankind and

he was convinced that further progressive development would occur. Of course, he had in mind not merely the development of *culture* (i.e., of the material conditions of life), but mainly of *civilisation*, enlightenment, i.e., the development of the intellectual and the spiritual organisation of society, the improvement in institutions and in mutual relations among

men.[[76](#)] In this progress he ascribed a great importance to idealisation, to the ideals that in certain periods acquire the ascendancy over the petty daily cares, when the discrepancy between the law, understood as the highest expression of justice, and actual life as it is developed under the power of legislation, acquires the proportions of a glaring, unbearable

contradiction.

In a later part of this work we shall have occasion to return to the significance of justice in the elaboration of the moral conceptions. For the present I will simply remark that no one prepared the ground for the correct understanding of this fundamental conception of all morality so well as Proudhon.

[[77](#)]

The highest moral aim of man is the attaining of justice. The entire history of mankind, says Proudhon, is the history of human endeavour to attain justice in this life. All the great revolutions are nothing but the attempt to realise justice by force; and since during the revolution *the means*, i.e., violence, temporarily prevailed over the old form of oppression, the actual result

was always a substitution of one tyranny for another. Nevertheless, the impelling motive of every revolutionary movement was always justice, and every revolution, no matter into what it later degenerated, always introduced into social life a certain degree of justice. All these partial realisations of justice will finally lead to the complete triumph of justice on

earth.

Why is it that, in spite of all the revolutions that have taken place, not a single nation has yet arrived at the complete attainment of justice? The principal cause of this lies in the fact that the idea of justice has not as yet penetrated into the minds of the majority of men. Originating in the mind of a separate individual, the idea of justice must become a

social idea inspiring the revolution. The starting point of the idea of justice is the sense of personal dignity. In associating with others we find that this feeling becomes generalised and becomes the feeling of *human* dignity. A rational creature recognises this feeling in another—friend or enemy alike—as in himself. In this, justice differs from love and from other sensations of

sympathy; this is why justice is the antithesis of egoism, and why the influence which justice exerts upon us prevails over other feelings. For the same reason, in the case of a primitive man whose sense of personal dignity manifests itself in a crude way, and whose self-aimed tendencies prevail over the social, justice finds its expression in the form of supernatural prescription,

and it rests upon religion. But little by little, under the influence of religion, the sense of justice (Proudhon writes simply “justice,” without defining whether he considers it a *conception* or a *feeling*) deteriorates. Contrary to its essence this feeling becomes aristocratic, and in Christianity (and in some earlier religions) it reaches the point of humiliating mankind. Under

the pretext of respect for God, respect for man is banished, and once this respect is destroyed justice succumbs, and with it society deteriorates.

Then a Revolution takes place which opens a new era for mankind. It enables justice, only vaguely apprehended before, to appear in all the purity and completeness of its fundamental idea. "Justice is

absolute and unchangeable; it knows no ‘more or less’.”[[78](#)]

It is remarkable, adds Proudhon, that from the time of the fall of the Bastille, in 1789, there was not a single government in France which dared openly to deny justice and to declare itself frankly counter-revolutionary.

However, all governments violated justice, even the government at the time of the

Terror, even Robespierre—especially Robespierre.[[79](#)]

Proudhon pointed out, however, that we should guard against tramping upon the interests of the individual for the sake of the interests of society. True justice consists in a harmonious combination of social interest with those of the individual. Justice, thus interpreted, contains nothing mysterious or mystical.

Neither is it a desire for personal gain, since I consider it my duty to demand respect for my fellow-men, as well as for myself. Justice demands respect for personal dignity even in any enemy (hence the international military code).

Since man is a being capable of progressing, justice opens the path to progress for all alike. Therefore, wrote Proudhon, justice found

expression in the earliest religions, in the Mosaic law, for example, which bade us love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our might, and to *love our neighbour as we love ourselves* (in the book of “Tobit,” where we are told not to do unto others what we do not want done unto us).[[80](#)] Similar ideas were expressed by the Pythagoreans, by

Epicurus, and Aristotle, and the same demand was made by non-religious philosophers like Gassendi, Hobbes, Bentham, Helvétius, etc.[[81](#)]

In short, we find that equity is everywhere considered the basis of morality, or, as Proudhon wrote, as regards the mutual personal relations —“without equality—there is no justice.”[[82](#)]

Unfortunately, all the

worshippers of the ruling power, even the State-socialists, fail to notice this fundamental principle of all morality and continue to support the necessity of the inequality and non-equity inherent in the State. Nevertheless, equity became in principle the basis of all the declarations of the Great French Revolution (just as it was accepted earlier in the

Declaration of Rights in the North American Republic). Already the Declaration of 1789 proclaimed that “nature made all men free and equal.” The same principle was reiterated in the Declaration of July 24, 1793.

The Revolution proclaimed individual equality, equality of political and civic rights, and also equality before the law and the courts. More than

that, it created a new social economy by recognising instead of private rights, the principle of the *equivalent value of mutual service*.[\[83\]](#)

The essence of justice is respect for our fellow-men, Proudhon constantly insisted. We know the nature of justice, he wrote; its definition can be given in the following formula:

“Respect thy neighbour as thyself, even if thou canst not

love him, and do not permit that he or thyself be treated with disrespect.” “Without equality—there is no justice.” (I. 204, 206).[[84](#)]

Unfortunately, this principle has not as yet been attained either in legislation or in the courts, and certainly not in the Church.

Economics suggested one way out—the subdivision of labour in order to increase

production, which increase is, of course, necessary; but it has also shown, at least through the testimony of some economists, such as Rossi, for example, that this division of labour leads to apathy among the workers and to the creation of a slave class. We thus see that the only possible way out of this situation is to be found in *mutuality of service*, instead of the

subordination of one kind of service to another (I. 269)—and therefore in the *equality of rights and possessions*. This is just what was asserted by the declaration of the Convention of 15th February, and 24th July of 1793, in which Freedom and the Equality of all before the law were proclaimed, and this declaration was reiterated in 1795, 1799, 1814, 1830, and

1848, (I. 270.) Justice, as Proudhon sees it, is not merely a *restraining* social force. He sees in it a *creative* force, like reason and work.[[85](#)] Then, having remarked, as Bacon had already done, that *thought is born of action*, and dedicating for this reason a series of excellent pages to the necessity of manual labour and of the study of trades in schools as a means of

broadening our scientific education—Proudhon proceeds to consider justice in its various applications: with respect to individuals, in the distribution of wealth, in the State, in education, and in mentality.

Proudhon had to acknowledge that the development of justice in human societies requires time: a high development of ideals

and of the feeling of solidarity with all, is required, and this can be attained only through long individual and social evolution. We will return to this subject in another volume. I will only add here that all this part of Proudhon's book, and his conclusion in which he determines wherein lies the sanction of the conception of justice, contain very many ideas stimulating to human

thought. This quality of mental stimulation is characteristic of all Proudhon's writings, and it was pointed out by Herzen and by many others.

However, in all his excellent words about justice, Proudhon did not indicate clearly enough the distinction between the two meanings given in the French language to the word "Justice." One meaning is equality, an equation in the

mathematical sense,—while the other meaning is the *administering* of justice, i.e., the act of judging, the decision of the court, and even the *taking of the law into one's own hands*. Of course, when justice is mentioned in ethics it is interpreted only in the first sense, but Proudhon at times used the word Justice in its second sense, which circumstance leads to a certain

indefiniteness. This is probably the reason why he did not try to trace the origin of this concept in man,—a problem with which, as we will see later, Littré[[86](#)] dealt at some length.

At any rate, from the time of the appearance of Proudhon's work, "Justice in the Revolution and in the Church," it became impossible to build an ethical system

without recognising as its basis *equity*, the equality of all citizens in their rights. It is apparently for this reason that the attempt was made to subject this work of Proudhon's to a unanimous silence, so that only Jodl was unafraid of compromising himself and assigned to the French revolutionist a prominent place in his history of ethics. It is true that the

three volumes which Proudhon devoted to justice contain a great deal of irrelevant matter, a vast amount of polemics against the Church (the title, *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, justifies this, however, all the more because the subject under discussion is not justice in the Church, but in *Christianity* and in the religious moral teachings in

general); they also contain two essays on woman, with which most modern writers will, of course, not agree; and finally they contain many digressions, which, though they serve a purpose, help to befog the main issue. But notwithstanding all this, we have at last in Proudhon's work an investigation in which justice (which had been already alluded to by many

thinkers who occupied themselves with the problem of morality) was assigned a proper place; in this work, at last, it is stated that *justice is the recognition of equity* and of the striving of men for equality, and that this is *the basis of all our moral conceptions*.

Ethics had for a long time been moving toward this admission. But all along it had

been so bound up with religion, and in recent times with Christianity, that this recognition was not fully expressed by any of Proudhon's predecessors.

Finally, I must point out that in Proudhon's work, "Justice in the Revolution and in the Church," there is already a hint of the *threefold* nature of morality. He had shown in the first volume though in a very

cursory way, in a few lines,—the primary source of morality, sociality, which is observed even among the animals. And he dwelt later, toward the end of his work, on the third constituent element of all scientific, as well as of religious morality: the *ideal*. But he did not show where the dividing line comes between justice (which says: “give what is due,” and is thus reduced to

a mathematical equation), and that which man gives to another or to all “above what is due,” without weighing what he gives or what he receives—which, to my mind, constitutes a necessary, constituent part of morality. But he already finds it necessary to complete justice by adding the *ideal*, i.e., the striving for idealistic actions, due to which, according to Proudhon, our

very conceptions of justice are continually broadened and become more refined. And indeed, after all that mankind lived through from the time of the American and the two French Revolutions, our conceptions of justice are clearly not the same as they were at the end of the eighteenth century, when serfdom and slavery called forth no protest even from

liberal moralists. We have now to consider a series of works on ethics by thinkers who take the evolutionist viewpoint and who accept Darwin's theory of the development of all organic life, as well as of the social life of man. Here ought to be included a succession of works by modern thinkers, because almost all who wrote on ethics in the second half of the nineteenth century show

evidence of the influence of the evolutionist theory of gradual development—which rapidly conquered the mind, after it was so carefully elaborated by Darwin in its application to organic nature.

[...]

[67](#)[] Friedrich Jodl (1849–1914) was born in Munich, Germany, and was professor of philosophy. Rejecting metaphysical speculation, he argued that the basis of philosophy, like that of science, can only be experience.

He sought a naturalistic conception of the world, free of religion and metaphysics. In ethics, Jodl was a convinced evolutionist and argued that ethical values have been subject to continuous transformation, an evolutionary product of the interaction between the individual and society. The basis of morality was the will, which rested on social instincts, was influenced by reason, and aimed at the welfare of the whole. (Editor)

[68](#)[[Isidore Auguste Marie François Xavier Comte (1798–1857) was a French philosopher, a founder of the discipline of sociology and of the doctrine of positivism. Strongly

influenced by utopian socialist Henri Saint-Simon, he developed his positive philosophy in an attempt to remedy the social malaise of the French Revolution, calling for a new social doctrine based on the sciences. His social theories culminated in the “Religion of Humanity.” Comte coined the word *altruisme* (altruism).
(Editor)

[69](#)[] That is, the International Working Men’s Association (in Russian, *Mezhdunarodnoye Tovarishchestvo Rabochikh*), whose anthem declared that “L’égalité veut d’autres lois/Pas de droits sans devoirs dit-elle/Égaux, pas de devoirs sans droits [Equality wants other laws:/No rights without

obligations, she says,/And no obligations without rights].” (Editor)

[70](#)[] *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (1840), first and second memoirs translation by Benjamin Tucker in 1876; *System of Economic Contradictions, or the Philosophy of Poverty* (1846), volume 1 translation by Benjamin Tucker in 1888. Extracts from all three works as well as volume 2 of *System of Economic Contradictions* are included in *Property is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (AK Press, 2011); *The Philosophy of Progress* (1853) translation by Shawn Wilbur in 2009. (Editor)

[71](#)[] *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?* pp. 181 ff.; also 220–221.

[72](#)[] *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, Vol. 1, p. 216.

[73](#)[] At this point Jodl falls into the same error as Proudhon, by identifying Morality in general with justice, which, in my opinion, constitutes but one of the elements of Morality.

[74](#)[] *Geschichte der Ethik*, 11, p. 266, references to Proudhon's *Justice, etc.*, Étude II.

[75](#)[] Again, note the contrast this presents with interpretations of Kropotkin as a moral naturalist trusting in the goodness of “human nature.” (Editor)

[76](#)[] In recent times, these two entirely

different conceptions have begun to be confused in Russia.

[77](#)[] In addition to the work, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église (Nouveaux Principes de Philosophie Pratique)*, 3 vols. Paris, 1858, very valuable thoughts on ethics and justice may be found in his *Système des Contradictions Économiques, ou, Philosophie de la Misère*, 2 vols. (A work which, of course, lost none of its considerable merit on account of Marx's malignant pamphlet, *La Misère de la Philosophie* [The Poverty of Philosophy]); also *Idée Générale de la Révolution au XIX Siècle* [General Idea of the Revolution in

the 19th Century], and *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?* An ethical system was shaping itself in Proudhon's mind from the time of his very first appearance as a writer, at the beginning of the 'forties.

[78](#)[] *Justice*—etc., Étude II, pp. 194–195, ed. of 1858.

[79](#)[] *Ibid*, Étude II, p. 196.

[80](#)[] *Tobit* 4:15 (“Do to no one what you yourself hate”). The Book of Tobit, also called the Book of Tobias (from the Hebrew Tobiah: “Yahweh is my good”), is a book of scripture that is part of the Catholic and Orthodox biblical canon. It tells the story of a righteous Israelite named Tobit living in Nineveh after the deportation of the

northern tribes of Israel to Assyria in 721 BC under Sargon II. This ethical position was later repeated by Jesus: “Do for others what you want them to do for you” (Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31). (Editor)

[81](#)[] I will only add that we find the identical idea in the rules of conduct of all savages. (See my book, *Mutual Aid, a factor of Evolution.*)

[82](#)[] “En ce qui touche les personnes, hors de l'égalité point de Justice.” [“As far as people are concerned, outside equality, no Justice”] (Étude III, beginning; Vol. 1, p. 206).

[83](#)[] The formula of the communists, adds Proudhon—“To each according to his needs, from each according to

his abilities,” can be applied only in a family. Saint-Simon’s formula, “to each according to his abilities, to each ability according to its deeds” is a complete negation of actual equality and of equality of rights. In a Fourierist community, the principle of mutuality is recognised, but in the application to an individual Fourier denied justice. On the other hand, the principle practised by mankind from the remotest time is simpler, and, what is most important, more worthy; value is assigned only to the products of industry—which does not offend personal dignity, and the economic organisation reduces itself to a simple formula—*exchange*.

84[] Proudhon wrote these words in 1858. Since that time many economists have upheld the same principle.

85[] Man is a creature “rational and toiling, the most industrious and the most social creature, whose chief striving is not love, but a law higher than love. Hence the heroic self-sacrifice for science, unknown to the masses; martyrs of toil and industry are born, whom novels and the theatre pass over in silence; hence also the words: ‘to die for one’s country’.” “Let me bow before you, ye who knew how to arise and how to die in 1789, 1792, and 1830. You were consecrated to liberty, and you are

more alive than we, who have lost it.”
“To originate an idea, to produce a book, a poem, a machine; in short, as those in trade say, to create one’s chef d’œuvre; to render a service to one’s country and to mankind, to save a human life, to do a good deed and to rectify an injustice,—all this is to reproduce oneself in social life, similar to reproduction in organic life.” Man’s life attains its fullness when it satisfies the following conditions: love—children, family; work—industrial reproduction; and sociality, i.e., the participation in the life and progress of mankind. (Étude V, ch. v; Vol. II. 128–130).

[86](#)[] Émile Maximilien Paul Littré

(1801–1881) was a French lexicographer and philosopher, best known for his *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (commonly called “The Littré”). He was a friend and follower of Auguste Comte, popularising his ideas in numerous works on the positivist philosophy before publishing his own ideas in his *Paroles de la philosophie positive* in 1859. (Editor)

Capitalism and the State

“When a workman sells his labour to an employer and knows perfectly well that some part of the value of his produce will be unjustly taken by the employer; when he sells it without even the slightest guarantee of being employed so much as six consecutive months, it is a sad mockery to call that a free

*contract [...] As long as
three-quarters of humanity are
compelled to enter into
agreements of that
description, force is of course
necessary, both to enforce the
supposed agreements and to
maintain such a state of
things. Force—and a great
deal of force—is necessary to
prevent the labourers from
taking possession of what they
consider unjustly*

*appropriated by the few; and
force is necessary to
continually bring new
‘uncivilised nations’ under the
same conditions.”*

*—Anarchist-Communism: Its
Basis and Principle*

*“Of what use in fact is this
great machine that we call the
State? Is it to hinder the
exploitation of the worker by
the capitalist, of the peasant
by the landlord? Is it to assure*

*us work? To protect us from
the loan-shark? To give us
sustenance when the woman
has only water to pacify the
child who weeps at her dried-
out breast?*

*“No, a thousand times no! The
State is there to protect
exploitation, speculation and
private property; it is itself
the by-product of the rapine of
the people. The proletarian
must rely on his own hands;*

he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder emancipation at all costs.

“Everything in the State is loaded in favour of the idle proprietor, everything against the working proletarian: bourgeois education, which from an early age corrupts the child by inculcating anti-egalitarian principles; the

*Church which disturbs
women's minds; the law which
hinders the exchange of ideas
of solidarity and equality;
money, which can be used
when needed to corrupt
whoever seeks to be an
apostle of the solidarity of the
workers; prison—and
grapeshot as a last resort—to
shut the mouths of those who
will not be corrupted. Such is
the State."*

—“The Breakdown of the
State,” *Words of a Rebel*

From “Representative Government”

Translation by Paul
Sharkey

*This article on the interwoven
nature of economic and
political systems appeared in
Words of a Rebel (1885).
Following Proudhon's lead,
Kropotkin stresses that a non-*

capitalist economy means the end of government. He also stresses that political rights and liberties are won by the struggle of the people, not given by ruling elites.

I

When we look at the essential features of human societies, setting secondary and temporary features to one side, we find that the *political*

regime to which they are subjected is always the expression of the *economic* regime existing within that society. The political organisation does not change at the whim of lawmakers; true, it may change name and may today present itself in the guise of a monarchy and tomorrow in that of a republic, but it does not undergo any equivalent modification [in

substance]; it is fashioned and made after the economic regime of which it is always the expression and at the same time the consecration and support.

As it evolves, the political regime of such-and-such a country may occasionally find itself overtaken by the economic changes taking place, whereupon it is abruptly rearranged, remodelled so as

to fit in with the economic regime which has been established. But on the other hand, if, in time of revolution, that political regime should race ahead of economic change, it amounts to nothing more than a dead letter, a formula inscribed in charters but bereft of any real impact. Thus the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, whatever part it may have played in history,

is now nothing more than an historical document and those splendid words *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* will be nothing more than dreams or lies scrawled on church and prison walls until such time as liberty and equality become the foundations of economic relations. Universal suffrage would have been as unthinkable in a slave-based society as despotism in a

society founded upon what is called freedom of transactions but which is rather freedom of exploitation.

Western Europe's working classes have learnt this lesson well. They know or have an inkling that societies shall continue to find it hard to breathe freely within existing political institutions until such time as today's capitalist order has been overthrown. They

know that such institutions, for all their splendid names, are nevertheless the corruption and domination of the strongest and the stifling of all freedom and progress; they know that the only way to shrug off these encumbrances would be to found economic relationships upon a fresh arrangement, collective ownership. Finally, they know that for a thoroughgoing and

lasting political revolution to be brought off, there has to be an economic revolution. Precisely because of the close connection that exists between the political regime and the economic regime, however, it is plain that any revolution in the manner of the production and distribution of goods could not take place if it were not made together with a profound alteration of those institutions

that are generally referred to as political. The abolition of private property and its associated exploitation, the establishment of a collectivist or communist arrangement would be unrealisable if we were to insist on holding on to our parliaments or our kings. A new economic departure requires a new political departure, and that truth is so readily appreciated by

everybody that in fact the intellectual efforts currently under way among the masses of the people focuses willy-nilly upon both sides of the matter in hand. In thinking through the future economy, it also probes the politics of the future, and alongside the terms *Collectivism* and *Communism* we hear these words said: *Workers' State, Free Commune, Anarchy, or*

indeed, *Anti-Authoritarian or Anarchist Communism and Collectivist Commune*.

General rule: “Do you wish to study fruitfully? Make a start by sending the thousand prejudices in which you were schooled up in smoke, one by one!”—These words, one famous astronomer’s preface to his lectures, are equally applicable to every branch of human knowledge: even more

to the social sciences than to the physical sciences; because, right from the very earliest venture into the realms of the latter, we find ourselves grappling with a host of prejudices inherited from a bygone age, notions that are entirely false and which are started in order to mislead the people that much better, a scrupulously calculated sophistry designed to taint

popular opinion. So we have some basic groundwork to carry out before we can move sure-footedly ahead.

Now among those prejudices there is one that is especially deserving of our attention, because, not only does it underpin all our modern political institutions, but we can detect traces of it in nearly every social theory advanced by the reformers. It consists of

trusting to *representative government*, to *government by proxy*.

Towards the close of the last century, the French people overthrew the monarchy and the last of the absolute kings mounted the scaffold, paying the price for his crimes and those of his predecessors. It seemed that at that precise point—just when everything good, great and lasting

achieved by the revolution had been pulled off through the enterprise and energy of individuals or groups and thanks to the disorganisation and weakness of central government—at that time, I say, it seemed that the people would not be disposed to submit to the yoke of some new authority founded upon the same principles as its predecessor, of an authority

not yet corroded by the vices that afflicted the former authorities.

Far from it. Under the sway of governmental prejudices and letting themselves be taken in by the semblance of freedom and well-being afforded—so it was said—by the British and American constitutions, the French people raced to endow itself with a constitution, then

[more] constitutions which it often changed, introducing infinitely varying details, but all of which were founded upon this principle: representative government. What matter whether it be Monarchy or Republic? The people does not govern itself: it is governed by more or less wisely chosen representatives. It may crow about its sovereignty: but it will be

quick to abdicate it. Willynily, it will elect its deputies, on whom it will or will not keep an eye, and it will be such deputies who will assume the burden of ruling over the vast range of interconnected interests and the whole complexity of human relationships throughout the length and breadth of France!

Later, every country in continental Europe followed

suit. One after another, they toppled their absolute monarchies and all embarked upon the parliamentary path. All but the Oriental despotisms tread that same path: Bulgaria, Turkey and Serbia dabble in constitutional government; even in Russia, we see efforts to shrug off the yoke of one *camarilla*[[87](#)] and replace it with the easier yoke of a delegated assembly.

And, worse still, France, breaking fresh ground, is still lapsing back into the same bad old ways. Disgusted by the sad experience of the constitutional monarchy, the people one day overthrows it, only to hasten the very next day to elect an assembly unchanged other than in name and to entrust the burden of government to its care... which it would sell on to some

brigand who will invite the foreign invader on to the fertile plains of France.[[88](#)]

Twenty years later, it makes the same mistake all over again. Seeing the city of Paris free and deserted by the troops and the powers-that-be, it does not turn to experimenting with some new formula that might speed the establishment of a new economic arrangement.

Content to replace the word “Empire” with “Republic” and the latter with “*Commune*,” it hurriedly replicates the representative system under the Commune. It camouflages the brand new idea with the worm-eaten legacy of the past, abdicates its own initiative to the care of an assembly of fairly haphazardly elected folk and trusts to them to handle the complete reorganisation of

human relationships that was the only thing that might have breathed strength and life into the Commune.

[...]

II

[...]

Its supporters—and it does have supporters of good faith, if not of good judgment—invariably boast of the services that we have been rendered

thanks to that institution, or so they say. To listen to them, it is to the representative system that we owe a debt for the political freedoms we enjoy these days, freedoms previously unknown under the late absolute monarchy. But is that sort of reasoning not tantamount to mistaking the cause for the effect, or, rather, one of two simultaneous effects for the cause?

In essence, what few freedoms we have gained over the past century have not been given to us nor indeed guaranteed to us by representative government. They were wrested from governments, along with national representation, by the great tide of liberal thought issuing from the Revolution; furthermore it is this spirit of freedom and rebelliousness

that has successfully preserved them in spite of and in the face of relentless encroachments by governments and parliaments themselves. Representative government does not of itself dole out real freedoms and is wonderfully compatible with despotism. Freedoms must be wrested from it just as much as from absolutist kings: and once wrested, they have still to be defended against

parliament just as they once would have been against a monarch, day by day, inch by inch, relentlessly[[89](#)] [...]

[...]

To attribute the achievements of general progress to parliaments, to imagine that a Constitution is of itself enough to ensure freedom—these fly in the face of the most elementary rules of historical judgement.

Besides, this is not the issue. It is not a matter of knowing whether the representative system has any advantages to offer over the reign of a pack of flunkys exploiting the whims of an absolute master. If it has made headway in Europe, this is because it was better suited to the phase of capitalist exploitation through which we have passed during the nineteenth century but

which is now drawing to an end. It certainly offered better security for the industrial entrepreneurs and merchant to whom it gave the power that had fallen from the grasp of the [feudal] lords [*seigneurs*].

But in addition to its considerable drawbacks, monarchy too might have had a few advantages over the reign of the feudal lords. It too was the inevitable creation of

its times. Does that mean that we must forever remain under the authority of some king and his servants?

[...]

Comparable in this regard to despots, representative government—whether it goes under the name of Parliament, Convention, or Council of the Commune, or endows itself with some other, more or less preposterous title, whether it is

appointed by the prefects of a Bonaparte or elected as freely as can be by an insurgent city—representative government will always be out to extend its legislation, always bolstering its authority by interfering with everything, by killing individual and group initiative so as to replace it with law. Its natural and inescapable predisposition will be to seize hold of the individual from childhood

onwards and to lead him, law by law, from threat to punishment, from the cradle to the grave, without ever releasing its prey from its close surveillance. Has an elected assembly ever been caught declaring that it is not competent to pronounce upon anything? The more revolutionary it is, the more it lays hands on everything that falls outside of its remit.

Legislating on every single aspect of human activity, meddling even in the tiniest details of the lives of “its subjects”—this is the very essence of the State, or government. Setting up a government, be it constitutional or otherwise, amounts to establishing a force that will inevitably be out to take over everything and to regulate every function of

society, acknowledging no restraint beyond that which we may be able from time to time to deploy against it by means of agitation or insurrection. Parliamentary government—the record shows—is no exception to this rule.

“The mission of the State”—they tell us, the better to bind us—“is to offer the weak protection against the strong, the poor against the rich, the

labouring classes against the privileged classes.” We know how governments have acquitted themselves of this mission: they have turned it on its head. In keeping with its origins, government has always been the protector of privilege against those keen to slip its bonds. Representative government in particular has, with the connivance of the people, organised the defence

of every one of the privileges enjoyed by the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie against the aristocracy on the one hand and the exploited on the other—showing itself modest, polite and mild in its dealings towards some and ferocious with the others. Which is why the smallest labour protection law, no matter how anodyne, can only be extracted from a parliament

by means of insurrectionist agitation. Just cast your mind back to the battles that had to be fought, the agitation that had to be raised in order to extract a few miserable laws on limiting working hours from the British Parliament, the Swiss Federal Council or the French Chambers. The very first such laws, passed in Britain, were extorted only by barrels of gunpowder placed

under the machines [in the factories].

[...]

Either we shall achieve economic equality in the nation, the city, whereupon free and equal citizens, not about to abdicate their rights to the care of the few, will seek some new form of organisation that allows them to manage their affairs for themselves; or there will still

be a minority that bullies the masses economically—a fourth estate made up of privileged bourgeois—in which case, woe betide the masses! —The representative government, elected by that minority, will act accordingly. It will legislate to uphold their privileges and will deploy force and massacre against the rebellious.

[...]

III

[...]

That is the way things are, and it cannot be otherwise, as long as people hold elections in order to appoint their masters. Just let workers surrounded by naught but equals take it into their heads one day to endow themselves with rulers—and it will be the same story. No more legs of lamb will be handed out then: it will be all

adulation and lies—and there will remain plenty of rotten tomatoes. What more is to be expected when one stakes one's most sacred rights on an auction?

What is it that is actually asked of the voters? That they come up with someone to whom they can entrust the right to legislate on all that they hold most dear: their rights, their children, their

work! And then we are taken
aback when two or three
thousand Robert Macaires[[90](#)]
step forward to compete for
these royal rights? We look for
a man, along with a few others
picked out in the same lottery,
to whom we entrust the right
to lose our children at twenty
one or nineteen years of age,
if he so chooses: to lock them
away for a three year stretch,
and for ten whole years, if he

prefers, in the putrefying atmosphere of the barrack; to have them slaughtered whenever and wherever he chooses by launching a war that the country will be forced to continue, once launched. He will have the power to shut down the universities or to open them up, depending on his whim: forcing parents to send their children there or barring them from entering. A

new Louis XIV, he will have it within his power to favour industry: to sacrifice the North in favour of the South, or the South for the sake of the North; to annex a province or to give it away. He will be able to command something of the order of three billion [francs] per annum, which he will snatch away from the mouth of the worker. He will still have the royal prerogative of

appointing the executive, which is to say, a power which, for as long as it can get along with the Chamber, may prove every bit as despotic and tyrannical as that of the former royalty. For whereas Louis XIV had only a few dozen civil servants at his command, he will command them by the hundreds: and if the king managed to pilfer a few measly sacks of *ecus* from the

State treasury, the constitutional minister of our own day can “honestly” pocket millions by a single Stock Exchange operation.

And you are surprised to see all of the passions come to the fore when people are on the look-out for a master who is to be vested with such power! When Spain put her vacant throne up for auction, were we taken aback to see the

buccaneers running in from every side? For as long as this selling of royal rights endures, nothing will be susceptible to reform: the election will be a bonfire of the vanities and consciences.

Besides, no matter how far we might reduce the powers of the deputies, even were we to break it down so far as to turn every municipality into a miniature State—everything

would remain as it was.

One can understand delegation when there are one or two hundred men who come together every day in the course of their work, in their common concerns, who know each other thoroughly, who have scrutinised some matter from every angle and who have arrived at a decision, and who pick someone out and send him off to arrive at an

agreement with other delegates of the same sort in relation to that particular matter. Then the selection is made with full knowledge of the case, and each and every person knows that he can rely on his delegate. That delegate, furthermore, will merely expound to other delegates the thinking that led his colleagues to such and such a conclusion. Not empowered to enforce

anything, he will seek to reach an agreement and will come back with a simple proposition that those who gave him his mandate are free to embrace or reject. Indeed, that was how delegation came about: when the Communes used to send their delegates out to other Communes, that was their only mandate. And it is still the way that meteorologists and statisticians

run their international congresses or the delegates from the railway companies and postal services in various countries.

But what is now being asked of the voters?—Ten or twenty thousand men (a hundred thousand with the list voting system) who do not know one another at all, who have never set eyes on one another, who never get together on any

shared concern, are asked to agree upon the selection of one man. And that man will not be dispatched to expound upon one specific matter or to advocate on behalf of a resolution bearing upon such-and-such a specific issue. No, he has to be a jack-of-all-trades; he must pass laws on anything and everything, and his word shall be law. The original meaning of delegation

has been wholly betrayed and has become an absurdity.

The omniscient creature being sought for today does not exist [...]

[...]

To this collection of non-entities the people abdicates all its rights, except for the right to oust them from time to time and appoint replacements. But as the new assembly, appointed in accordance with

the same procedures and charged with the same task, is going to be every bit as bad as its predecessor, the broad masses end up losing interest in the farce and restrict themselves to papering over the cracks, accepting whichever new candidates may carry the day.

But if the electoral system bears the marks of a constitutional defect that is

beyond reform, what can we say about the fashion in which the assembly carries out its mandate? Just one moment's reflection and you will instantly see the pointlessness of the task you foist upon it.

Your representative is required to cast an opinion, a vote on a whole infinitely varied host of issues arising from within that redoubtable machine—the centralised

State.

He must vote on the luxury tax on dogs and on the reform of university teaching, without ever having set foot in a university nor known the advantages of owning a dog in the countryside. He must pronounce upon the advantages of the Gras rifle and the best site for the State stud farm. He shall vote on the phylloxera infestation, on

tobacco, on primary education, and on municipal sanitation; on Cochinchina and Guiana, on chimney-pots and on the Paris Observatory. He, who has only seen soldiers in parades, shall reorganise the army corps, and without ever having seen an Arab, he shall write and rewrite the Muslim property laws for Algeria. He shall vote on the least details of military uniform according

to the tastes of his spouse. He shall protect sugar and sacrifice wheat. He shall kill the vineyards while imagining that he is protecting them, and he shall vote for the reforestation of pasture lands while protecting pastures against the forest. He will be solidly in the pocket of the banks. He shall kill off this canal to make way for that railway without being entirely

sure in what part of France either of them is located. He shall add new articles to the Penal Code without ever having consulted it. An omniscient and omnipotent Proteus, today a man at arms, tomorrow a pig farmer, and by turns banker, academic, sewer-cleaner, doctor, astronomer, pharmacist, currier, or merchant, according to the agenda of the

Chamber, he shall never hesitate. Accustomed, in his role as a lawyer, journalist, or public orator, to speaking on what he knows nothing about, he shall vote on all of these issues [...]

[...]

Moreover, anyone who is capable of thinking without letting himself be led astray by the prejudices of our depraved education will find enough

examples of his own from the history of representative government in our own day. And will realise that, no matter what the representative body may be—be it made up of workers or of bourgeois, be it wide open to revolutionary socialists—it will keep all the vices of representative assemblies, which are not functions of the individuals, but inherent in the institution

itself.

The dream of a workers' State, governed by an elected assembly, is the most unwholesome of the dreams derived from our authoritarian education.

Just as there can be no good king, be he a Rienzi[[91](#)] or an Alexander III, so there can be no good parliament. The socialist future lies elsewhere: it will open up fresh paths to

humanity in politics as in economics.

IV

[...]

What did the Great Revolution do when it laid its axe to the authority of the king?

What made that Revolution possible was the disorganisation of the central authorities which were reduced over four years to

absolute powerlessness, to the role of mere recorder of *faits accomplis*: spontaneous actions from the towns and countryside stripping the authorities of all their prerogatives, withholding taxes and obedience.

But was the high-ranking bourgeoisie able to live with that state of affairs? It could see that the people, having done away with the rights of

the *seigneurs*, was about to turn on those of the urban and village bourgeoisie, and it successfully sought to stem this. To which end it made itself the apostle of representative government and spent four years working with all the force of action and organisation it could muster to inculcate this idea in the nation. Its ideal was Étienne Marcel's[[92](#)] ideal: a king who

is theoretically endowed with absolute authority, but who is actually reduced to a cipher by a parliament obviously made up of representatives from the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie omnipotent through parliament, under a veneer of royalty—that is its goal. The people may well have forced a Republic upon it, but this it accepts only grudgingly and discards at the first

opportunity.

Attacks upon the central authorities, stripping these of their prerogatives, decentralisation, dispersing authority would have amounted to abandoning its affairs to the people and would have run the risk of a genuinely popular revolution. Which is why the bourgeoisie is out to strengthen the central government still further, to

endow it with powers of which the king himself never dared even to dream, to concentrate everything into its hands, to enforce its writ throughout the entire length and breadth of France—and then to seize all of it through the National Assembly.

That Jacobin ideal remains to this very day the ideal of the bourgeoisie in every country in Europe and representative

government is its weapon.

Can this ideal be ours? Can socialist workers dream of remaking [society] in the same terms as the bourgeois revolution? Can they, in their turn, dream of reinforcing central government by handing over the entire economy to it and entrusting the governance of all their political, economic and social affairs to representative government?

Must what was a compromise between royalty and bourgeoisie become the ideal of the socialist worker?

Self-evidently not.

A new political phase corresponds to a new economic phase. A revolution as profound as the one dreamed of by socialists cannot be kept within the mould of the political life of the past. A new society

founded upon equality of conditions, on collective possession of the instruments of labour cannot tolerate, even for eight days, the representative regime nor any of the tinkering designed to electrify that cadaver.

That regime has had its day. Its disappearance is as inevitable today as its appearance was in times past. It corresponds to the reign of

the bourgeoisie. It is by this regime the bourgeoisie has reigned for the past century and it will vanish with it. As for ourselves, if we want social revolution, we have to look for a form of political organisation appropriate to the new form of economic organisation.

Besides, that form exists in outline already. It is the formation, moving from the simple to the complex, of

groups freely established to cater for all of the multifarious needs of individuals within society.

Modern societies are even now moving in that direction. On every front, free association and free federation are out to supplant passive obedience. These free groupings are already numbered in the tens of millions, with new ones

emerging daily. They are spreading and even now beginning to cover entire branches of human activity: science, the arts, industry, commerce, aid, indeed even territorial defence and crime prevention and the courts—nothing is beyond their remit, their sphere of influence is spreading and will eventually encompass everything that was once upon a time

arrogated by kings and parliament to themselves.

The future belongs to the unfettered banding together of interested parties, and not to governmental centralisation—to freedom and not to authority.

[...]

[87](#)[] From the Spanish *camarilla*, “little room”: a small, privileged group of plotters, a ruling clique or junta. (Editor)

[88](#)[] The “brigand” was Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon

Bonaparte, who was elected President in 1848, seized power in December 1851, and declared himself Emperor in December 1852 (the last two events were ratified by plebiscite). (Editor)

[89](#)[] The need to fight for political freedoms and seize them from government's was the theme of another chapter of *Words of a Rebel*, entitled "Political Rights," which concludes "Freedoms are not given, they are taken." (Editor)

[90](#)[] Robert Macaire was the archetypal criminal assassin from French literature. (Translator)

[91](#)[] Cola di Rienzi (1313–1354) was the leader of a popular movement in

Rome who tried to create a popular empire in central Italy. He was assassinated after power went to his head, resulting in arbitrary rule which lead to a popular uprising. (Editor)

[92](#)[] Étienne Marcel was a 14th century French draper and bourgeois reformer who came to entertain the idea of becoming king himself. (Translator)

Our Riches

This discussion of how capitalism exploits and oppresses the working class is the first chapter of The Conquest of Bread. It is a succinct restatement of the libertarian critique of capitalism as a system rooted in exploitation and oppression, a critique first presented under the name of “anarchism” by Proudhon in

What is Property? (1840).

I

The human race has travelled far since those bygone ages when men used to fashion their rude implements of flint and lived on the precarious spoils of the chase, leaving to their children for their only heritage a shelter beneath the rocks, some poor utensils—and Nature, vast,

ununderstood, and terrific,
with whom they had to fight
for their wretched existence.

During the agitated times
which have elapsed since, and
which have lasted for many
thousand years, mankind has
nevertheless amassed untold
treasures. It has cleared the
land, dried the marshes,
pierced the forests, made
roads; it has been building,
inventing, observing,

reasoning; it has created a complex machinery, wrested her secrets from Nature, and finally it has made a servant of steam. And the result is that now, the child of the civilised man finds ready, at its birth, to his hand an immense capital accumulated by those who have gone before him. And this capital enables him to acquire, merely by his own labour, combined with the

labour of others, riches surpassing the dreams of the Orient, expressed in the fairy tales of the Thousand and One Nights.

The soil is cleared to a great extent, fit for the reception of the best seeds, ready to make a rich return for the skill and labour spent upon it—a return more than sufficient for all the wants of humanity. The methods of cultivation are

known.

On the wide prairies of America each hundred men, with the aid of powerful machinery, can produce in a few months enough wheat to maintain ten thousand people for a whole year. And where man wishes to double his produce, to treble it, to multiply it a hundred-fold, he makes the soil, gives to each plant the requisite care, and

thus obtains enormous returns. While the hunter of old had to scour fifty or sixty square miles to find food for his family, the civilised man supports his household, with far less pains, and far more certainty, on a thousandth part of that space. Climate is no longer an obstacle. When the sun fails, man replaces it by artificial heat; and we see the coming of a time when

artificial light also will be used to stimulate vegetation. Meanwhile, by the use of glass and hot water pipes, man renders a given space ten and fifty times more productive than it was in its natural state.

The prodigies accomplished in industry are still more striking. With the co-operation of those intelligent beings, modern machines—themselves the fruit of three or

four generations of inventors, mostly unknown—a hundred men manufacture now the stuff to clothe ten thousand persons for a period of two years. In well-managed coal mines the labour of a hundred miners furnishes each year enough fuel to warm ten thousand families under an inclement sky. And we have lately witnessed twice the spectacle of a wonderful city

springing up in a few months at Paris,[[93](#)] without interrupting in the slightest degree the regular work of the French nation.

And if in manufactures as in agriculture, and as indeed through our whole social system, the labour, the discoveries, and the inventions of our ancestors profit chiefly the few, it is none the less certain that mankind in

general, aided by the creatures of steel and iron which it already possesses, could already procure an existence of wealth and ease for every one of its members.

Truly, we are rich, far richer than we think; rich in what we already possess, richer still in the possibilities of production of our actual mechanical outfit; richest of all in what we might win from our soil, from

our manufactures, from our science, from our technical knowledge, were they but applied to bringing about the well-being of all.

II

We, in civilised societies, are rich. Why, then, are the many poor? Why this painful drudgery for the masses? Why, even to the best paid workman, this uncertainty for

the morrow, in the midst of all the wealth inherited from the past, and in spite of the powerful means of production, which could ensure comfort to all in return for a few hours of daily toil?

The Socialists have said it and repeated it unwearyingly. Daily they reiterate it, demonstrating it by arguments taken from all the sciences. It is because all that is necessary

for production—the land, the mines, the highways, machinery, food, shelter, education, knowledge—all have been seized by the few in the course of that long story of robbery, enforced migration and wars, of ignorance and oppression, which has been the life of the human race before it had learned to subdue the forces of Nature. It is because, taking advantage of

alleged rights acquired in the past, these few appropriate today two-thirds of the products of human labour, and then squander them in the most stupid and shameful way. It is because, having reduced the masses to a point at which they have not the means of subsistence for a month, or even for a week in advance, the few only allow the many to work on condition of

themselves receiving the lion's share. It is because these few prevent the remainder of men from producing the things they need, and force them to produce, not the necessities of life for all, but whatever offers the greatest profits to the monopolists. In this is the substance of all Socialism.

Take, indeed, a civilised country. The forests which once covered it have been

cleared, the marshes drained, the climate improved. It has been made habitable. The soil, which bore formerly only a coarse vegetation, is covered today with rich harvests. The rock-walls in the valleys are laid out in terraces and covered with vines bearing golden fruit. The wild plants, which yielded nought but acrid berries, or uneatable roots, have been transformed by

generations of culture into succulent vegetables, or trees covered with delicious fruits. Thousands of highways and railroads furrow the earth, and pierce the mountains. The shriek of the engine is heard in the wild gorges of the Alps, the Caucasus, and the Himalayas. The rivers have been made navigable; the coasts, carefully surveyed, are easy of access; artificial

harbours, laboriously dug out and protected against the fury of the sea, afford shelter to the ships. Deep shafts have been sunk in the rocks; labyrinths of underground galleries have been dug out where coal may be raised or minerals extracted. At the crossings of the highways great cities have sprung up, and within their borders all the treasures of industry, science, and art have

been accumulated.

Whole generations, that lived and died in misery, oppressed and ill-treated by their masters, and worn out by toil, have handed on this immense inheritance to our century.

For thousands of years millions of men have laboured to clear the forests, to drain the marshes, and to open up highways by land and water. Every rood of soil we cultivate

in Europe has been watered by the sweat of several races of men. Every acre has its story of enforced labour, of intolerable toil, of the people's sufferings. Every mile of railway, every yard of tunnel, has received its share of human blood.

The shafts of the mine still bear on their rocky walls the marks made by the pick of the workman who toiled to

excavate them. The space between each prop in the underground galleries might be marked as a miner's grave; and who can tell what each of these graves has cost, in tears, in privations, in unspeakable wretchedness to the family who depended on the scanty wage of the worker cut off in his prime by fire-damp, rock-fall, or flood?

The cities, bound together

by railroads and waterways, are organisms which have lived through centuries. Dig beneath them and you find, one above another, the foundations of streets, of houses, of theatres, of public buildings. Search into their history and you will see how the civilisation of the town, its industry, its special characteristics, have slowly grown and ripened through the

co-operation of generations of its inhabitants before it could become what it is today. And even today; the value of each dwelling, factory, and warehouse, which has been created by the accumulated labour of the millions of workers, now dead and buried, is only maintained by the very presence and labour of legions of the men who now inhabit that special corner of

the globe. Each of the atoms composing what we call the Wealth of Nations owes its value to the fact that it is a part of the great whole. What would a London dockyard or a great Paris warehouse be if they were not situated in these great centres of international commerce? What would become of our mines, our factories, our workshops, and our railways, without the

immense quantities of merchandise transported every day by sea and land?

Millions of human beings have laboured to create this civilisation on which we pride ourselves today. Other millions, scattered through the globe, labour to maintain it. Without them nothing would be left in fifty years but ruins.

There is not even a thought, or an invention, which is not

common property, born of the past and the present. Thousands of inventors, known and unknown, who have died in poverty, have co-operated in the invention of each of these machines which embody the genius of man.

Thousands of writers, of poets, of scholars, have laboured to increase knowledge, to dissipate error, and to create that atmosphere

of scientific thought, without which the marvels of our century could never have appeared. And these thousands of philosophers, of poets, of scholars, of inventors, have themselves been supported by the labour of past centuries. They have been upheld and nourished through life, both physically and mentally, by legions of workers and craftsmen of all

sorts. They have drawn their motive force from the environment.

The genius of a Séguin, a Mayer, a Grove, has certainly done more to launch industry in new directions than all the capitalists in the world.[[94](#)] But men of genius are themselves the children of industry as well as of science. Not until thousands of steam-engines had been working for

years before all eyes, constantly transforming heat into dynamic force, and this force into sound, light, and electricity, could the insight of genius proclaim the mechanical origin and the unity of the physical forces. And if we, children of the nineteenth century, have at last grasped this idea, if we know now how to apply it, it is again because daily experience has

prepared the way. The thinkers of the eighteenth century saw and declared it, but the idea remained undeveloped, because the eighteenth century had not grown up like ours, side by side with the steam-engine. Imagine the decades that might have passed while we remained in ignorance of this law, which has revolutionised modern industry, had Watt[[95](#)]

not found at Soho skilled workmen to embody his ideas in metal, bringing all the parts of his engine to perfection, so that steam, pent in a complete mechanism, and rendered more docile than a horse, more manageable than water, became at last the very soul of modern industry.

Every machine has had the same history—a long record of sleepless nights and of

poverty, of disillusion and of joys, of partial improvements discovered by several generations of nameless workers, who have added to the original invention these little nothings, without which the most fertile idea would remain fruitless. More than that: every new invention is a synthesis, the resultant of innumerable inventions which have preceded it in the vast

field of mechanics and industry.

Science and industry, knowledge and application, discovery and practical realisation leading to new discoveries, cunning of brain and of hand, toil of mind and muscle—all work together. Each discovery, each advance, each increase in the sum of human riches, owes its being to the physical and mental

travail of the past and the present.

By what right then can any one whatever appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say—This is mine, not yours?

III

It has come about, however, in the course of the ages traversed by the human race, that all that enables man to

produce, and to increase his power of production, has been seized by the few. Sometime, perhaps, we will relate how this came to pass. For the present, let it suffice to state the fact and analyse its consequences.

Today the soil, which actually owes its value to the needs of an ever-increasing population, belongs to a minority who prevent the

people from cultivating it—or do not allow them to cultivate it according to modern methods.

The mines, though they represent the labour of several generations, and derive their sole value from the requirements of the industry of a nation and the density of the population—the mines also belong to the few; and these few restrict the output of coal,

or prevent it entirely, if they find more profitable investments for their capital. Machinery, too, has become the exclusive property of the few, and even when a machine incontestably represents the improvements added to the original rough invention by three or four generations of workers, it none the less belongs to a few owners. And if the descendants of the very

inventor who constructed the first machine for lace-making, a century ago, were to present themselves today in a lace factory at Bâle or Nottingham, and demand their rights, they would be told: "Hands off! this machine is not yours," and they would be shot down if they attempted to take possession of it.

The railways, which would be useless as so much old iron

without the teeming population of Europe, its industry, its commerce, and its marts, belong to a few shareholders, ignorant perhaps of the whereabouts of the lines of rails which yield them revenues greater than those of medieval kings. And if the children of those who perished by thousands while excavating the railway cuttings and tunnels were to assemble one

day, crowding in their rags and hunger, to demand bread from the shareholders, they would be met with bayonets and grape-shot, to disperse them and safeguard “vested interests.”

In virtue of this monstrous system, the son of the worker, on entering life, finds no field which he may till, no machine which he may tend, no mine in which he may dig, without

accepting to leave a great part of what he will produce to a master. He must sell his labour for a scant and uncertain wage. His father and his grandfather have toiled to drain this field, to build this mill, to perfect this machine. They gave to the work the full measure of their strength, and what more could they give? But their heir comes into the world poorer than the lowest

savage. If he obtains leave to till the fields, it is on condition of surrendering a quarter of the produce to his master, and another quarter to the government and the middlemen. And this tax, levied upon him by the State, the capitalist, the lord of the manor, and the middleman, is always increasing; it rarely leaves him the power to improve his system of culture.

If he turns to industry, he is allowed to work—though not always even that—only on condition that he yield a half or two-thirds of the product to him whom the land recognises as the owner of the machine.

We cry shame on the feudal baron who forbade the peasant to turn a clod of earth unless he surrendered to his lord a fourth of his crop. We call those the barbarous times.

But if the forms have changed, the relations have remained the same, and the worker is forced, under the name of free contract, to accept feudal obligations. For, turn where he will, he can find no better conditions. Everything has become private property, and he must accept, or die of hunger.

The result of this state of things is that all our production

tends in a wrong direction. Enterprise takes no thought for the needs of the community. Its only aim is to increase the gains of the speculator. Hence the constant fluctuations of trade, the periodical industrial crises, each of which throws scores of thousands of workers on the streets.

The working people cannot purchase with their wages the wealth which they have

produced, and industry seeks foreign markets among the moneyed classes of other nations. In the East, in Africa, everywhere, in Egypt, Tonkin or the Congo, the European is thus bound to promote the growth of serfdom. And so he does. But soon he finds everywhere similar competitors. All the nations evolve on the same lines, and wars, perpetual wars, break

out for the right of precedence in the market. Wars for the possession of the East, wars for the empire of the sea, wars to impose duties on imports and to dictate conditions to neighbouring States; wars against those “blacks” who revolt! The roar of the cannon never ceases in the world, whole races are massacred, the States of Europe spend a third of their budgets in

armaments; and we know how heavily these taxes fall on the workers.

Education still remains the privilege of a small minority, for it is idle to talk of education when the workman's child is forced, at the age of thirteen, to go down into the mine or to help his father on the farm. It is idle to talk of studies to the worker, who comes home in the

evening crushed by excessive toil with its brutalising atmosphere. Society is thus bound to remain divided into two hostile camps, and in such conditions freedom is a vain word. The Radical begins by demanding a greater extension of political rights, but he soon sees that the breath of liberty leads to the uplifting of the proletariat, and then he turns round, changes his opinions,

and reverts to repressive legislation and government by the sword.[[96](#)]

A vast array of courts, judges, executioners, policemen, and gaolers is needed to uphold these privileges; and this array gives rise in its turn to a whole system of espionage, of false witness, of spies, of threats and corruption.

The system under which we

live checks, in its turn, the growth of the social sentiment. We all know that without uprightness, without self-respect, without sympathy and mutual aid, human kind must perish, as perish the few races of animals living by rapine, or the slave-keeping ants. But such ideas are not to the taste of the ruling classes, and they have elaborated a whole system of pseudo-science to

teach the contrary.

Fine sermons have been preached on the text that those who have should share with those who have not, but he who would act out this principle is speedily informed that these beautiful sentiments are all very well in poetry, but not in practice. “To lie is to degrade and besmirch oneself,” we say, and yet all civilised life becomes one huge

lie. We accustom ourselves and our children to hypocrisy, to the practice of a double-faced morality. And since the brain is ill at ease among lies, we cheat ourselves with sophistry. Hypocrisy and sophistry become the second nature of the civilised man.

But a society cannot live thus; it must return to truth or cease to exist.

Thus the consequences

which spring from the original act of monopoly spread through the whole of social life. Under pain of death, human societies are forced to return to first principles: the means of production being the collective work of humanity, the product should be the collective property of the race. Individual appropriation is neither just nor serviceable. All belongs to all. All things are

for all men, since all men have need of them, since all men have worked in the measure of their strength to produce them, and since it is not possible to evaluate every one's part in the production of the world's wealth.

All things are for all. Here is an immense stock of tools and implements; here are all those iron slaves which we call machines, which saw and

plane, spin and weave for us, unmaking and remaking, working up raw matter to produce the marvels of our time. But nobody has the right to seize a single one of these machines and say, "This is mine; if you want to use it you must pay me a tax on each of your products," any more than the feudal lord of medieval times had the right to say to the peasant, "This hill, this

meadow belong to me, and you must pay me a tax on every sheaf of corn you reap, on every rick you build.”

All is for all! If the man and the woman bear their fair share of work, they have a right to their fair share of all that is produced by all, and that share is enough to secure them well-being. No more of such vague formulas as “The Right to work,” or “To each

the whole result of his labour.”
What we proclaim is T_{HE} R_{IGHT} TO
W_{ELL-BEING}: W_{ELL-BEING} FOR A_{LL}!

[93](#)[] For the International Paris Exhibitions of 1889 and 1900.

[94](#)[] Marc Séguin (1786–1875) was a French engineer, inventor of the wire-cable suspension bridge and the multi-tubular steam-engine boiler; Julius Robert von Mayer (1814–1878) was a German physician and physicist and one of the founders of thermodynamics; William Robert Grove (1811–1896) was a physicist who anticipated the general theory of the conservation of energy and was a pioneer of fuel cell technology.

(Editor)

[95](#)[] James Watt (1736–1819), the Scottish engineer who helped to perfect the steam engine, and after whom the unit of power is named.

(Editor)

[96](#)[] The term Radical (from the Latin *radix* meaning root) has changed its meaning since this article was initially written in 1890 for *La Révolte*. In France, it was illegal to openly advocate republicanism after the Napoleonic Wars until 1848, so republicans called themselves “radicals.” In 1869, a faction led by Georges Clemenceau called themselves Radicals, claiming to be the true heirs of the French

revolutionary tradition. They sought political power to implement a widening of the franchise, often as a prelude to legislating social reform.
(Editor)

The Division of Labour

This chapter from The Conquest of Bread summarises Kropotkin's critique of the division of labour within capitalism. In this he follows a well-known socialist analysis of its negative effects and repeats

*many of the points Proudhon
raised in his 1846 work
System of Economic
Contradictions.*

Political Economy has always confined itself to stating facts occurring in society and justifying them in the interest of the dominant class. Thus it is in favour of the division of labour created by industry. Having found it profitable to capitalists, it has set it up as a

principle.

Look at the village smith, said Adam Smith, the father of modern Political Economy. If he has never been accustomed to making nails, he will only succeed by hard toil in forging two to three hundred a day, and even then, they will be bad. But if this same smith has never done anything but nails, he will easily supply as many as two thousand three hundred

in the course of a day. And Smith hastened to the conclusion—"Divide labour, specialise, go on specialising; let us have smiths who only know how to make heads or points of nails, and by this means we shall produce more. We shall grow rich."

That a smith sentenced for life to the making of heads of nails would lose all interest in his work, would be entirely at

the mercy of his employer with his limited handicraft, would be out of work four months out of twelve, and that his wages would decrease when he could be easily replaced by an apprentice, Smith did not think of it when he exclaimed—"Long live the division of labour. This is the real gold-mine that will enrich the nation!" And all joined in the cry.

And later on, when a Sismondi or a J. B. Say[[97](#)] began to understand that the division of labour, instead of enriching the whole nation, only enriches the rich, and that the worker, who for life is doomed to making the eighteenth part of a pin, grows stupid and sinks into poverty—what did official economists propose? Nothing! They did not say to themselves that by a

lifelong grind at one and the same mechanical toil the worker would lose his intelligence and his spirit of invention, and that, on the contrary, a variety of occupations would result in considerably augmenting the productivity of a nation. But this is the very issue now before us.

If, however, only economists preached the permanent and

often hereditary division of labour, we might allow them to preach it as much as they pleased. But ideas taught by doctors of science filter into men's minds and pervert them; and from repeatedly hearing the division of labour, profits, interest, credit, etc., spoken of as problems long since solved, men, and workers too, end by arguing like economists, and by venerating the same

fetishes.

Thus, we see a number of socialists, even those who have not feared to point out the mistakes of science, justifying the division of labour. Talk to them about the organisation of work during the Revolution, and they answer that the division of labour must be maintained; that if you sharpened pins before the Revolution you must go on

sharpening them after. True, you will not have to work more than five hours a day, but you will have to sharpen pins all your life, while others will make designs for machines that will enable you to sharpen hundreds of millions of pins during your lifetime; and others again will be specialists in the higher branches of literature, science, and art, etc. You were born to

sharpen pins, while Pasteur was born to invent the inoculation against anthrax, and the Revolution will leave you both to your respective employments. Well, it is this horrible principle, so noxious to society, so brutalising to the individual, source of so much harm, that we propose to discuss in its divers manifestations.

We know the consequences

of the division of labour full well. It is evident that we are divided into two classes: on the one hand, producers who consume very little and are exempt from thinking because they only do physical work, and who work badly because their brains remain inactive; and on the other hand, the consumers, who, producing little or hardly anything, have the privilege of thinking for the

others, and who think badly because the whole world of those who toil with their hands is unknown to them. The labourers of the soil know nothing of machinery; those who work at machinery ignore everything about agriculture. The ideal of modern industry is a child *tending* a machine that he cannot and must not understand, and a foreman who fines him if his attention

flags for a moment. The ideal of industrial agriculture is to do away with the agricultural labourer altogether and to set a man who does odd jobs to tend a steam-plough or a threshing-machine. The division of labour means labelling and stamping men for life—some to splice ropes in factories, some to be foremen in a business, others to shove huge coal-baskets in a

particular part of a mine; but none of them to have any idea of machinery as a whole, nor of business, nor of mines. And thereby they destroy the love of work and the capacity for invention that, at the beginning of modern industry, created the machinery on which we pride ourselves so much.

What they have done for individuals, they also wanted to do for nations. Humanity

was to be divided into national workshops, having each its speciality. Russia, we were taught, was destined by nature to grow corn; England to spin cotton; Belgium to weave cloth; while Switzerland was to train nurses and governesses. Moreover, each separate city was to establish a speciality. Lyon was to weave silk, Auvergne to make lace, and Paris fancy articles.

Economists believed that specialisation opened an immense field for production and consumption, and that an era of limitless wealth for mankind was at hand.[[98](#)]

But these great hopes vanished as fast as technical knowledge spread abroad. As long as England stood alone as a weaver of cotton, and as a metal-worker on a large scale; as long as only Paris made

artistic fancy articles, etc., all went well, economists could preach so-called division of labour without being refuted.

But a new current of thought induced all civilised nations to manufacture for themselves. They found it advantageous to produce what they formerly received from other countries, or from their colonies, which in their turn aimed at emancipating themselves from

the mother-country. Scientific discoveries universalised the methods of production and henceforth it was useless to pay an exorbitant price abroad for what could easily be produced at home. Does not then this industrial revolution strike a crushing blow at the theory of the division of labour which was supposed to be so sound?

[97](#)[] Jean-Baptiste Say (1767–1832) was a businessman and the leading

French laissez-faire economist of his time. He expounded classical liberal views in favour of free competition and free trade and in 1831 he was made professor of political economy at the College de France. He originated Say's law, which is often quoted as "supply creates its own demand." Proudhon used his ideas as the starting point of his critique of the division of labour in *System of Economic Contradictions* (1846).
(Editor)

[98](#)[] This is what economists refer to as the theory of comparative advantage.
(Editor)

Economic Expedients

Translation by Paul
Sharkey

This article on the interwoven nature of oppression and exploitation appeared in Les Temps Nouveaux (No. 11) in July 1895. It summarises a theme that Kropotkin stressed, namely that economic and

political issues need to be viewed as a whole and that combating just one form is impossible.

Before running an eye over the various economic expedients by means of which partial improvements to the workers' lot are sought today, we will do well to return to their origins—the beginning of this century.

When the communists of the

first half of this century—
Fourier, Saint-Simon, Robert
Owen—launched their great
ideas out into the world, they
reckoned that the sheer
fairness of their ideas and the
grandeur of them would be
enough to convert humanity.
Capitalist and worker alike
would appreciate the benefits
of communism, would turn
communist and would
reorganise society in

accordance with the new principles.

That was, as we know, the age of unrestrained, shameless exploitation of labour. Men, women and children driven from the village by law and taxation, stranded in the big towns, were delivered up to the mercy of exploiters. The bourgeoisie, victorious all down the line since the great [French] Revolution, held

political power as well as capital in its hands. Hiding behind grand pronouncements on the freedom of labour, it forced the worker to accept the conditions dictated by the greed of the capitalist—on pain of imprisonment for vagrancy; every attempt by workers to organise was savagely punished; the master had become, in the real sense of the term, the feudal lord of

“his” male and female workers. And the worker, ground into squalor, sank ever deeper into intellectual and religious serfdom, no longer daring to revolt.

At that time, inspiring revolt against those two allies, capital and the State, might have been the only practical means of progressing towards implementation of the great ideas proclaimed by the

communists of the day. Only acts of revolt could prepare the liberation of the masses.

A double revolt, let it be understood, for, contrary to the wrong-headed interpretation of history in vogue these days, it was not just in the 16th century and for the purposes of the “primitive accumulation of capital” that the State acted as strong arm for the capitalist. It was

actually in the 19th century—
and still to this very day—that,
armed with all its powerful
machinery, the State helped
capital to establish itself,
placed entire populations in
thrall to it and, by a series of
legal measures, starting with
the National Assembly and
continuing through every
parliament right up until our
own day, represented, by law,
the formidable might of capital

which the people seek today to overthrow. For a multiplicity of reasons we might be well advised to bear in mind, however, the communists of the beginning of this century [i.e., the nineteenth] took quite a different path.

The acts of the great Revolution that had the greatest resonance were its political deeds. True, the peasant had freed himself

from the feudal regime and claimed back much of the land from the *seigneurs*. But he had done so wordlessly; so much so that it is only today that historians are discovering the scale of the agrarian revolution mounted by the peasant *jacqueries*, despite the attempts of the National Assembly or the Convention orators to repress the victorious march of the

jacqueries. In the great gatherings of the Revolution, the spoken word was always the politician's province. And behind all his grand speeches, the bourgeois politician had forged the chains that still hold the workers of both worlds in thrall to capital's yoke.

Living on memories of the great Revolution, the revolutionaries of France and England back in the [eighteen-

]twenties and thirties still dreamt of a return to the political forms of the first Jacobin republic, as the great goal for them to aim at as the century progressed. Political freedom and political equality were to be the grand cure for all evils.

It was obviously necessary to react against this outlook. Above all, the communist ideal which had been lost sight of

and forgotten amid political struggles had to be revived. Every eye had to be opened to the ideal of economic equality, and it had to be demonstrated that, even under the most advanced republican forms, the slave to the soil and to the factory would always remain a slave unless private ownership of the soil and of the instruments of labour was abolished.

Hence the tendency of the first communists—a tendency still found today—to dwell exclusively on economic servitude and to attach a completely secondary significance to the political forms of popular life. “Economic conditions are everything. He who is a slave to the soil or to the machine cannot be a free citizen. For as long as economic slavery

endures, there can never be any political freedom.”

An idea that is perfectly correct. An idea that needed spreading all the more at that time, since the initiative in progressive movements was then coming from the bourgeoisie, while the worker and peasant masses, subjected to twelve- and fifteen-hour working days, sunken in poverty, reading little or not at

all, scarcely dared ponder the whole of society and let themselves be led by bourgeois rebels, and while the latter, by dint of their education, were inclined to neglect economic questions and dream only about freedoms of the press, assembly, and association—of the “democratic regime,” in short, as the remedy for all suffering.

In that respect, the first

communists of our century have done the cause of civilisation a great service. To them are we indebted for a whole generation of pre-1848 socialists, together with their descendants—Proudhon, Marx, Bakunin—who highlighted the social and economic question and launched this idea, so often formulated prior to 1848 and taken up later by the

International: the idea of economic struggle, of economic liberation over and above political struggles.

But in order to encapsulate the whole truth rather than just one facet of the truth, its essential complement needed setting alongside that formula. And this was not done at the time.

Without doubt, economic conditions make for slavery.

Without doubt, the serf to the soil or to the machine will never be a free citizen. Without doubt, political slavery will last as long as economic slavery exists.

But of those two forms of subjection, the economic and the political, neither can be regarded as mother to the other. The two go hand in hand, and each one in turn gives rise to the other. In the

primitive tribe and even in the village community which came after it in history, such-and-such a person might be impoverished as the result of accident. But the tribe and the community have a whole series of arrangements for overcoming this adversity and restoring equality. It is only once the first seeds of the State appear in the tribe or community that a body of

customs arises, later followed by laws, aimed at preserving inequality so as to make poverty and wealth alike permanent and to exploit the former to the advantage of the latter.

And as the State develops and grows, it develops a whole vast mechanism for maintaining and exaggerating inequalities of fortune and generating the rich man's

lordship over the poor man.

Serfdom was one of its historic forms, but with its passing, fresh, new forms of the same domination have been devised within and by the State. Today, these have found their most scandalous development in the American republics, where billions are made with the aid and through the good offices of the State, while every attempt at revolt

by the poor is repressed with the same fury with which the revolt of the Parisian proletariat was crushed during the bloody week of May 1871. To the formula regarding economic subjection, then, this additional formula must henceforth be added:

“The State being the political form by means of which economic subjection is established and perpetuated,

economic liberation is an impossibility with a parallel demolition of the machinery of government by which economic subjection will remain for as long as the State shall exist.”

This double character of the “law of progress,” if we choose to call it that, is located within a mass of other human and organic phenomena in general. Without dwelling

upon examples lifted from biology, the fact of the matter is that, for as long as man remains mired in poverty, he is not going to be released from religious and intellectual (clerical and academic) slavery either. But it would be utterly wrong to conclude that liberation from religious and intellectual servitude will come automatically once man is freed from poverty. Rather,

since various nations are on the march at differing rates towards well-being, we might cite the fact that the conquest of well-being in America and England goes hand in hand with the increase in intellectual servitude in the two realms of superstition and servitude before that of scientific authority.

And since those two enslavements inevitably bring

back political and economic servitude, we are forced to acknowledge that if there will be no end to religious and intellectual servitude as long as economic and political enslavement last, the latter are not going to disappear as long as the human intellect remains immersed in submission to religious and intellectual authority. The man who swears upon the Bible, or

upon some other book, will always be a slave and an authoritarian by nature and will gradually reconstitute all forms of slavery—if ever he managed to make some disappear.

The credit for having grasped this twofold or rather threefold character of the law of progress belongs to Proudhon. Whilst, like so many others, he paid a heavy

tribute to German metaphysics' fondness for jargon, he nevertheless understood and spelled out in very clear terms that the formula of progress was, so to speak, two-sided, and that if one wanted economic emancipation, one also had to want political emancipation—the abolition of the State.

For anybody with the capacity for thought, he

proved that, unless one wishes to see an effort come to naught, it is, from here on, impossible to trace the history of Capital without simultaneously tracing the history of Authority: that, from the infancy of humanity through to our own times, both—Capital and Authority—represent the two forms through which minorities have always worked and still work

to establish and maintain Domination.

It has to be said that the earliest communists had all more or less guessed as much. But guided by the needs of the moment (the need to draw public attention to economic questions), faced with powerful enemies and not daring to attack them, anxious to embark upon a few attempts at practical

implementation of their ideas in society as it was, and, lastly, all imbued with the Christian notion of reforming characters rather than institutions, they followed a different trail.

Overstating the necessities of the moment, the better to push their economic ideas, they broke with the revolutionaries who sought to overthrow the political domination of the bourgeoisie. They ended up

accommodating themselves to any sort of government, even looking to potentates for succour, in order to put their ideas into practice—a tack which persists right into the present and which prompts some socialists to pay no heed to anti-statist propaganda—indeed, to despise it—and to preach that the reactionaries, as champions of strong government, are more likely to

be allies of theirs than allies of State-hating radicals.

In addition, in their schemes for rebuilding society, the first communists based their calculations on the establishment of a formidable authority—a tradition maintained right into our own day by the authoritarian socialists.

And finally, they poured some of their energy into

[creating] institutions of partial communism that were to help regenerate society, since they would provide the evidence that communism better meets everyone's interests than the current individualism.

And even as the working masses were forming their secret societies for the war against capital, it was under the influence of communists that an entire series of

institutions were founded such as communes in America, co-operatives for distribution and production, workers' settlements, etc., which were to be used to prove the feasibility of communism. We will examine these attempts in a forthcoming article, so as to see what lesson the revolution might one day draw from them.

From *The State: Its Historic Role*

This is Vernon Richards' translation of the first and last chapters of Kropotkin's famous account of the rise, evolution and role of the State. It first appeared in Les Temps Nouveaux in 1896–97. It is significant for its analysis of the State as a specific form of social organisation which

has evolved certain features to ensure a certain task—to rule the many in the interests of a few. From this analysis, Kropotkin argues that States cannot be utilised by the masses to transform society—it simply cannot be adapted to such tasks. Hence the need for workers to create new social organisation to achieve liberation.

I

In taking the State and its historic role as the subject for this study, I think I am satisfying a much felt need at the present time: that of examining in depth the very concept of the State, of studying its essence, its past role and the part it may be called upon to play in the future.

It is above all over the

question of the State that socialists are divided. Two main currents can be discerned in the factions that exist among us which correspond to differences in temperament as well as in ways of thinking, but above all to the extent that one believes in the coming revolution.

There are those, on the one hand, who hope to achieve the social revolution through the

State by preserving and even extending most of its powers to be used for the revolution. And there are those like ourselves who see the State, both in its present form, in its very essence, and in whatever guise it might appear, an obstacle to the social revolution, the greatest hindrance to the birth of a society based on equality and liberty, as well as the historic

means designed to prevent this blossoming. The latter work to abolish the State and not to reform it.

It is clear that the division is a deep one. It corresponds with two divergent currents which in our time are manifest in all philosophical thought, in literature as well as in action. And if the prevailing views on the State remain as obscure as they are today, there is no

doubt whatsoever that when—and we hope, soon—communist ideas are subjected to practical application in the daily life of communities, it will be on the question of the State that the most stubborn struggles will be waged.

Having so often criticised the State as it is today, it behoves one to seek the reason for its emergence, to study in depth its past role, and to compare it

with institutions that it has replaced.

Let us, first of all, be agreed as to what we wish to include by the term “the State.”

There is, of course, the German school which takes pleasure in confusing *State* with *Society*. This confusion is to be found among the best German thinkers and many of the French who cannot visualise Society without a

concentration of the State; and it is for this reason that anarchists are generally upbraided for wanting to “destroy society” and of advocating a return to “the permanent war of each against all.”

However to argue in this way is to overlook altogether the advances made in the domain of history in the past thirty or so years; it is to

overlook the fact that Man lived in Societies for thousands of years before the State had been heard of; it is to forget that so far as Europe is concerned the State is of recent origin—it barely goes back to the sixteenth century; and finally, it is to ignore that the most glorious periods in Man's history are those in which civil liberties and communal life had not yet

been destroyed by the State, and in which large numbers of people lived in communes and free federations.

The State is only one of the forms assumed by society in the course of history. Why then make no distinction between what is permanent and what is accidental?

On the other hand the *State* has also been confused with *Government*. Since there can

be no State without government, it has sometimes been said that what one must aim at is the absence of government and not the abolition of the State.

However, it seems to me that State and government are two concepts of a different order. The State idea means something quite different from the idea of government. It not only includes the existence of

a power situated above society, but also of a *territorial concentration* as well as the concentration *in the hands of a few of many functions in the life of societies*. It implies some new relationships between members of society which did not exist before the formation of the State. A whole mechanism of legislation and of policing has to be developed

in order to subject some classes to the domination of others.

This distinction, which at first sight might not be obvious, emerges especially when one studies the origins of the State.

Indeed, there is only one way of really understanding the State, and that is to study its historic development, and this is what we shall try to do.

The Roman Empire was a State in the real sense of the word. To this day it remains the legist's ideal. Its organs covered a vast domain with a tight network. Everything gravitated towards Rome: economic and military life, wealth, education, nay, even religion. From Rome came the laws, the magistrates, the legions to defend the territory, the prefects and the gods. The

whole life of the Empire went back to the Senate—later to the Caesar, the all powerful, omniscient, god of the Empire. Every province, every district had its Capitol in miniature, its small portion of Roman sovereignty to govern every aspect of daily life. A single law, that imposed by Rome, dominated that Empire which did not represent a confederation of fellow

citizens but was simply a herd of *subjects*.

Even now, the legist and the authoritarian still admire the unity of that Empire, the unitarian spirit of its laws and, as they put it, the beauty and harmony of that organisation.

But the disintegration from within, hastened by the barbarian invasion; the extinction of local life, which could no longer resist the

attacks from outside on the one hand nor the canker spreading from the centre on the other; the domination by the rich who had appropriated the land to themselves and the misery of those who cultivated it—all these causes reduced the Empire to a shambles, and on these ruins a new civilisation developed which is now ours.

So, if we leave aside the

civilisation of antiquity, and concentrate our attention on the origin and developments of this young barbarian civilisation, right up to the times when, in its turn, it gave birth to our modern States, we will be able to capture the essence of the State better than had we directed our studies to the Roman Empire, or to that of Alexander of Macedonia, or again the

despotic monarchies of the East.

In using, for instance, these powerful barbarian overthrowers of the Roman Empire as our point of departure, we will be able to retrace the evolution of our whole civilisation, from its beginnings and up to its Statal phase.

X

If one goes a little deeper into these different categories of phenomena which I have hardly touched upon in this short outline, one will understand why—seeing the State as it has been in history, and as it is in essence today—and convinced that a social institution cannot lend itself to *all* the desired goals since as with every organ, it developed according to the function it

performed, in a definite direction and not in all possible directions—one will understand, I say, why the conclusion we arrive at is for the abolition of the State.

We see it in the Institution, developed in the history of human societies to prevent the direct association among men to shackle the development of local and individual initiative, to crush existing liberties, to

prevent their new blossoming
—all this in order to subject
the masses to the will of
minorities.

And we know an institution
which has a long past going
back several thousand years
cannot lend itself to a function
opposed to history for which
and by which it was developed
in the course of history.

To this absolutely
unshakeable argument for

anyone who has reflected on history, what reply do we get? One is answered with an almost childish argument:

“The State exists and represents a powerful ready-made organisation. Why not use it instead of wanting to destroy it? It operates for evil ends—agreed; but the reason is that it is in the hands of the exploiters. If it were taken over by the people, why would

it not be used for better ends, for the good of the people?”[[99](#)]

Always the same dream—that of the Marquis de Posa, in Schiller’s drama, seeking to make an instrument of emancipation out of absolutism,[[100](#)] or again, the dream of the gentle Abbé Pierre in Zola’s *Rome* wanting to make of the Church the lever for socialism.[[101](#)]

How sad it is to have to reply to such arguments! For those who argue in this way either haven't a clue as to the true historic role of the State, or they view the *social* revolution in such a superficial and painless form that it ceases to have anything in common with their socialist aspirations.

Take the concrete example of France.

All thinking people must have noticed the striking fact that the Third Republic, in spite of its republican form of government, has remained monarchist in essence. We have all reproached it for not having republicanised France—I am not saying that it has done nothing for the social revolution, but that it has not even introduced a morality—that is an outlook which is

simply republican. For the little that has been done in the past 25 years to democratise social attitudes or to spread a little education has been done everywhere, in all the European monarchies, under pressure from the times through which we are passing. Then where does this strange anomaly of a republic which has remained a monarchy come from?

It arises from the fact that France has remained a State, and exactly where it was thirty years ago. The holders of power have changed the name but all that huge ministerial scaffolding, all that centralised organisation of white-collar workers, all this apeing of the Rome of the Caesars which has developed in France, all that huge organisation to assure and extend the

exploitation of the masses in favour of a few privileged groups, which is the essence of the State institution—all that has remained. And those wheels of bureaucracy continue as in the past to exchange their fifty documents when the wind has blown down a tree on to the highway and to transfer the millions deducted from the nation to the coffers of the privileged.

The official stamp on the documents has changed; but the State, its spirit, its organs, its territorial centralisation, its centralisation of functions, its favouritism, and its role as creator of monopolies have remained. Like an octopus they go on spreading their tentacles over the country.

The republicans—and I am speaking of the sincere ones—had cherished the illusion that

one could “utilise the organisation of the State” to effect a change in a Republican direction, and these are the results. Whereas it was necessary to break up the old organisation, *shatter the State* and rebuild a new organisation from the very foundations of society—the liberated village commune, federalism, groupings from simple to complex, the free

workers union—they thought of using the “organisation that already existed.” And, not having understood that, one does not make an historical institution follow in the direction to which one points—that is in the opposite direction to the one it has taken over the centuries—they were swallowed up by the institution.

And this happened though in

this case it was not even a question yet of changing the whole economic relations in society! The aim was merely to reform only some aspects of political relations between men.

But after such a complex failure, and in the light of such a pitiful experiment, there are those who still insist in telling us that the conquest of powers in the State, by the people, will

suffice to accomplish the social revolution!—that the old machine, the old organisation, slowly developed in the course of history to crush freedom, to crush the individual, to establish oppression on a legal basis, to create monopolists, to lead minds astray by accustoming them to servitude—will lend itself perfectly to its new functions: that it will become the instrument, the

framework for the germination of a new life, to found freedom and equality on economic bases, the destruction of monopolies, the awakening of society and towards the achievement of a future of freedom and equality!

What a sad and tragic mistake!

To give full scope to socialism entails rebuilding

from top to bottom a society dominated by the narrow individualism of the shopkeeper. It is not as has sometimes been said by those indulging in metaphysical wooliness just a question of giving the worker “the total product of his labour”; it is a question of completely reshaping all relationships, from those which exist today between every individual and

his churchwarden or his station-master to those which exist between trades, hamlets, cities and regions. In every street, in every hamlet, in every group of men gathered around a factory or along a section of the railway line, the creative, constructive and organisational spirit must be awakened in order to rebuild life—in the factory, in the village, in the store, in

production and in distribution of supplies. All relations between individuals and great centres of population have to be made all over again, from the very day, from the very moment one alters the existing commercial or administrative organisation.

And they expect this immense task, requiring the free expression of popular genius, to be carried out within

the framework of the State and the pyramidal organisation which is the essence of the State! They expect the State whose very *raison d'être* is the crushing of the individual, the hatred of initiative, the triumph of *one* idea which must be inevitably that of mediocrity—to become the lever for the accomplishment of this immense transformation. They want to

direct the renewal of a society by means of decrees and electoral majorities... How ridiculous!

Throughout the history of our civilisation, two traditions, two opposing tendencies have confronted each other: the Roman and the Popular; the imperial and the federalist; the authoritarian and the libertarian. And this is so, once more, on the eve of the social

revolution.

Between these two currents, always manifesting themselves, always at grips with each other—the popular trend and that which thirsts for political and religious domination—we have made our choice.

We seek to recapture the spirit which drove people in the twelfth century to organise themselves on the basis of free

agreement and individual initiative as well as of the free federation of the interested parties. And we are quite prepared to leave the others to cling to the imperial, the Roman and canonical tradition.

History is not an uninterrupted natural development. Again and again development has stopped in one particular territory only to

emerge somewhere else. Egypt, the Near East, the Mediterranean shores and Central Europe have all in turn been centres of historical development. But every time the pattern has been the same: beginning with the phase of the primitive tribe followed by the village commune; then by the free city, finally to die with the advent of the State.

In Egypt, civilisation begins

with the primitive tribe. It advances to the village commune and later to the period of the free cities; later still to the State which, after a period in which it flourished, leads to death.

Development starts afresh in Syria, in Persia and in Palestine. It follows the same pattern: the tribe, the village commune, the free city, the all-powerful State and...

death!

A new civilisation then comes to life in Greece. Always through the tribe. Slowly it reaches the level of the village commune and then to the republican cities. In these cities civilisation reaches its zenith. But the East communicates its poisonous breath, its traditions of despotism. Wars and conquests create the Empire

of Alexander of Macedonia. The State asserts itself, grows, destroys all culture and... it is death.

Rome in its turn restarts civilisation. Once more one finds at the beginning the primitive tribe, then the village commune followed by the city. At this phase Rome was at the height of its civilisation. But then come the State and the Empire and then... death!

On the ruins of the Roman Empire, Celtic, Germanic, Slavonic and Scandinavian tribes once more take up the threads of civilisation. Slowly the primitive tribe develops its institutions and manages to build up the village commune. It lingers in this phase until the twelfth century when the republican city arises, and this brings with it the blossoming of the human spirit, proof of

which are the masterpieces of architecture, the grandiose development of the arts, the discoveries which lay the foundations of natural sciences... But then the State emerges... Death? Yes: death—or renewal!

Either the State for ever, crushing individual and local life, taking over in all fields of human activity, bringing with it all its wars and domestic

struggles for power, its palace revolutions which only replace one tyrant by another, and inevitably at the end of this development there is... death!

Or the destruction of States, and new life starting again in thousands of centres on the principles of the lively initiative of the individual and groups and that of free agreement.

The choice lies with you!

[99](#)[] Kropotkin is referring to the Social Democrats who followed Engels'

arguments from 1883 that while he and Marx saw its “gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance,” the proletariat “will first have to possess itself of the organised political force of the State and with its aid stamp out the resistance of the Capitalist class and re-organise society.” The anarchists “reverse the matter” by advocating revolution “has to *begin* by abolishing the political organisation of the State.” For Marxists “the only organisation the victorious working class finds ready-made for use, is that of the State. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment, would be to destroy the only

organism by means of which the working class can exert its newly conquered power” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 47, p. 10).
(Editor)

[100](#)[] Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) was a German Romantic poet, philosopher, historian, and playwright. His philosophical work was concerned with human freedom, which also guided his historical researches and found its way into his dramas. The Marquis de Posa is a character from his 1787 play *Don Carlos* (addressing the revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish rule in the 16th century) whose famous speech to the King of

Spain proclaims Schiller's belief in personal freedom and democracy, but ends in a prostrate plea to the King: "A single word of yours can suddenly / Create the world anew. Give us the freedom / To think." (Editor)

[101](#)[] Émile François Zola (1840–1902) was a French writer and a major figure in the political liberalisation of France. Abbé Pierre Froment is the hero of his *Three Cities Trilogy*, of which *Rome* (1896) is the second book. In these works, Zola discusses Catholicism with the hero writing a book to create his "dream of resuscitating a Christian and evangelical Rome, which should assure the happiness of the world"

based on “a Christian love for the lowly and the wretched.” He visits Rome and meets with Pope, who promptly rejects the Abbé’s vision of a return “to the spirit of primitive Christianity” and places his work on the index of forbidden books. It ends with denunciations of the Catholic Church and a panegyric to science as sovereign and sweeping all before it. (Editor)

Prisons: Universities of Crime

Originally a paper read before the British Medical Association, this article was published in Mother Earth (vol. VIII, No. 8) in October 1913. In it, Kropotkin summarises the problems with prisons and sketches how to truly solve the issue of anti-social benefit which prisons,

by their very nature, cannot.

Leaving aside the great question of “Crime and Punishment” which occupies now so many prominent lawyers and sociologists, I shall limit my remarks to the question: “Are prisons answering their purpose, which is that of diminishing the number of antisocial acts?”

To this question, every unprejudiced person who has

a knowledge of prisons from the inside will certainly answer by an emphatic *No*. On the contrary, a serious study of the subject will bring everyone to the conclusion that the prisons—the best as much as the worst—are breeding places of criminality; that they contribute to render the antisocial acts worse and worse; that they are, in a word, the High Schools, the

Universities of what is known as Crime.

Of course, I do not mean that everyone who has been once in a prison will return to it. There are thousands of people sent every year to prison by mere accident. But I maintain that the effect of a couple of years of life in a prison—from the very fact of its being a prison—is to increase in the individual those

defects which brought him before a law court. These causes, being the love of risk, the dislike of regular work (due in an immense majority of cases to the want of a thorough knowledge of a trade), the despise of society with its injustice and hypocrisy, the want of physical energy, and the lack of will—all these causes will be aggravated by detention in

a jail.

Five-and-twenty years ago, when I developed this idea in a book, now out of print (*In Russian and French Prisons*), I supported it by an examination of the facts revealed in France by an inquest made as to the numbers of *recidivistes* (second offence prisoners). The result of this inquest was that from two fifths to one half

of all persons brought before the assizes and two fifths of all brought before the police courts had already been kept once or twice in a jail. The very same figure of forty percent was found in this country; while, according to Michael Davitt, as much as ninety-five percent of all those who are kept in penal servitude have previously received prison education.

A little reflection will show that things cannot be otherwise. A prison has, and must have, a degrading effect on its inmates. Take a man freshly brought to a jail. The moment he enters the house he is no more a human being; he is "Number So and So." He must have no more a will of his own. They put him in a fool's dress to underline his degradation. They deprive him

of every intercourse with those towards whom he may have an attachment and thus exclude the action of the only element which could have a good effect upon him.

Then he is put to labour, but not to a labour that might help to his moral improvement. Prison work is made to be an instrument of base revenge. What must the prisoner think of the intelligence of these

“pillars of society” who pretend by such punishments to “reform” the prisoners?

In the French prisons the inmates are given some sort of useful and paid work. But even this work is paid at a ridiculously low scale, and, according to the prison authorities, it cannot be paid otherwise. Prison work, they say, is inferior slave work. The result is that the prisoner

begins to hate his work, and finishes by saying, "The real thieves are not we, but those who keep us in."

The prisoner's brain is thus working over and over again upon the idea of the injustice of a society which pardons and often respects such swindlers as so many company promoters are, and wickedly punishes him, simply because he was not cunning

enough. And the moment he is out he takes his revenge by some offence very often much graver than his first one. Revenge breeds revenge.

The revenge that was exercised upon him he exercises upon society. Every prison, because it is a prison, destroys the physical energy of its inmates. It acts upon them far worse than an Arctic wintering. The want of fresh

air, the monotony of existence, especially the want of impressions, take all energy out of the prisoner and produce that craving for stimulants (alcohol, coffee) of which Miss Allen spoke so truthfully the other day at the Congress of the British Medical Association.[[102](#)]

And finally, while most antisocial acts can be traced to a weakness of will, the prison

education is directed precisely towards killing every manifestation of will.

Worse than that. I seriously recommend to prison reformers the *Prison Memoirs* of Alexander Berkman, who was kept for fourteen years in an American jail and has told with great sincerity his experience. One will see from this book how every honest feeling must be suppressed by

the prisoner, if he does not decide never to go out of this hell.

What can remain of a man's will and good intentions after five or six years of such an education? And where can he go after his release, unless he returns to the very same chums whose company has brought him to the jail? They are the only ones who will receive him as an equal. But

when he joins them he is sure to return to the prison in a very few months. And so he does. The jailers know it well.

I am often asked—What reforms of prisons I should propose; but now, as twenty-five years ago, I really do not see how prisons could be reformed. They must be pulled down. I might say, of course: “Be less cruel, be more thoughtful of what you do.”

But that would come to this: “Nominate a Pestalozzi as Governor in each prison, and sixty Pestalozzis as warders,” which would be absurd. But nothing short of that would help.[[103](#)]

So the only thing I could say to some quite well-intentioned Massachusetts prison officials who came once to ask my advice was this: If you cannot obtain the abolition of the

prison system, then—never accept a child or a youth in your prison. If you do so, it is manslaughter. And then, after having learned by experience what prisons are, refuse to be jailers and never be tired to say that prevention of crime is the only proper way to combat it. Healthy municipal dwellings at cost price, education in the family and at school—of the parents as well as the children;

the learning by every boy and girl of a trade; communal and professional co-operation; societies for all sorts of pursuits; and, above all, idealism developed in the youths; the longing after what is lifting human nature to higher interests. This will achieve what punishment is absolutely incapable to do.

[102](#)[] Martha née Meir Allen (1854–1926) was a Superintendent of the Department of Medical Temperance

for the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Her works include *Alcohol: A Dangerous and Unnecessary Medicine* (1900). (Editor)

[103](#)[] Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) was a Swiss pedagogue and educational reformer who advocated revolutionary modern principles of education. His motto “Learning by head, hand and heart” is still a key principle in successful modern schools. He felt that education must be broken down to its elements in order to have a complete understanding of it and emphasised that every aspect of the child's life contributed to the formation of

personality, character, and reason.
(Editor)

From *The Modern State*

This chapter from the 1913 expanded French edition of Modern Science and Anarchism indicates Kropotkin's analysis of the capitalist State. An obvious complement to The State: Its Historic Role, it shows the symbiotic relationship between capitalism and the

*State. It was serialised in
Freedom between November
1913 and September 1914
(where this translation comes
from) but was never
completed thanks to the
outbreak of the First World
War.*

I

The Essential Principle of Modern Society

In order to understand

thoroughly the direction that is now taken by the development of society, and so to see what has hitherto been acquired by progressive evolution, and what we may expect to conquer in the future, we must consider carefully, first of all, what are the distinctive features of modern society and the modern State.

It need hardly be said that society, such as it is now, is

not the logical development of some unique fundamental principle applied to the infinite variety of the needs of human life. Like every other living organism, society represents, on the contrary, an extremely complex result of thousands of struggles and thousands of compromises, of survivals of the past and of longings towards a better future.

The theocratic spirit of a

remote antiquity, slavery, imperialism, serfdom, the medieval commune, the old superstitions, and the modern spirit—all these are more or less represented, with all possible gradations, in the societies of the present time. Shadows of a remote past, and rough sketches of the future; habits and customs as antiquated as the Stone Age, and aspirations towards a

future which is hardly perceptible on the horizon—all these are found in our present human agglomerations, struggling one against the other in every individual, every layer of society, and every generation.

However, if we consider the great struggles, the great popular revolutions which took place in Europe and America since the twelfth century, we

see one principle distinctly arising out of all these struggles. All the uprisings of the last eight centuries were aiming at the abolition of what had survived of ancient slavery in its mitigated form—Serfdom.

All these struggles had the purpose of freeing either the rural populations or the inhabitants of the towns and cities, or both at the same

time, from the *obligatory labour* that was imposed upon them by law, to the advantage of some masters. To recognise the right of every man to dispose at his own will of his own personal powers, the right to do the work he himself chooses to do, and so long as he likes to do it, without any one having the legal right to *compel* him to do that work—in other words, the liberation

of the *personality* of the peasant and the artisan—this was the object of all those popular revolts. The uprisings of the communes in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries; the peasant upheavals in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Bohemia, Germany, and the Netherlands; the revolutions of 1381 and 1648 in England; and, finally, the Great

Revolution of 1789–93 in France—all had that purpose.

It is true that the aim of these upheavals was only partially attained. In proportion as the individual freed himself and gained *personal* liberty, new economic conditions were imposed upon him, so as to paralyse his liberty, forge new chains, and bring him back

under the old yoke by the menace of starvation. A striking example of that was given quite recently, when the Russian serfs, liberated in 1861, were compelled to pay for their liberation by a redemption of the land that they had cultivated for centuries past—which meant poverty and misery and the reimposition of a new economic serfdom. And what was done

in Russia was done, in one way or another, everywhere in Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Physical compulsion disappeared, but new forms of constraint were established. Personal serfdom was abolished in the laws of the country, but it reappeared in a new form—the economic one.

And yet, with all that—theoretically, *in Law*—this is

proclaimed as the fundamental principle of our modern society. In theory, the freedom of labour is proclaimed as every one's fundamental right. By law, work is no longer *obligatory* for any one. A caste of slaves, bound to work for their masters, does not exist; and, at least in Europe, there exists no longer a class of men, bound to give to their masters three days of work

every week, in return for the use of a small piece of land to which the serf formerly remained attached all his life. Every one—at least, in law—is considered free to work where he likes, and so much as he likes.

And yet we know—and the Socialists of all shades of opinion are never weary of demonstrating it every day—

how illusory, how unreal is this supposed freedom. Millions and millions of men, women, and children are forced every day, under the menace of starvation, to give their labour to a master, accepting the conditions he imposes upon them. And we know, and we try to make it well understood by the masses, that under the name of land-rent, house-rent, interest, profit, and so on, that

are paid to the capital-owner, the industrial working man and the agricultural labourer continue to give, to several masters instead of to one, as much as the three days they formerly used to pay to the landlord, in order to cultivate a plot of land, or merely to live under a roof.

We know, moreover, that if some day an economist would make real “political economy,”

and calculate all that several masters—the employer, the house-owner, the landlord, the countless intermediaries, the capital-owners, and the State—levy directly or indirectly upon the wages of the working man, one would be amazed to learn how little of it remains for paying all other workers whose produce is consumed by every working man. The working man hardly realises

how small is the part which goes to pay the agricultural labourer who has grown the wheat he consumes, the mason who built the house he dwells in, those who made the clothing he wears, the furniture he has in his rooms, and so on. One would be amazed to find how little goes to all those workers who produce the things consumed by other working men, in

comparison to that immense portion which goes to the feudal barons of our own time.

However, this robbing of the worker is not accomplished by one master imposed on every worker by the law. There exists for that purpose a special mechanism, extremely complicated—impersonal and irresponsible. Nowadays, the worker gives, just as in olden

times, a considerable portion of his life to work for the privileged ones; but he does it no more under the whip of a master. The compulsion is no more a bodily constraint, as it was under serfdom. He will be thrown out into the street, and be forced to dwell in a slum; he will be so reduced as never to have sufficient to satisfy his hunger, and he will see his children perishing from want

of food and healthy surroundings; he will have to beg in his old days, or go to a workhouse. But he will not be put on a bench in a police-station and flogged for a badly sewn coat or a badly harrowed field, as was done in our childhood days in Eastern Europe, and was formerly done all over Europe.

Under the present system—which is often more ferocious

and pitiless than the old one—man has nevertheless a feeling of personal liberty. We know that for the proletarian such a feeling is almost an illusion; and yet we must recognise that all modern progress and all hopes for the future are based on this feeling of freedom, whatever its limitations may be.

The most miserable man, in the darkest moments of his

dejection, will not exchange his stone bed under the arch of a bridge for the secure daily food of a slave, with the slave's chain in addition. More than that. This feeling, this principle of personal liberty, is so dear to modern man that continually we see whole populations of working men starving for months in succession, and marching against the bayonets of their

rulers, only to maintain some conquered rights.

The most obstinate strikes and the most bitter popular revolts result nowadays more often from questions of rights than from questions of wages.

The right to work at what a man chooses to work at, and so long as he chooses, thus remains *the principle* of modern society. Consequently,

the chief accusation we level at society is, that this freedom, so dear to man, is continually rendered a fiction, by the worker being placed under the necessity of *selling* his labour-force to a capitalist—the modern State being the chief weapon for maintaining the working men under this necessity, by means of the monopolies and privileges it continually creates in favour of

one class of citizens, to the detriment of the others.

It begins, indeed, to be generally understood that the fundamental principle, upon which all are agreed, is continually evaded by means of a widely-developed system of monopolies. He who owns nothing becomes once more the serf of those who possess, because he is bound to accept the conditions of the owners of

the land, the factory, the dwelling-houses, the trade, and so on; he is thus compelled to pay to the rich—to all the rich—an immense tribute, as a consequence of the established monopolies. These monopolies become hateful to the people, not only on account of the lazy life they guarantee to the rich, but chiefly on account of the rights they give to the monopolists

over the working class.

Consequently, the great fault we find with modern society is, that after having proclaimed the principle of liberty of work, it has created such conditions of property-ownership that *they do not permit the worker to be master of his work*. They wipe out this principle, and place the worker in such a condition that he *must* work to enrich his

masters, and to perpetuate, as it were, his own inferiority. He is forced to forge his own chains.

Well, then, if it is true that the principle of liberty of work is really dear to modern man, if he repudiates servile work and cherishes personal freedom, then the course to be followed by a revolutionist is quite evident.

He will repudiate all forms

of a veiled serfdom. He will work to put an end to a state of things in which freedom has come to be an empty word. He will try to find out what it is that prevents the worker from being the master of his own brain and hands; and he will aim at the abolition—by force if necessary—of the obstacles opposed to that freedom, always taking care that he does not introduce new

obstacles which, perhaps, might give a temporary increase of well-being to a section of the working class, but would limit their liberty at the same time.

Let us, then, analyse the obstacles which reduce the working man's liberty and tend to enslave him, in opposition to a principle generally recognised.

II

Serfs of the State

“Nobody can be compelled by the law to work for somebody else.” Such is, we said in our previous issue, the fundamental principle of modern society—a right conquered by a series of revolutions. And those of us who have seen serfdom at work in the first half of the nineteenth century, in Russia,

or those who have seen its vestiges in this country up to 1848, will fully appreciate the value of this conquest. Those who saw how children were taken by force from their parents if the latter had entered a workhouse, transported to the cotton factories of Lancashire, and there compelled to work fourteen hours a day in abominable conditions for a

miserable pay—those of us who have seen that, and realised the stamp that such conditions impressed upon society as a whole, will understand the importance of the change accomplished by the definite abolition of legal servitude.

But if the *legal* obligation for men to work for other men does not exist any more, the State has retained to itself the

right of imposing obligatory work on its subjects. More than that, in proportion as the relations of master and serf disappeared from society, the State increased its own powers of imposing forced labour upon the citizens. And it has succeeded so well, that the powers of the Modern State over its subjects would have inspired with envy the lawyers of the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries, when they worked to constitute it.

Nowadays, for instance, the State imposes upon every one an obligatory primary education. An excellent thing, in principle, so long as one sees in it only the *right* of every child to go to school, even if its parents were opposed to it, or sent it instead to a factory, or to an ignorant “sister” in a convent.

But, in reality—what has become nowadays of the instruction given in primary schools? It is a tissue of false doctrines that are taught, to persuade the children of the rights of the State over its subjects; to establish the holy rights of the rich ones to exploit the poor and thus to grow rich upon their poverty; to teach children that revenge, when it is exercised by

society, becomes Supreme Justice, and that military conquerors were the true benefactors of society. Worse than that! State instruction—a worthy heir of the instruction given by the Jesuits—is a perfected means of killing in the child all spirit of independence and to teach it servility in thought and action.

When the child will have grown, the State will impose

upon it compulsory military service—as well as, if need be, various sorts of obligatory work for the State and the Commune.[[104](#)] Besides, by means of rates and taxes, the State will compel every one to accomplish during his life an immense quantity of work for the State, as well as for the favourites of the State—only doing it in such a way that the innocent citizen should believe

that it is he himself who imposes it, and who disposes, through his representatives, of the masses of money which run into the coffers of the State.

A new principle has thus been introduced in modern society. Personal servitude exists no more. The State has no slaves. A king can no longer order that twenty or thirty thousand of his subjects

should build his fortresses, or lay out parks and gardens for his favourites. The palaces and the parks of the kings are no longer built and laid out by “statute labour.” It is by means of taxes, under the pretext of “productive works which will serve to protect the liberty of the citizens and increase their wealth,” that the State obtains the same services from its subjects.

We are the first to greet the abolition of the principle of serfdom, and to indicate the importance of that abolition for the general advancement of the ideas of freedom and progress. To be brought bodily to Versailles or Westminster, in order to build there palaces for a king's favourites, was certainly harder than to pay, as we do now, so much in taxes

—i.e., so many days of labour. We feel our indebtedness to the men of 1648, 1793, and 1848 for having freed Europe from “statute labour.”

But the fact remains. In proportion as the abolition of personal servitude disappeared in Europe in the course of the nineteenth century, the servile obligations towards the State grew. From year to year the number and variety, as well as

the quantity, of “duties”—really work exacted by the State from the citizen—were increasing.

By the end of the nineteenth century we even see the State openly proclaiming its right to statute labour. It imposes upon the railway workers (it was done quite recently in Italy) compulsory work in case of a strike—that is, true statute labour in favour of the railway

companies. From the railway to the coal mine, and from the coal mine to the factory, is but a short step. And once the pretext of *public safety*, or even only of *public utility*, will have been recognised as an excuse for forced labour, there will be no more limits to the powers of the State.

If miners and railway men have not yet been treated as guilty of high treason each

time they went on strike (in Russia it has already been done, in 1906, while a new law treats as felony all strikes in “establishments of public utility”), it was only because the need of it has not yet been felt. Our rulers still prefer to take advantage of the menacing attitude of a few men to shoot down the crowds of strikers and to send their leaders to hard labour.

Up till now they have found enough “voluntary servility” amongst the workers not to feel the need of proclaiming compulsory servitude. But the moment the need of it or the fear of such a need will be felt, it will be done. And if we do not take our precautions, we shall see the day when discontented strikers will be executed or transported to some pestiferous colony,

simply for having failed to accomplish the “public service” imposed upon them by the rich exploiters.

Let us make no mistake on this account. Two great currents of thought and action have characterised the nineteenth century. One of them was a systematic fight against all survivals of serfdom. And the result of it

was that in the laws of Europe personal servitude has at last disappeared, even in Russia (in 1861) and in the Balkan States (after the war of 1878).

More than that; in every nation man has worked to conquer personal freedom. He has freed himself to a great extent from superstitious respect for nobility, royalty, and the upper classes; and by a thousand small acts of revolt,

accomplished in every corner of Europe, he has established—by using it—his right of being treated as a free man.

At the same time, all the intellectual movements of the nineteenth century—its poetry, its romance, its drama, when they were something more than a mere amusement for the leisured class; its history and philosophy, even its music—have borne in their highest

productions the same character of a struggle for freeing the individual [man], the woman, the child, from the habits and manners of thought that had been established by centuries of slavery and serfdom.

But, by the side of this liberating movement, another movement, which also had its origin in the Great French Revolution, was going on at

the same time. And its purpose was, *to develop the omnipotence of the State* in the name of that vague and treacherous conception which has opened the door to all ambitions—*the conception of public welfare organised, not by the nation itself in each town and village, but by its chosen so-called representatives.*

Born in the times when the Church had undertaken to govern men in order to bring them to salvation, inherited by us from the Roman Empire and the Roman Law, this idea of an omnipotent and all-organising State has silently made its advance during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Take, for instance, compulsory military service, as

it is practised now, and compare it with what it was several centuries ago; and you will be terrified with the growth of that idea of servitude towards the State.

Never did the medieval serf allow himself to be deprived of his human rights to such a degree as he is deprived now, with the present spirit of voluntary servitude. As the age of twenty—that is, at the age

when the young man needs most his liberty—he lets himself be imprisoned for three years in barracks [conscripted into the armed forces], where he ruins his intellectual and moral health—what for? To learn the military trade, which the Boers have learned so well while they cultivated their fields and rode across their wide plains on horseback.

He not only risks his life, but he goes further in his voluntary servitude than the serf of old. He permits it to control his love, he abandons the woman he loves and accepts celibacy; he lets himself be commanded by men whose military knowledge and capacities he has no means of controlling. Worse than that! He supports without revolting the horrors of a punishment battalion in

Africa—in the terrible Biribi.
[[105](#)]

When in the Middle Ages did men styling themselves free ever accept such conditions? When did peasants or artisans ever abandon their right to make their own secret leagues to oppose the leagues of the lords, and to fight them arms in hand! Was there in medieval times an epoch so dark that the citizens of the

free communes should have disowned their right to throw their judges in the river, if they disapproved of their justice! And when did it happen, even during the darkest periods of antiquity, that the State had the means of perverting all instruction, from the primary school to the Academy, by its system of education? Machiavelli was dreaming of that, but his dream was

realised only in the nineteenth century! [[106](#)]

We have thus had during the last hundred and twenty years a great *progressive* movement, which worked during the first half of last century for the complete liberation of the individual and of human thought; and we have had a great *regressive* movement which overcame the former in the second half of the century,

and which works to re-establish the servitude of old, *but in favour of the State*—and to increase it, by rendering it voluntary.

And yet what we have mentioned refers only to the *direct* servitude. As to all sorts of *indirect servitude*, established by means of taxation and different capitalist monopolies, they grow every day. They become so powerful

and so menacing, that it is high time to study them very seriously. This we shall do in our next essay.

III

Taxation as a Means of Increasing the Power of the State

While the State, by means of the military service, the education which it directs in the interests of the rich, the

Church, and, finally, its thousands of functionaries, exercises already a powerful tyranny over its subjects, taxation comes in to increase its powers tenfold.

[...]

Have you ever reckoned what an amount of labour we are giving every year to the State? No economist has done that. None of them has ever tried to find out how many

days of labour the agricultural labourer and the working man in the city give every year to the State. And if we try to find it out ourselves by taking the Budget estimates of the States, the counties, and the boroughs, we shall not come to a correct result; because, what we want to know is not how many pounds enter the Treasury, but how many hours of labour of working men are

represented in the millions of pounds entering the Treasury. All we can say is, that the quantity of labour every one gives to the State being very great, for many classes it must be higher than the three days' work per week which the serf used to pay to his landlord. For we must not forget that, whatever may be done to reform taxation, it is *always the working man who supports*

the whole of its burden. Every penny entering the Treasury is paid, after all, by the working man, the producer.

The State may nibble to some extent at the revenue of the rich, but somebody has to make that revenue, and nobody can make it but he who produces something by his work. The State claims its part of the spoil of the rich: but from whence comes this spoil,

which represents so much iron, or corn, or china, or cotton that has been sold? It comes from the working men's labour, and cannot come from anything else. Apart from the riches which come to this country from abroad, and represent the fruit of exploitation of so many Russians, Hindus, Spaniards, Africans, Putumayo Indians, and so on, it is always the

working men of the country itself who have to give so many days of their labour to enrich their masters, and to pay the taxes levied upon them by the State.

[...]

It is so self-evident that it is *only he who produces, he who creates new riches by his labour, who can pay the taxes*, that we need not further insist upon that. So that we can say

that, apart from the taxes levied upon the incomes derived from the exploitation of foreign working men by means of interest on foreign loans, all the taxes levied by the State are levied upon the nearly twelve million workers of these isles.

Here the working man pays as a consumer of drinks, tea, or coffee; there it is in paying his house rent that he pays to

the Treasury the inhabited house duty paid by the house owner (and even more than that). In paying for his bread he pays the land taxes, the land rent, the house rent, and the taxes paid by the baker, the salaries of the bakery inspectors, the expenditure of the Ministry of Finance in collecting the taxes, and so on, When he buys his coal, when he travels by rail, he pays the

owners of the monopolies created by the State in favour of capitalists, and the share of the spoil which they pay to the State. In short, it is always *he* who pays *all* the taxes that the State, the county, the city, and the parish are levying, whatever the nature of these taxes may be.

How many days of labour do all these taxes represent? Is it not probable that, if they

were all added together, we should find that the working man works more days every year for the State than his ancestors used to work for the serf-owner?

[...]

IV

Taxation as a Means of Enriching the Rich

It is so nice for the rulers of the State to have at their

disposal such a nice tool as Taxation! Those innocent men, the “dear citizens” of electoral periods, have been taught to see in taxation the means for accomplishing the great civilising works which make the greatness of a nation; and they accept all sorts of taxes so easily! But those who drive the “dear citizen” to the ballot-box and pull the wires behind the

scenes, they know quite well what taxation means. They know it is the means, in a “well-organised” State, to make big fortunes at the expense of the small ones; to make the masses poorer, and to enrich the few; to hand over the peasant and the factory proletarian to the manufacturer first, and the financial speculator next, for further squeezing; to

encourage one industry at the expense of another—and all industries at the expense of the tiller of the soil and the nation together. They know, only never tell that to the people. Only fancy what an outcry would have arisen if Salisbury had come one day to the House [of Commons] and asked it to make a national gift of £2,000,000 to the landlords! But by means of taxation the

whole thing was managed very smoothly in 1900, and the gift *was* given. The landlords pocketed the millions, and the nation paid them without grumbling.[[107](#)] And everywhere—in France, in Germany, in all “civilised” States—they manage all the time to make similar gifts to the landlords, the manufacturers, the company promoters, and the bankers—

and the “dear citizen” pays,
and glorifies his
representatives and rulers.

It is easy! Put only a small
new tax on the peasant, on his
horse, his cart, or his windows
—and you have ruined ten,
twenty thousand of those
toilers on the land who
hitherto hardly succeeded in
making both ends meet. A
slight increase of the taxes will
send them irretrievably into

the ranks of the proletarians. But that is precisely what was wanted, since they sell their small parcels of land and go to a town, where they offer their hands to a manufacturer for the mere cost of a miserable existence. Some of them may, of course, resist for some time: they may grow thin on the land; but soon comes some new increase of taxes, and they are sent to join the others.

Such a proletarianisation of the weaker ones goes on from year to year, everywhere—but who notices it, except the ruined ones? In Russia, this dream of the great landlords and the Moscow manufacturers (and the Social Democratic admirers of the great industry)—the proletarianisation of millions of peasants—has been accomplished quite smoothly

within the last forty or fifty years, simply by the means of taxation. A law to that effect would have raised a hue-and-cry all over the country; but taxation has done on the sly what the legislator would never have dared to do openly.

And the economists—those who describe themselves as “scientific”—never ceased in the meantime to talk very learnedly of the “established

laws of economic development,” of “capitalist fatalism” and “its proceeding towards its own negation”—while a simple, honest study of taxation would have explained a good half of what they attribute to “economic laws.” The fact is, that the ruining and the expropriation of the peasants, which began in this country in the seventeenth century, and which Marx

described as “the primary accumulation of capital,” *still continues. It is accomplished every year*, especially by the means of that nice little tool, Taxation.

Far from being capable of growing by itself, in virtue of “unchangeable economic laws,” the force of Capital would have been terribly paralysed had it not in its service that admirable tool, the

State. By means of it the capitalists have created, and continue to create every day, new monopolies (mines, railways, water supply, telephones, measures against Trade Unions, the right of shooting the strikers, privileged education, and so on); and on the other hand, they have used taxation for enriching the rich and impoverishing the poor.

If capitalism has helped to

erect the Modern State, it is also—let us never forget that—the Modern State that created and feeds capitalism.

[...]

And you, the worker, toil, and forge, and economise, all to enrich the minions of the State—as long as you continue to expect that you can improve your conditions without daring to revolt against that Holy Trinity—Private Property,

Taxation, and the State!

Keep them up—and remain
their slave!

[...]

And you, children of the
poor, you will be taught in the
elementary schools (different
things will be taught to the
children of the rich in the
Universities, but you must not
know them)—you will be
taught that Taxation has been
introduced to relieve the poor

peasants from statute labour;
and on returning from school
to your poor, destitute homes,
don't forget to tell your
parents that they teach you at
school such a nice, such a
useful science—Political
Economy!

Take, indeed, education. We
have made such progress since
those times when the village
community itself used to build

the schoolhouse and to find the teacher, or when the learned man, the philosopher, used to gather round himself those to whom he transmitted his knowledge and thoughts. We have now the so-called free (but costly) education, organised by the State: schools, high schools, Universities, academies, learned societies supported entirely or partly by the State,

and so on.

The State being always pleased to enlarge the sphere of its activities, and the citizen being always delighted to “emancipate himself” from the affairs of his co-citizen—all goes splendidly. “You speak of education,” says the State; “we are delighted, ladies and gentlemen, to educate your children! So delighted, that, in order to relieve you from that

burden, we are going to *forbid* your taking any part in it. *We* shall settle all the programmes, and—no criticisms, please! First of all, we shall ‘discipline’ your children’s minds by teaching them dead languages and extolling the virtues of Roman Law. That will make them pliable and obedient. Then we shall weed out of them all spirit of revolt by preaching to them about

the virtues of the rulers and the crimes of the ruled ones—and flogging them if they are not pliable enough. Then we shall persuade them that since they have learned Latin and studied Roman Law, and learned to despise manual work, they have become the salt of the Earth, the leaven of progress. You will be flattered to learn that, and they will become ridiculously vain, just

what we need them to be. We shall teach them that the misery of the masses is a 'law of nature,' and they will be delighted to learn it, and to repeat it like parrots. All our education will aim at proving to them that, apart from the State and the Government of that 'salt of the earth,' of which they are such perfect representatives, there is no salvation for the poor. And you

—the parents—of course, you will loudly approve of our teaching.

“Then, after having made the people pay the costs of all education—elementary, intermediate, and University—we shall manage so as to keep the best places in the Administration for your sons, ladies and gentlemen of the middle classes. And the workmen will not even notice

that: they will have learned that they are ‘the Unfit.’ You see now the trick. If we told them abruptly that they will be governed, tried, condemned, accused and defended, educated and rendered stupid by the rich, in the interest of the rich—they might kick. But with Taxation and some nice little laws purporting to be very democratic, all will run smoothly.”

And so it has happened that the government of the people by the landlords and the richer middle classes is now reconstituted in full, *with the consent of the masses.*

We need not talk about the taxation for military purposes. By this time every one ought to understand what armies and navies are kept for. Evidently not for the defence of the

country, but for the conquest of new markets and new territory, to exploit them in the interest of the few.

But take any other taxes—direct or indirect, on the land, on incomes, or on spirits, imported food, and so on; take the taxes imposed for making new loans, or under the pretext of paying the old ones (in reality, State loans are never paid). Think over each

of them—and you will be amazed at the formidable powers you have handed over to your rulers.

Taxation is the surest means of keeping the masses destitute. It is also the most perfect means for making of the governing trade an eternal monopoly of the rich. The best means also for forging the arms by means of which a popular revolt can be crushed.

And so long as the State, armed with its formidable power of Taxation, continues to exist, the liberation of the proletarian, either by means of reforms or by means of a revolution, will remain impossible. Because the Revolution, if it does not cut off the arms and the suckers of this octopus, will be strangled by the beast. The Revolution itself will become the means of

creating new monopolies, as happened with the Great French Revolution.

V

The Monopolies

Let us consider how the Modern State—that which established itself after the sixteenth century in Europe on the ruins of the medieval cities, and later grew up in the young American Republics—how

this State has worked, and works still, to enslave the individual.

Having been compelled to make up, more or less, with the *personal* freedom of those strata of society that had freed themselves from the feudal yoke in the free cities, the Modern State began to work, as we saw it, to retain the feudal servitude, as long as possible, in the villages, and at

the same time to re-impose the old servitude in a new shape. It worked to bring all its subjects under the double yoke of its own functionaries—its bureaucracy—and of new classes of privileged people: the State Church, the landlords, and some especially favoured merchants, capitalists, and moneylenders.

In a preceding chapter we saw how the State utilised for

this purpose one of its arms—
Taxation. Now we must see
how it used another of its arms
—the creation of privileges
and monopolies to the
advantage of some of its
subjects, against all others.
Here we shall see the State
accomplish its proper, its true
function.

It began to use this arm at its
very beginning—as soon as
the authority of a king began

to be established upon the ruins of the medieval free Republics. This was how the State was constituted—how it enrolled in its service the landlord, the soldier, the clergyman, and the judge, and brought these four robbers to recognise its sovereignty.

To this mission the State remains true till today. Because, if it failed in it—if it ceased for a moment to

represent a Mutual Insurance Company between the privileged lord, the soldier, the priest, and the judge—that would be the death of the institution, of the historical growth which is known as “The State.”

It is striking, indeed, to see to what extent the creation of monopolies in favour of those who already possessed

privileges by birth or by belonging to the theocratic, military, or judicial caste constituted the very essence of the organisation which began to develop itself in the sixteenth century.

We can take any nation we like: France, England, or the German, the Italian, or the Slavonic States—everywhere we find in them the same character. So let us take

England [...]

Already, before the reign of Elizabeth, when the State was only at its very beginning, the Tudor kings were granting all sorts of monopolies to their favourites.[[108](#)] But under Elizabeth, when maritime commerce began to develop, and quite a number of new industries were introduced in England, this tendency became still more marked.

Every new industry was made a monopoly, either in favour of foreigners who paid the Queen, or in favour of courtiers whom it was desired to reward for their services (against the nation).

[...]

However, the State bureaucracy continued to grow and to gain force. Centralisation, which is the very essence of every State,

was making its way; and very soon the creation of new monopolies began in a new way—this time on a much larger scale than under the Tudor Kings. Then, the art of monopolising was in its infancy. Now, the State was reaching its maturity.

[...]

The Enclosure Acts[[109](#)] were sheer acts of robbery [against the peasantry]. But in

the eighteenth century the State, rejuvenated by the Parliamentary Revolution of 1688, felt itself strong enough to face discontent and to crush down the peasant revolts. Had it not for that the support of the middle classes?

For Parliament, while it thus threw its boons to the landlords, did not forget the bourgeois masters of industrial concerns. While it expelled

from the villages the agricultural population, it peopled the towns with famishing “hands,” ready to be bought by the factory owners at famine wages. Besides, in virtue of the interpretation put by Parliament on the Poor Law, the agents of the cotton factories visited workhouses, where whole families of poor people were imprisoned, and

took away whole cartloads of children, who, under the name of “workhouse apprentices,” were compelled to work fourteen and sixteen hours a day in cotton factories. There are whole towns in Lancashire whose population bears till now the stamp of such an origin. The impoverished blood of the hungry children, brought from the workhouses of the South of England, and

compelled by the whips of the foremen to work in the factory from the age of seven—is seen now in the anaemic, physically undeveloped population of many a small town of Lancashire and Yorkshire. *These horrors lasted till the awakening of Labour in 1830–1848.*

Besides, in order to favour the national industries in Great Britain, the British Parliament

crushed down the industries that began to grow in the Colonies and in Ireland. Thus was killed the beautiful weaving industry which had attained such perfection in India. The rich market offered by her immense population was thus opened to the inferior British goods. In the same way the linen industry was killed in Ireland—in favour of the Lancashire cottons.

[...]

VI

The Monopolies in the Nineteenth Century

During the first half of the nineteenth century new monopolies began to be created on such a scale that the old ones soon became child's play in comparison with them.

To begin with, the money-

makers devoted themselves to the railways and navigation companies subsidised by the State. Colossal fortunes began thus to be made, both in England and in France, by means of “concessions,” a certain minimum of revenue being usually guaranteed by the State to each new railway company.

Then came the foundation of big mining and metal

companies for supplying the railways with rails, iron and steel bridges, rolling stock, and coal—all of them realising fabulous revenues and making immense speculations on lands bought for this purpose.

Big companies for building iron ships, and still more for obtaining iron, steel, and copper for war purposes, making guns, warships, and so on, followed suit. And then

came the building of ironclads,
[[110](#)] the equipment of
immense armies, the digging
of the Suez and Panama
canals, the so called
“development” of
“undeveloped” backward
countries, Transoceanic
navigation with State
subventions, and finally wars
—no ends of wars, European
and colonial. Millionaires were
thus created by the score by

the millions of half-starved workers, who were pitilessly shot as soon as they made the slightest attempt to resist the growing State-aided exploitation.

And then came the building of immense networks of railways in Russia, in the United States, in Mexico, in the South American Republics—all these enterprises becoming the source of

colossal “concessions” and of a hitherto undreamed-of pillaging of whole nations. An unheard-of wealth was thus accumulated by means of real robberies accomplished under the protection of the Governments of the respective States—autocratic, constitutional, and republican.

But that was not yet all. New sources of enrichment

for the privileged ones were soon discovered. There was the commercial fleet to be subsidised by the State in view of coming wars; the subsidised lines of postal navigation; the submarine cables and the transcontinental telegraph lines; the piercing of chains of mountains; the embellishment of cities that was begun under Napoleon III; and finally—dominating all that like the

Eiffel Tower dominates the houses [in Paris]—the loans of the States, and State-aided banking.

All these new perfected instruments of robbery were now brought into the monopolies market and sold by the minions of the State. Hordes of millionaires and multi-millionaires were created.

But let this be well

understood: the usual excuse, that in this way numbers of “useful” enterprises were brought into existence, is more humbug. Because, for each million pounds usefully spent in these enterprises the company promoters saddled the nation with three, five, and sometimes ten millions added to the public debt. Let us only recall the Panama swindle, during which out of each ten

million francs paid by the shareholders only one million went for the real work of piercing the Panama isthmus. [111] “Nearly all our railways and other undertakings were overloaded in the same way,” Henry George wrote in *Progress and Poverty*. “Where one dollar had been really spent, obligations or shares for two, three, five, and even up to ten dollars were issued; *and*

it was on these fictitious sums that both interest and dividends had to be paid.”

But if it were only that! The worse is, that once these big companies had been formed, their power over human agglomerations became such that it could only be compared with the power exercised in the medieval age by feudal barons, who levied a tribute upon every one who passed on

the high road in the vicinity of their castles. And while millionaires were thus created by the State, millions and millions flowed into the pockets of the functionaries in the Ministries.

[...]

By the side of these colossal legal robberies, the fortunes that are ascribed by the economists to the moral

virtues of the capitalists are a mere trifle. When the economists tell us that at the origin of Capital the worker would find the pence and shillings carefully put aside, at the cost of hard privation, by the masters of the factories—these economists are either ignoramuses who repeat parrot-like the fables they were taught at the University, or they consciously tell what

they themselves know to be lies.

The appropriation of national wealth, by means of “interesting” in the appropriation the rulers of the day—this is the true source of the immense fortunes made every year, down to the present time, by the landowners and the bourgeois.

What we say does not apply

only to the “young countries,” like the American Republics. It fully applies to the old nations and States, like France and Great Britain. Let us only remember the Panama scandals, the South African companies and the Boer War, the adventures of Russia in Manchuria and Persia, the Morocco, Egypt, and Tripoli adventures, and so on.

The fact is, that the great

Capital and the State are two parallel growths which never could have existed without each other, and for that reason must be combated together. The State would never have grown and acquired the power it has now—not even the power it had under the Roman emperors, or the Pharaohs of Egypt, the Assyrian kings, and so on—had it not favoured the growth of capital, agricultural

and industrial, and the exploiting—to begin with—of wild tribes and shepherds, of peasants later on, and of industrial working men in our own time.

It was by protecting with its whip, its sword, and its clergy those who grabbed the land and brought free men into slavery or serfdom, that Capitalism was developed; and it was by forcing those who

owned nothing to work for the landlords, the owners of the mines, the company promoters, and the industrial employers, that gradually was developed that formidable organisation, the present State. If Capitalism could never have reached its present development without the aid of the State, the State in its turn could never have been the power it is now were it not for

the support it always gave to Capitalism and the exploiting of Labour.

[...]

[104](#)[] The term “commune,” in this context, refers simply to local government. In France, “commune” refers to the lowest administrative unit of the state (whether village, town or city). (Editor)

[105](#)[] See the book of Lucien Descaves on these places of horror. [In the late 19th century, the name “Biribi” was popular shorthand for military prisons and disciplinary service in French-

controlled North Africa. Lucien Descaves (1861–1949) was a French novelist whose anti-military novel, *Sous-Offs* (1889), provoked a scandal while *Biribi* (1890) was drawn from the author's harrowing experiences in army disciplinary companies in Tunisia. (Editor)]

[106](#)[] Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli (1469–1527) was an Italian historian, politician, diplomat, philosopher, and writer based in Florence during the Renaissance. He is most famous for writing *The Prince*, which advocated the employment of immorality, cunning and duplicity in statecraft. (Editor)

[107](#)[] A reference to the 1896

Agricultural Relief Bill introduced under the Conservative Prime Minister Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury (1830–1903), which halved the local tax burden of landowners. Ostensibly aiming to offset the effects of the depression in farming by reducing local taxation on the agrarian economy, it granted assistance directly to landowners, so failing the tenant farmers who were bearing the brunt of the decline in agricultural prices. It was denounced by opponents as a “dole” to the landlords. (Editor)

[108](#)[] The Tudor dynasty was a royal house which ruled England and its

colonies from 1485 until 1603. Its first monarch was Henry VII and its last Elizabeth. After Elizabeth died without children, the Stuart dynasty replaced the Tudors when James VI of Scotland became King of both England and Scotland. (Editor)

[109](#)[] The Enclosure Acts were a series of laws passed in 18th- and 19th-century Britain that turned lands formerly held by the community—the “commons”—into private property, a process accelerating the impoverishment of rural areas and the transfer of population into towns and cities in search of factory jobs. (Editor)

[110](#)[] An ironclad was a steam-

propelled warship in the early part of the second half of the 19th century protected by iron or steel armour plates. Ironclads were designed for several roles, including as high seas battleships, coastal defense ships, and long-range cruisers. They were often considered as symbols of imperialist expansion and the waste associated with militarism. (Editor)

[111](#)[[1](#)] This is a reference to the Panama Scandal which involved abuses and corruption in the management of the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique*, formed in France in 1879 to organise the digging of the Panama Canal. The failure of the project ruined tens of thousands of

small shareholders. A judicial examination into it revealed that the company, finding itself in financial difficulties, had bribed influential officials, politicians, and newspaper editors and it uncovered corruption deep within the bureaucracy of the French Third Republic. In spite of a public outcry, almost all of the officials entangled in the scandal escaped punishment, and only the minor defendants were convicted. The term “Panama scandal” has come to denote large-scale fraud and swindles. (Editor)

The Workers' Movement and Class Struggle

“Consequently, the new ideas have provoked a multitude of acts of revolt in all countries, under all possible conditions: first, individual revolt against Capital and State; then collective revolt—strikes and working class insurrections—both preparing, in men’s

*minds as in actions, a revolt
of the masses, a revolution. In
this, Socialism and Anarchism
have only followed the course
of evolution, which is always
accomplished by force-ideas
at the approach of great
popular risings [...]*

*“In all Europe we see a
multitude of risings of
working masses and peasants.
Strikes, which were once ‘a
war of folded arms,’ today*

easily turning to revolt, and sometimes taking—in the United States, in Belgium, in Andalusia—the proportions of vast insurrections. In the new and old worlds it is by the dozen that we count the risings of strikers having turned to revolts.”

—Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal

“The old faith in Political Democracy was gone, and the

*first principles upon which the
Paris working men agreed
with the British trade-
unionists and Owenites, when
they met in 1866 at London,
was that 'the emancipation of
the working-men must be
accomplished by the working-
men themselves.' Upon
another point they also fell in.
It was that the labour unions
themselves would have to get
hold of the instruments of*

*production, and organise
production themselves. The
French idea of the Fourierist
and Mutualist ‘Association’
thus joined hands with Robert
Owen’s idea of ‘The Great
Consolidated Trades’ Union,’
which was extended now, so as
to become an International
Working-men’s Association
[...]*

*“[...] we see that countless
attempts have been made all*

*over Europe and America
[...] to get into the hands of
the working-men themselves
wide branches of production
[...] Trade-unionism, with a
growing tendency towards
organising the different trades
internationally, and of being
not only an instrument for
improving the conditions of
labour, but also to become an
organisation which might, at a
given moment, take into its*

*hands the management of
production; Co-operativism,
both for production and for
distribution, both in industry
and agriculture, and attempts
at combining both [...]"*
—“Preface,” *The Conquest of
Bread*

From *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*

This extract from the chapter “Western Europe” from Kropotkin’s Memoirs of a Revolutionist summarises his thoughts on the nature of the labour movement. He contrasts the anarchist tactic of “direct struggle against capitalism” by unions to the parliamentary tactics of

*Marxism, linking this
revolutionary unionism with
the ideas of Bakunin.*

[...]

The Jura Federation has played an important part in the modern development of socialism.

It always happens that after a political party has set before itself a purpose, and has proclaimed that nothing short of the complete attainment of

that aim will satisfy it, it divides into two factions. One of them remains what it was, while the other, although it professes not to have changed a word of its previous intentions, accepts some sort of compromise, and gradually, from compromise to compromise, is driven farther from its primitive programme, and becomes a party of modest makeshift reform.

Such a division had occurred within the International Workingmen's Association. Nothing less than an expropriation of the present owners of land and capital, and a transmission of all that is necessary for the production of wealth to the producers themselves, was the avowed aim of the association at the outset. The workers of all nations were called upon to

form their own organisations for a direct struggle against capitalism; to work out the means of socialising the production of wealth and its consumption; and, when they should be ready to do so, to take possession of the necessities for production, and to control production with no regard to the present political organisation, which must undergo a complete

reconstruction. The Association had thus to be the means for preparing an immense revolution in men's minds, and later on in the very forms of life—a revolution which would open to mankind a new era of progress based upon the solidarity of all. That was the ideal which aroused from their slumber millions of European workers and attracted to the Association its

best intellectual forces.

However, two factions soon developed. When the war of 1870 had ended in a complete defeat of France, and the uprising of the Paris Commune had been crushed, and the Draconian laws which were passed against the Association excluded the French workers from participation in it; and when, on the other hand, parliamentary rule had been

introduced in “united Germany”—the goal of the radicals since 1848—an effort was made by the Germans to modify the aims and the methods of the whole socialist movement. The “conquest of power *within the existing States*” became the watchword of that section, which took the name of “Social Democracy.”[[112](#)]
The first electoral successes of

this party at the elections to the German Reichstag aroused great hopes. The number of the social democratic deputies having grown from two to seven, and next to nine, it was confidently calculated by otherwise reasonable men that before the end of the century the social democrats would have a majority in the German parliament, and would then introduce the socialist

“popular State” by means of suitable legislation. The socialist ideal of this party gradually lost the character of something that had to be worked out by the labour organisations themselves, and became State management of the industries—in fact, State socialism; that is, State capitalism. Today, in Switzerland, the efforts of the social democrats are directed

in politics toward
centralisation as against
federalism, and in the
economic field to promoting
the State management of
railways and the State
monopoly of banking and of
the sale of spirits. The State
management of the land and
of the leading industries, and
even of the consumption of
riches, would be the next step
in a more or less distant

future.

Gradually, the life and activity of the German social democratic party was subordinated to electoral considerations. Trade unions were treated with contempt and strikes were met with disapproval, because both diverted the attention of the workers from electoral struggles. Every popular outbreak, every revolutionary

agitation in any country of Europe, was received in those years by the social democratic leaders with even more animosity than by the capitalist press.

In the Latin countries, however, this new departure found but few adherents. The sections and federations of the International remained true to the principles which had prevailed at the foundation of

the Association. Federalist by their history, hostile to the idea of a centralised State, and possessed of revolutionary traditions, the Latin workers could not follow the evolution of the Germans.

The division between the two branches of the socialist movement became apparent immediately after the Franco-German war. The International, as I have already

mentioned, had created a governing body in the shape of a general council which resided at London; and the leading spirits of that council being two Germans, Engels and Marx, the council became the stronghold of the new social democratic direction; while the inspirers and intellectual leaders of the Latin federations were Bakunin and his friends.

The conflict between the Marxists and the Bakunists was not a personal affair. It was the necessary conflict between the principles of federalism and those of centralisation, the free commune and the State's paternal rule, the free action of the masses of the people and the betterment of existing capitalist conditions through legislation—a conflict between

the Latin spirit and the German *Geist*, which, after the defeat of France on the battlefield, claimed supremacy in science, politics, philosophy, and in socialism too, representing its own conception of socialism as “scientific,” while all other interpretations it described as “utopian.”

At the Hague Congress of the International [Working

Men's] Association, which was held in 1872, the London general council, by means of a fictitious majority, excluded Bakunin, his friend Guillaume, and even the Jura Federation from the International. But as it was certain that most of what remained then of the International—that is, the Spanish, the Italian, and the Belgian federations—would side with the Jurassians, the

congress tried to dissolve the Association. A new general council, composed of a few social democrats, was nominated in New York, where there were no workmen's organisations belonging to the association to control it, and where it has never been heard of since. In the meantime, the Spanish, the Italian, the Belgian, and the Jura federations of the

International continued to exist, and to meet as usual, for the next five or six years, in annual international congresses.

The Jura Federation, at the time when I came to Switzerland, was the centre and the leading voice of the International federations. Bakunin had just died (July 1, 1876), but the federation retained the position it had

taken under his impulse.

[...]

[112](#)[] Asked about Marx's comments in *The Civil War in France* on the need of smashing the state-machine, Engels explained: "It is simply a question of showing that the victorious proletariat must first refashion the old bureaucratic, administrative centralised state power before it can use it for its own purposes: whereas all bourgeois republicans since 1848 inveighed against this machinery so long as they were in the opposition, but once they were in the government they took it over without altering it and used it partly against the reaction but still more against the proletariat"

(*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 47, p. 74). Later he reiterated this position: “A republic, in relation to the proletariat, differs from a monarchy only in that it is the *ready-made* political form for the future rule of the proletariat. You [in France] have the advantage of us in that it is already in being” (Vol. 50, p. 276). Thus: “Everywhere the labourer struggles for political power, for direct representation of his class in the legislature” (Vol. 24, p. 405). (Editor)

Enemies of the People

Translation by Paul Sharkey

In this article published in Le Révolté (February 1881), Kropotkin discusses labour movement and the importance of creating a fighting union organisation. In this, he is repeating the ideas of

*Bakunin and the libertarian
wing of the First
International.*

No question about it: there is a reawakening of the spirit of revolution in Europe at present. People want more and want it more passionately than hitherto; they are more daring and more outspoken about their unhappiness. There is a greater cogency and boldness in everything that is

being said, everything that is being done, in all of the demands articulated. Skirmishing is already under way. Besides, none who have pondered the runaway disintegration of States, the spreading disarray in industry, the increasing predicaments of governments in the governance of peoples grown less docile, the accumulation of discontent and the new ideas struggling to

be born—none heedful of these symptoms could have any remaining doubts today but that a revolution in Europe is imminent.

The coincidence of these two factors, a revolutionary situation and the awakened spirit of revolution, thus leads us to the conviction that in a few years—no matter what may transpire—a time is coming when a European

revolution, or indeed a series of national revolutions, will set Europe ablaze.

That said, the question naturally arises: what are we to do, what must we do in anticipation of those events?

History has a valuable lesson to teach us. She tells us that a revolution profits only those who have a clear conception of what they are out to achieve and who seek to make a

reality of their own idea, without handing that task over to others; those who are working towards a goal of their own, heedless of whatever obstacles are placed in their path, and who do not allow themselves to be stopped, not by promises, nor by the fine words of interested people out to derail the movement.

So acted, for example, the

peasants of 1789.

In January 1789, the Court finally made up its mind to summon the States-General and invited the French people to spell out its demands and its grievances. The peasants spelled out theirs: abolition of seigneurial rights and obligations of all sorts, reduced taxes and the restoration of the communal lands upon which the

seigneurs had encroached. But when it was put to them: “Name your delegates and leave it to them to pursue your grievances,” they did not fall into the trap set for them.

Profiting from the general ferment and the disorganisation of power, they took it upon themselves to burn the chateaux, tear down the enclosures and force the *seigneurs* into abjuring their

rights. They did not wait for the abolition of feudal dues to come from the deputies they had just appointed: long before the States-General was constituted as a National Assembly, they had already set about destroying the feudal system.

And later, when the frightened nobility voted seigneurial rights out of existence on the night of 4th

August [1789]—they did not let themselves be lulled by such “patriotic” prattle. They continued to prosecute the war against the chateaux. It could be said that they foresaw that which shortly came to pass—that the Constituent [Assembly] would retreat from its decisions of 4th August and would look for ways and means of softening them and neutralising their implications.

Trusting no one, not the Legislature nor the fine words of the Convention, they stuck at their work of destruction for four years, so much so that when in 1793 the Convention passed laws intended to deliver the *coup de grace* to feudal rights, it was merely sanctioning a *fait accompli*.

And serfdom was done away with forever.

On the other hand, what had

the urban workers gained? Finding themselves in closer contact with the bourgeoisie, they allowed themselves to be duped by it. Failing to see that the bourgeoisie had *its* own objective—absolute freedom of industrial exploitation—that this was the opposite of their own objectives, and that it was only in order to achieve that purpose that the bourgeoisie was out to take power... and

they placed their brawn and blood in the service of the very people who were about to become their worst exploiters. They ran to applaud fine orators' speeches about liberty, equality and fraternity even as they were forging the shackles for the proletariat. They stormed Bastilles, chopped the heads off the *aristos*, marched to their deaths in battle, and grew

drunk on words concerning political freedoms without so much as dreaming of making an economic revolution—and they woke from their dreams to find themselves more enslaved than ever.

Once free artisans, they had become the master's serfs, and such they remain today.

Well, the closer we get to the supreme moment of the coming European

conflagration, the more we wonder: do the working class, the worker in the fields and in the towns, “the factory negro and the helot of the fields,” have well-defined aspirations? Are they aware of the economic and social revolution that they will have to carry out lest they be trapped for another century in the same slavish circumstances, exploited by a handful of

idlers? In the name of what will they be making the revolution?—If any such aspirations exist, if they have been formulated, will the workers not let themselves be diverted from their goal by that whole gang of people who will see the revolution as nothing but a means of hoisting themselves and their friends into the vacancy left by those whom the people will have

driven out?—And if the workers' aspirations are not quite definite enough yet, not quite widespread enough yet, what is being done to make them definite and to bring the watchword of the true revolution, the social revolution, to the darkest corners and into the most isolated villages?

As to aspirations, these already exist. If workers throw

themselves into the revolutionary movement, it shall not be for the pleasure of a change of masters: it will be because they expect the revolution to deliver a new era of justice and equality; an era of guaranteed work for all; an era of adequately recompensed work in which human beings will be able to live as human beings should live and not like a wild beast in

a hovel; an era of justice leading to the eradication of idlers and exploiters.

As to how this to be brought to pass, the thinking is, as yet, not quite clear. But let us not forget that there is one thing that is certain: that the worker does not share the prejudices that the bourgeois economists have striven to inculcate into him. Expropriation of the factory-owners—that prospect

does not frighten urban workers at all; they know that they will lose nothing by it and can only gain from it. Nor is it going to scare the peasants; they know that they are not about to lose their plots of land, and they will not be looking askance at the expropriation of the capitalists in town and of the big landowners in the countryside; and the abolition of mortgages

or taxes and the eradication of usurers are surely hardly likely to turn them into enemies of the revolution. The Commune's direct take-over of the organisation of work and consumption does not scare workers either: from painful personal experience, they know only too well how things stand today when the organisation of industry is left to the individual whims of the

exploiters. They know—especially given the propaganda that will be carried out between now and then—that, come the revolution, determined groups will set about doing away with large-scale individual property, banks, usury, and mortgages, and the urban or village workers are certainly not about to go on the warpath to defend them.

The bourgeoisie understands this wonderfully well. It knows very well that the notion of expropriation goes down well with the masses once it is spelled out frankly and bluntly: it knows that it will have a following; it foresees the consequences of this; and, feeling powerless to halt the spread of these ideas, it busies itself right here and right now with trying to derail the

coming revolution. It is out to steer the spirit of revolution down a road where it will be reduced to impotence, down the road of political reforms.

It is out to do what it did in 1848. At that time, too, the masses' dreams were of organised work. Back then, too, just like today, they [the bourgeoisie] proposed to take advantage of the revolution to try out social reforms, and

they came up with just the trick. With a great show of economic expertise, the bourgeoisie's emissaries turned up to tell the people: "But we, dear friends, are socialists and communists, just like you. We too want social revolution. The only thing is that we do not want to see you giving freely of your blood, which we prize so dearly, and getting nothing in return. Thorough study of

the matter—something which is, sad to say, impossible for you to do—has taught us that an economic revolution would not be feasible unless a political revolution had first been carried through. So let us first overthrow the throne, let us proclaim the republic and establish universal suffrage. With that mighty snare—sorry, that mighty tool—universal suffrage, you will be able to

introduce all the reforms you please: you will put your people in power, you will give them your mandates, and the revolution will be a done deal, and without a single drop of your precious blood being spilt.”

The June massacres, the December massacres, the shame of the Empire, the corpses of May, the penal colonies in New Caledonia

and the vileness of the reign of [Napoléon III]—that was the price the French people has paid for heeding such advice from the enemies of the people.

So, are we going to follow such poisonous advice from the bourgeoisie again, a bourgeoisie, sad to say, aided and abetted today by all those workers who, out of ambition or personal sympathy or from

some bourgeois turn of mind, or indeed lack of common sense, have let themselves be dragooned into the service of our enemies? Will we let the gathering revolution be derailed yet again? Are we going to abandon the terrain of the economic struggle, of the worker against the capitalist, in order to become compliant tools in the hands of the politicians? Are we yet again

to leave the prey in order to chase after its shadow?

No. Enough tomfoolery, enough lies.

We have better things to do than be amused by the war of the paper ballots. We have much more important business to be about.

We have to organise the workers' forces—not to make them into a fourth party in Parliament, but in order to

make them a formidable
MACHINE OF STRUGGLE
AGAINST CAPITAL. We
have to group workers of all
trades under this single
purpose: “War on capitalist
exploitation!” And we must
prosecute that war relentlessly,
day by day, by the strike, by
agitation, *by every
revolutionary means.*

And once we have worked
on such organisation over two

or three years, once the workers of every land have seen that organisation at work, taking the workers' interests into its hands, waging unrelenting war on capital, castigating the employer at every opportunity; once the workers from every trade, from village and city alike, are united into a single union,[[113](#)] inspired by an identical idea, that of destroying capital, and

by an identical hatred, hatred of the exploiters—then, separation of bourgeoisie and worker being complete, we can be sure that it is on his own account that the worker will throw himself into the Revolution. Then, but only then, will he emerge from it victorious, having crushed the tyranny of Capital and State for good.

So let the bourgeois tear one

another to pieces over
parliamentary lists! Let us
found our league, the
Workers' League, against
exploiters of every description!

[113](#)[] Kropotkin uses the word
“faisceau” which is the French for
fasces which, in Italian, is fascio
(literally “a bundle” of sticks or
rods). Before its appropriation by
Fascism, it was used by many Italian
political groups (“leagues”) as a
symbol of strength through unity (for
while each rod was weak, as a bundle
they were strong). In the late 19th
century, it was used by many Italian

labour unions and it is in this sense that Kropotkin is using it. (Editor)

The Workers' Movement in Spain

Translation by Paul Sharkey

In this article published in Le Révolté (12th November 1881), Kropotkin discusses the Spanish labour movement. He notes that anarchists have continued to work within unions to great success and

*urges libertarians in France
to follow their example. This
call for anarchist
participation in the labour
movement predates the rise of
syndicalism by over a decade.*

There is no doubt about it.
The workers' movement is
bouncing back in Europe with
renewed strength. Two years
ago we saw the birth of the
workers' movement in France.
Now it is the turn of Spain,

Italy, Belgium and even England.

But it is especially in Spain that it is now growing considerably. After eight years in the hatching, like fire under the cinders, it has just shown itself openly at the recent Barcelona Congress, at which one hundred and forty workers' organisations were represented by 136 delegates. One hundred and forty

workers' organisations, we say: meaning 140 solidly organised groups and trades federations. Not seven- or eight-member branches gathered by happenstance in some district, but branches of workers plying the same trades, their members perfectly familiar with one another and seeing one another on a daily basis, driven by the same hopes,

sharing a common enemy in the employer and a common goal—liberation from the yoke of capital: in short, real *organisations*.

That Congress gave the workers' movement a very big boost. We leaf through copies of *Revista Social*, a newspaper made and published by the workers themselves,[[114](#)] and each edition of the paper informs us

either of the establishment of new trades branches, the affiliation of existing groups or the federation of previously isolated groups. Reading the bulletin of the Spanish workers' movement, we feel as if we were being transported back to the best days of the International, with just this difference: better-defined aspirations, a clearer conception of the struggle that

it will have to wage, and a more revolutionary disposition in the great mass of the association.

Inevitably a comparison comes to mind: a comparison between the movement operating in Spain and that operating in France—a comparison entirely in Spain's favour and in France's disfavour.

For two years now, they

have been groping around in France for a mode of organisation that makes it feasible to band the workers' forces together under the same banner, and no such mode of organisation have they found—for the simple reason that they are looking in the wrong place. A tiny minority of the proletariat, seduced by what it is promised in terms of parliamentary contests, is out

to marshal the broad masses under its electoral colours, a patchwork of blue and yellow and reddish hues. But all in vain! The masses stubbornly refuse to heed the call. They pursue their own line of conduct. Caring little for political struggles, they pursue *their* struggle, the struggle against capital, and in that hand-to-hand fight they find support nowhere. They strike,

they fight the boss, they fight soldier and gendarme—but who lends them support? Should the strikers, ground into the most dismal poverty, send out a desperate appeal, it is equally impoverished proletarians who answer, whilst the organised minority lavishes its cash on funding its candidates. In Spain, obtained *by the strike*, they have won the eight and a half hour day

in the building trade: in France, workers toiling for fifty *sous* per eleven hour shift are told: "Put us in Parliament, and, once we have a majority in 30 to 40 years' time, we will vote through the nine hour day (at which, by the way, the bosses poke fun just as they do at the forty years)." If the strikers get a visitor, he comes with an eye to putting himself forward as a candidate

tomorrow—and still they would have workers believe in the disinterested service of journalists! On the one hand, the minority, questing after political power, limps along in the wake of the bourgeois radicals. On the other, the broad masses in hot pursuit of their goal, following their own course, their direct struggle with capital, but without organisation, with nothing to

call upon save their brawn and what little education they have acquired at the sacrifice of sleep. The minority has a special goal of *its* own: to set itself up as a political party, to get its hands on power—what use it will make of it on the day it gets there remains to be seen—while the broad masses have *their* own goal; to wage war directly on the boss, to starve him out if possible and

then to dethrone him; first the strike and then the attack, taking possession [of capital]. These are two quite distinct worlds: the thoughts of one are on Gambetta, the Le Havre speech[[115](#)] and vacant seats: and working out how many grocers might vote for him, if he were to strip an overly radical phrase from his programme. The other thinks of using his hammer to smash

the boss's skull and, as far as the Gambettas of the present and future are concerned, he will have something to say to them on the day he ensures that the boss bites the dust. That being the case, then obviously, from time to time, some microscopic victory may well be scored in the electoral circus, but not the building of a serious socialist workers' organisation. Much less would

there be any likelihood of a fighting organisation bent on overthrowing the current system of property.

In Spain, it is the other way round. Faithful to the anarchist traditions of the International, clever, active, energetic men are not about to set up a group to pursue *their* petty ends: they remain within the working class, they struggle with it, for it. They bring the

contribution of their energy to the workers' organisation and work to build up a force that will crush capital, come the day of revolution: the revolutionary trades association. Trades sections, federations embracing all the workers in the same trade, federation of all the trades of the locality, of the region, and combat groups independent of trades but socialist before all

else—that is how they constitute the structures of the revolutionary army. Inside those groups there are no votes for them to canvass. They state bluntly: “No revolution is possible unless the broad masses seize the first opportunity that comes along to take over the soil, the instruments of labour, all of society’s wealth; unless they overthrow the State, proclaim

the free Commune and simultaneously expropriate all the present holders of social capital. This being the goal that the coming revolution should be setting itself, everything done in the run-up to that revolution should contribute directly to this purpose. Since capital is the enemy we have to strike at in the next revolution, let us base all our organisation on the

struggle against capital and its supporters.”

That being so, the Spanish organisation does not suffer from the duality that necessarily paralyses all attempts at organisation in France: the moment it finds the slightest opportunity to manifest its existence, it grows rapidly and in a few months achieves results the effectiveness of which exceeds

all comparison with what has been accomplished in France after two years of groping.

So we cannot recommend too much to French workers that they return to the traditions of the International, as their Spanish brothers have, and organise themselves outside of any political party, inscribing upon their banner: *solidarity in the struggle against capital!*

Let those wishing to take their chances in the parliamentary circus organise themselves separately, as a political party. The workers want to become emancipated from the yoke of capital, so let their organisation be an organisation that puts *all* of its forces into smashing capitalist feudalism. They do not have too many to waste them in the pointless fight to capture

parliamentary seats. *All* these forces, even doubled or multiplied by ten, would barely be up to the enormous task we must tackle.

[114](#)[] *La Revista Social* (1881–1885), an anarchist journal that served as the house organ of the Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Española (1881–1888). (Editor)

[115](#)[] A reference to the National Congress of the *Workers Party* at Le Havre in 1880, at which the French party accepted a minimum programme written by Jules Guesde, in consultation with Karl Marx, that

committed the party to standing in elections are a means to seize political power. Marx wrote the preamble which stated: “That such an organisation must be striven for, using all the means at the disposal of the proletariat, including universal suffrage, thus transformed from the instrument of deception which it has been hitherto into an instrument of emancipation” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 340). (Editor)

Workers' Organisation

Translation by James
Bar Bowen

In this important article published in Le Révolté (10th and 24th December 1881), Kropotkin discusses the workers' movement and anarchist perspectives upon it. He stresses that the role of

anarchists is to encourage direct action against capital, seeing that this is the key means of producing a general revolt against its protector, the State. These arguments echo those of Bakunin's on the importance unions and strikes.

I

As bourgeois society becomes more and more chaotic, as

States fall apart, and as one can sense a coming revolution in Europe, we perceive in the hearts of the workers of all countries an ever increasing desire to unite, to stand shoulder to shoulder, to organise. In France particularly, where all workers' organisations were crushed, dismantled and thrown to the four winds after the fall of the Commune, this

desire is ever more visible. In almost every industrial town there is a movement to reach agreements and to unite; and even in the villages, according to reports from the most trusted observers, the workers are demanding nothing less than the development of institutions whose sole purpose is the defence of workers' rights.

The results that have been

achieved in this area over the last three years have certainly been significant. However, if we look at the enormity of the task incumbent on the revolutionary socialist party, [\[116\]](#) if we compare our meagre resources with those available to our adversaries, if we honestly face up to the work that we still have to do, in order that, in four or five years' time, on the day of the

revolution, we can offer a real force capable of marching resolutely towards the demolition of the old social order—if we take that into account, we have to admit that the amount of work left to do is still immense and that we have scarcely begun the creation of a true workers' movement: the great working masses are still a long way removed from the workers'

movement inaugurated three years ago. The collectivists, in spite of the fact that they give themselves the pretentious name “Workers’ Party,” are still not seeing the rush of workers to their organisation that they envisaged when they first launched their electoral campaign;[\[117\]](#) and, as they lean more and more towards the Radical Party,[\[118\]](#) they lose ground instead of gaining

it. As for the anarchist groups, most of them are not yet in sustained daily contact with the majority of workers who, of course, are the only ones who can give the impetus to and implement the action necessary for any party, whether in the field of theoretical propaganda and ideas or in the field of concrete political action.

Well, let us leave these

people to their illusions, if that is what they want. We prefer to face up to the task in all its enormity; and, instead of prematurely announcing our victory, we prefer to propose the following questions: what do we need to do to develop our organisations much further than at present? What do we need to do to extend our sphere of influence to the whole of the mass of workers,

with the objective of creating a conscious and invincible force on the day of the revolution, in order to achieve the aspirations of the working class?

It appears to us that an essential point that has been ignored up till now but which needs to be explored before we go any further is this: for any organisation to be able to

achieve wider development, to become a force, it is important for those at the forefront of the movement to be clear as to what is the final *objective* of the organisation they have created; and that, once this objective has been agreed upon—specify a proposed course of action *in conformity with the ends*. This prior reasoning is clearly an indispensable precondition if

the organisation is going to have any chance of success, and essentially all of the organisations have, up to now, never proceeded differently. Take the Conservatives, the Bonapartists, the Opportunists, the Radicals, the political conspirators of previous eras—each one of their parties has a well-defined objective and their means of action are absolutely in accordance with

this objective.

It would take too long to analyse here the goals and methods of each of the parties. Therefore, I will explore just one illustrative example here and let it stand as an example for all. Let us take, by way of example, the Radical or intransigent party.

Their goal is well defined: the Radicals tell us that they wish to abolish personal

government and to install in France a democratic republic copied from the US model. [119] Abolition of the Senate, a single chamber, elected by the simple means of universal suffrage; separation of Church and State; absolute freedom of the press, of speech and of association; regional autonomy; a national army. These are the most important features of their programme.

“And will the worker be happier under this regime or not? And as a result, will he cease to be a wage-earner at the mercy of his boss?...”

These questions do not really interest them; these things can be sorted out at a later date, they reply. The social question is reduced in importance to something that can be settled some time in the future by the democratic State. It is not a

question for them of overturning existing institutions: it is simply a matter of modifying them; and a legislative assembly could, according to them, do this easily. All of their political programme can be implemented by means of decrees, and all that needs to happen—they say—is that power needs to be wrenched from the hands of those who

currently hold it and passed into the hands of the Radical Party.

This is their goal. Whether it is achievable or not is another question; but what is important to us is to establish whether their means are in accordance with their ends. As advocates of political reform, they have constituted themselves as a political party and are working towards the conquest of

power. Envisaging the realignment of the centre of governmental power towards a democratic future, with a view to getting as many Members as possible elected to the Chamber, in local councils and in all of the government institutions and to become the bigwigs in these positions of power. Since their enemy is the current administration, they organise against this

administration, boldly declaring war on it and preparing for it to fall.

Property, in their eyes, is sacrosanct, and they do not wish to oppose it by any means: all their efforts are directed towards seizing power in government. If they appeal to the people and promise them economic reforms, it is only with the intention of overturning the

current government and putting in its place a more democratic one.

This political programme is very definitely not what we are working for. What is clear to us is that it is not possible to implement real social change without the regime of property undergoing a profound transformation. However, while having strong criticisms of this programme, we have to

agree that the means of action proposed by this party are in accordance with its proposed goals: these are the goals, and that is the organisation proposing to achieve them!

What then is the objective of the workers' organisation? And what means of action and modes of organisation should they employ?

The objective for which the

French workers wish to organise has only ever been vaguely articulated up until now. However, there are two main points about which there definitely remains no doubt. The workers' Congresses have managed to articulate them, after long discussions, and the resolutions of the Congresses on this subject repeatedly receive the approval of the workers. The two points are

as follows: the first is common ownership as opposed to private property; and the second is affirmation that this change of regime regarding property can only be implemented by revolutionary means. The abolition of private property is the goal, and the social revolution is the means. These are the two agreed points, eloquently summed up, adopted by those at the

forefront of the workers' movement. The communist-anarchists have honed these points and have also developed a wider political programme: they believe in a more complete abolition of private property than that proposed by the collectivists,[[120](#)] and they also include in their goals the abolition of the State and the spread of revolutionary propaganda. However, there is

one thing upon which we all agree (or rather did agree before the appearance of the *minimum* programme[[121](#)]) and that is that the goal of the workers' organisation should be the *economic* revolution, the *social* revolution.

A whole new world opens up in the light of these resolutions from the workers' Congresses. The French proletariat thus announces that

it is not against one government or another that it declares war. It takes the question from a much wider and more rational perspective: it is against the holders of capital, be they blue, red or white, that they wish to declare war. It is not a political party that they seek to form either: it is a party *of economic struggle*. It is no longer democratic reform that

they demand: it is a complete *economic* revolution, the *social* revolution. The enemy is no longer M. Gambetta nor M. Clemenceau; the enemy is capital, along with all the Gambettas and the Clemenceaus from today or in the future who seek to uphold it or to serve it. The enemy is the boss, the capitalist, the financier—all the parasites who live at the expense of the

rest of us and whose wealth is created from the sweat and the blood of the worker. The enemy is the whole of bourgeois society and the goal is to overthrow it. It is not enough to simply overthrow a government. The problem is greater than that: it is necessary to seize all of the wealth of society, if necessary doing so over the corpse of the bourgeoisie, with the intention

of returning all of society's wealth to those who produced it, the workers with their calloused hands, those who have never had enough.

This is the goal. And now that the goal has been established, the means of action are also obvious. The workers declaring war on capital? In order to bring it down completely? Yes. From today onwards, they must

prepare themselves without wasting a single moment: they must engage in the struggle against capital. Of course, the Radical Party, for example, does not expect that the day of the revolution will simply fall from the sky, so that they can then declare war on the government that they wish to overthrow. They continue their struggle at all times, taking neither respite nor repose:

they do not miss a single opportunity to fight this war, and if the opportunity to fight does not present itself, they create it, and they are right to do so, because it is only through a constant series of skirmishes, only by means of repeated acts of war, undertaken daily and at every opportunity that one can prepare for the decisive battle and the victory. We who have

declared war on capital must do the same with the bourgeoisie if our declarations are not to constitute empty words. If we wish to prepare for the day of the battle [and] our victory over capital, we must, from this day onward begin to skirmish, to harass the enemy at every opportunity, to make them seethe and rage, to exhaust them with the struggle, to demoralise them.

We must never lose sight of the main enemy: capitalism, exploitation. And we must never become put off by the enemy's distractions and diversions. The State will, of necessity, play its part in this war because, if it is in any way possible to declare war on the State without taking on capital at the same time, it is absolutely impossible to declare war on capital without

striking out at the State at the same time.

What means of action should we employ in this war? If our goal is simply to declare this war, then we can simply create conflict—we have the means to do this: indeed, they are obvious. Each group of workers will find them where they are, appropriate to local circumstance, rising from the very conditions created in

each locality. Striking will of course be one of the means of agitation and action, and this will be discussed in a later article, but a thousand other tactics, as yet unthought-of and unexpressed in print, will also be available to us at the sites of conflict. The main thing is to carry the following idea forward:

The enemy on whom we declare war is capital, and it is

against capital that we will direct all our efforts, taking care not to become distracted from our goal by the phony campaigns and arguments of the political parties. The great struggle that we are preparing for is essentially *economic*, and so it is on the economic terrain that we should focus our activities.

If we place ourselves on this terrain, we will see that the

great mass of workers will come and join our ranks, and that they will assemble under the flag of the League of Workers. Thus we will become a powerful force which will, on the day of the revolution, impose its will upon exploiters of every sort.

II

In the last issue, *Le Révolté* showed that a party which

proposes a social revolution as its goal, and which seeks to seize capital from the hands of its current holders must, of necessity, and from this day onwards, position itself at the centre of the struggle against capital. If it wishes that the next revolution should take place against the regime of property and that the watchword of the next call to arms should necessarily be

one calling for the expropriation of society's wealth from the capitalists, the struggle must, on all fronts, be a struggle against the capitalists.

Some object that the great majority of workers are not sufficiently aware of the situation imposed upon them by the holders of capital: "The workers have not yet understood," they say, "that

the true enemy of the worker, of the whole of society, of progress, and of liberty is the capitalist; and the workers allow themselves to be drawn too easily by the bourgeoisie into fighting miserable battles whose focus is solely upon bourgeois politics.” But if this is true—if it is true that the worker all too often drops his prey in order to chase shadows; if it is true that all

too often he expends his energies against those who, of course, are also his enemies, but he does not realise that he actually needs to bring the capitalist to his knees—then we too are guilty of chasing shadows, since we have failed to identify the workers' true enemies. The formation of a new *political* party is not the way to bring the *economic* question out into the open. If

the great majority of workers is not sufficiently aware of the importance of the economic question (a fact about which we anarchists remain in no doubt), then relegating this question itself to the background is definitely not going to highlight its importance in the eyes of the workers. If this misconception exists, we must work *against* it, not preserve and perpetuate

it.

Putting this objection to one side, we must now discuss the diverse characteristics of the struggle against capitalism. Our readers of course realise that such a discussion should not take place in a newspaper. It is actually on the ground, among those groups themselves, with full knowledge of local

circumstances and spurred on by changing conditions that the question of practical action should be discussed. In *The Spirit of Revolt*,[\[122\]](#) we showed how the peasants in the last century and the revolutionary bourgeoisie managed to develop a current of ideas directed against the nobility and the royals. In our articles on the Agrarian League in Ireland,[\[123\]](#) we

showed how the Irish people have managed to organise themselves to fight on a daily basis a relentless and merciless war against the ruling class. Taking inspiration from this, we must find the means to fight against the boss and the capitalist in ways appropriate to each locality. What may work perfectly in Ireland may not work in France, and what may give great results in one

country may fail in another. Moreover, it is not through following the advice of a newspaper that groups of activists will manage to find the best ways to fight. It is by posing questions in the light of local circumstances for each group; it is by discussing in depth; it is by taking inspiration from events which, at any given moment, may excite local interest, and by

looking closely at their own situation that they will find the methods of action most appropriate for their own locality.

However, there remains one tactic in the revolutionary struggle about which *Le Révolté* is willing to give its opinion. This is not because this is a superior method, much less the only valid tactic. But it is a weapon that

workers wield in different contexts, wherever they may be, and it is a weapon that can be drawn at any time, according to circumstance. This weapon is the strike!

It is, however, even more necessary to speak of it today because, for some time now, the ideologues and the false friends of the workers have campaigned covertly against the use of the strike, with a

view to turning the working class away from this form of struggle and railroading them down a more “political” path. [124] The result of this has been that recently strikes have broken out all over France, and those who have inscribed upon their banners that the emancipation of the workers must be achieved by the workers themselves [125] are now maintaining a healthy

distance between themselves and the struggle being undertaken by their brothers and sisters; they are also maintaining for themselves a distance from the subsequent privations suffered by the workers, be these in the form of the sabres of the gendarmes, the knives of the foremen or the sentences of the judges.

It is fashionable these days

to say that the strike is not a way to emancipate the worker, so we should not bother with it. Well, let us just have a closer look at this objection.

Of course, going on strike is not, in itself, a means of emancipation. It is [only] by revolution, by expropriating society's wealth and putting it at the disposal of everyone, that the workers will break

their chains. But does it follow that they should wait with folded arms until the day of the revolution? In order to be able to make revolution, the mass of workers must organise themselves, and resistance and the strike are excellent means by which workers can organise. Indeed, they have a great advantage over the tactics that are being proposed at the moment (workers'

representatives, constitution of a workers' political party, etc.) which do not actually derail the movement but serve to keep it perpetually in thrall to its principal enemy, the capitalist. The strike and resistance funds[[126](#)] provide the means to organise not only the socialist converts (these seek each other out and organise themselves anyway) but especially those who are

not yet converted, even though they really should be.

Indeed, strikes break out all over the place. However, isolated and abandoned to their own fate, they fail all too often. What the workers who go on strike really need to do is to organise themselves, to communicate among themselves, and they will welcome with open arms anyone who comes and offers

help to build the organisation that they lack. The task is immense: there is so much work to do for every man and woman devoted to the workers' cause, and the results of this organisational work will of course prove enormously satisfying to all those who put their weight behind the movement. What is required is to build resistance associations[[127](#)] for each

trade in each town, to create resistance funds and fight against the exploiters, to unify [*solidariser*] the workers' organisations of each town and trade and to put them in contact with those of other towns, to federate across France, to federate across borders, internationally. The concept of workers' solidarity must become more than just a saying: it must become a daily

reality for all trades and all nations. In the beginning, the International faced national and local prejudices, rivalry between trades, and so on; and yes—and this is perhaps one of the greatest services the International has done for us—these rivalries and these prejudices were overcome, and we really did witness workers from distant countries and trades, who had

previously been in conflict, now working together. The result of this, let us not forget, was achieved by organisations emerging from and owing their very existence to the great strikes of the time. It is through the organisation of resistance to the boss that the International managed to gather together more than two million workers and to create a powerful force before which

both bourgeoisie and governments trembled.

“But the strike,” the theoreticians tell us, “only addresses the selfish interests of the worker.” In the first place, it is not egotism which drives the worker to strike: he is driven by misery, by the overarching necessity to raise wages in line with food prices. If he endures months of

privation during a strike, it is not with a view to becoming another petty bourgeois: it is to avoid dying of starvation, himself, his wife, his children. And then, far from developing egotistical instincts, the strike serves to develop the sense of solidarity which emerges from the very heart of the organisation. How often have we seen the starving share their meagre earnings with

their striking comrades! Just recently, the building workers of Barcelona donated as much as half their scant wages to strikers campaigning for a nine-and-a-half hour day (and we should acknowledge in passing that they succeeded, whereas if they had followed the parliamentary route, they would still be working eleven or twelve hours a day). At no time in history has solidarity

among the working classes
been practised at such a
developed level as during
strikes called by the
International.

Lastly, the best evidence
against the accusation levelled
at the strike that it is purely a
selfish tactic is of course the
history of the International.
The International was born
from strikes; at root, it was a
strikers' organisation, right up

until the bourgeoisie, aided by a few ambitious types, managed to draw a part of the Association into parliamentary struggles. And, at the same time, it is precisely this organisation, by means of its local sections and its congresses, which managed to elaborate the wider principles of modern socialism which today gives us our strength; for—with all due respect to the

so-called scientific socialists—until the present there has not been a single idea on socialism which has not been expressed in the Congresses of the International. The practice of going on strike did not hinder different sections within the International from addressing the social question in all its complexity. On the contrary, it helped it as well as simultaneously spreading the

wider ideas among the masses.

Others have also often been heard to say that the strike does not awaken the revolutionary spirit. In the current climate, we would have to say that the opposite is true. There is hardly a strike called these days which does not see the arrival of troops, the exchange of blows, and numerous acts of revolt. Some

fight the soldiers, others march on the factories; in 1873 in Spain, the strikers at Alcoy declared the Commune and fired on the bourgeoisie; [in 1877] at Pittsburgh in the USA, the strikers found themselves masters of a territory as large as France, and the strike became the catalyst for a general uprising; [[128](#)] in Ireland, the striking farm workers found

themselves in open confrontation with the State. Thanks to government intervention, the factory rebel becomes a rebel against the State. Today, he finds ranged before him soldiers who will tamely obey the orders of their officers to shoot. But the use of troops to suppress strikes will only serve to “demoralise,” that is to say, to moralise the soldier; as a

result, the soldier will lay down his arms and refuse to fight against his insurgent brothers.

In the end, the strike itself, the days without work or bread, spent in these opulent streets of limitless luxury and the vices of the bourgeoisie, will do more for the propagation of socialist ideas than all manner of public meetings in times of relative

social harmony. Such is the power of these ideas that one fine day the strikers of Ostrau in Austria will requisition all the food in the town's shops and declare their right to society's wealth.

But the strike, we must be clear, is not the only engine of war in the struggle against capital. In a strike, it is the workers as a whole who are

taking up the fight; but there is also a role for groups and even individuals; and the ways in which they may act and be effective can vary infinitely according to local circumstances and the needs of the moment and the situation. It would be pointless to analyse these roles here since each group will find new and original ways to further the workers' cause as it

becomes active and effective in their own part of the great labour movement. The most important thing for us to do here is to agree upon the following principles:

The goal of the revolution is the expropriation of the holders of society's wealth, and it is against these holders that we must organise. We must marshal all of our efforts with the aim of creating a vast

workers' organisation to pursue this goal. The organisation of resistance [to] and war on capital must be the principal objective of the workers' organisation, and its methods must be informed not by the pointless struggles of bourgeois politics but the struggle, by all of the means possible, against those who currently hold society's wealth—and the strike is an excellent

means of organisation and one of the most powerful weapons in the struggle.

If we manage, over the course of the next few years, to create such an organisation, we can be sure that the next revolution will not fail: the precious blood of the people will not be spilled in vain, and the worker, currently a slave, will emerge victorious from the conflict and will commence a

new era in the development of human society based on Equality, Solidarity and Labour.

[116](#)[] Kropotkin is using the term “party” in a wide sense to mean an organisation of those with similar ideas rather than a political party in the usual sense of the word. Part of the conflict within the French socialist movement when he was writing was over whether, as urged by Marxists, to convert the existing socialist movement into an organisation which stood in elections (i.e., a party in the usual sense of the word). Kropotkin rejected this in

favour of encouraging workers' union struggle. (Editor)

[117](#)[] Kropotkin is referring to the French Marxists, rather than to collectivists like Bakunin who were active in the First International. The *Parti Ouvrier (Workers' Party)* was created in 1880 by Jules Guesde who drew up in conjunction with Marx the minimum programme accepted at its National Congress that year. It stressed the need to form a political party, using elections to pursue the goal of socialism. Marx wrote the preamble which stated "[t]hat such an organisation must be striven for, using all the means at the disposal of the proletariat, including universal

suffrage, thus transformed from the instrument of deception which it has been hitherto into an instrument of emancipation” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 340). (Editor)

[118](#)[] That is, the “Radical” faction among the French Republicans, as distinct from the more moderate “Opportunist” faction. (Editor)

[119](#)[] “Personal government” refers to situations in which the head of State extended his powers and controlled other parts of the government. The classic example in France was when Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, the elected President of the Republic, staged a *coup d'état* in December

1851 and dissolved the National Assembly, proclaiming himself Emperor the following year. This situation remained until 1869 when, under pressure by the population, a parliamentary monarchy was substituted for personal government. (Editor)

[120](#)[] As Kropotkin discussed later in the pamphlet “The Wage System,” the collectivists advocated common ownership of the means of production but retained payment according to work done. Communist-anarchists argued that this retained private property in products and argued that both logic and ethics demanded the socialisation of products as well as

means, in other words, “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” (Editor)

[121](#)[] A reference to the standard Marxist practice of drawing up two programmes, a *minimum* one listing various immediate reforms which could be implemented within capitalism and a *maximum* one which listed the longer term aims and would be implemented once the Marxist party had won political power. The former existed to secure popular support, the latter to console the consciences of the socialists. In conjunction with Marx, Jules Guesde drew up the minimum programme accepted by the National Congress of

the *French Workers Party* at Le Havre in 1880, which stressed the creation of a socialist party, use of elections and possible reforms.
(Editor)

[122](#)[] *L'Esprit de Révolte* was one of Kropotkin's most famous pamphlets and was initially published in *Le Révolté* between 14th May and 9th July 1881 and was subsequently included in *Words of a Rebel*.
(Editor)

[123](#)[] “La Question Agraire” (*Le Révolté*, 18th Sept. 1880, translated as “The Agrarian Question” in *Words of a Rebel*) and “La Ligue et les Trade Unions” (*Le Révolté*, 1st Oct. 1881). The “Agrarian League”

Kropotkin refers to was the *Conradh na Talún* or Irish National Land League, founded in 1879. (Editor)

[124](#)[] The *Parti Ouvrier* did not encourage strikes, although they supported them once they had begun. (Editor)

[125](#)[] An ironic reference to the first sentence of the “General Rules” of *The International Working Men’s Association* drawn up by Marx in 1864. Anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin agreed with this position and argued that Marx’s support for “political action” (electioneering) by political parties contradicted this fundamental position of genuine socialism. (Editor)

[126](#)[] *Caisse de résistance* (resistance funds) are strike funds, reserves set up by a union ahead of a strike or gathered from other unions and workers during a strike which are used to provide strike pay or for other strike-related activities. (Editor)

[127](#)[] *Sociétés de résistance* was a common term for militant unions within the libertarian-wing International Working Men's Association. (Editor)

[128](#)[] A reference to the Great Railroad Strike of 1877; see the Glossary. (Editor)

The Use of the Strike

In this article published in Freedom (April 1890), Kropotkin discusses the importance of strikes and unions in both improving conditions under capitalism but also in promoting

*revolutionary ideas and
starting a social revolution. It
is of note because it repeats
long-standing anarchist ideas
on the strike as well as
raising these ideas long
before French syndicalism
was internationally known.*

The workers of England have
been bestirring themselves
again during the past few
weeks. This is a good and
encouraging sign, although the

demands made are comparatively trifling. It shows a healthy discontent with existing conditions, a kind of feeling that the capitalist is not doing quite the square thing by the worker. We are sure that at bottom this movement is due to the impetus of the energetic revolutionary nucleus of Socialists, which now exists in every large industrial centre and amongst every large body

of workers in the country. It is our work to fan the flame by increasing the number of those who strive for a really fair division of the profits of labour, that is to say, for a total abolition of exploitation.

Let us hope—and we have every reason to feel that our wish will be realised—that the growth of those little groups of energetic men, scattered amongst our miners and our

artisans, will equal, if not surpass, the growth of Socialism, which the recent political census has shown us in the case of Germany. We use the words “political census,” because we cannot regard that election as useful in any other way than as a numbering of the workers’ army, although it is of course an incomplete numbering. From the action of Messrs.

Bebel & Co.,[129](#) in the Reichstag we expect little, but from the 1,341,587 men who registered themselves as uncompromising enemies of the existing order, we hope much. Doubtless the effect of this political census in Germany has been and will be great upon William Hohenzollern[130](#) and his associates, but far greater was the effect of the miners' strike

in Germany last year, and it is to that more than anything that the Berlin Labour Conference, of which some English Socialists make so much, is due. It is the Strike and not the Ballot Box which terrorises the exploiter and makes him see the shadow cast before by the coming Revolution.

Here, in England, there are many amongst the exploiting classes—who see dimly the

danger ahead, and the capitalist press (and more especially that portion which circulates exclusively amongst the capitalist class, such as the trade journals) contains many articles just now urging the most drastic measures against their slaves who dare to rebel against their will and feebly ask for a higher wage or a shorter working week. The interference of the State is

loudly demanded to put down these troublesome strikes and labour unions. The strong arm of the law is to be invoked not for but against the worker. "We have too much liberty," one trade journal of the highest class shrieks in terrified tones; and indeed we shall not be surprised if the workers speedily have to guard against attempts upon such feeble rights of

combination and free action as they possess.

There is perhaps no safer rule of thumb for the worker than to do that which his enemy most denounces and to avoid that which his enemy least objects to. To be a State Socialist, to advocate legislative restriction and to pass resolutions at mass or other meetings is sneered at generally and sometimes

faintly praised by the capitalist press, but hold an unemployed meeting or two in Trafalgar Square, organise a strike, or initiate a no-rent campaign, and the enemy unmasks himself and charges the workers, who do these dreadful but practical things, with being Anarchists, enemies of society, disturbers of the public order. Long screeds are written, showing

the terrible loss entailed on the community by this action, the selfishness of the strikers, the awful suffering of their families (which is never thought of under other circumstances) and so on. This unmeasured abuse on the part of the capitalists should convince even Social Democrats that the strike is a useful weapon, which will help the workers much in

inaugurating the Revolution. Moreover, it is a weapon which the workers are learning to use with greater and greater effect. The association of unions, national and international, makes it possible for us to have strikes over a whole country and in more than one country at a time. The recent successful coal strike included about a quarter of a million of men

and practically covered England, Wales and a part of Scotland.

The workers are beginning to learn also that not only is solidarity needful amongst the members of a trade and amongst all workers, but that the strikes which affect the greatest industrial necessities are the most important. Coal, the indignant capitalist press tells us, is of the greatest

importance to our industries; few of them can go on long if the coal strike lasts. How delightfully true this is. Why do not our candid enemies go still further and tell us point blank, "if you want a general strike, first stop the coal supply." Dock labour is also a very necessary commodity; at least the capitalists tell us so, and we are quite prepared to believe them. In fact, the

capitalist Balaam,[[131](#)] in cursing the despised worker at the lowest rung of the ladder, is really blessing him; he is declaring to all the world that everything would come to a standstill but for the man whose capital is in his hands. More, he is telling the worker that, if he will but organise himself effectively and freely, make common cause with his unemployed brother and

demand the whole, instead of merely a portion, of the proceeds of his labour, there is nothing to stop him. Let us, fellow-workers, thank friend Balaam and act upon his advice; let us spread the light in every corner of the land, infusing the spirit of Revolution into every mine, factory and workshop. By so doing, we shall soon have the workers of England no longer

asking for trifling increases of wages, but demanding in sturdy tones a cessation of the system of robbery which obtains today.

[129](#)[] A reference to the leadership of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Ferdinand August Bebel (1840–1913) was one of its founders and remained committed to revolutionary Marxism. He was also member of the Reichstag until his death. (Editor)

[130](#)[] A reference to Wilhelm II, the German Emperor (Editor)

[131](#)[] This is an allusion to the miracle

of Balaam's ass speaking: Numbers 22:30 relates the story of how Balaam's ass, who "saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way" and turned aside, was beaten so cruelly by its master that God "opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?" It is used in the figurative sense to describe a silent person who suddenly says something worthy of attention. (Editor)

Strikes

Translation by Paul
Sharkey

This article, published in La Révolte (27th September 1890), sees Kropotkin continue his campaign for anarchist involvement in the labour movement started ten years previously. He raises the need for workers to organise massive unions to be

able to resist their exploiters.

The workers are in revolt everywhere. Everywhere, strikes are taking a more and more serious turn; they are involving hundreds of thousands of proletarians, and their attitudes toward the holders of capital are becoming increasingly bitter.

At present there are two big strikes occupying the attentions of English workers;

the one in Southampton and the one in Australia.[[132](#)] The Australian one is still not resolved. We do not know as yet what will come of it. As to the Southampton strike, it failed. It did not have the backing of the London dockers; but it showed the extent to which relations between the bosses and the workers are strained and how the workers are at the end of

their tether. Blood flowed in Southampton and the [dockers'] strike there nearly became an uprising—an uprising, which, unfortunately, in the present circumstances, might have been drowned in blood.

However, there came a point when the strike seemed to be turning into a revolt with some prospect of success. That was when the bosses crossed the

line by shutting down their worksites last Monday, tossing a hundred thousand men onto the streets. That provocation was enough to rouse the dockers in London and, had the bosses stuck by their decision, who can say whether a general strike by all English dockers was not about to erupt and bring the whole of English industry to a standstill? Who can say whether the bosses,

surrounded by troops, were not dreaming of desperate remedies and a little massacre of workers so as to plant terror in the workers' ranks, but what if that massacre had touched off the powder keg in England?

Or did they recoil from the responsibility of a massacre of their own devising and offer the concessions that have been accepted—temporarily, as a

last resort?

And despite that, relations between bosses and workers have remained strained in Southampton. The strike, the defeat, the intervention of troops, the closure of the worksites—all of this has embittered many minds and the dockers' thoughts are on revenge. Besides, the dock owners and ship owners are preparing for a final

showdown. A massive company with two and a half thousand million in assets has just been launched. Every single member of this Holy Alliance of Scoundrels[[133](#)] undertakes to lay out the sum of... per ton of cargo carried on their vessels. And these monies are to be spent by a committee on breaking the labour unions *by any means*; initially by bribery, [then]

resistance and conspiracy, whereby men of vigour can be dispatched to prison, and so on. A private police force is to be raised by the scoundrels to break the workers' morale, sow discord among them and quietly kill them in the event of a strike.

We are entering a new phase of the struggle here. If we stop to think what opposition the workers can put up against the

exploiters, we shall see that *nothing* can tilt the scales in their favour other than monster unions embracing millions of proletarians against the exploiters' thousands and millions in gold. What is needed right now, above all, is *men*—men ready to march against the enemy, ready to pursue him to his very last stronghold.

And we must ensure that

such men meet one another,
unite with one another, and
support one another.

They must know each other
above all in their unions; for
without that—[there can be]
no mutual trust.

And without mutual trust—
there is no courage, only
defeat!

[132](#)[] The Southampton Dock Strike
(England, September 1890) and the
Maritime Strike (Australia and New
Zealand, August–December 1890).
(Editor)

[133](#)[] The Holy Alliance was a coalition of the monarchies of Russia, Austria and Prussia created in 1815 ostensibly to instil the Christian values of charity and peace in European political life. In practice, it was a bastion against revolution, democracy and secularism. (Editor)

1st May 1891

Translation by Paul Sharkey

In this three part article, Kropotkin reiterates his ideas on anarchist involvement in the labour movement. He stresses that anarchists need to be part of the people and share their lives and struggles. It appeared in La Révolte (18th and 25th

October and 1st November 1890) and marks the start of the process which saw anarchists in France return to the unions and lead to the rise of revolutionary syndicalism.

I

Our article “Allez-vous en! [Hands Off!]” [*La Révolte*, 4th October 1890] had drawn a few comments from comrades

and friends. “Is there,” they ask, “any point in our taking an active hand in the strike wave presently taking place? Is there a danger to be foreseen there? Are we not running the risk of muddling the ideas of the revolutionary workers by letting them think that this eight-hours panacea[[134](#)] peddled by the hypnotisers [*les endormeurs*[[135](#)]] has our

approval?”—There you have what is worrying honest anarchists the length and breadth of Europe.

In the article on the back page of this issue, we return to debating this matter and will carry on doing so in the next issue. We shall simply remind our Geneva comrades that the issue of whether or not the recent 1st of May demonstration was offensive

or defensive has been debated by the comrades in Vienne (Isère) more than any other. [[136](#)] They acted and that was that, and it is for them that we are continuing this series of articles we began by setting out the facts. We shall set out our ideas: discussion by the groups will determine what is to be done.

The question troubling a

very large number of French, English, German, Italian, Spanish and Austrian anarchists right now is this:

“In a few months’ time—on 1st of May 1891, barring unforeseen circumstances such as might alter the course of events—several million workers are going to find themselves on the streets of every major industrial city—against the wishes and in spite

of the opposition of all the political leaders, radical, socialist and others.

“Given the circumstances, what can we do to help our ideas triumph? What are we to do between now and 1st of May and on the 1st of May itself? Seven months will have come and gone in no time; it is not too early for us to start thinking about things today.”

In our article “Allez-vous

en!” we tried to clarify what we believe to be the thoughts of the working masses at this moment. And we reckon that those in daily contact with the masses will find our depiction an accurate one. A few comrades may well have thought it more “revolutionary” for them to be told that the masses are anarchists to a man. That would have been a lie: they

are not. However, no matter what may be said by those who concern themselves too much with politics and very little with the working masses, the spirit of the masses is more revolutionary than is generally believed. They are running out of patience, and they have vaguely anarchistic aspirations, which vindicates our *raison d'être* and which will be their strength once the revolution

starts. For the time being, we can say this:

The great bulk of the workers who will be on the streets on the 1st of May will simply be out to assert their right not to work, should they so choose; they will be out to flex their muscles, to bring their strength to bear on the bourgeois.

But among those millions, in every great working-class

centre, there will be tens of thousands who will seek to do more than mount a mere demonstration. Some are growing impatient about ever seeing the Revolution come. Others—and there are many of them—will be wanting the general strike which is *very popular* in England, Belgium and Germany; and if they turn out to be ready to strike in those trades that feed the

whole of industry (mining, gas, docks), even then the strike would mean fighting in the streets. We saw that in Southampton and during the recent strikes in Belgium and in many a place in Italy and Spain on 1st of May last.[[137](#)]

Finally, among those millions, there will be a very substantial minority, if not a majority, whose thinking follows these lines:

“We’re working too much and we’re fed up with fattening the bosses. The socialists had promised us that the Revolution would put an end to that, but there is no sign of it coming. Anyway, they cannot make it on their own. Then again, the very ones who formerly used to talk to us of revolution today talk of Parliament or of changing the government. Once in power,

they will tell us to have patience.

“But we have shown enough patience! Let us see whether we cannot make a start through our immense unions. If the revolution comes along, our unions will certainly do no harm. They will have helped us, at least, to get to know one another.

“We know just how the Sirs run industry, and they *must*

make us work long hours to continue to grow wealthy. And if we refuse to work more than eight hours, here is what is going to happen.—Some of them will try to cut our pay, which we will be physically unable to accept. Most will try to replace us with unemployed workers, but that, take it from me, will mean war. The same thing will happen as did in Pittsburgh, when all the

Eastern Railroad rolling stock was burnt, or as did in Belgium.[[138](#)] It will be like what was going to happen in a recent strike. (Among workers, what is never spelled out in the press is common knowledge. In particular, in that strike, the strikers were going to start again in Pittsburgh when the bosses hurriedly caved in: the people is not given to exaggerating

promises; very modest at the beginning, it acts when it needs to.)

“Finally”—the workers think —“we know that a large number of industrial companies only make a profit by making us work long hours. Come the eight-hour day, they will no longer be able to operate. Well, too bad for them! We will do what has been stated over and over in

every strike in recent times. We will take things into our own hands and tell the bosses: ‘Off you go! We have no further use for you!’ That will mean a new beginning.”

Such, we are sure, are the essential ideas circulating around a very substantial minority of the English, Belgian and German workers. Their ideal far outstrips the petty concerns of their leaders.

For all its modesty, it is not as modest as that of the authoritarian general staff. And it is our belief that pretty much the same ideas are in circulation in France, in certain trades, at any rate. A substantial minority in Italy and Spain also shares these ideas.

In any event, what is beyond question is that we shall not be counting on illusions if we take

as our starting point the assumption that a very substantial minority of workers, if not the majority, thinks along these lines.

Well, it is our contention that it was with ideas like these—no more clear-cut, precise, or advanced—that every revolution *started* when it began to spread. The rest developed *during* the Revolution, through the action

of advanced groups and the force of circumstances. For whereas a change of government can sometimes be accomplished within twenty-four hours, a *social* revolution is going to take time, months or years, to be carried through. And it is during this interval that [revolutionary] ideas will make headway, especially if the revolution was triggered by an economic

issue.

Given this frame of mind and the international political mess we all know about—what are we going to do?

Bide our time? Remain onlookers? Let others get on with it? Wait for the masses to become entirely anarchistic and, in the meantime, involve ourselves in nothing or meddle only in battles between scheming politicians

[*politicaillieurs*]? Would that not be tantamount to our not calling ourselves anarchists at all? Should we restrict ourselves to what we have done in recent years, namely, standing back to work out [our] ideas? We have done that, and we had no option but to go through the stage of developing our ideas, coming to an understanding with one another on what we mean by

Anarchy. True, during that time, our ideas gradually found their way to the masses.

To be sure, in spite of everything, we have brought our influence to bear on the development of the idea of Social Revolution. But that is not enough. Historical events do not wait for stragglers. And as, over the seven months between now and the 1st of May, a very considerable

number of labour meetings are going to be held and some very animated discussions between workers as to what must be done, we cannot stand by with arms folded, and if we cannot, in addition, deploy part of the efforts we have been putting into converting the masses to Anarchy by then, we can still spread our ideas far and wide if we immerse ourselves in the

movement.

It has often been said: “Our role is outlined in advance. Once the people takes to the streets, all we need do is turn the struggle into deeds.”— Very well then! But the masses must know who we are, and anarchists must feel the courage to engage in the struggle, and all this requires a lot of groundwork to be laid in advance.

In our view, whilst we do not question their courage nor that of their comrades, people who talk in those terms should nonetheless ponder the example set for us in Chicago on 1st of May 1886.[[139](#)]

We know that on that date the Knights of Labor were contemplating mounting a general strike. The American anarchists did not believe in that. They foresaw that any

such attempt would be pitifully aborted due to the all too obvious lack of agreement among the workers at that point. Also, by their reckoning, when strikers were being massacred, the anarchists would be there—a people's army—well prepared for the fight. Benefiting from the arrangements offered by American customs at that time—arrangements which we in

Europe do not enjoy and which are no longer enjoyed in America—they armed companies of anarchist volunteers.[[140](#)]

The outcome we know. At the point at which the troops fired on the people, the anarchists were not there. Not being strikers themselves, not being in the trade unions alongside the workers, they were not on the scene. And

later, they had no opportunity to make use of their strength.

How come? For all that, there were brave men among them—brave men who lived under the gallows for eighteen months and never let their beliefs down by a single word of weakness, these heroes who showed how one dies for a cause, they and many another who would have done the same thing in their place.

What basis, therefore, could there be for misgivings about whether Lingg or Parsons or Fischer and many another having a moment's second thoughts about risking their lives in the struggle?

But the occasion for a fight never came. It is all too often thought that during barricade-fighting, courage is everything. But that is to forget that barricades have to be prepared

by protracted activity in the midst of the masses, sometimes over years, and that *without a rebellious people there are no barricades*. People forget that the supreme honour of dying not in one's bed, but in the armed struggle for the emancipation of a people has to be earned by protracted preparatory work. Which of us has not dreamt of perishing on the barricades,

surrounded by the people, in the ecstasy of the struggle, rather than dying on a cot, with microbes gnawing at us? But the only one who will get such a death is the one who manages to become *the people* in the midst of *the people*. Without the masses—no barricades! Without the masses, no armed struggle!

That is why the anarchists, even the Chicago anarchists

whose numbers included heroes such as our brothers who were strangled by the bourgeois—failed to come up with an occasion to join battle; whereas, there has been scarcely a single strike over these past few years in which strikers who have never talked about propaganda by deed, have nevertheless carried out revolutionary acts, occasionally more significant

that anything planned at any anarchist gathering.

Anarchists are no more and no less courageous than those strikers. Or maybe more. Certainly, they are not braggarts. They can face the Caledonias[[141](#)] and mount the scaffold for their beliefs. But there is one thing that sets them apart from these strikers and which represents their weakness. They [the strikers]

were the people. They were known to one and all. They were comrades in the midst of comrades. They felt supported. Whatever they did in one day of struggle had been a long time in the making thanks to the preparatory work they had put in whilst living in those surroundings.

That—rather than courage—is where anarchists have been found wanting up to the

present. And each time they have lived the life of the people, they have taken the lead when it came time to act. Recently we saw this, for instance, in the case of our comrades from Vienne. Without betraying their anarchist beliefs by as much as a single word, they lived the life of the people for some years. And they got their chance to carry out the

propaganda act so often advocated at meetings but so rarely achieved, whilst at the same time, when brought to trial they managed to spread the idea; more so than all our newspapers and pamphlets.

It seems to us too that the change that has taken place over the past few years has gone unnoticed.

Nine years ago, there was a dead calm. The word Anarchy

was had just been uttered in France. In terms of revolt, the watchword was to roar. Conditions being as they were, the masses had to be woken up at all costs and made to reflect and unleash the gales of revolt. One isolated act could do that job. It gave food for thought.

But today the masses are awake, as they always are when great movements are

approaching.

They want to march forwards and our role is to help them make strides and take the few steps separating them from Revolution. And for this reason it is necessary to be with the people, which is no longer asking for some isolated deed but for *men of action within its ranks*.

But what can we do from the ranks of this strike wave

whose illusions we do not share? Can we get involved without diminishing our programme?

That is what we are going to discuss now.

II

No matter what anyone else may say, we maintain that with the labour movement emerging just now in Europe and the United States, we are

dealing with a popular movement. Popular, in that it brings together such imposing numbers of men and women who have no visible ties between them; huge, because it is *spontaneous*, because it is no one's handiwork, but the outcome of everything said and done over the past twenty years.

At present, it embraces upwards of 2,500,000 men

and women in Europe alone. Upwards of 1,500,000 in England, nearly 500,000 in Germany, nearly 200,000 in Austria (perhaps a lot more), the same number in Italy and in Spain and let us say, 100,000 in France. And—as we stated previously in the article “Mineurs et paysans” [“Miners and Peasants”]—it particularly takes in the miners and the more poorly paid

trades, the ones that have been beyond the reach of all socialist propaganda.

Some Englishmen will try to explain this movement away in terms of intrigues by the Conservatives, whilst others will cite the agitation in Ireland, the one excluding the other, and the Marxists, whose modesty is well known, will write in the continental press that they have created this

movement, all half-dozen of them. Belgians will discern German or governmental intrigues in this; Germans will chalk it up to courtiers, and the French can try to explain it away in terms of some Orléanist-Boulangist intrigue or, even more laughably, credit it to the five or six known Guesdists.[[142](#)]

And all these explanations will [be shown to] be

laughable, since they will leave the most striking thing unexplained: the general unrest in England, Belgium, Germany and France, Austria, Italy and Spain; its anonymous character; the variety of elements that hasten to lend it aid; the political parties racing to take it over after having sought in vain for years to prevent it from erupting.

It is a popular unrest. And its

origins, we repeat, lie in the flow of ideas that have been produced over the last twenty years. In England we saw it coming and we predicted it as long ago as 1882 when there were not a hundred conscious socialists in the entire country. From the moment one entered mining country, one could smell it on the breeze: it was fermenting even then.

The push made in 1869 is

well-known and it found expression in the International, which everybody later claimed to have sired.

If we must try to seek its origin in a single *event*, we should have to hark back to the Pittsburgh strike and to the 1st of May 1886 in Chicago. And even that would be to link the *historic* movement to a single phenomenon that was no more than its initial

expression.

The main point that needs stressing is that if one delves into this movement looking for Conservative scheming within the English movement, German or even government hands in the Belgian movement, Boulangist hands in the French one and so on—it will all be found there and much else besides.

All the reactionaries, but

also all revolutionary parties, sought to benefit from this movement. Reactionary gold will be found there if one goes looking for it, but so too will the secret societies of the miners,[[143](#)] the restless energy of the Knights of Labor—the members—not their leader [Terence Powderly], the frantic activity of the Irish, the republican dreams of the Defuisseaux of every

nationality,[[144](#)] the charitable sentimentalism of the thousands of organisers of unions of women, social democratic propaganda, the incendiary harangues of revolutionaries, [and] the action, the blood of the anarchists.

All have contributed to this movement. But it would be as nonsensical to explain it in terms of a single cause as it

would be to say that it was Philippe Egalité's money that brought about the French Revolution,[[145](#)] monarchist gold that set the châteaux ablaze, or the Jacobin Club (the Constitutional Club at the time) that made 1793.

As for the socialists who would like to claim the credit for the movement—just re-read what we wrote *prior* to 1st of May 1890. The

movement came as a surprise to them and, to be blunt about it, an unpleasant surprise. It wrecked the calculations of the theoreticians. They resolved to join the movement just this last fortnight once they found themselves being overtaken by it.

Here are the facts. What should we do in view of this movement? What part can we play in it? Having called for

spontaneous movements by the people, are we about to stand aside because this movement does not march under the anarchist banner, which was, by the way, very easily predictable?

“But how can we join in with an agitation that is based on illusions about the eight hour day?” That is the question looming in front of us.

It seems to us that there is a very straightforward answer to that question.

—By remaining ourselves at all times. By always and at every opportunity that presents itself speaking our thoughts, *all* our thoughts, holding nothing back and hiding nothing from the workers. By demolishing the illusions by which the legalitarians seek to blind the masses and repeating

at all times that whatever the masses *want* and will *do*—they will have it outside of the law.

When speaking in a bar or some small get-together or at some huge eight-hours rally, let us always speak our mind and speak it more often.

Eight hours working for the boss—that is eight hours too many. Not just because out of those eight hours, the worker gives four towards lining the

pockets of an exploiter and puts a weapon in the hands of the man who has him under the yoke; but also because those eight hours are spent on producing, not what society needs, but whatever offers the exploiter the best chance of exploiting him further.

In major industries, there is nothing extravagant about an eight hour day. They work only 9 hours, 52 to 53 hours a

week in the larger English industries; it is mainly on the back of industries that work only 52 hours a week that the entrepreneurs grow rich. So well do the bourgeois know this that even now bourgeois economists are steering public opinion in that direction. In bourgeois literature they are forever citing the works of Steinkof who has painstakingly examined wages across

Europe and shown how, in America, where wages are considerably higher, the flesh-and-blood machine—the worker—produces much more than anywhere in England and that anything—cotton goods, tracks, railroads, etc.,—comes much cheaper to the employer in America than in England. “High wages—cheap goods,” is becoming quite a topical theme in bourgeois literature.

So an eight hour day for ten hours' pay no longer frightens English industrialists. They are getting used to it. They will introduce it once the pressure becomes serious enough. Their last line of defence is that the workers themselves are not in agreement on the matter.

But that fact indicates how illusory are the claims of socialist ignoramuses out to

persuade the workers that, come the eight hour day, the masses of unemployed workers will have something to use their arms on. When these ignoramuses start telling fairy tales to the workers, saying that where we now have 80 men working a ten hour day, they will have to hire 100 men working an 8 hour day—the workers' eyes must be opened to the stupidity of

such reasoning.

Workers see right away that this is nonsense when we tell them: “If they are going to take on an additional 20 men, won’t they have to introduce 20 new machines? But then the employer, instead of buying 20 of the old model machines is going to opt instead for 30 of the newer model machines which will allow him to churn out the

same quantities with just 70 men where once there were 80.”

The scope for improvements to be made is so great in most factories that the improved machinery of which we are speaking poses no problem.

So the eight hour days boils down to this:—A temporary improvement for the 70 workers kept on at the plant, plus a further 10 workers

added to the ranks of the army of the unemployed—a reserve army that is capital's ace card when it comes to cutting the pay of those still in work. So that the 70 workers kept on at the factory will only be able to cling on to their wages if they continually mount strikes, which face more dubious prospects of success with each passing day.

When we tell them that, they

understand us perfectly. Which is why the champions of the eight hours campaign are then so quick to add: “Precisely. But that is the very reason why we are *simultaneously* calling for nationalisation of land. A good third of the country will then be working the land that we will snatch from the landowners!”

But nationalisation of the

land—and our readers know this—is either a *word* that means nothing, a hollow phrase, or else the revolution. And once you have demonstrated that the land will not be wrested from the landowners except by revolution—the very people who, a moment ago, were debating legal measures answer you:

—“Well, if that is revolution

—never mind or all the better, as you please. What we know is that we *do not want to* work more than eight hours. Eight hours per day of leisure—we shall not budge!”

III

So the reduction in working time boils down to this: For a given number of workers, conditions are improved; that much is true. But what is less

certain, is that such improvement is gained at the cost of stability in employment and frequent layoffs for the very people whose conditions have been, for a time, improved; furthermore, every improvement in the conditions of a minority of workers is followed by an increase in the immense army of out-of-work workers and by the impoverishment of that army.

Some of those who once had jobs are reduced to the ranks of that army. Off they go to populate the suburbs of the great cities and there they fall prey to the agencies and the middle-ranking petty bosses of small industry.

Because, with due respect to the Marxist theoreticians, small industries linger on alongside the bigger ones in every industrialised country.

[[146](#)] They are sustained by starvation wages. Except that instead of remaining in the villages, where men used to be able to fall back on agriculture, now they have relocated to the suburbs of the major cities, where the starving worker is served up, bound hand and foot, to the small exploiters.

The entire history of England—the archetypal

industrial country—is reduced to this:

Conditions for workers in the larger industries improve. But they lose their job stability: work becomes available only in spurts.

At the same time, with every improvement, the numbers of people finding employment in the bigger industries fall, those surplus to requirements being cast into the army of

unemployed workers.

The latter represent the capitalist's reserves: he calls upon them in the event of a strike as a means of forcing down wages, which is precisely why the army of the unemployed grows to such an enormous size in the industrially more developed countries.

Reduced to the blackest of miseries, that army seeks for

the means of subsistence in the smaller industries which emerge by the thousands in the big cities. Thus the *sweating system* that has been such a topic of conversation of late—the arrangement whereby the smaller trades are exploited by swarms of intermediaries—becomes the *inevitable outcome of improvements made to the conditions of the workforce of*

the larger industries. This is the price paid for such improvements.

Ruthlessly exploited by the *sweaters* (those who “sweat” the working man and woman) the smaller industries act as the necessary counterweight to the better paying larger industries. Another equally inevitable outcome is the continual replacement of male labour by female labour and,

above all, by the labour of girls and boys.

Besides, as the workforce of the bigger industries strikes in order to secure either better pay or shorter hours, a ferocious battle erupts between them and the army of the unemployed. It is from that army that the boss recruits his replacement staff, and the strikers, thrown into a panic by the hardships of the strike,

introduce a note of truly
terrifying fury into their
dealings with those
replacements. If only it went
no further than blows! But in
the recent London dock strike,
serious consideration was even
given to blowing up and
derailing an entire trainload of
blacklegs hired in the
provinces and slaughtering
them wholesale.

And in contests between the

incipient fourth estate and the fifth—a battle fought out on a daily basis—we have heard but one voice, one single voice, coming from our brother anarchists in Australia, pleading the cause of the jobless workers.

“You come away from a strike as the victors,”—they stated in the manifesto to which we referred a fortnight ago,—“and the jobless

workers, though dying in poverty, backed you; they did not step forwards to replace you. And afterwards?—You will go back to work, having secured better conditions. But what about them?—No work, no bread prior to the strike and no work and no bread after your victory! Do not ask too many heroics from them after their having suffered so much without *any* hope of

betterment of their lot.”

Well, through study, sacrifice and hardships, we have come—we anarchists—to understand the complicated relationships of modern industry, disentangling them from our masters’ accumulated lies.

Was our purpose to keep all this knowledge for ourselves? For entertainment at our meetings? So as to inject a

flavour of scientific discussion into them? To make an impression—as so many bourgeois do—though not all, fortunately—who hoard their learning for their scientific gatherings, their newspapers, their books, without ever bringing it to those in the greatest need of it? Was it in order to take our turn at being bourgeois that we wrapped ourselves up in that grand

word “anarchy,” which means, above all, being with the people, living among the people, working with the people?

Luckily, the great socialist movement has done more than just breed this new aristocracy, which will some day perish in the smoke of street-fighting, just like the aristocrats from the *Corso di Roma* who marched to their deaths in

yellow gloves in the attack upon the quadrilateral of fortresses in Lombardy, but who sneered at the people for its superstitions, its naïve notions, its inability to understand science.

Alongside the Eight Hours campaign in the privileged trades and alongside the theoretical socialist movement, an entire army of volunteers is working to organise the

smaller trades in the smaller industries, the masses of day labourers, the women and children working in the larger and smaller factories.

Those unknown male and female volunteers are numbered in their thousands—in England at least—and they carry out the hard preparatory work. And asked why they do such work, they answer: “You know, I have yet to delve into

your socialist theories. But it turns my stomach to see workers exploited so. I help them to join together, to fight. If they can but realise that the workers in the same factory have a shared interest and a common enemy, the exploiter—that's all I can hope for. Introduced into the great union of all possible trades, they will feel their strength. My power is weak—I do what I can."

And the unions emerge, and a weaver who used to scorn the match-maker starts treating him with respect and everybody gets to feel that there is a class, the class of the disinherited, whose interests are counter to those of all the rich.

Which is how the groundwork is laid for all revolutions.

Except that, instead of

sowing the ideas of social revolution, worker initiative, revolt against authority in these emerging groups right from the outset—the groundwork is being done by people whom themselves share all of the masses' prejudices about authority, parliament, reforms and all the rest of it—the emerging groups fed on such prejudices from the moment they appear.

Not because they are incapable of comprehending anything different. But because nobody has ever told them any different. Barely one in a hundred has ever heard tell of anarchy, and that from some newspaper that has sensationalised the most striking phrases of some public speaker—phrases that, in the ear of the worker who had never heard tell of these

things, sound like words from an incoherent dream. Socialists in general, and anarchists in particular, all too easily forget that they were not anarchists from birth. All too readily they forget what they used to be before they became anarchists and how this transformation took place. They forget the prejudices with which they themselves were imbued and the effort it

took to struggle free of them.

And instead of taking these organisers one at a time, instead of convincing each of them, the way Fanelli did in Spain and Bakunin everywhere, through long discussions carried on day after day over a period of weeks—they throw up their hands immediately, whinging about stupidity, should the novice's eyes widen on

hearing it said that thievery will do away with property and a few sticks of dynamite (not enough even to blow down a door) are enough to carry through a social revolution.

Last winter we were gathered at an anarchist branch in a large English city. One English worker gave the history of the branch to an audience made up of about

fifty comrades, male and female, in the following terms: “Two years ago,” he was saying, “we were all, as you know, social democrats. Then along came the London tailors’ strike. A group of Whitechapel tailors sent us a delegate in the hope of persuading the tailors hereabouts not to take up orders coming from London.

“That delegate was an anarchist. He spent a few

months with us, working as a tailor. Over those three months, he chatted to us day in and day out about anarchy. Never wearied of it. Every day, on every free evening he would expound upon his ideas to us. And now here we are, anarchists every last one of us. The youngsters who join are anarchists. The tailors' union contains a fair number of anarchists. And the most

striking point for me, comrades, is that back when we used to speak in the street on Sundays and talked about parliament and discipline and such, they applauded us. Now our talk on the streets is about anarchy, social revolution and they clap even louder! And they would have us believe that the people understand nothing! If only we had had more men like our friend!

(meaning the delegate).

“In three months of conversation our friend carried out more anarchist propaganda than we had in three years by means of our newspaper.”

“But all these organisations are out only for a reduction in the hours of work—What can we achieve there?” our friends may well ask.

It appears to us that

introducing into the movement all our ideas about industrial relations such as we have just quickly outlined is a worthy task in itself.

But if, in spite of everything, the workers refuse to accept our logic and answer us: “That’s all well and good, but let us all organise—, in the great and small trades, and we will already have gone a long way towards bringing *all* the

workers of the country together.[[147](#)] And then, when we are strong enough, we can secure the eight hours for all [by means of Parliamentary legislation].”

Well, if that should be their answer, we have only one thing to say to them:—“If you are that strong, you do not need a parliament to settle this matter. You have merely to indicate to the industrialists

that you have made up your minds to work no more than eight hours. Parliament will not do anything. In England it is already proposing an enquiry that will take two years. A parliament cannot pass any measure that will upset all of industry. It will want to play for time and, in the meantime, it will destroy your unions by corruption.

“Well, if you have set your

mind on eight hours, you have merely to *take* them. Between now and 1st May, you can call the main trades together. The leaders will tell you to wait. Bypass them. Come to some arrangement without them. And come 1st May, when two or three million of you take to the streets in the major cities, pass this resolution:

“Tomorrow, all of us, many as we are, walk out of work at

four o'clock in the afternoon
—and that is that.

“Do that. There will definitely be a general strike by the bosses, a general closing of the workshops, a general stop of industry.

“In those circumstances, you will not have the troops on your side but (in England, Belgium and Spain at any rate) you will not have them against you.

“The time of revolution will thus have begun—not at the behest of some States-General, not over some Boulangist-Orléanist-Ferryist issue, but over a labour issue.

“Your conduct thereafter will be dictated by how things develop.”

There’s what we can do in this movement, for a start. The rest will come later, and it will depend upon what we will

have done beforehand,
between now and 1st May
1891.

In any event, that is *one*
proposal or, if it will not do, let
us look for a different one. But
please, let us not wait for the
revolution to fall upon us
unsolicited, like manna from
heaven.

[134](#)[] The Eight-Hour Movement,
emerging in Britain in the 1810s with
the demand for a standard of “Eight
Hours for Work, Eight Hours for Rest,
Eight Hours for What We Will,” had

reached a critical pitch in several countries by the 1880s, notably in the Haymarket police riot of 1886. Kropotkin was to advocate for a work regimen of roughly five hours a day in *The Conquest of Bread* (1892). (Editor)

[135](#)[] Kropotkin is referring to those who seek to beguile, smooth-talk or otherwise pacify the working class with hopes of change by means of reforms legislated by politicians rather than, as anarchists argued, by direct action and economic self-organisation. It should be noted that in June–July 1869, shortly after joining the *International Working Men's Association*, Bakunin wrote a series

of articles for the Swiss newspaper L'Égalité on this issue entitled “Les endormeurs” (“The Hypnotizers,” *The Basic Bakunin: Writings, 1869–1871*, [Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1992], Robert M. Cutler [ed.]). (Editor)

[136](#)[] After several strikes, tension in Vienne (a town of 25,000 in the Isère department of France) was particularly acute. In April 1890, anarchists organised a meeting tour in the region arguing for the general strike and the importance of mobilising on the 1st of May. On that day, 3,000 gathered at a meeting in the town and local anarchists urged the audience to march to those few

factories still working (due to threats of dismissal from their bosses). The crowd was met by the police and barricades were raised. The marchers succeeded in reaching the factory of a notorious boss, which was looted. Eighteen people were arrested, with anarchists using the trial to denounce capitalist exploitation and argue for anarchism. At the end of the trial, a rally of 2,000 was organised to express solidarity with the prisoners and to spread libertarian ideas. (Editor)

[137](#)[] A reference to the 1890 dockers strike in Southampton (see glossary). There were major strikes over low wages by miners in Belgium in both

January and August 1890, although Kropotkin could be referring to the Walloon *jacquerie* of 1886 (see glossary). (Editor)

[138](#)[] That is, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and the Walloon *jacquerie* of 1886 (see glossary). (Editor)

[139](#)[] It must be noted that Kropotkin is downplaying the involvement of the Chicago anarchists in the labour movement, perhaps to bolster his case to a French audience many of whom were infatuated with insurrectionary acts by small groups. As Paul Avrich shows in *The Haymarket Tragedy*, while a minority of Chicago anarchists *did* oppose activity in unions (the “Autonomist” wing, which

included Engel and Fischer), the majority were involved in the Central Labor Union, which grouped together the anarchist-influenced unions which had split from the Chicago Trades Assembly (both of which were separate from the Knights of Labor, the largest union at the time). Moreover, initially the anarchists refused to be involved in the 8 hours movement, dismissing it as reformist, but by early 1886 most had recognised their mistake and took an active part in it. It is fair to say that the ultra-revolutionary autonomists were not involved in the strikes unlike the union focused ones who called the protest meeting in the

Haymarket. Significantly, Kropotkin later wrote (*Freedom*, December 1891): “Were not our Chicago Comrades right in despising politics, and saying the struggle against robbery must be carried on in the workshop and the street, by deeds not words?” (Editor)

[140](#)[] A reference to the formation of militias such as the Lehr-und-Wehr Verein (Education and Battle Association) formed by immigrant workers in Chicago in 1875, made illegal in 1879 by the Militia Law. (Editor)

[141](#)[] A reference to New Caledonia, an island in located in the southwest Pacific Ocean, which was used by the

French State as a penal colony between the 1860s and 1897. Over 20,000 criminals and political prisoners were sent there, among them many Communards. (Editor)

142[] The Guesdists were a Social Democratic faction in French workers' movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, led by Jules Guesde. During the 1880s and early 1890s, the Guesdist French Workers Party (the Parti Ouvrier Français or POF) spread Marxism in French labour circles, fighting both anarchism and reformism of the "Possibilists." In 1905, they joined with other socialist parties to form the French Section of the Workers

International (the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière or SFIO) and became more reformist, most following Guesde in supporting the French State during the First World War. (Editor)

[143](#)[] Kropotkin uses *franc-maçonneries*, or Free-Masons; however, he must be referring to the Molly Maguires, a secret society of mainly Irish-American coal miners in the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania (USA) from the 1860s, broken by arrests and trials in 1876–8. Its members were trade unionists and members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (an Irish Masonic-like body). After provoking a 6 month

strike by announcing a 20% pay cut, the mining company destroyed the miners' union by the imprisonment of its leadership and by vigilante attacks on strikers. The defeated miners returned to work, but some continued the fight against the cruelty of the bosses with sabotage and violence in the Molly Maguires. (Editor)

[144](#)[] Alfred Defuisseaux (1843–1901) was a Belgium socialist who published in 1886 “The Catechism of the People” calling for the conquest of universal suffrage. This led him to being jailed for six months as one of the ringleaders of the Walloon *jacquerie* of March 1886 (actually inspired by anarchists in Liège). A

national demonstration in favour of the universal suffrage organised in August 1886 failed in its demands while a socialist inspired general strike for universal suffrage in May 1887 failed to find support in Liège nor the rest of industrial Belgium. The newly formed Belgium Worker's Party came out against the strikes and expelled Defuisseaux. (Editor)

[145](#)[] Philippe Égalité was the name taken during French Revolution by Louis Philippe Joseph d'Orléans (1747–1793). Although an aristocrat and member of the House of Orléans (and so an heir to the throne), he actively supported the revolution. The royal court claimed he was at the

bottom of every popular movement and saw the “gold of Orléans” as the cause of the storming of the Bastille. This did not stop him being guillotined during the Reign of Terror. (Editor)

[146](#)[] Here, Kropotkin refers to the Marxist “concentration of capital” hypothesis, according to which competition will lead to a decline in the number of firms as smaller capitals are absorbed by larger ones; see, for instance, *Capital* Vol. I, ch. 25, sec. 2. (Editor)

[147](#)[] This is already the case with a good fifth of English workers, since a million and a half of them are organised, and there are no more than

seven million working in the branches
of English industry, all counted.

Letter to French and British Trade Union Delegates

This letter was read to a meeting of French and British trade unionists at South Place Institute, 21st June, and was later published in Freedom (September 1901). In it Kropotkin calls upon the delegates to repeat the actions of their brethren in 1864 and

*recreate a militant
international trade union
organisation for the direct
struggle against capitalism.*

Dear Comrades,

I am extremely sorry that ill-health prevents me from being with you at this meeting of welcome to the delegates of the French Trade Unions.

I feel the more sorry as it entirely depends upon ourselves and our own

endeavours that the present visit of French Trade Unions should become the starting point of a great International Federation between the workingmen all over the world.

It was from a similar visit that the great International Workingmen's Association was born in 1864. And if by this time the international union between the

workingmen of both hemispheres has made immense progress, and has been established directly, by means of a continuous intercourse which is going on amongst the workers of all nations,—there remains still the necessity of consolidating that union and of making it a powerful weapon—both in the conflicts between Labour and Capital, and in international

conflicts.

There is a common stock of *ideas* circulating amidst the working classes of all nations; but there must also be a common ground for *international action*. The necessity of spreading labour organisations internationally, and of an international support in case of strikes, that international federations of separate trades—

Glassblowers, Coalminers,
Cotton-operatives, Dock-
labourers, the Shop-assistants
and, partly, the Engineers—
are already being organised.

What is required now is an
*International Federation of
all the Trade Unions all over
the World.*

Such a Federation will not
interfere with the existing
international Socialist
organisation, such as it

appears at its congresses.[[148](#)]

The International Socialist Congresses have delineated their own special field of action—namely, legislation in favour of labour. But this legislation—no matter how sweeping it may be—would leave untouched the great problem of our times: Labour and Capital. It sanctions the existing relations between the exploiting Capitalist and the

exploited Labourer. It only tries to improve them.

However, the great struggle between Labour and Capital—Labour endeavouring to free itself from the yoke of Capital—this great struggle goes on. It requires that the labourers should offer to the capitalist a compact mass—united, not subdivided by their political opinions. Whether Conservative or Liberal,

Nationalist or Internationalist,
Social Democrat or Anarchist,
the workingmen have their
own interests as such; they
have their own struggle to
carry on—they are Labourers
placed under the yoke of the
rich ones and trying to shake
off that yoke. And as the rich
ones, whether Conservative,
Liberal, Jingo or anti-Jingo,
English or French, German or
Russian, unite together to

combat the workers as soon as these rise against the oppression of Capital—so the workers all over the world must constitute a formidable Federation, ready to support each other irrespective of political opinions and nationality, *in the direct struggle of Labour against Capital.*

An International Federation of all the Trade Unions,

across all the frontiers, is thus an absolute necessity.

As to the special question—the question of Peace and International Arbitration—which has brought over the French Trade Union delegates to London, we can but heartily greet *every* step, however small it may be, in the sense of a *direct union between the workingmen of all nations in order to oppose the warlike*

and conquering spirit which takes hold of the middle classes.

Everything that will be done to establish that DIRECT union will receive our hearty support. But so long as an International Federation of all labour organisations of Europe and America has not been established, and so long as the workers have not seen in such a Federation the natural and

true expression of *their own* interests, all such attempts will remain fruitless.

Take the present war in South Africa.[[149](#)] It was begun in the interests of a handful of shameless money-grabbers of the worst description, whose names will be, and are already, cursed by every thinking human being. And the war is conducted with a barbarity of which no other

civilised nation has ever rendered itself guilty before mankind.

The good name of England has been dragged in the mud, and it is now execrated everywhere in Europe for the abominations that are committed in England's name, in South and North Africa and in famine- and plague-stricken India.

Whose fault is it?

I don't hesitate to say that the fault is—not with the moneyed robbers (to rob, to plunder, to exact is their profession)—the fault is *with the British workingmen*.

They alone could have opposed this war. They alone can put an end to the abominations committed against women and children in their name. If tomorrow the Labour Unions of London

alone would come out to Hyde Park and put their foot upon this bloody war—within a week's time peace would be concluded, and the gold-embroidered heroes of warfare against children and women would not dare to parade the streets of an English city.

But the preachings of the rich and the systematic lies of a venal press have blinded the

workers of England as they will tomorrow blind the workers of France, of Germany, of Russia, when the middle classes of these countries will prepare *their* wars.

An International federation of all Labour Unions of the World, alone, would be capable of opposing its force to that organised for robbery by [the] middle classes.

If such a Federation existed, if the workers of all nations had grown accustomed to listen to its mighty voice and to see in it the expression of their own ideas, the present war in South Africa would never have taken place. The Federation would have told the truth to the English workers, it would have roused their conscience; it would have called them to action. And the same is true of

all future wars, of which a rich crop is already coming.

Let us, then, solemnly put tonight the first foundations of an International Federation of Labour, and for the true and complete liberation of mankind without distinction of creed, of colour or nationality, as the great International Workingmen's Association had proclaimed it in 1864.

P. Kropotkin

[148](#)[] A reference to the recently formed

Marxist Second International, which had been created in 1889 and which primarily contained Social Democratic parties although some trade unions also participated. (Editor)

[149](#)[] A reference to the Boer War (1899–1902). (Editor)

The Death of the New International Translation by Paul Sharkey

This article, published in La Révolte (17th October 1891), discusses the Social Democratic Second International and contrasts it to the First International, a genuine international labour

*movement based on unions
committed to direct action
against capital.*

The democratic socialist press continues to make a great fuss over the recent congress at Brussels.[[150](#)] If these newspapers are to be believed, it was a grandiose act of federation on the part of the working class in every land. And since the Congress's resolutions, even in the opinion

of some democratic socialist newspapers, do not have much to say, it is the *spirit* and the *tendency* of the Congress that we are invited to contemplate.

At the risk of repeating ourselves over the details, let us take yet another look at that spirit, that tendency. This is all the more useful insofar as the Brussels Congress did indeed display a pronounced tendency and spirit setting it

apart from preceding congresses. It marks a new phase in the series of international workers' congresses.

One day in 1867, the bourgeoisie got wind of a great league being formed between workers. That league was international. Its purpose, to fight the bosses. Its weapon, a strike with international backing: its ultimate aim, the

abolition of the employer class.

We still remember the terror that the birth of the International Working Men's Association struck into the bourgeoisie. They studied it, they shrouded it in all manner of mysteries and sought to fathom them. "What is to become of society"—the more intelligent bourgeois asked one another—"if this dream of

international unity between workers comes to fruition? They will be a power to be reckoned with, *the* power to be reckoned with. With their strikes they will be able to ruin every branch of industry, one by one. Nothing could withstand them. They can ruin all our machines and there is not a thing we can do to prevent them. They can bring all production to a standstill

and oust us out of production. Even massacring the workers would achieve nothing. Sabres might be deployed against them, but what if they have international backing and do not go back to work? We will all be ruined and they will end up driving us out.”

And the bourgeoisie was right. A formidable organisation embracing every trade absolutely could ruin the

bourgeoisie and reduce the bourgeois to *pleading* with the workers to take over the factories, mines and railways and run them for themselves. The bourgeoisie saw this danger and did not have much of an idea how to counter it.

The workers, and above all the German Marxists, made it their business to set bourgeois minds at rest.

“The economic struggle has

to take precedence over the political struggle,” said the International. And this set the bourgeoisie quaking and it saw workers rallying to its colours in their millions.

“Perfect,” said the Marxists; “But to succeed in the economic struggle, we must acquire political power. Let us tackle the political struggle first, and that will provide a solution to the economic

struggle.” This made a nonsense of the principle of the International. It amounted to telling the founders of the International, particularly Marx, that they had been imbeciles to set the economic struggle over political struggles.

But—what was there for bourgeois leaders in such economic struggles?—Better wages? But they are not wage-

earners.—A reduction in working hours?—But they are already working from home as writers or word-mongers! Only the political struggle had something to offer them. They sought to steer the workers in that direction.

The workers' prejudices helping in this, they succeeded.

After that, the bourgeoisie was able to sleep easy for nigh

on twenty years. They were not naïve enough to believe that socialists might achieve a majority in Parliament in such-and-such a year. An Engels might be that naïve and repeat today—he has just done so again—his reckoning that 1898 might well be the year when that will happen, just as he did some fourteen years ago. But the bourgeois are not *that* naïve.

It suddenly came to them that if the workers were to throw themselves into the political struggle, that would put paid to their strength. There would be squabbles over candidacies—just as we have seen in France over the past fifteen years; [[151](#)] there would be splintering, just as there has been splintering in England from 1887 to this day. [[152](#)] And if a kind of a unity

was preserved as it has been in Germany, it would be for the purpose of fighting Bismarck in conjunction with such-and-such a parliamentary faction, so as to paralyse the workers' strike power and lay socialism to rest.

Once that step was taken, the bourgeoisie no longer worried about the International.

The International was

defunct.

Nineteen years later, and on a grander scale, the Brussels Congress has just repeated the deeds of the Hague Congress of 1872.

Indeed, two or three years ago, a vast workers' movement was under way in Britain. In a development never witnessed before, a few men had managed to rouse the outcast labourer and

dockworker trades. Women, ground into the ghastliest poverty, revolted and organised themselves in turn. The number of workers organised in trade unions more than doubled, climbing from a half million to something akin to a million and a half.

For a number of weeks, a big strike brought some big industries in London—the heart of world trade—grinding

to a halt. And in that strike, the people displayed a gift for organisation that even anarchists had not dared imagine. Finally, in that strike, the workers attracted absolutely unbelievable support from thousands of men and women and from déclassé elements of the British bourgeoisie, whilst Australia sent unexpected help.

That great strike and the labour awakening was echoed on the continent: on the docks in Holland, among the Belgian, German and Slav miners, and among the major trades in France, Italy and Spain.

As in the [First] International, the idea of the general strike emerged and its implementation seemed imminent, as the various trades banded together, federated

and took to the streets on May 1st.

These were stirrings that had to be halted at all costs.

The Marxists took charge of that. Had they been paid by the bourgeois for so doing, they could not have worked more ardently to bring the movement to a standstill. And in England, they found heartfelt support from the Conservatives—the worthy

offspring of the Earl of Beaconsfield, whom Liebknecht would have us believe today was a great thinker! [[153](#)]

At the Brussels Congress, these gentlemen, aided by English Conservatives, achieved their purpose. From here on, the bourgeois will be able to sleep easy, just as they were in the wake of the Marxists' victory at the Hague

Congress.

Actually, as the Marxists see it, the workers will not be troubling with the economic struggle any more. The economic struggle was all very well for dreamers such as Marx and Bakunin. But they, being practically minded, are going to concern themselves with votes. They will enter into alliances—some with the Conservatives, some with

[Kaiser] Wilhelm II—and they will get their men into Parliament. This is item one, the essential point of the Marxist gospel promulgated at the Brussels congress. This is to take priority over all the other resolutions.

In the second item [of the Congress' agenda], the talk will be of strikes—to promote them?—Hardly! To tell the workers that the strike “*is a*

double-edged sword” that has to be handled with care and never without the permission of the bureaux of labour statistics. The latter may give approval or deny approval for a strike, and obedience will follow. They will allow it if Wilhelm II allows it in Germany and if the Conservatives in England allow it. They will forbid it if these gentlemen forbid it.

Above all, they will forbid it if they fear it will sink a candidate in such-and-such an electoral district.

Such is the net result of the congress. The whole immense workers' organisation into which so much effort has lately been invested has been jesuitically sold to the bourgeois, in return for a few candidatures guaranteed to a Mr X here and a Mr Y there.

“Sleep easy, bourgeois. There is no workers’ International now to pose a threat to your factories. We German, British, Belgian, Dutch, and Italian Marxists will be watching over you! We say nothing of the virtually non-existent French and Spanish Marxists. We shall keep our flocks entertained with candidatures and set them to tearing one another to

pieces over seats in Parliament and on Councils. And if that old nitwit Marx turns unhappily in his grave—well, too bad for him:—in politics, —we are his children!”

There you have the *idea* underlying this noxious Congress.[[154](#)]

[150](#)[] The Second Congress of the Second International took place in Brussels, between the 3rd and 7th of August 1891. (Editor)

[151](#)[] In 1879, at a congress at Marseille, some workers associations

created the *Federation of the Socialist Workers of France* (FTSF). Three years later, Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue (1842–1911) left the federation because they considered it too moderate, founding the *French Workers Party*. At the same time, Édouard Vaillant (1840–1915) and the Blanquists founded the *Central Revolutionary Committee*. During the 1880s, the Socialists gained their first electoral success and Jean Allemane (1843–1935) and some FTSF members criticised the focus on electoral goals. They split from the FTSF in 1890 and created the *Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party* which aimed to win political

power through the general strike. In 1902, Guesde and Vaillant founded the *Socialist Party of France*, while Jean Jaurès, Allemane and the possibilists formed the *French Socialist Party*. In 1905, under pressure from the Second International, the two groups merged into the *French Section of the Workers International*. At the outbreak of war in 1914, like almost all of the Second International, it replaced its internationalist conceptions about class struggle with patriotism, supporting the National Union government. After the war, it split at the Tours Congress. (Editor)

[152](#)[] A reference to the 1887

Conference of the *Socialist League* which saw the defeat of the minority who wished to participate in elections by the anti-parliamentarian majority. The Parliamentary faction was expelled the following year. For details, see John Quail's *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of British Anarchism* (Granada Publishing, 1978). (Editor)

[153](#)[] A reference to Benjamin Disraeli, British Prime Minister, who was given the title Earl of Beaconsfield by Queen Victoria in 1876. (Editor)

[154](#)[] It should be noted that Engels had a different perspective on the Brussels Congress of the Second International. He wrote in a letter on

14th September 1891: “The Congress 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.” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 49, p. 238). (Editor)

Commemoration of the Chicago Martyrs

This speech was published in Freedom (December 1892). In it, Kropotkin sketches both the validity of anarchist theories and the necessity of applying them in the labour movement.

We cannot better
commemorate the death of our

brethren of Chicago than by casting a glance on the progress of the ideas for which they lived and died, after having been so cruelly tortured for 18 long months by the American land and money grabbers.

The beginnings of the Anarchist party were very modest. It was born from a protest, which soon became a fierce struggle, against the

authority constituted within the International Working Men's Association. This modest beginning concealed, however, a great principle—that of negation of authority altogether, in all relations between the members of a Society, and a high ideal—that of a Society based upon the full liberty of the individual, and the free grouping of free individuals, free groups, and

free federations of groups.

The party found support for its ideas from many quarters. It proved to be in accordance with the great work, the criticism of authority, which was going on in the depths of the toiling classes. And it proved to be in accordance with the thought which has been of late occupying a more and more prominent position in the writings of modern

philosophers.

The idea grew; it found support in both philosophy and science; it developed. And however few the numbers of Anarchists were, the Anarchist idea was so much in accordance with the modern progress of thought that at this moment, we may say, that it HAS already deeply modified the current conceptions upon many vital questions

connected with the great strife for the emancipation of man.

The conceptions as to the relative parts played by Evolution and Revolution in the progress of mankind have totally changed of late. No intelligent man can now oppose Evolution to Revolution—it being evident that both are only two aspects of the same progress. Checked Evolution calls forth a

Revolution, and the principles proclaimed by a Revolution are applied to life by subsequent Evolution. Even some prominent Darwinians recognise now that revolutions have been necessary parts of past organic evolution. The more so in human life: Revolution is a necessary part of human Evolution.

The conceptions upon authority have also immensely

changed. Confidence in it is being rapidly lost. While twenty years ago, the adversaries of authority were treated by Social Democrats as fools, these same Social Democrats are brought to bend before the disrespect for authority which is felt in their own ranks. The State Socialists are now compelled to repudiate State Socialism—at least in their programs—and

they are compelled every day to part with the authority which they formerly considered as a necessary condition of Socialist success. The Social Democratic groups claim freedom for each one of themselves, and the formerly autocratic leaders are bound to recognise this autonomy of the groups. The old argument as to the autonomous groups going to annihilate each other

by their struggles would simply appear laughable, if it were unearthed from the Social Democratic papers of twenty years ago and brought on the platforms of today.

You all remember the unhappy imaginary Commune of the authoritarian's argument, which Commune was refused any independence on the ground that it would—our adversaries said—oppose

any progress of the remainder of the nation. How often did we hear of this bogus Commune in our discussions! The argument would now appear simply ridiculous. The most authoritarian Socialists are bound to inscribe the municipalisation of property in their programs, and to recognise the free Commune as a necessary basis of a free nation.

In Economics the idea of an entire reconstruction of the whole system of production has become generally accepted. He who would now maintain that the Social Revolution must simply consist in every worker returning to his workshop and there sharing his part of the surplus value—he who would now repeat this formula of old Marxism—would simply

appear a ghost of times past. The evil, we all know, is not in an unfair distribution of surplus value, it is not in low wages, nor in long hours—but in the wage-system itself, in a wrong direction given to production under the wage-system, in the very possibility and existence of such a thing as what has been improperly named surplus value. And, in proportion as these ideas

spread, the Communist ideal gains ground, and no thinking man would shudder now at the idea of Communist Communes and communistically producing groups entering into free agreements for carrying on such matters as require the agreement of many groups or many Communes. Yet twenty years ago such ideas were simply looked upon as foolish.

At the same time, the

impossibility of representative government is being clearly demonstrated even within the Socialist party itself, not to mention larger groups such as cities, nations, and federation of nations; the necessity of taking out of the hands of the State the functions which it has appropriated to itself, according as power fell more and more into the hands of the middle-class, becomes more

and more evident. Not “limitation of power” but “abolition of power” becomes now a common watchword even outside our circles.

Another point—the free initiative of group and of individual—also becomes more and more understood, even amidst the workers grouped under authoritarian programs. It becomes evident that initiative is the only

condition of progress within the Socialist party itself, and that in proportion as it is checked, regress[ion] in the party becomes inevitable. We Anarchists understand, and a number of others begin to understand as well, that it is a thousand times better that the workers, and the younger revolutionists altogether, commit the worst mistakes, or even faults, than to have the

individual always guided,
always directed, always
obeying and never acting
under his own free impulse
and responsibility. All
revolutions have been
moments of free play of the
individual, not moments of
submission of the individual to
an authority which may think
itself very wise—but always
represents only the average
mediocrity of the past.

Anarchy was born as an expression of the deeply felt necessity of a thorough revising—not only of the present laws or economical relations and their principles, but also of the very forms and habits of daily life. This work is going on rapidly and extends to ever wider spheres. The moral ideals of old are submitted to a thorough revision; the sanction which

they formerly received from religion, metaphysical philosophy, or custom, is attacked at its root; and the very anti-social theories which from time to time prevail in our own ranks are, for us, simply tokens of a great work of thought which is going on in all classes of society, and especially among the workers. The cowards are afraid of this work. They would gladly

reintroduce the whip of the State and the stake of the Church for fear that that such theories might sap the foundations of moral feelings in human society. We are not afraid of these kind of opponents, however far they would go. The moral bases of society—and each society, human or animal, has such bases—are in danger, not from those of the working classes

who throw overboard the old teachings, in order to find new, higher and sounder bases for public morality, but from those who hypocritically maintain that they respect the old bases and yet undermine public morality by the acts of their false lives. The anti-social views which we now have developed among ourselves are a protest against this hypocrisy. They are a work of

eruption of the stifling atmosphere of lies and sophisms which surround us, and they are the best proofs that society, as whole, is thirsting for greater justice, for grander ideals, for more human relations among us.

In Science, in Literature, in Art, and in Philosophy, we now see going on a great movement of thought which gives further and wider

support to the bases of that grand idea, Anarchy, which certainly will be the leading idea of the Evolution already spreading in the civilised world.

European thought, in all its branches, proves the correctness of the principles which were laid down by our predecessors in the Anarchist branch of the International Working Men's Association. It

proves that they had struck the right key, and had inscribed on their banner such principles as really have become the basis of further Evolution among mankind. But what is to be done now in the practical field for a further development of our ideas? The results hitherto achieved are grand. But much remains to be done, and what is the next task before us?

To tell my thoughts in a few

words, I should say that the chief point to be achieved now, is to make the Anarchist ideas permeate the great labour movement which is so rapidly growing in Europe and America; and to do so by all those means, and only by such means, which are in strict accordance with our own principles—without any concession to the present authoritarian or narrow

tendencies of the movement. To be in the movement, BUT YET ALWAYS REMAIN OURSELVES, without making any of those concessions which often seem to be expedient, but in the long run always prove to be an abandonment of true principles for a mere shadow of momentary success.

No one can underrate the importance of this labour

movement for the coming revolution. It will be those agglomerations of wealth producers which will have to reorganise production on new social bases. They will have to organise the life of the nation and the use which it will make of the hitherto accumulated riches and means of production. They—the labourers, grouped together—not the politicians.

The importance of the movement is so well felt that you see now, especially in this country, how all parties court it in order to take possession of it.

By all means, let us NOT join in this struggle for supremacy. We cannot, we must not, nourish any such ideas as that of taking possession of the movement. We should cease to be

ourselves the day that any such plan would be born in our minds. We do not want to take possession of anything, just as we ourselves will surrender to none. And the more we keep aloof from any such dreams of ruling, the more ascendancy our ideas will have in the movement.

But to bring our ideas into that movement, to spread them, by all means, among

those masses which hold in their hands the future issue of the revolution, is our duty—a duty which we have not yet taken sufficiently to heart.

After having had our period of isolation—during which period we have elaborated and strengthened our principles—let us now enter the “wide, wide world” and propagate among the masses the ideas which we consider as the

bases of the coming development. If we had no choice between either to cease to be ourselves or to remain isolated, we most certainly should choose the latter, and lay our hopes on the mere infiltration of right ideas which always succeed in the long run. But great obstacles always yield before the firm will of resolute men, and the obstacles which we now meet

in our way will yield to us, being resolved. The collective intelligence, the individual initiative, and a firm will must break the walls which are now skilfully erected by political intriguers between the toiling masses and the teachers of Anarchist ideas. But these walls will be broken just as the walls which formerly separated us from the Social Democratic masses have been

broken! And it is only in the great working masses—supported by their energies, applied by them to real life—that our ideas will attain their full development. And the more we remain ourselves, the less we let ourselves be influenced by the surroundings, the purer we keep the grand ideas which humanity has always endeavoured to realise and

which we, having learned them from the unspoken ideal of the masses, now strive to bring to life within the masses—the purer we keep these ideas, the greater will be their effect.

Our aim is very grand, and the very obstacles must stimulate the energy to realise it. History shows us that the Anarchists have now remained the sole bearers of the

Socialist ideal which inspired the great movement of the International twenty years ago. All parties have deserted the red flag, in proportion as they felt themselves nearer to power. This red flag—the hope of the toiling and suffering masses—is now our inheritance. Let us keep it firm, unstained; and let us live for it and, if necessary, die for it as our brethren of Chicago

did.

The Workers' Congress of 1896

Translation by James
Bar Bowen

*This article from Les Temps
Nouveaux (August 1895) sees
Kropotkin discuss anarchist
attitudes to the planned
London Congress of the
Second International in 1896.
It summarises his views on*

how a genuine labour congress should be organised.

Last Sunday, the comrades of the Freedom Group from London, along with a few friends, met to discuss whether they should attend the Workers' Congress which will take place in August 1896 in London. The fact is that in England, much as everywhere else, there are anarchist comrades who are members

of workers' groups and who may be delegated by their trades' unions to present an anarchist perspective with regard to the agenda items of the Congress. The groups in question are not going to stand by, arms folded, watching while the politicians magic the workers' movement away to invisibility; neither are they willing to observe, without voicing their disapproval, the

egotistical relationships often established between the best remunerated workers and those who have less, or indeed those who are not paid at all because they do not work. These groups plan to work together with anarchists of other countries with regard to what they need to do to introduce into the workers' unions anarchist ideas and to drive out the reactionaries

from their lairs.

The advances recently achieved in this way are particularly encouraging: in certain unions, and particularly in America, the greatest push for workers' resistance comes from those who are outside of the organised trades, and they are in fact leading the unionised workers (as was recently observed in the latest railway workers' strike). This

new spirit of revolt that animates the working classes imposes an obligation upon those of us who do not think ourselves better than the “ignorant masses” just because we are anarchists and they are not yet, an obligation to do everything possible to spread the anarchist idea among the working masses. We must also show solidarity with the idea of the general

strike, in contrast to the politicians who are using every means at their disposal to suppress it until the next Congress.

We know that the Congress will be completely stage-managed by these very politicians. The German Social Democrats, who dominate with their organising committee, have therefore taken precautions to stop

anyone coming to disrupt them in their petty discussions of parliamentary irrelevancies with a decree, put forward by these gentlemen, announcing that anyone who does not advocate parliamentary politics will be excluded from the Congress. We therefore need to be clear exactly what it is we want to achieve there.

The unanimous opinion of the assembled comrades was

that we should definitely attend the Congress, and that we should do so in large numbers. However, before doing anything, all anarchist groups in London will be called together to discuss this question.

If the Congress were billed as a Social Democratic Congress, the anarchists would of course not attend. Why would we want to disrupt

the Social Democrats when they are discussing their own private business, or when they are reaffirming among themselves that Marx alone discovered socialism, the philosophy of history and all the rest?

However, the Congress has been billed as a Universal Workers' Congress, and so either the trades' unions alone will be admitted, but no

political socialist or revolutionary group will be allowed in unless they are a trade union or an unemployed workers' union; or all the socialist and revolutionary groups who wish to attend should be admitted. Essentially it does not make any more sense for just the workers' groups along with the Social Democrats to be admitted, rather than having a Congress

composed of workers' unions, Social Democrats, along with the anarchists and all the socialist tendencies. It is prejudicial to insist that the workers' groups should be social democrats and work for [the election of] politicians.

Nevertheless, this is precisely what these gentlemen have done. If you are an anarchist, delegated by a trades' union, as agreed

eight months in advance, you will be allowed in; if you are a Social Democrat who does not belong to any workers' union, but you simply belong to a social democratic party, you will also be allowed in: your social democrat opinions will open doors for you. But if you are an anarchist who does not belong to a workers' union and you arrive as a representative of your

anarchist group, then you will not be allowed in: your anarchist opinions will close doors for you.

If all the workers' parties and workers' groups accept this resolution, we might as well bow to the basest human instincts. However, this is precisely what we will not do. The Dutch Workers' Party, for example, does not accept it. This Party says (as do we):

either we have a Congress for Workers or a Congress for the Social Democratic Party, or better still, we have a Workers' Congress which opens its doors to both anarchists and social democrats. However, don't have the workers believe that the majority of workers have signed up to the parliamentary tactics of so-called socialist democrats! The American party doesn't want

it either, as is shown by their decision to take no further part in politicking. The Spanish too, in all probability, would not want some kind of Marxist exclusivity; and the Italians the same. In effect, as their votes are conducted by nationality, Liebknecht will once again have to put himself forward, this time as the representative from the Workers' Party of Brazil, or perhaps from the

Sandwich Islands.[[155](#)] Thus, at the anarchists' meeting in London, we will propose to issue two manifestoes. One, addressed to all the European, American, and Australian anarchists, will propose that they discuss the question of the Congress. The other, addressed to the British trade unionists, will be intended to open their eyes and to thwart the plans of the organisers of

this comedy that they want to stage on the workers' backs.

Additionally, the anarchist newspapers are requested to open up their columns to these discussions.[[156](#)]

[155](#)[] At the 1893 Congress of the Second International held at Zurich, one of the mandates from Brazil was held by the leading German Social Democrat Wilhelm Liebknecht. (Editor)

[156](#)[] The anarchists did organise to attend the 1896 Congress of the Second International, although they were expelled by the Marxist

majority (led by the German Social Democrats). For an excellent discussion of this event see Davide Turcato, “The 1896 London Congress: Epilogue or Prologue?,” 110–125, *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: the Individual, the National and the Transnational*, edited by David Berry and Constance Bantman (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

The Development of Trade-Unionism

This lecture was delivered in the Memorial Hall on 24th January 1898 and later published in Freedom (March 1898). In it Kropotkin sketches both the origins of and a possible future for trade unions. He urges them to have a constructive policy based on workers' management of

production.

A few months ago I was delivering a number of lectures on Socialism and Anarchism in the cities of the Eastern [United] States of America. These were attended to a great extent by American workers belonging to the Trade unions, especially when delivered in the big industrial centres. That gave the idea to our New York comrades of convening a big

meeting in the Cooper Union Hall, and to invite representatives of Trade unions and as many members of Trade unions as possible. It was done and we had a splendid meeting on the eve of my departure. At this meeting, comrade McCraith read a short message from the Trade unionists of America to be transmitted to their English comrades. It was accepted

unanimously and I was requested to convey it.

I was much prouder of carrying it than I would have been of carrying any political message of any importance, which, in fact, I would not have accepted at all.

It would be presumptuous of me, having stayed so short a time in America, to come here to tell you of the movement there. It would have required

wider knowledge and more serious study, and moreover a journey to the Western States where Trade-unionism takes a quite a different character to the “nibbling” Unionism of the Eastern States. I can only say that it is full of youth and of force, and that happily the differences between “Americans” and the Bohemians, Poles, Hungarians and other “strangers” are

disappearing. When, in the strike at Hazelton[[157](#)] such “strangers” were massacred recently, it produced such indignation in New York that the “American” Trade-unionists called a great meeting and told the police who were present such things as to what would happen if they, the “Americans,” were attacked as the poor Bohemians had been, that not

one single paper of the middle class cared to report it.

My intention is to speak from a more general standpoint. I have not much to say which you may not know already, but perhaps some general views may not be out of place.

Everyone feels, in this country, that some change in the present organisation, aims and methods of the Trade

unions is absolutely imposed by the union of international capitalism.

For many years, in the medieval towns, the workers of all nationalities were united in unions, and very often it is said that the guilds of old have given origin to the Trade unions of today. Perhaps it is true, but the modern Trade unions are absolutely different from the old guilds; they cover

but a very small part of the field covered by the Unions of old. The workers of a guild considered themselves as the masters of the industry—not as men hired to do the work without any interest in the management of the concern. They did not consider themselves as outsiders to industry: they considered rather the *others*, the capitalists, as the outside and

useless element.

They used to buy all raw material and to sell the produce. They managed the industry entirely; and the cities were nothing but the unions of these unions, the *amitas* between these unions. When they had to export something, they did not leave it to someone going to find new markets in Africa, nor in China. It was the city which

carried on the export; it was the city which was considered the first, the great consumer.

Moreover, the guild was supreme in its own concerns; it was autonomous. If any dispute arose between two workers of the same guild, it was to the arbiters (or judges, if you like), nominated by the guild, it had to be referred; if any dispute arose between two workers of different unions, it

was referred to the persons elected by these two unions, who if they disagreed could call in the nominee of a third to decide. It had its own militia; it would join with the others in war if it *liked*, and such wars were, of course, wars of defence, not of conquest. It was a brotherly organisation of production, of distribution, of mutual support and of defence of the citizen.

What is the modern Trade union in comparison with this?

What was the result? That in these medieval cities of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such extraordinary progress was made as has never been equalled.

You know how all this disappeared, how States and kings took possession of the funds of these guilds, how the

king conquered the cities and imposed his judges on them and his laws, how the cities were crushed, and how for two centuries, the seventeenth and the eighteenth, all industries in Europe went *backwards*, were destroyed where they had flourished.

One union however was not crushed, that of the men engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, the men who

continued to work in their silent studies; who were adding new discoveries to the old ones. In the medieval universities men had made experiments which led ultimately to the steam engine; chemistry and other new sciences sprang into being; man's force in the long run was increased a hundredfold. If we were to take some books on modern industry, we should

be told that the nineteenth century is a beautiful illustration of what can be achieved under capitalist organisation. “Look what industry was a hundred years ago, look what it is now! And who has made it? The capitalist.” The reality is that it is *science* which has made it. It was under the influence of the ideas circulating at the end of the last century that man

has accomplished the
prodigies we see now.
Capitalism has not helped, but
hindered it. What the
capitalists did to promote it we
know—helped with a
legislation which pauperised
the population, which expelled
the peasant from the land
which he and his ancestors
had cultivated; sent their
agents travelling all over
England stealing children for

the factories of Lancashire and Yorkshire. That was what the capitalist invented for the organisation of large industry.

What was the worker to do under such circumstances—legislation in the hands of the monopolising classes and these workers driven to the factories to compete with their children. In their small secret societies they fought this Moloch but they could only try to prevent

capitalists from crushing them altogether. They were hanged for strikes, they were deported to Australia. All they could imagine at that horrid time was *a policy of resistance*. Not a constructive policy, not a destructive [one], simply a policy of conserving only the little they could maintain. This policy has been continued too long. To this policy the Trade unions continue to adhere

although the conditions have changed and it is time to come forwards with new demands of a destructive and constructive order.

Already in the commencement there were men who undertook a greater task, who understood that that would not be enough, that it would be necessary to carry on a policy of active reconstruction. Already in the

beginning, Robert Owen, the man to whom we Socialists owe infinitely more than most of us think—a man who really foresaw the future development of Socialism better than many of his successors—had started an international society for discussing these questions, and had constituted “The Great Trades’ Union”—the Union of all trades.

You know what the attitude of the government was towards these unionists. They were met with deportation and hard labour, crushed down by prosecution, and for a while again they had to return to their little committees, their little councils in secret, to carry on merely a passive resistance.

Then came the great movement on the continent of

1848. But again the workers were crushed down, and again all hope disappeared from the hearts of the workers. In the sixties began a new movement. The International Workingmen's Association. This has now been forgotten, yet it succeeded in bringing together several millions of workingmen all over Europe. It put all the great problems into discussion, and gave some

solution for each which was not inspired by books but by a knowledge of life and work. In a few years this association seemed to become a tremendous power. The journalists of the capitalist world attended its congresses and hastened to wire from them that things were still quiet, the dreaded revolution was not coming off this time. The International

Workingmen's Association growing constantly in power finally led the French government to begin that struggle which resulted, alas, again in the crushing of the workers movement.

The Commune of Paris was an attempt of the working class to try something new, something *constructive* in Socialism and Communism. It was crushed out in blood of

the thirty thousand workers killed in the streets. One hundred thousand were deported. Driven back again, all the workers could do was to fight step by step for the rights of combination and of striking—a fight which has still to be kept up. Men are still condemned for picketing in this country. Look at the money still spent in defending this, the soul of a strike.

Yet gradually an immense work has been done. Progress has been made since these years when almost everything seemed crushed, when the only light we saw gleaming was maintained by the Trade-unionists of this country. At the time of the dockers' strike an attempt was made to create an international union. An Eight hours day movement was begun in Chicago, when

the five Anarchists were hanged. The May Day movement was started. A great meeting was held in Hyde Park in 1891, and great hopes were awakened all over the world in regard to its success, which could be carried [out] by the workers themselves in their unions. Unhappily, it drifted into parliamentary channels; so much was talked about an eight-hours bill, and

gradually it has faded away. It was a fact of the greatest importance when the engineers again began this movement. We have had several months of resistance, and you know how it has ended. The capitalists have united all over the world; they went to Germany, France and Austria to get help in crushing the English engineers.

This defeat—for if it is not a

victory it is a defeat—what does it show? That it is time to come out of those conditions of forty years ago when the Trade-unionists could do no more than timidly offer a passive resistance, and to enter *a new period of constructive activity*.

When anything is brought up just now, something to be done for the workers, our ruling classes have but one answer to

it. The housing of the poor, for instance—tons of matter have been written about this. When anything is proposed what do they say? “Wait. Wait a little. Wait a bit. Wait.” You have your children educated in the schools. This may be pretty good, but your children go hungry. You are told to wait, wait, wait. You would be pauperised, remember, if they were fed! The problem of the

unemployed? The Land going out of cultivation? In every direction there is a problem standing and when you ask for a solution to it, they have no answer for us but “Wait. Wait a little. Wait a bit. Wait. Let us see what the political economists say. Wait.”

No; we must not wait. Are the workers of England now less intelligent than in the time of the guilds that they could

not manage industries as their forefathers did? They tell us you could not manage, you could not organise them. I must be very much mistaken if you could not manage them *as well as your masters*. The capitalists are continually complaining that they cannot manage industries well enough to be productive; they are too poor to pay you a living wage. Well, if they cannot manage

industry without exploiting us so, *let them go*. We don't want them; we can manage better than they have done yet.

I advise everybody to read in this connection the book of [Edward] Bellamy's, *Equality*. Here you will find a brilliant proof of the uneconomical organisation of the present day. He does not criticise it from the standpoint of morality, of Christianity; he

shows simply that it is the most uneconomical [system] you could imagine, the most wasteful. The idea is growing amongst the workers that it is not for them to be considered outsiders in industry. You are told that you have nothing to say in the management of these things; the present is a good time to begin saying you have, that it is the capitalist who is the outsider and that

the organisation of industry must be taken into the hands of the workers. This is one movement in which you have only to be logical; to come to the necessary conclusion imposed upon you by the managers of industry themselves.

Then you see the Co-operative movement, since it has organised a market, moving on now towards

production; Socialist ideas are penetrating it; many of the people in it are returning to its old conception, that they should combine not for laying aside a few shillings by the end of the year, but for the taking over of all industries which are now in the hands of the capitalists.

And we see a third movement growing more and more, in the attempt of the

cities to organise such things as the tramways, gas, the water supply and so on. It is a childish movement yet, and will remain so as long as it continues in the hands of governing bodies. But bring it to its logical conclusion, let it take its full development, and it will be that *the people themselves* take possession of the territory, of the city, of its houses, of all the city contains

for the satisfaction of all needs of the population.

Take these three different movements, and let them take their logical development. Imagine a Trade Union movement not only for increasing wages and reducing hours, but inspired by the grander idea of getting rid of the drones and taking possession of the works; imagine the Co-operative

movement, inspired, too, by a grander idea, aiming not only at a small benefit to the members of the society, but at organising the distribution and production of all the country; imagine the third movement emerging from its present childish phase, growing to become a man—the people—and this man asserting his rights on the territory, the houses, all the necessaries for

satisfying the needs of the whole population.[[158](#)] Who has made all that is valuable in a city?—The inhabitants themselves! And if it be the presence and labour of the people round it, why should it be the property of a private individual? Why should not the city take into its possession everything that stands upon the ground of the city and the city itself, those values created

by its inhabitants, not today or yesterday but by many centuries of work?; imagine that these three movements, instead of always seeking a governor or even a dictator, instead of stopping half-way, take their entire development, combine amongst themselves, with freedom not for the whole city or union only but for every separate part of it; imagine these things and we

have, not yet the Social Revolution, but the beginning of the Social Revolution.

I appeal to you members of the Trade Unions now. Hitherto you have admitted the right of the employer to consider the factory, the mine, as something which belonged to him alone. You have treated with him, but you have always recognised his right, the right of giving you such or such

wages, of producing as he liked, of opening or closing it. The great change in ideas which must be produced is that Trades Unions should no longer recognise that right, that they should recognise that which results from the labour of all cannot belong to any separate individual. What we have all worked for and produced, what everyone has contributed to, no one has a

right to take into his own hands. For you, the Trade-unionists of England, it is time to recognise that these changes are not for the twenty-first century but for the immediate future. It is time to combine your efforts in these three directions, and joining hands across frontiers and oceans, to proclaim that at last is arriving the emancipation of the workers.

[157](#)[] In August 1897, workers were

laid off at strip mines in Pennsylvania, the pay of the remaining employees cut and fees raised for workers residing in the company towns. In response, nearly all the miners joined the *United Mine Workers* (UMW) and within two days almost all the mines in the region had closed due to the spreading strike. The first wave of the strikes ended on August 23rd, after the company agreed to union demands. A second broke out two days later, and Slav miners refused to scab and joined the strike instead. The company quickly agreed to raise pay but went back on their promises and the strikes resumed in September. The mine

owners' private armed force proved too small to break the strike, so the owners appealed for help from the Luzerne County Sheriff. On 10th September, about 300 to 400 unarmed strikers—nearly all of them Slavs and Germans—marched to a coal mine at the town of Lattimer to support a newly formed UMW union. When the demonstrators reached Lattimer, they were met by the sheriff and 150 armed deputies who opened fire on the unarmed crowd, killing nineteen miners. In spite of medical evidence at a later trial showing all had been shot in the back, the sheriff and his deputies were acquitted. The Lattimer massacre was a turning point in the

history of the UMW, witnessing a dramatic upsurge of more than 10,000 new members. It helped end a longstanding myth about the docility of non-English-speaking miners and just three years later the union would be powerful enough to win very large wage increases and significant safety improvements for miners throughout the region. (Editor)

[158](#)[] Kropotkin returned to this in a later article entitled “Municipal Socialism” in the December 1902 issue of *Freedom* (and reprinted in *Act For Yourself*). (Editor)

From *Mutual Aid*: A Factor of Evolution

These extracts from Mutual Aid (1902) show Kropotkin discussing strikes and unions as examples of mutual aid under capitalism. This shows that his most famous work, a work of popular science, did not, as some claim, ignore class struggle.

Mutual Aid Amongst Ourselves

The mutual-aid tendency in man has so remote an origin, and is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history. It was chiefly evolved during periods of

peace and prosperity; but when even the greatest calamities befell men—when whole countries were laid waste by wars, and whole populations were decimated by misery, or groaned under the yoke of tyranny—the same tendency continued to live in the villages and among the poorer classes in the towns; it still kept them together, and in the long run it

reacted even upon those ruling, fighting, and devastating minorities which dismissed it as sentimental nonsense. And whenever mankind had to work out a new social organisation, adapted to a new phasis of development, its constructive genius always drew the elements and the inspiration for the new departure from that same ever-living tendency.

New economical and social institutions, in so far as they were a creation of the masses, new ethical systems, and new religions, all have originated from the same source, and the ethical progress of our race, viewed in its broad lines, appears as a gradual extension of the mutual-aid principles from the tribe to always larger and larger agglomerations, so as to finally embrace one day

the whole of mankind, without respect to its divers creeds, languages, and races.

[...]

For the last three hundred years, the conditions for the growth of such institutions [of mutual support] have been as unfavourable in the towns as they have been in the villages. It is well known, indeed, that when the medieval cities were subdued in the sixteenth

century by growing military States, all institutions which kept the artisans, the masters, and the merchants together in the guilds and the cities were violently destroyed. The self-government and the self-jurisdiction of both, the guild and the city were abolished; the oath of allegiance between guild-brothers became an act of felony towards the State; the properties of the guilds

were confiscated in the same way as the lands of the village communities; and the inner and technical organisation of each trade was taken in hand by the State. Laws, gradually growing in severity, were passed to prevent artisans from combining in any way. For a time, some shadows of the old guilds were tolerated: merchants' guilds were allowed to exist under the

condition of freely granting subsidies to the kings, and some artisan guilds were kept in existence as organs of administration. Some of them still drag on their meaningless existence. But what formerly was the vital force of medieval life and industry has long since disappeared under the crushing weight of the centralised State.

In Great Britain, which may

be taken as the best illustration of the industrial policy of the modern States, we see the Parliament beginning the destruction of the guilds as early as the fifteenth century; but it was especially in the next century that decisive measures were taken. Henry the Eighth not only ruined the organisation of the guilds, but also confiscated their properties, with even less

excuse and manners, as Toulmin Smith wrote, than he had produced for confiscating the estates of the monasteries. [[159](#)] Edward the Sixth completed his work,[[160](#)] and already in the second part of the sixteenth century we find the Parliament settling all the disputes between craftsmen and merchants, which formerly were settled in each city separately. The Parliament

and the king not only legislated in all such contests, but, keeping in view the interests of the Crown in the exports, they soon began to determine the number of apprentices in each trade and minutely to regulate the very technics of each fabrication—the weights of the stuffs, the number of threads in the yard of cloth, and the like. With little success, it must be said; because contests and

technical difficulties which were arranged for centuries in succession by agreement between closely-interdependent guilds and federated cities lay entirely beyond the powers of the centralised State. The continual interference of its officials paralysed the trades; bringing most of them to a complete decay; and the last century economists, when

they rose against the State regulation of industries, only ventilated a widely-felt discontent. The abolition of that interference by the French Revolution was greeted as an act of liberation, and the example of France was soon followed elsewhere.

With the regulation of wages the State had no better success. In the medieval cities, when the distinction between

masters and apprentices or journeymen became more and more apparent in the fifteenth century, unions of apprentices (*Gesellenverbände*), occasionally assuming an international character, were opposed to the unions of masters and merchants. Now it was the State which undertook to settle their griefs, and under the Elizabethan Statute of 1563 the Justices of

Peace had to settle the wages, so as to guarantee a “convenient” livelihood to journeymen and apprentices. The Justices, however, proved helpless to conciliate the conflicting interests, and still less to compel the masters to obey their decisions. The law gradually became a dead letter, and was repealed by the end of the eighteenth century. But while the State thus

abandoned the function of regulating wages, it continued severely to prohibit all combinations which were entered upon by journeymen and workers in order to raise their wages, or to keep them at a certain level. All through the eighteenth century it legislated against the workers' unions, and in 1799 it finally prohibited all sorts of combinations, under the

menace of severe punishments. In fact, the British Parliament only followed in this case the example of the French Revolutionary Convention, which had issued a draconic law against coalitions of workers—coalitions between a number of citizens being considered as attempts against the sovereignty of the State, which was supposed equally

to protect all its subjects. The work of destruction of the medieval unions was thus completed. Both in the town and in the village the State reigned over loose aggregations of individuals, and was ready to prevent by the most stringent measures the reconstitution of any sort of separate unions among them. These were, then, the conditions under which the

mutual-aid tendency had to make its way in the nineteenth century.

Need it be said that no such measures could destroy that tendency? Throughout the eighteenth century, the workers' unions were continually reconstituted.[[161](#)] Nor were they stopped by the cruel prosecutions which took place under the laws of 1797 and 1799. Every flaw in

supervision, every delay of the masters in denouncing the unions was taken advantage of. Under the cover of friendly societies, burial clubs, or secret brotherhoods, the unions spread in the textile industries, among the Sheffield cutlers, the miners, and vigorous federal organisations were formed to support the branches during strikes and prosecutions.[[162](#)] The repeal

of the Combination Laws in 1825 gave a new impulse to the movement. Unions and national federations were formed in all trades[[163](#)] and when Robert Owen started his Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, it mustered half a million members in a few months. True that this period of relative liberty did not last long. Prosecution began anew in the thirties, and the well-

known ferocious
condemnations of 1832–1844
followed. The Grand National
Union was disbanded, and all
over the country, both the
private employers and the
Government in its own
workshops began to compel
the workers to resign all
connection with unions, and to
sign “the Document” to that
effect. Unionists were
prosecuted wholesale under

the Master and Servant Act—workers being summarily arrested and condemned upon a mere complaint of misbehaviour lodged by the master.[[164](#)] Strikes were suppressed in an autocratic way, and the most astounding condemnations took place for merely having announced a strike or acted as a delegate in it—to say nothing of the military suppression of strike

riots, nor of the
condemnations which
followed the frequent
outbursts of acts of violence.
To practise mutual support
under such circumstances was
anything but an easy task. And
yet, notwithstanding all
obstacles, of which our own
generation hardly can have an
idea, the revival of the unions
began again in 1841, and the
amalgamation of the workers

has been steadily continued since. After a long fight, which lasted for over a hundred years, the right of combining together was conquered, and at the present time [1902] nearly one-fourth part of the regularly-employed workers, i.e., about 1,500,000, belong to trade unions.[[165](#)]

As to the other European States, sufficient to say that up to a very recent date, all sorts

of unions were prosecuted as conspiracies; and that nevertheless they exist everywhere, even though they must often take the form of secret societies; while the extension and the force of labour organisations, and especially of the Knights of Labor, in the United States and in Belgium, have been sufficiently illustrated by strikes in the nineties. It must,

however, be borne in mind that, prosecution apart, the mere fact of belonging to a labour union implies considerable sacrifices in money, in time, and in unpaid work, and continually implies the risk of losing employment for the mere fact of being a unionist.[[166](#)] There is, moreover, the strike, which a unionist has continually to face; and the grim reality of a

strike is, that the limited credit of a worker's family at the baker's and the pawnbroker's is soon exhausted, the strike-pay goes not far even for food, and hunger is soon written on the children's faces. For one who lives in close contact with workers, a protracted strike is the most heartrending sight; while what a strike meant forty years ago in this country, and still means in all but the

wealthiest parts of the continent, can easily be conceived. Continually, even now, strikes will end with the total ruin and the forced emigration of whole populations, while the shooting down of strikers on the slightest provocation, or even without any provocation,[[167](#)] is quite habitual still on the continent.

And yet, every year there

are thousands of strikes and lock-outs in Europe and America—the most severe and protracted contests being, as a rule, the so-called “sympathy strikes,” which are entered upon to support locked-out comrades or to maintain the rights of the unions. And while a portion of the Press is prone to explain strikes by “intimidation,” those who have lived among strikers speak

with admiration of the mutual aid and support which are constantly practised by them. Every one has heard of the colossal amount of work which was done by volunteer workers for organising relief during the London dock-labourers' strike; of the miners who, after having themselves been idle for many weeks, paid a levy of four shillings a week to the strike fund when

they resumed work; of the miner widow who, during the Yorkshire labour war of 1894, brought her husband's life-savings to the strike-fund; of the last loaf of bread being always shared with neighbours; of the Radstock miners, favoured with larger kitchen-gardens, who invited four hundred Bristol miners to take their share of cabbage and potatoes, and so on. All

newspaper correspondents, during the great strike of miners in Yorkshire in 1894, knew heaps of such facts, although not all of them could report such “irrelevant” matters to their respective papers.[[168](#)]

[...]

Co-operation, especially in Britain, is often described as “joint-stock individualism”; and such as it is now, it

undoubtedly tends to breed a co-operative egotism, not only towards the community at large, but also among the co-operators themselves. It is, nevertheless, certain that at its origin the movement had an essentially mutual-aid character. Even now, its most ardent promoters are persuaded that co-operation leads mankind to a higher harmonic stage of economical

relations, and it is not possible to stay in some of the strongholds of co-operation in the North without realising that the great number of the rank and file hold the same opinion. Most of them would lose interest in the movement if that faith were gone; and it must be owned that within the last few years broader ideals of general welfare and of the producers' solidarity have

begun to be current among the co-operators. There is undoubtedly now a tendency towards establishing better relations between the owners of the co-operative workshops and the workers.

[...]

Conclusion

[...]

It will probably be remarked that mutual aid, even though it

may represent one of the factors of evolution, covers nevertheless one aspect only of human relations; that by the side of this current, powerful though it may be, there is, and always has been, the other current—the self-assertion of the individual, not only in its efforts to attain personal or caste superiority, economical, political, and spiritual, but also in its much more important

although less evident function of breaking through the bonds, always prone to become crystallised, which the tribe, the village community, the city, and the State impose upon the individual. In other words, there is the self-assertion of the individual taken as a progressive element.

It is evident that no review of evolution can be complete, unless these two dominant

currents are analysed. However, the self-assertion of the individual or of groups of individuals, their struggles for superiority, and the conflicts which resulted therefrom, have already been analysed, described, and glorified from time immemorial. In fact, up to the present time, this current alone has received attention from the epical poet, the annalist, the historian, and

the sociologist. History, such as it has hitherto been written, is almost entirely a description of the ways and means by which theocracy, military power, autocracy, and, later on, the richer classes' rule have been promoted, established, and maintained. The struggles between these forces make, in fact, the substance of history. We may thus take the knowledge of the

individual factor in human history as granted—even though there is full room for a new study of the subject on the lines just alluded to; while, on the other side, the mutual-aid factor has been hitherto totally lost sight of; it was simply denied, or even scoffed at, by the writers of the present and past generation. It was therefore necessary to show, first of all, the immense

part which this factor plays in the evolution of both the animal world and human societies. Only after this has been fully recognised will it be possible to proceed to a comparison between the two factors.

[...]

[159](#)[] Toulmin Smith, *English Guilds*, London, 1870, Introd. p. xliii.

[160](#)[] The Act of Edward the Sixth—the first of his reign—ordered to hand over to the Crown “all fraternities, brotherhoods, and guilds being within

the realm of England and Wales and other of the king's dominions; and all manors, lands, tenements, and other hereditaments belonging to them or any of them" (*English Guilds*, Introd. p. xliii). See also Ockenkowski's *Englands wirtschaftliche Entwicklung im Ausgange des Mittelalters*, Jena, 1879, chaps. II–V.

[161](#)[] See Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade-Unionism*, London, 1894, pp. 21–38. [Sidney Webb (1859–1947) and Beatrice Webb (1858–1943) were Fabian socialists and leading theorists of the co-operatives movement. (Editor)]

[162](#)[] See in Sidney Webb's work the associations which existed at that

time. The London artisans are supposed to have never been better organised than in 1810–1820.

[163](#)[] The National Association for the Protection of Labour included about 150 separate unions, which paid high levies, and had a membership of about 100,000. The Builders' Union and the Miners' Unions also were big organisations (Webb, *loc. cit.* p. 107).

[164](#)[] I follow in this Mr. Webb's work, which is replete with documents to confirm his statements.

[165](#)[] Great changes have taken place since the forties in the attitude of the richer classes towards the unions. However, even in the sixties, the employers made a formidable

concerted attempt to crush them by locking out whole populations. Up to 1869 the simple agreement to strike, and the announcement of a strike by placards, to say nothing of picketing, were often punished as intimidation. Only in 1875 the Master and Servant Act was repealed, peaceful picketing was permitted, and “violence and intimidation” during strikes fell into the domain of common law. Yet, even during the dock-labourers’ strike in 1887, relief money had to be spent for fighting before the Courts for the right of picketing, while the prosecutions of the last few years menace once more to render the conquered rights illusory.

[166](#)[] A weekly contribution of 6*d.* out of an 18*s.* wage, or of 1*s.* out of 25*s.*, means much more than 9*l.* out of a 300*l.* income: it is mostly taken upon food, and the levy is soon doubled when a strike is declared in a brother union. The graphic description of trade-union life, by a skilled craftsman, published by Mr. and Mrs. Webb (pp. 431 *seq.*), gives an excellent idea of the amount of work required from a unionist.

[167](#)[] See the debates upon the strikes of Falkenau in Austria before the Austrian Reichstag on the 10th of May 1894, in which the fact is fully recognised by the Ministry and the owner of the colliery. Also the

English Press of that time.

[168](#)[] Many such facts will be found in the *Daily Chronicle* and partly the *Daily News* for October and November 1894.

Politics and Socialism

In this article published in Freedom (February to May 1903), Kropotkin contrasts the dismal results of Marxism on the workers movement to the ideas of revolutionary unionism anarchists have advocated since the First International. It subsequently appeared as a Freedom Press

I

It was in 1871—immediately after the defeat of France by the Germans, and of the Paris proletarians by the French middle classes—that a conference of the International Working Men's Association, secretly convoked [by] Marx and Engels instead of the usual annual Congress and the

composition of which had been cleverly manipulated for the purpose, met at London. This conference decided that the Working Men's Association, which had hitherto been a revolutionary association for organising the international struggle of labour against capitalism, should become henceforward a series of national organisations for running Social-Democratic

candidates in the different Parliaments.

Thirty years have passed since this step was taken. And we can fully appreciate by this time the results of the new tactics.

The main argument in favour of it was that the working men were not prepared to accept the ideas of Socialism: that consequently a long

preparatory period was required in order to spread these ideas: and that—to say nothing of the prestige of Members of Parliament—periods of elections, when everyone's interest in public affairs is awakened, are the best moments for spreading broadcast Socialist ideas.

To this the working men, especially those of France and Spain, replied that the

International Working Men's Association, such as it was, had already been excellent for the propaganda of Socialism. In less than three years it had awakened the conscience of the workers' interests all over Europe: it had done more for the theoretical elaboration of the principles of Socialism, and for the practical application of Socialistic principles, than fifty years of

theoretical discussions. It had immensely contributed to the spreading of the idea of *international* solidarity of interest amongst the workers of all nations, and of an international support of their strikes: of International Labour opposed to International Capitalism. Besides, the strikes, especially when they attain great dimensions and are supported internationally,

awake general attention, and are infinitely better opportunities for spreading broadcast Socialist ideas than electoral meetings, in which, for the very success of the election, Socialists will often be compelled to compromise with the middle classes—"to parliament and to practice" with them. In the struggles for political power Socialism would soon be forgotten—it

was foretold—for some spurious teachings in which Radical political reforms would be mixed up with some palliative legislation in favour of labour, thus creating a confusion in the minds, from which the middle classes only would profit: while palliative laws (hours of labour, compensation for accidents, and so on) might be enforced upon the Parliaments in a

much more effective form if the labour unions took everywhere the great extension which an International propaganda in this direction could give them.

It is for a good reason that we are here re-stating these arguments at such a length. Every one of them has had, within the last thirty years, its full confirmation.

See what has become of theoretical Socialism—not only in this country, but in Germany and Belgium as well—owing to the extension taken by the party which takes part in the elections under the etiquette of Socialism. There is less of it left than there ever was in a Fabian pamphlet. Who speaks now of Socialism, with the exception of the Anarchists, who precisely

therefore are described as Utopians, if not as fools!

In the years 1869–1871, you could not open one single Socialist paper without finding on its very first page this discussion:—Whether we must, and if we must—how shall we expropriate the owners of factories, the mines, the land: Then—and this was especially important—every legislative measure, every

political event was discussed from the point of view, whether it was leading to, or leading away from, the aim in view—the Social Revolution. Of course, everyone was extremely interested in obtaining shorter hours and better wages for every branch of trade; everyone passionately took the part of strikers all over the world: the International was indeed a

permanent international strike
—an international conspiracy,
if you like, for reducing hours,
increasing wages, obtaining
respect for the workers’
freedom, and limiting the
powers of Capital in every
direction. Of course, everyone
was passionately interested,
too, in widening political
liberties, and this is why the
International was frankly anti-
imperialist. But it was also

something else.

It undertook, above all, the spreading of those ideas and the conquest of those rights which neither the old type trade unions nor the political Radicals sufficiently cared for. The labour party, thirty years ago, had *its own special functions*, in addition to Trade-unionism and Radicalism, and these were Socialism—the *preparation of the Social*

Revolution. But where is this now? All gone! What is now described as Socialism—all of them are Socialists now!—is the most incoherent mixture of Trade-unionism, which trusts no more to itself and looks for a John Gorst[[169](#)] to make its business with Toryism (the paternal State to whom you must look for every improvement of your conditions), with State

capitalism (State monopoly of railways, of banks, of the sale of spirits, of education, etc., is preached and fought for by the Socialist party of free Switzerland), with Fabianism—nay, even occasionally with imperialism, when Socialists declare in the German Reichstag that let the State only wage a war, they will all fight as well as the Junkers!

Add to this all sorts of

theories built up with bits of metaphysics for persuading the workers that a Social Revolution is bosh: that Socialism is only good for a hundred years hence. And those who talk about it now are dangerous Utopians: that all capitals must first be concentrated in a few hands—which every intelligent man sees they never will—and that the peasant owners must

disappear, and all become even more miserable than they are now, before Socialism becomes possible. This is what has now taken the place of the distinctly expressed idea: "The land, the mines, the factories, everything that is wanted for living must return to the community, which by local action and free agreement, must organise free communistic life and free

communistic production.”—Is *this* progress?

If the working men of Europe and America had only the so-called Socialist and Social-Democratic parties to rely upon for the triumph of the Socialist idea, the general position would be really desperate. We certainly are the first to recognise that the Social-Democratic party in

Germany is doing excellent *Republican* propaganda, and that, *as a Republican party*, it splendidly undermines the authority of the petulant William.[[170](#)] We gladly acknowledge that the Parliamentary Socialists in France are thorough *Radicals*, and that they do excellent work for the support of radical legislation, thus continuing the work of Clemenceau and

Rank, with the addition of some genuine interest in the working classes: they are *Radicals, sympathetic to the workers*. But who is doing work in the Socialist direction? Who is working for bringing the masses nearer and nearer to the day when they will be able to take hold of all that is needed for living and producing? Who contributes to the spreading of the spirit of

revolt among the slaves of the wage-system?

Surely not the parliamentarian!

There is only one possible reply to this question: it is the labour movement in France, in Spain, in America, in England, in Belgium, and its beginnings in Germany, and the Anarchists everywhere, who, despite all the above-mentioned dampers, despite all

the confusion that is being sown in the ranks of Labour by clever *bourgeoisie*, despite all the propaganda of quietness and all the advice of deserting their fighting brothers; continue the old, good, *direct* fight against the exploiters.

The great and desperate colliers' strike in America has done more to shake the authority of trusts, and to show the way to fight them,

than all the talk in the talking assemblies. The attempts at general strikes in Belgium (despite the opposition of the politicians), at Milan (despite the treason of the leaders), at Barcelona, at Geneva, and in Holland, have done much more for spreading conviction in the necessity of the expropriation of the exploiters than anything that has been said in or out of a parliament

by a parliamentary leader. The refusal of 400 Geneva militia soldiers to join the ranks, and the attitude of those fifteen who have been bold enough to tell the martial Court that they would never join the ranks of their battalions for fighting against their brother workers—such facts of revolt are doing infinitely more for the spreading of true Socialism than anything that has been, or

will ever be, said by those Socialists who seek their inspirations in economical metaphysics. Of course, it is those Anarchists whom the would-be Socialists hate so much for not having followed them in their middle-class “evolution”: of course, it is those blessed Anarchists who have their hand in these labour movements, and go to prison like Bertoni[[171](#)] in Geneva

and scores of our brothers in France and in Spain. Yes, it is true they have a hand in these labour movements, and 8,000 workers on strike in Madrid shouted, the other day: *Long live Anarchism!* This is true. But they are proud to see that the workers trust them more than they trust their gloved “representatives.”

II

We have seen in our last article how Socialism has been circumscribed and minimised since it became the watchword of a political party, instead of as formerly, the popular labour movement. Nowadays, when Socialism is spoken of, all that is meant is: State railways, State monopoly of banks and spirits, perhaps, in a remote future, State mines, and plenty of legislation

intended to slightly protect Labour—without doing the slightest harm to Capitalism—and at the same time bringing Labour as much as possible into a complete submission to the present middle class Government of the State. State arbitration, State control of the Trade Unions, State armies for working the railways and the bakeries in the case of strikes, and like measures in favour of

the capitalists, are, as is known, necessary aspects of “Labour legislation,” in accordance with the well-known programme of Disraeli, John Gorst, *The People*, and like Tory Democrat swindlers.

To understand Socialism, as it was understood thirty years ago,—that is, as a deep revolution which would free man by reconstructing the distribution of wealth,

consumption and production on a new basis,—is now described by the “Neo-Socialists” as sheer nonsense. We have now “scientific Socialism,” and if you would know all about it, read a few “authorised version” pamphlets, in which the guessings which Fourierists, Owenites, and Saint-Simonians used to make sixty years ago concerning the

concentration of capital, the coming self-annihilation of capitalism, and like naive predictions—retold in a far less comprehensible language by Engels and Marx—are represented as so many great scientific discoveries of the German mind. Only, alas, owing to these would-be discoveries, the teaching which formerly, by its Communistic aspirations,

inspired the masses and attracted the best minds of the nineteenth century, has become nothing but a mitigated middle-class State capitalism.

To speak now of the Social Revolution is considered by the “scientific” Socialist a crime. Vote and wait! Don’t trouble about the revolution; revolutions are mere inventions of idle spirits! Only

criminal Anarchists talk of them now. Be quiet, and vote as you are told to. Don't believe these criminals who tell you that owing to the facilities of exploitation of the backward races all over the world, the numbers of capitalists who climb on the necks of the European working man are steadily growing. Trust to the Neo-Socialists, who have proved

that the middle-classes are going to destroy themselves, in virtue of a “Law of self-annihilation,” discovered by their great thinkers. Vote! Greater men than you will tell you the moment when the self-annihilation of capital has been accomplished. They will then expropriate the few usurpers left, who will own everything, and you will be freed without ever having

taken any more trouble than that of writing on a bit of paper the name of the man whom the heads of your fraction of the party told you to vote for!

To such shameful nonsense the politician Socialists have tried to reduce the Great Revolution which calls for the energies of all the lovers of freedom and equality.

And in the meantime reaction tries to take the fullest advantage of these suicidal preachings. It concentrates its forces all over the world. Why should it not? Where is the revolutionary party which might be capable of appealing to the people against its oppressors? And so it takes hold of all the channels of power which the present State provides for the ruling middle

classes.

Look at education! They destroy with a sure and clever hand all that had been done in 1860–1875 for wresting instruction out of the hands of the clergy. Why should they not, when it was the once menacing but now tamed Socialist politicians who have helped at the last election the Conservatives to be so powerful in Parliament? The

School Board teacher had ceased to tell the poor, “Suffer, it’s the will of the creator that you should be poor.” On the contrary, he told them: “Hope; try yourselves to shake off your misery!” The slum mother began to get into the habit of going to the School Board teacher to tell of her needs and sorrows, instead of going to the parson, as she formerly did.—Down then

with the School Boards! And why not? Why should they not dare anything; when they know that it was the Socialists, the politicians who had helped them to win such a power in Parliament! Even in France, where they ostensibly fight to free the schools from the clergy, the best and largest colleges are in the hands of the Jesuits—within a stone's throw of the Chamber of

Deputies. Everywhere the middle class return to religion, everywhere they work to bring the clergyman, with his ignorance and his eternal fire, back to the school—and the working men are told to take no interest in these matters, to *laissez faire* and to study John Gorst's program of paternal State legislation.

There was in the years 1860–1875 a powerfully

destructive force at work—the materialistic philosophy. It produced the wonderful revival of sciences, and led to the wonderful discoveries of the last quarter of a century. It induced men to think. It freed the minds of the workers... “Down, then, with Materialism,” is now the outcry of the middle classes. “Long live metaphysics, long live Hegel, Kant, and the

Dialectic method!” Why not? They know that in this direction, too, the reaction will find no opposition from the Neo-Socialists. They are also dialecticians, Hegelians; they also worship economic metaphysics, as has been so well shown by [Warlaam] Tcherkesoff in his *Pages of Socialist History*.

Happily enough, there is one

element in the present life of Europe and America which has not yielded to political corruption. It is the labour movement, so far as it has hitherto remained foreign to the race for seats in Parliament. It may be that here and there the workers belonging to this movement give support to this or that candidate for a seat in a parliament or in a municipality

but there are already scores of thousands of working men in Spain, in Italy, in France, in Holland, and probably in England too, who quite consciously refuse to take any part, even for fun, in the political struggle. Their main work lies in quite another direction. With an admirable tenacity they organise their unions, within each nation and internationally, and with a still

more admirable ardour they prepare the great coming struggle of Labour against Capital: the coming of the international general strike.

One may judge of the terror which this movement, unostensibly prepared by the workers, inspires in the middle classes, by the terrible prosecutions—which have not stopped even at torture—which they have carried on

against the revolutionary trade unions in Spain.[[172](#)] One may judge of that terror by the infamous repression of the Milan insurrection which was ordered by King Umberto, [[173](#)] or by the measures which were going to be taken against railway strikers in Holland.[[174](#)] These measures, as is known, were prevented by the splendid act of international solidarity

accomplished by the British Dock Labourers' Union, and immediately followed by the menacing declarations of the General Unions of the French Syndicates. It hardly need be said that all the Parliamentary Socialists of France, Germany, Spain, headed by the famous [Alexandre] Millerand and [Jean] Jaurès[[175](#)] (one year ago this last was for the general strike—now he writes

long articles against it), bitterly oppose this idea of a general strike. But the movement spreads every month, and every month it gains new support and wins new sympathies.

III

Our first intention was to conclude this series of articles by a general review of the so-called Labour-protecting

legislation in different countries, and to show how far this legislation is due to the Socialist politicians on the one side, and to the direct pressure exercised by Labour agitation on the other.

Such a study would have been deeply interesting. Not that we should attribute to this legislation more importance than it deserves. We have often proved that any such

law, even if it introduces some partial improvement, always lays upon the worker some new chain, forged by the middle class State. We prefer the ameliorations which have been imposed by the workers upon their masters in a direct struggle: they are less spurious. However, it is also easy to prove that even those little and always poisoned concessions which have been

made by the middle classes to the workers and which are now represented as the very essence of “practical, scientific” Socialism, stand in no relation to the numerical forces of the political Socialist parties. Such concessions as the limitation of the hours of labour, or of child labour, whenever they represent something real have always been achieved by the action of

the trade-unions—by strikes, by labour revolts, or by menaces of labour war. They are labour victories—not political victories.

If there were a work in which the conditions of labour and the recent labour legislation were given for each country, it would have been easy to prove the above assertion by a crushing

evidence of data. But no such work exists, and consequently we have to mention but a few striking facts.

Our readers will see on another page what a substantial reduction of the hours of labour in the mines was achieved by the great miners' strike of Pennsylvania, and, by the way, the effect which the strike has had upon other branches of

American industry. That such hours as twelve hours, every day of the week (including Sundays) should have existed in Pennsylvania, we need not wonder when we are reminded that every year the Eastern States receive thousands of fresh immigrant miners from Germany and Austria, where, notwithstanding the presence of so many Democrat-

Socialists in Parliament, the hours of labour are outrageously long. But precisely because there are no such political go-betweens in the United States the Pennsylvania strike could last long enough to end in a substantial victory for the labourers. The twelve hours' day exists no more in the mines of Pennsylvania.[[176](#)]

The same applies to Britain. All the little victories which the working men have won for the last fifty years were won by the force of their trades unions and not of Socialist politicians. Of course, it would not be fair to compare the conditions of labour in Britain and in Germany; two countries, one of which has no Social-Democratic party in its Parliament, but has a number

strongly organised trade unions, while the other has no less than fifty-three Social-Democratic representatives in the Reichstag, and boasts of two million Social-Democratic electors, but is only just beginning to develop (in opposition to the politicians) its trade-union movement.

It would not be fair to insist upon the incomparably better conditions of labour in this

country, because the labour movement and industry itself are so much older in England. But still we can ask, what results have numerous Social-Democratic deputies obtained from Parliament for the protection and personal emancipation of the labourer in Germany? The nullity of such results is simply striking, especially in comparison with the promises which have been

made, and the hopes which were cherished by many sincere working men.

Everyone remembers the Eight Hours' Day Movement which was started in Europe in 1889–90. Beginning at Chicago, in 1887, where it cost the lives of five of our best Anarchist brothers, it came to Europe in the shape of a First of May demonstration—a sort of one-

day general strike of all working men which had to be made for the propaganda of an eight hours' day. The enthusiasm of the first demonstration in Hyde Park on 1st May 1890, must be fresh in the minds of many, and by this time we surely would have been in a fair way towards the realisation of that demand, were it not for the political Socialists who saw in

the eight hours' movement a plank to step on for getting into Parliament, and did their best to nip the movement in the bud.

The attitude of the German Socialist politicians at the time was most typical. They were in mortal fear lest the eight hours' movement should become a labour movement, over which they would have no control; they hated the very

idea of a general strike for the purpose of reducing the hours of labour, and they hammered into the workers' heads, "legal eight hours! legal eight hours!" They said, "Only vote for us, and for those whom we shall recommend to you! Discipline! And then you will see. In 1891 you will have the eleven hours' day, in such a year a ten hours' day, then a nine hour's day, and in 1903 you will have

the eight hours' day, without having all the troubles and the sufferings of the strikes." This is what Engels and Liebknecht promised them and printed plainly in their papers.

Well, up to now they have not yet *got* even the nine hours' day and the weekly half-holiday!... in Russia, the despotic Government of the Tsar, under the pressure of strikes, has passed directly

from a thirteen and fourteen hours' working day to one of eleven hours', even though it still treats strikes as rebellions... But where is the eight hours' law in Germany? As distant in the future as it is in Russia! Much more distant, at any rate, than it is in Spain, which has only a handful of impotent Social-Democrats in Madrid, but has, in return, powerful labour organisations

in all its leading industries.

Spain is especially instructive on this account. Since the times of the foundation of the International, it has had strong labour organisations in Catalonia, keeping in close touch with the Anarchists, and always ready to support their demands by strikes, and sometimes by revolts. Everyone remembers, of

course, the continual strikes—labour wars would even be more correct—which took place so many times at Barcelona, the desperate measures to which the Government resorted against the Catalonian working men during the Montjuich tortures, and the latest attempts at a general strike.

Now, the result of all this is that the eight hours' day has

been fought for long since (more than ten years ago) and introduced in all the building trades of Barcelona, and although it was lost during the Montjuich prosecutions, it was recovered again two years ago, and is nearly general now in these and several other trades. Moreover we have read during the past few days in the daily telegrams that in Aragon the nine hours' day,

now in force there, is to undergo a further reduction. Does it not compare favourably with the promised *legal* nine hours' day in Germany?

Happily enough, the German workers begin to lose faith in the promises of the politicians. Their trade unions, which were formerly so bitterly opposed by the Marxists, are meekly courted by them now,

since they number over 1,000,000 men (this is the figure given by the *Reformer's Year Book*), and they seem to be so little under the influence of the Social-Democratic leaders that, after all they have heard from them about the uselessness of strikes and the wickedness of a general strike, they sent the other day their hearty congratulations and promises of support to their

Dutch brothers who had proclaimed the general strike in Holland. As to the intellectual and social movement which is going on in connection with the more advanced trade unions in Germany, it seems to be a subject of deep interest.

Striking facts could be mentioned from the labour history of France to show how

the young labour organisations, the strikes, and the labour revolts were instrumental in wresting from the middle class rulers a number of concessions; but space forbids us to mention more than one fact.

Up to 1883, trade unions and all sorts of associations of more than nineteen persons were strictly forbidden in France. Only in 1883, the

restriction was abolished by the law of the syndicates, and from that time began the present labour movement, the agricultural syndicates (1,300,000 members now), the Labour Exchanges, and the rest. And if you ask any politician, What induced, in 1883, the Opportunist Ministry to take this far-reaching step? you will be told that it was the Anarchist movement at Lyon

(for which fifty of us were imprisoned in 1882), the unemployed processions in Paris under the black flag, during one of which Louise Michel “pillaged” a baker’s shop,[\[177\]](#) and perhaps above all that, the secret labour organisations which sprang up and rapidly spread among the miners of Montceau-les-Mines and in all the mining basin, and resulted in a series of

explosions. Guesde and his friends, at that time, were still most hopelessly putting forward their candidatures after each strike.

The conclusion is self-evident. We saw what results Socialist politics have given for theoretical propaganda. Just as the name of “Republic,” which formerly meant social equality, after it was taken up

by middle class politicians, was gradually deprived by them of its social meaning, and was shaped into a sort of middle class rule, so also the word “Socialism” has become in the hands of the Socialist politicians the preaching of some sort of mitigated middle class exploitation. They are all Socialists now, but Socialism is gone, and the most confused ideas prevail now among the

Social-Democrats concerning the sense of this great war-cry of the workers.

And now we find that although parliamentary action has always been represented as the means for obtaining small concessions to the advantage of the worker, these concessions, however insignificant they may be, have been won, all of them, by strikes (such as the match

girls', the miners', the dock labourers', and so on), and by the standing menace of still more serious labour wars. The presence of a number of more or less Socialistic deputies in parliament does not, it appears now, dispense the working man in the least maintaining his trade organisations in full mental and material readiness for war. On the contrary, it is only by the constant menace

of a declaration of war, and by real war—and in proportion to this readiness—that the workers have won any victories; while the tactics of the politicians have always been to weaken the anti-capitalist labour organisations, under the pretext of political concentration and discipline. As to this country, by their abominable tactics, prompted by Engels and Marx, of

arraying at election times all their forces against the Radicals and the Liberals, which was equal to supporting the Conservatives, they have done their best to pave the way for the present Imperialism, and they have got their heavy share of responsibility for the heavy blows which the Conservative Government has struck lately at the security of the labour

organisations. It is never too late to mend, but it takes some time to mend the harm that has been done by mistaken politicians.

[169](#)[] John Gorst (1835–1916) was a British Conservative politician and Vice-President of the Committee on Education (1895–1902). He was one of many leading Conservatives who attacked local school boards after anger from the Church (its schools were being overtaken by board schools funded by ratepayers). He played a key role in ensuring that the boards could not fund anything but

elementary schools and their abolition by the 1902 Education Act (which replaced them by all-embracing local education authorities and the provision of public cash for church schools). (Editor)

[170](#)[] A reference to Kaiser Wilhelm II, ruler of the German Empire. (Editor)

[171](#)[] Luigi Bertoni (1872–1947) was a Swiss-Italian typesetter, printer and anarchist. Editor of the bilingual *Le Réveille-Il Risveglio* (*Awakening*) between 1900 and 1947. (Editor)

[172](#)[] A reference to the Montjuich tortures of 1897 (see glossary). (Editor)

[173](#)[] A series of “bread and work” riots broke out across Italy in 1898,

climaxing with a general strike and street fighting in Milan in early May. The army proclaimed martial law and opened fire, killing 118 civilians and wounding 450 (according to official figures). The Italian King Umberto I (1844–1900) decorated and publicly praised General Bava-Beccaris, the military officer in charge during the massacre. In July 1900, anarchist Gaetano Bresci (1869–1901) returned to Italy from America and assassinated the King in revenge. While Bresci's act is remembered and used as evidence of anarchism's "violent" nature, no such conclusions are drawn about the State's far less well known actions. (Editor)

[174](#)[] March 1903 saw workers employed in State-owned industries come out in support of striking dock workers. The transport workers were subsequently threatened with anti-strike legislation. (Editor)

[175](#)[] Auguste Marie Joseph Jean Léon Jaurès (1859–1914) was a French Socialist. One of the first social democrats in France, in 1902 he became the leader of the French Socialist Party. A gradualist reformist, he believed that socialists should work to change the system from within and urged cooperation with bourgeois parties. He approved of socialist Alexandre Millerand joining the René Waldeck-Rousseau

cabinet. (Editor)

[176](#)[] The Pennsylvania strike lasted five months and involved 147,000 miners. It was a huge victory, ensuring union recognition, an eight hour day and a 10% pay increase. It also ended the employment of little girls (some as young as 10) in the mines. (Editor)

[177](#)[] Louise Michel (1830–1905) was a French anarchist, Communard and school teacher. An active participant in the Paris Commune of 1871, she was arrested and at her trial defied the court and dared the judges to sentence her to death. After spending twenty months in prison, she was sentenced to deportation in New

Caledonia. After an amnesty was granted to the Communards, she returned to France in 1880 and became an active member of the anarchist movement. Instrumental in getting anarchists to embrace the black flag as their symbol, she raised it in an unemployed demonstration in Paris, on 9th March 1883. (Editor)

Trade Unionism and Parliamentarism

Translation by Paul
Sharkey

*This article from Les Temps
Nouveaux (13th October
1906) sees Kropotkin
discussing how Marxist Social
Democracy came to recognise
the importance of militant
trades unionism. He indicates*

*how unions, created as a
means of fighting
exploitation, could be the
building blocks of a socialist
economy.*

The wire service brings us news of an important decision that has just been taken by the German Social Democratic Party at its recent congress in Mannheim. But first, the telegraph from the Reuter Agency, *verbatim*: “Then, by

386 votes to 65, the Congress passed the second part of the resolution, which states that the trades unions (syndicates) are *indispensable* organisations if the social conditions of the working class are to be improved, and that *they are no less indispensable than the Social Democratic Party itself*. As a result, it is often vital to the two organisations that they should

act in concert with one another in their struggle. In order to make sure of this unity of thought and deed, it is declared an absolute necessity that the trade union movement should be imbued with the spirit of social democracy.”

There we have it then; the German Social Democratic Party, which has over many long years—as we have attested here—fought against

the independent organisation of trades, which, in the past, declared that it was useless in comparison with Social Democracy, and which for a long time sought to absorb it, has been obliged to concede the “indispensable necessity” of a powerful trade union organisation *flanking the Social Democratic Party*. It even goes so far as to state that trade union organisation is

every bit as “indispensable as the Social Democratic Party itself.”

It is also added that it is absolutely necessary that the trade union movement should be “*imbued* with the spirit of social democracy,” but that is merely a pious wish: besides, that wish is a far cry from the ambitions of earlier times, which were, initially, to absorb the trade union organisation,

or at least to direct it with a conductor's baton. This is understandable, for even though the trade union organisation in Germany may be ultra-moderate—and this was plain enough from its resolution at the Cologne Congress—it refused to let itself be governed by the parliamentary leaders of Social Democracy. Some trade unions are inspired by the

authoritarian, parliamentary socialists; some are imbued with a bourgeois spirit; finally, some are independent unions that hate the bosses and stand ready to fight them tooth and nail on the economic terrain. But all three types have been established entirely separately from the socialist politicians. Of late their numbers have swollen vastly—in Germany like everywhere else—and the

latest figures speak of about a million unionised workers in Germany, organised outside of the political parties. These are the million men whose right to exist the Social Democratic leaders have at last acknowledged. They ask only of them that they let themselves be absorbed by the political organisation: they end up conceding that the trade union organisation *must*

remain *separate and independent of the political organisation.* All they ask of them now is that they “act in concert with one another in their *struggle*”—and collaborate when the occasion arises.

This is plainly the best means—the only means—of establishing *effective collaboration* in place of the frictions that persisted as long

as the leaders of Social Democracy sought to conquer the trade unions and lay down the law to them.

But there is more. The same phenomenon is being repeated everywhere. The workers are noticing that they were on the wrong road when they allowed the social democratic politicians to seize their professional organisations[[178](#)] and make

of them a weapon in the parliamentary struggle.

The fundamental idea of the French and English workers when they first came together in 1864 to found the International Working Men's Association, had been to constitute a formidable workers' force that might impose its will on the managers of industry and extract from them, first,

improved working conditions—better pay, reductions in working hours, healthier factories, less dangerous machinery, and so on—but also,—ultimately, wrest the very organisation of industry from their hands.

For make no mistake about it. Way back in 1830, when Robert Owen founded the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union in England

(aiming even then for it to become international), the idea was already emerging among the English workers to make their unions more than merely a tool for bettering wages. They must, of necessity, become *bodies that would, one day, take the entire organisation of each branch of industry into their hands.* That was Owen's fundamental idea.

From 1830 onwards, the English workers pursued that plan. When they drew up the unprecedentedly complex tables governing the entire wages scale in the many branches of weaving—they were, so to speak, organising the weaving industry. To date those tables, painstakingly revised from year to year, have governed that industry.

When the English miners

agreed to the sliding scale—*l'échelle mobile*—for wages, which hinges upon the sale prices of the various types of coal, they were behaving as, so to speak, co-managers, co-partners [*co-partageants*], of the mining industry. They were taking the first step towards becoming co-owners.

And this idea has never been abandoned by the English trade unionists.

When they got together in 1864 with the (Proudhonian) French mutualists in order to lay the foundations of the International, their central idea was,—as a first step, to build up a force capable of imposing better working conditions on the bosses, but also—indeed primarily—to create among the working classes the union structures that might some day replace the bosses and take

into their own hands the production and management of every industry.

It took all the might of the bourgeoisie descending upon the International; it took the defeat of France [in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871] and the impossibility, for the French, of membership in the International; finally, it took the entire statist and parliamentary infatuation of

the Germans as they learned the rudiments of socialism and, sad to relate, the spirit of intrigue of Engels and Marx, in order to replace the core idea of the International, the trade union idea, with another notion: that of making the workers' unions into a machine for winning Social Democrat seats in parliament.

In short, it took an enormous sleight-of-hand, substituting

Social Democracy for Socialism.

Parliamentary Social Democracy has been tried out pretty much everywhere over the last thirty years. Pretty much everywhere an attempt has been made by political Social Democracy to destroy the trade union movement, to hinder it, then dominate it. It was actually looking as if it had succeeded in this. But just

when it was thought that it had succeeded—lo and behold, the workers' movement of the old French-English International of 1864 reappears. The trades unions are raising their heads again: they are reorganising and expanding everywhere and are everywhere shrugging off the tutelage of the politicians.

This is natural. Each of them pursues a different goal.

German Social Democracy wants *government socialism*, “*every man a functionary*” as [Paul] Brousse puts it, or, to put it another way, *government capitalism*, of which the state-owned railways offer us a foretaste. Meanwhile, the trade unions, which trace their origins back to Owen’s movement, to the French socialists and to the International of 1864–1871,

pursue a quite different goal. Their idea is to discover a *means for the workers, organised by trades, to seize all branches of industry*, and to prepare the means whereby they themselves can *manage* these industries for the benefit of society.

That idea, which some have sought to kill off so as to replace it with the notion of State capitalism, lives on in the

masses of the English trade unions, even though the workers may be loath to voice their thoughts in the face of all the cant they hear about self-styled scientific socialism.

But ever since the great dock strike [of 1889] in London raised some hope, the English workers openly expressed the idea of the docks' being seized by the Dockers' Union and the

General Labourers' Union managing their operation.

Furthermore, the English Co-operative Union wrote me one day: “Comrade, could you not provide us with a detailed article about how railway workers’ unions might run the entire British rail network themselves, *without the State’s laying hands on the railways?*”

That was where their eyes

were directed. Not at the system of [Count Sergei] Witte or the king of Italy, which vests ownership in the State and makes the State the manager of the transportation industry, but all the workers, engineers, stokers, etc., *managing that industry themselves.*

And they are right. *This is the future.* For it is not going to be the ministers but rather the

workers themselves who will see to the honest management of industry.

So the needs of the moment, the demands of the everyday battle between the worker and the boss, the thousand-fold clashes of this hidden fight that the workers must wage in every workshop, every factory, every mine are so plain to be seen that there cannot be the slightest doubt

as to the utter necessity for workers' unions completely independent of the political parties, socialist or otherwise. Each worker realises this on a daily basis. He knows it. Just let the trades unions falter tomorrow, and the gains made will again be subject to the whim of the bosses.

But there is also an anticipation of the needs of the immediate future. One way or

another, socialisation of the means of production is in the cards. Everyone can sense that it is coming. And each worker will understand that none but the workers themselves can handle the management of industries on the day we begin to socialise them. So how could the immense task of all the preparatory work be left to writers and lawyers and bourgeois, even should these

be guided by the best of intentions?

The emancipation of the workers must be the workers' own doing; that much is recognised. But the environment in which that liberation will be conducted should also be the environment of the workers themselves.

[178](#)[] Given that the Russian for trade unions is professional unions it is obvious he is referring to trade unions here. (Editor)

Letter to *The Voice of Labour*

This letter to the syndicalist newspaper The Voice of Labour (9th February 1907) sees Kropotkin stressing the importance of a revolutionary labour movement. He places developments in Britain into an international context.

Dear Friends,
To my great regret I am again

in bed and cannot be present tomorrow at the *Voice of Labour* meeting. I am the more sorry for it, as I wanted to tell you why my warmest greetings and hopes go to the new paper, founded by our English comrades.

The free organisation of Labour, independent of all Parliamentary parties, and aiming at the DIRECT solution—by the working men

themselves, and through their own Unions—of the immense social problem which now stands before civilised mankind, such a Labour organisation, wide and powerful, has become the necessity of the moment.

This is why the same idea which prevailed in 1830 at the foundation of the Great [Grand National Consolidated] Trades' Union of Robert

Owen, in “the [International] Working Men’s Association” of the sixties, has again been revived in France, in Switzerland, in Spain (where it survived all prosecutions), and now it grows even in Germany. The working men realise the great mistake they committed when they substituted Parliamentary politics for the Direct Action of the Labour organisations in

enforcing their demands upon the land and capital owning classes. And the working men of all these countries return once more to that type of Labour organisation which was formed for a direct pressure in the Socialist direction upon landlordism and capitalism in these isles at three different periods during the last hundred years. Labour returns to it, after having lost

forty years in trying to use in its service the various forms of advanced parties in Parliament, and ascertained that this was a failure. They don't turn their backs on Radicalism, but while they see in it a weapon to oppose Toryism in politics, they will have their own weapon to fight capitalism.

The English *Voice of Labour* is thus a sign of movement

which is going on all over Europe, and our English paper will take its place by the side of the series of French, Swiss, and Spanish Syndicalist and Labour papers, bearing the same, or very similar names.

A fortnight ago I saw in Paris several of the active members of the great Labour movement, and on all sides I saw the greatest hopes being based on that new force which is known

as the Revolutionary Syndicalist movement.

All the active energies of the young generation go to it. This movement has certainly its dangers, but one thing is certain. If such a movement had attained a serious development at the time when the Chartist agitation began in this country, or when the Revolution of 1848 broke out in France, both movements

would not have ended as fruitlessly as they did—in France, in fantastical “National workshops” which drove the Paris proletarians to despair and ended in the June massacres; and in this country in the supremacy of the middle classes and the postponement of social reforms for generations to come.

The whole history of Europe would have taken a different

turn if the proletarians had come then to the definite idea of a direct action through their own Unions for the solution of the great problem of labour and supply.

Let us greet, then, this new movement which permits the workers to work out themselves the main lines upon which the emancipation of Labour will have to be accomplished.

Let us hope, also, that the *Voice of Labour*, finding an echo amongst the British working men, will accomplish its part of the great work that devolves upon us.

Yours fraternally,
P. Kropotkin
Bromley, Kent Feb. 1

Anarchists and Trade Unions

This article from Freedom (June 1907) sees Kropotkin summarising his views on anarchist participation in the labour movement. It was originally published in Les Temps Nouveaux (May 1907) as part of a discussion on anarchism and trade unionism. Kropotkin

*reproduces a draft of a letter
he had sent to one of his
opponents in the debate
(Lagardelle) to dispel false
impressions being raised
against him (namely that he
had attacked trade unionism)
before expanding on anarchist
activity in trade unions. All
notes by Kropotkin were
added after he wrote the letter
in 1898.*

Dear Comrades

I had agreed to write a preface to our pamphlet, *Anarchists and Syndicates*, before having read it; now, after reading it, I see that I should have to write, not a preface, but a criticism, and a very plain-spoken one, upon certain facts.

Instead of limiting themselves to arguments which might be adduced in favour of taking a more active part in Trade Union work, the

authors have set forth general ideas on Anarchy that I cannot agree with, and besides they have subjected those who differ from them to little pin-pricks which I do not approve of.

The conception of Anarchy that existed in the Collectivist and Federalist International is certainly not that of present-day comrades, and not mine (page 10). An entire evolution

has taken place during the last thirty years—a retrogression, some will perhaps say—a forward movement, according to my opinion. Between the *Idée[s] sur l'organisation sociale* of the Jura Federation, and *La Société Nouvelle*, *La Conquête du Pain*, etc.,[\[179\]](#) there is a whole generation which, to my mind, has neither trod the same ground nor gone back, and which

would have been welcomed by Bakunin himself had he lived in our time.[[180](#)]

The conception “Anarchist because Communist” *is your own*. Well, it has perhaps the advantage of making Communism the more important; but at least admit that it is not shared by a great number of Anarchists; that for many liberty is as dear as bread—I am one of

those[[181](#)]*—*that there are many who call themselves Anarchists *although* Communists, and that there are absolutely sincere comrades who believe Communism and Anarchism to be incompatible, which in no wise hinders many of them thinking there is much to be done in Trade Unions.[[182](#)]

In the third part of your pamphlet you allow yourself to

be carried away so far by your argument that you make several assertions which you would find it difficult to prove. No doubt on entering a Trade Union an Anarchist makes a concession—just as he does when he goes to register the name of his newspaper, or when he asks for permission to hold a meeting in Trafalgar Square; even when he signs the lease of his lodging or of

his co-operative farm, or when he allows himself to be handcuffed without retaliating with his fists. To style “ideologists” those who demonstrate that there is a concession is neither just nor justifiable. Without these ideologists you would be flogged in prison, as is still the custom in England.

On entering a Trade Union you make a concession, and

when you say that the concession is less than is generally believed, you are right; but let us not deny that it is a concession, like those mentioned above (asking for authorisation, lease, handcuffs), which make us hate the present system the more.

On entering a Trade Union you are certainly carried away by your surroundings, as in

Parliament,[\[183\]](#) only 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.

If Trade Unions set up a Social Democratic hierarchy, we could not enter them before having demolished it.

In short, there is enough for Anarchists to say about the

use of endeavouring to wrest Trade Unions from dabblers in politics, and to inspire them with broader and more revolutionary ideas, without striving, for all that, to limit their possibility of action to those who have their own special conception of Anarchism. I know Anarchists of *all* shades who have taken part in workmen's Unions. Once they work at a trade, it

is natural that they should associate themselves with comrades in the factory, without asking whether they understand Socialism or Anarchism in a particular way. That has nothing to do with the case.

Here, at page 8, my original letter ends, Probably I should not have added much to it. As to the date, I had written on

this rough copy: “Trade Unions and Anarchists. April 1898.”

Now that I have answered M. Lagardelle’s little insinuation, I shall take it upon myself to ask him a question. Was there nothing more interesting to say about Trade Unionism than to talk of this letter? Is he reduced to this? Supposing I had been a rabid enemy of Trade Unionism—

would this in any way have altered the relation between Anarchy and the Trade Union movement? Are they only *personal* relations? And would it not be precisely the duty of a man who pretends to be scientific, to study the relations between Anarchist ideas and those of the French Syndicalism?

And lastly, if M. Lagardelle absolutely wished to speak of

my ideas on the Labour movement, had he not, if it really interested him, my articles in *Le Révolté*, *La Révolte*, and *Les Temps Nouveaux*? (As I am not French, they can easily be recognised by their style). In perusing these papers between the years 1886–1898, I find one or two articles in each number during times of Trade Union struggles—leading

articles and notes on the Labour movement—in which I always return to the same ideas:

Workmen's organisations are the real force capable of accomplishing the social revolution—after the awakening of the proletariat has been accomplished, first by individual action, then by collective action, by strikes and revolts extending more and more; and where

workmen's organisations have not allowed themselves to be dominated by the gentlemen who advocate "the conquest of political power," but have continued to walk hand in hand with anarchists—as they have done in Spain—they have obtained, on the one hand, immediate results (an eight-hour day in certain trades in Catalonia), and on the other have made good propaganda

for the social revolution—the one to come, not from the efforts of those highly-placed gentlemen, but from below, from workmen's organisations.

I have perhaps annoyed my readers by returning too often to this subject, but I now ask myself if it would not be useful to make a selection of these articles and publish them in a volume. What is most important is, that if we consult

the collection of newspapers that followed the *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne* and *L'Avant-Garde*[[184](#)] till the *Temps Nouveaux*, we see that the anarchists have always believed that the working class movement—organised in each trade for the *direct conflict* with Capital (today in France it is called Syndicalism and “direct action”) constitutes, true strength, and is capable of

leading up to the Social Revolution and *realising* it, by the transformation based on equal rights of consumable commodities and production. Those of us who have believed in this during the last thirty-five years have simply remained faithful to the original ideas of the International, as it was conceived in 1864 by the French (*in opposition to* Marx

and Engels), and such as was always applied in Catalonia, in the Bernese Jura, in Eastern Belgium, and partly in Italy. The International was a great Syndicalist movement which determined everything that these gentlemen give out that they have discovered in Syndicalism.

We Anarchists do not pretend to have discovered a new idea or a new religion.

We say we have simply remained faithful to the practical idea that inspired the third awakening of the French proletariat and of the Latin proletariat in general. We have refused to associate ourselves with the juggling away of this idea, which was done by Germans and a few French Jacobins at the Hague Congress in 1872, when, profiting by defeat of the

French proletariat, they tried to cause the International to deviate from its economic struggle, and to drive it into conquering governing power in the bourgeois State. And now that the proletariat, disgusted with Parliamentary Social Democracy, returns to the old idea of direct international conflict against Capital, and that some gentlemen are again endeavouring to divert this

movement, so as to make of it their political stepping-stone, we shall oppose them as we opposed their forerunners, so as to always uphold the same idea: *The enfranchisement of the proletariat by direct and aggressive action against the exploiters.*

[179](#)[] James Guillaume's *Idées sur l'organisation sociale* (1876) has been translated as "On Building the New Social Order" in *Bakunin on Anarchism* (Black Rose Books, 1980); *La Société Nouvelle* was an

anarchist periodical published in Brussels between 1884 and 1896; Kropotkin's *La Conquête du Pain* had been translated into English as *The Conquest of Bread* the previous year. (Editor)

[180](#)[] Today we have a clearer understanding of the necessity of *immediate expropriation* and the necessity of *Communism*.

[181](#)[] I must remind you of the numberless strikes for man's *rights*. They are in general the most bitter, a fact I have often mentioned in my articles on the labour movement.

[182](#)[] The readers of Freedom know that this opinion was based upon a misunderstanding, consisting in the

belief that Communism must be authoritarian. To dispel this false prejudice, and to show that, on the contrary, Anarchism is only possible under Communism, and Communism will only be possible when it is Anarchistic, we have devoted a good deal of our energies since the year 1880, when the Italian and the Jura Federations of the International declared themselves Anarchist-Communists.

[183](#)[] Look at England. Forty years ago Trade Unions were fighting organisations. When they became rich, protected by the Government, and flattered by the Royal Family, they lost their combativeness. The

workers often complain of the bourgeois proclivities of their army of functionaries—like the Social Democratic workmen in Germany.

[184](#)[] The *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne*, house organ of the Jura Federation, was published from 1872–1878; its successor, *L'Avant-Garde*, ran just through December of 1878. (Editor)

1886–1907:

**Glimpses into the
Labour Movement
in this Country**

*This article from Freedom
(October 1907) sees
Kropotkin looking back at his
time in Britain and the
development of its labour
movement over that time. It is
significant for his comments*

*on anarchists having
advocated syndicalist tactics
in the First International and
the negative impact of
parliamentarism on the
workers movement, themes he
expressed on many occasions.*

Looking through the files of
Freedom, since its first
appearance in October 1886,
till the present date, we gather
through it the whole history of
the Labour movement in this

country for the last twenty-one years.

A history full of meaning and of lessons for the future. For we see in it how a movement, full of a youthful revolutionary energy, of great ideals and broad conceptions, and full of promises of a complete renovation of society, was brought, step by step, by its own faults, to abandon all these ideals and to become

what it is now,—an occasional patching up, by means of bureaucratic Parliamentary legislation, of a few of the most crying injustices from which Labour is suffering; a picking up, out of the masses of the workers, of the few of those who render themselves acceptable to the bourgeoisie and are taken into its ranks; a truce between the representatives of the

exploited workers and the exploiters, on the understanding that both of them shall exploit, for their common benefit, the black and the yellow races, and both shall share, more or less, in the toll levied by England upon the industrially backward nations.

Compromise all round. A science worked out to support compromise. Socialism

brushed aside, and Social Democracy slipped instead; which means submissive acceptance by the working men of the capitalist exploitation, with but a few limitations conceded from time to time by a capitalist Legislature against some of its most offensive forms.

To tell the history of the degradation of a great and mighty movement, and to tell

how the Anarchists and their English organ, *Freedom*, endeavoured to oppose that degradation, would require, of course, more than a few columns. Therefore, we shall limit ourselves to a few broad outlines.

In 1886, the year when *Freedom* was founded, a most enthusiastic Socialist movement was going on in this country. It was a *Socialist*—

not a Social Democratic—
movement, whose ideal was
that of a society entirely
reconstructed on the basis of a
social revolution: the working
men's organisations entering in
possession of all that is
necessary for the production
of wealth—the land, the
mines, the railways, the
factories—and working them
in the interests of the
community.

A severe industrial crisis which had broken out in 1886, throwing out of employment great numbers of workers, both skilled and unskilled, contributed to render the movement still more acute. A small riot even took place in London, when, after a Trafalgar Square meeting, a crowd rushed towards Regent Street, breaking a few windows in the shops, and

compelling the smart ladies to alight from their carriages. [[185](#)]

Contrary to what is currently said about the British workers, they received with eagerness, all over the country, the teachings of Socialism. Their only doubts were as to how to organise production when it would be wrested from the hands of the capitalists. State ownership of factories, mines,

and so on, which the Marxist Social Democrats began to preach, did not appeal to the British workers as it appealed to the Germans. Benevolent Caesarism, State capitalism, State ownership of industries, and paternal Government Socialism, such as was patronised by Tory Democrats, did not find much response with the British working men, who had been

educated in the ideas of Robert Owen and his followers; and they eagerly looked for some such solution of the social question as would tend to transmit the socialised instruments of production into the hands of the organised working men themselves. Even till now this idea is still alive with them, and this makes the weakness of Social Democracy and the

intellectual force of Anarchism in England.

Those of us who, on our lecturing tours, came into close contact with the working men masses in the provinces, felt strongly the existence of such a need, and *Freedom* did its best to answer to it. Unfortunately, in the whole English Socialist movement of those years there was no one who was sufficiently familiar

with the immense English Socialist literature of the Owenite times, so as to bring the teachings of the modern Socialists into direct connection with the ideas advocated by Godwin, Robert Owen, and later on by British Socialists and Anarchists in the thirties and the forties. This was especially regrettable in our case, as it would have been so easy to show the

relation of our Anarchist Communism with the ideas of our British forefathers, and to resume their traditions, especially in all matters concerning the land question and agriculture.

The movement had already divided by that time into three main sections: the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League, and the

Fabians. But the Social Democratic Federation, up to 1889, remained a revolutionary body. It organised large popular demonstrations which found a wide response in the poorest masses. All the language of its speakers was revolutionary; and when Hyndman[[186](#)] once asked me what I thought of the Federation, I could but answer him: “Very good!

because—mark it—you are yet scores of miles away from Parliament; but the day that you shall approach it within a measurable distance, that day your party will become as noxious for the revolutionary movement, and as insignificant for Socialism, as German Social Democracy already is.”

However, at that time the British Social Democrats took a revolutionary attitude, and in

1887, when we held meetings in favour of our condemned Chicago Anarchist brothers, the Social Democratic speakers by our side used the same language as we did. They did the same at our Commune celebrations, which brought us all together—they were miles away then from Parliament.

The change came in 1889 and in 1890. A striking and a

sudden change.

After some preparatory work, accomplished chiefly by Socialists, amongst the dock labourers of London, and by several Irishmen amongst the dockers of Scotland, there broke out the great strike in the London docks.

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

General Strike.

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

Another lesson of this strike was—in showing the powers of the working men for organising the supply and

distribution of food for a large population of strikers. The demonstration was quite conclusive.

But a third lesson, too, was deduced from the Dockers' Strike by the Labour and Socialist politicians. Some of the Socialists, especially Burns and Tillet,[\[187\]](#) were brought by it into prominence, and Burns could reckon with certainty upon being elected to

Parliament at the next election in his constituency of Battersea—with the support, of course, of the Liberal middle classes, who at once appreciated his organising capacities, his “love of order,” and especially his “moderation.” Burns prepared then for his election.

This was the beginning of the decay of the whole Socialist movement in this

country. The candidature of Burns provoked the first real split in the Social Democratic Federation, soon followed by other splits,—and the whole tone of the movement suddenly went down. Petty electoral considerations took the place of the outspoken revolutionary language of the previous years. To preach revolution became a crime. To speak of Socialism pure and

simple was to indulge in Utopias. A reduction of the hours of labour and “Labour legislation” became quite sufficient topics of discussion. Social Democracy—that is, a compromise with the middle classes for sharing political power with them in a middle-class State—took the place of Socialism.

In the meantime the middle classes rallied. When the first

fears inspired in them by the Labour movement were over, they perceived the weak point of its armour. It was Parliamentarism. And into that weak point of the armour they thrust their poisoned weapon.

They went on saying to the workers: “What, are you talking of revolution! Leave that to the hungry Frenchies! How could we live, thirty millions of us, on the produce

of our small islands? We have something better than that to do: we have to achieve the industrial and capitalistic conquest of the world! See, we gave a mere trifle of money as a loan to Egypt, and now all the country is ours! See, the millions we get therefrom in the shape of interest for moneys which we never lent otherwise than in the shape of imaginary

transfers on paper in our banks! And you, fools, talk of a revolution! Go to Egypt as our functionaries, save there—and we shall see we get an equally profitable use for your savings. Come to help us in the conquest of new countries in Africa and Asia. Send a few of yours to share with us the government of the masses.” And they consolidated in the meantime under the name of a

Unionist Party their Imperialist battalions, and spent extravagant sums of money in fostering Imperialism by every possible means. And they succeeded in thus bribing the better-to-do portion of the working men.

The first symptoms of the coming change were seen at the famous demonstration of 1890, when the poorest masses of the East End

marched to the West End, to show their poverty and to demonstrate and muster their forces. It was the Trade Unionists who undertook to marshal that demonstration and to maintain “order.” And one could see then, how, immediately after that demonstration, which separated the “moderate” and better-off Trade Unionists from the poorer masses, the whole

Socialist movement felt the effect of cold water thrown upon it. *Freedom* at that time recognised perfectly well these facts and their result.

And when, in the year 1890, the First of May movement reached this country, and the workers rushed in their hundreds of thousands to the First of May demonstration, with the hope of bringing out in this way a General Strike

and obtaining a great victory, cold water was again thrown on their enthusiasm by their leaders, who came to say: “No General Strike! A General Strike is general nonsense! Send *us* to Parliament, and we shall get you in due time *the Legal Eight Hours!*” *Freedom* fiercely combated that policy; but the force was theirs; they won the day—and they buried the Eight Hour movement.

Then came the disturbed years of 1890–1895. The furious prosecutions directed against the Anarchists in France and Spain brought about retaliation. The most violent means had to be resorted to by the Anarchists in order to conquer the very right to live and to work, without being hunted down by the police from spot to spot

like so many outlaws.

In this country the struggle never attained the violence it had attained in France and Spain. But even here we have had—in 1892–94—the abominable condemnation of the Walsall comrades for a plot hatched by the Scotland Yard agents, the prosecution of the *Commonweal* in 1892, the prosecution of our friend Cantwell for an open-air

speech, and so on.[[188](#)]

The ferocious prosecutions which were now started in all countries against the Anarchists had necessarily the effect of thinning our ranks. Most of the middle-class people who formerly sympathised with Anarchism turned the cold shoulder to us now; the timid withdrew. Abominable exceptional laws were passed against the

Anarchists on the Continent, and several advanced papers ceased to appear. In this country, *Commonweal*, which had lately become an Anarchist paper, had to stop its publication. *Freedom* had also to stop in January 1895, for the next four months. Anarchist propaganda was rendered more and more difficult; and in proportion as the voice of the revolutionary

wing of Socialism was less heard, the politicians won ground more and more.

However, at that very same time the leading ideas of Anarchism, becoming better known in a wider public, decidedly won sympathies in wide circles of thinking men; some of the greatest writers of our own time openly expressed themselves in favour of Anarchism. And while the

middle-class sympathisers, frightened by violence, left our ranks, much sympathy was won for our ideas amidst the working classes, even though most of the sympathisers did not dare openly to show their inclination, still less to join the circles, whose activities were more and more hampered by prosecutions and police interference.

It is interesting to note that

about the same time as these ferocious prosecutions of the Anarchists took place a new element was introduced into the Anarchist propaganda, viz., propaganda work in the Labour organisations—the Syndicates—especially in France, and a wide propaganda of *the General Strike* as well as of *direct action of the workers against their exploiters*.

Revolutionary Anarchist
Communist propaganda within
the Labour Unions had always
been a favourite mode of
action in the Federalist or
“Bakunist” section of the
International Working Men’s
Association. In Spain and in
Italy it had been especially
successful. Now it was
resorted to, with evident
success, in France, and
Freedom eagerly advocated

this sort of propaganda, carefully taking note of its successes all over the world. For this country our paper especially insisted upon what might have been attained by *direct action* in the Eight Hour movement, if the workers decided at a First of May demonstration *not* to work more than eight hours from the very next day, and to abandon work about four in

the afternoon.

Unfortunately, the Labour movement went in the meantime, both in this country and on the Continent, deeper and deeper into the quagmire of Parliamentary politics. All the efforts of the Labour leaders were now directed towards gaining seats in Parliament, and to compelling the middle-class Liberals to promise them their support at

the next elections.

The result of such a suicidal policy is fresh in the memories of all. For ten years we had a Conservative Government which twice brought the country to the verge of ruinous wars—first with the United States, and next with France—and finally waged a barbarous, unprovoked war against the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.[[189](#)] It demolished the

work that had been done in the early seventies for putting education on a secular basis, and it finally threatened to strike at the very root the efficacy of the Trade Unions, by rendering them responsible for the losses sustained by the employers in consequence of strikes. That Government was overthrown at last, at the very moment when it was going to throw the country into a war

with Germany, as recklessly engaged in as it had begun the war in Africa. And what was most significant—it was overthrown owing to a combined effort of the working classes, who seem to have realised at last how foolish they had been when they played into the hands of the Tory Imperialists at the two previous elections.

It is self-evident that the

conditions which we have briefly described were not favourable for the creation in this country of an Anarchist party. The last twenty-one years were years of a general triumph of the middle-class ideals and policy over the Socialist ideals. All that could be done by the Anarchists was consequently to keep high the banner of Anarchism; to spread as widely as possible

the ideas of a free, no-government organisation of Communism; and to counterbalance as much as we could the centralistic, bureaucratic ambitions of Social Democracy.

In this respect, *Freedom* has undoubtedly accomplished a task which will live. It has helped to shatter these ideas, and it has done something towards keeping alive amidst

the British workers those ideas of Free Communism of which the foundations had been laid by our forefathers in the very heart of the nation.

And we may be certain now, that when a new revival of Socialist agitation comes, as it came in 1884–86, it will bear the seeds of Communism as against Collectivism, and of Anarchism as against State Socialism.

[185](#)[] 8th February 1886 saw a march

and meeting of the unemployed turn into a riot in the West End of London. Four socialist leaders were unsuccessfully tried for sedition. The event became known as “Black Monday.” (Editor)

[186](#)[] Henry Hyndman (1842–1921) was the main founder of the Democratic Federation in 1881. This later became the Social Democratic Federation, the first Marxist Party in Britain. Libertarian Socialists, frustrated by Hyndman’s autocratic leadership split off to form the Socialist League. He supported the British State during the First World War. (Editor)

[187](#)[] John Burns (1858–1943) and Ben Tillett (1860–1943) were two leaders

of the great London Dock Strike of August–September 1889. Burns became a Liberal MP while Tillett became a trade union official and a Labour MP. (Editor)

[188](#)[] In April 1892, four anarchists were framed and imprisoned for a bomb plot in Walsall while the editor of anarchist paper *The Commonweal* was imprisoned in May 1892 for his angry protest at the convictions. In July 1894, Thomas Edward Cantwell (1864–1906) was imprisoned for his speech at the royal opening of Tower Bridge in London. (Editor)

[189](#)[] The imperialist Boer War of 1899 to 1902. (Editor)

Letter to Alexander Berkman

This 1908 letter to leading American anarchist Alexander Berkman sees Kropotkin reiterate his position that libertarians must participate actively in the workers movement and that revolutions are the product of class struggle, not individual acts.

Dear Berkman

You are quite right in taking a hopeful view of the progress of our ideas in America. It would have been far greater, I am sure, if the American anarchists had succeeded in *merging themselves into the mass of the workingmen*. So long as they remain a knot, a handful, aristocratically keeping apart from the mass of the working men—They

may display the most heroic devotion to the cause of labour—as you did, dear, good friend—their efforts will remain fruitless and their teachings will appeal more to the intellectual bourgeois who rebels against certain restraints in Art, in relations between man and woman, than to the worker. They will remain the same bourgeois and will do nothing to remove the

oppression of the rich upon the poor, of the owner on the proletarian, the Ruler upon the Ruled one.

I was lately in Paris, and on all sides I heard and saw that, at last, the work that we began as a handful only in 1878 is bearing fruit. The mass, the great mass—*those who made the revolution—those who are the only ones to make them—the workers—begin to display*

in their deepest layers that feeling of discontent and restlessness which is a true sign of some great movement coming.

And when I asked, Where is the comrade I knew in 1886? Where this other? This third? Where all of them?—The reply was invariably the same, “but it is he, who is the moving soul of the revolutionary fraction of the carpenters; he

—of the joiners; *they*—of all that movement, that thou hast seen, Peter, the other day at the Toulouse congress.” “And so and so of Lyon? So and So of Vienne? Of Montceau-les-Mines?” These ones died in exile, these ones (the few) have retired; but all those who still live *are men still*—all are in the labour movement and stir its lowest layers.—Some of our comrades who work in

the labour organisation, of course, will turn bureaucrats. *Some already are*, and we combat them openly and frankly in the *Temps Nouveaux* and the *Réveille-Risveglio* of Geneva.

But the great number are there, working, *stirring*, after having abandoned the “groups” where they were invaded by all sorts of middle class tramps who came to

express there the most
“terrific” paradoxes, only
better to sell afterwards—most
of them—their pen, their
bureaucratic talents, their
passive obedience to the
middle classes.

It is the Classes which made
the Revolutions—not the
Individuals.

Nay, even the really
revolutionary minded
individuals, if they remain

isolated, turn toward this Individual. But Anarchism of the bourgeois which is nothing but the epicureans *let it go* of the economists, spiced with a few “terrific” phrases of Nihilism—good to frighten the Philistines,—which it would really be time to leave to the Nitzeche-ists, the German Slavists, and all the familiar arch-Philistine “ists.”

I write at high pressure

speed and jot down these remarks—*not for print* but for you personally, dear old Berkman.

Answering your question about the Mother Earth Lecture Series—I have not yet finished my book on the *Great French Revolution* though I hope to send to the printer tomorrow the revised first proofs of the last sheets. The book grew to 720 or 750

pages. But it will give matter for discussion. The views I have are different from the orthodox ones, and the book will be, I suppose, violently attacked. The “historians”—the men of the trade—will surely attack it on matters of detail: they don’t like Cossack intruders. But—let it be. The real revolutionist will find in this many, many years’ work matters enough for reflection

(and research if he likes research and can afford to do it), and sad reflection, too, when he comes thinking, let us say, of the Russian Revolution, or the coming revolutions everywhere.

Where are we in the coming struggles? Personal heroism to any amount. Christian Saints could envy it.—So great, so widespread it was. But where [are] the hero and the masses?

The hero mostly does not know them—they hardly understand him, and the town-hero will not know the country masses which he leaves to the parliamentary agitators—to be put asleep by them by doses and doses of Duma-opium. But enough, dear friend.

You ask me to write something special for your series. It is impossible. I must terminate works already

began, works in hand, and they will be bigger works.

Translate from *Temps Nouveaux*, if you find something interesting.

Much brotherly love,
Peter Kropotkin

Syndicalism and Anarchism

In this two-part article, which was published in Freedom (July and August 1912), Kropotkin discusses the history of syndicalism and its relationship with anarchism.

He notes its links with the libertarian wing of the First International and iterates that while syndicalism is a long

*standing libertarian tactic,
anarchism is wider than it.*

I

We are asked on many sides: “What is Syndicalism? What are its relations to Anarchism?”—and we shall do our best to answer these questions. True, they were answered in our columns a few months ago by one of our friends (“Anarchist Methods in

Revolutionary Syndicalism,” *Freedom*, November 1911); but it is always interesting to return to this important subject, and to examine it under its different aspects.

Syndicalism is, in fact, only a new name for tactics long since resorted to with profit by the British workers—that of a *direct* struggle of Labour against Capital on the economic field. Such a

struggle was their favourite weapon; and in that above mentioned *Freedom* article it was pointed out that already in the first half of the nineteenth century the British workers, even “without possessing the vote, obtained great economic advantages, created a powerful trade union organisation, and even forced the governing classes to recognise their claims (1869–

76) in Labour legislation, including an extended political franchise.”

Direct struggle on the economic field thus proved to be an efficient weapon for obtaining both economic results and some political concessions.

This idea was so strong in England that already, in 1830–1831, Robert Owen tried to found a great “[Grand]

National [Consolidated]
Trades' Union" and an
international organisation of
Labour for the direct struggle
against Capital. Only the
ferocious prosecutions of the
British government compelled
him to abandon this idea.

Then came the Chartist
movement, which took
advantage of the widely spread
and powerful, partly secret
organisations of Labour, to

obtain some substantial political concessions. And the British workers received their first political lesson: they soon saw that though they heartily supported the political agitation, this agitation gave them no economic advantages save those which they themselves imposed upon their masters and their legislators by strikes and revolts. They saw how fallacious it was to trust

to Parliament for any serious improvement of their conditions.

The French working men came to exactly the same conclusion. The Revolution of 1848, which gave France a Republic, convinced them of the utter inefficacy of political agitation, and even of political victories, for achieving any vital change in the conditions

of Labour, if the working men themselves were not prepared to impose them upon the rich by their own direct action.

It also gave them another lesson. The French workmen saw how utterly helpless were their intellectual leaders when they had to find out the new forms which industrial production ought to take in society so as to give Labour its due and put an end to the

exploitation of the workers by the capitalists. Both in the Luxembourg Commission, which sat for this particular purpose on April, May, and June 1848, and in the Chamber elected in 1849, where there sat over a hundred “Social Democratic” Deputies, the workers saw this helplessness of the leaders. They thus understood that the working men themselves had

to work out the main lines which the Social Revolution had to take, in order to be practical and fruitful.

Direct struggle of Labour against Capital, and the *necessity of the workmen themselves* to work out the new forms which an organisation without capitalist exploitation should take—these, then, were the two great

lessons that the workers had learned, especially in the two countries most advanced in their industrial development.

Consequently, when in 1864–66 the old idea of Robert Owen was at last realised, and an international organisation of Labour was started, the new organisation embodied these two fundamental principles. When the International Working

Men's Association was founded at London by representatives of British Trade Unionists and French working men—chiefly followers of Proudhon—who had come to the second International Exhibition, the Association loudly proclaimed that *the emancipation of the workers must be their own work*; and that henceforth they intended to fight the capitalists

by means of *big strikes*, fought with international support.

Thus, the first two acts of the International, which produced a tremendous sensation in Europe and inspired a salutary fear in the middle classes, were two great strikes: one at Paris, supported by the English Trade Unions, and another at Geneva, in the building trade, supported by

British and French workers.

Worse than that. The working men at the Congresses of the International were no longer discussing the trash with which nations are amused by their rulers in the representative institutions. They discussed the fundamental question of a revolutionary reconstruction of society, and launched the idea which has since proved so

fruitful—the idea of a General Strike. As to the political form which a society reorganised by a social revolution might take, the Latin Federations of the International openly parted with the idea of a centralised State. They distinctly pronounced themselves in favour of an organisation based on the federation of free Communes and agricultural territories, getting rid of

capitalist exploitation, and federating to constitute larger territorial and national units.

The two main principles of modern Syndicalism—"direct action," as they say now, and the elaboration of new forms of social life based on the federation of the Labour Unions—these two principles were at the outset the leading principles of the International Working Men's Association.

However, already then there were within the Association two different currents concerning political action which divided the workers of different nations: the Latin current and the German current.

The Frenchmen in the International were chiefly followers of Proudhon, and Proudhon's leading idea was:

Get rid of the present bourgeois State organisation, and put in its place your own organisation of *Labour Unions*, which will themselves organise all that is substantial in society. The production of all that is needed for life, the equitable exchange of all the products of human labour, and the distribution and consumption of what has been produced—it is you, working

men, who must organise it, then you will see that very little will remain for the State. Production of all that is needed, an equitable exchange of produce, and its equitable consumption—these are *Labour problems*, which you alone can solve. And if you solve them—What remains to your present rulers and to their hierarchy of functionaries which constitutes the State?

Nothing that you yourselves could not organise.

But among the French founders of the International there were also men who had fought for the Republic and the Commune. They understood that political action must not be ignored: that it is not a matter of indifference to the proletarians whether they are under a Monarchy, a Republic, or a Commune.

They knew by their own experience that the triumph of the Conservatives or the Imperialists, means *a backward movement in all directions* and an enormous expenditure of energy by the workers to fight the aggressive capitalist policy (such as the Taff Vale or the Osborne decisions, which we have had lately). *They were not indifferent to politics*; but they

refused to see in electoral agitation, in electoral successes, and in the seesaw of political parties an instrument for the emancipation of Labour.

Accordingly, the French, the Italian, and the Spanish workers agreed to put in the statutes these words: “*All political action must be subordinated to the economic.*”

As to the English workers, there were among them a number of Chartists who had lived for political struggles. And the Germans had not yet had the experience of two Republics as had the Frenchmen. They laid faith in the coming Parliament of the future German Empire. Even Lassalle[[190](#)] had paid—it is now known—a tribute to some faith in a Socialist

Emperor of that United Germany which he saw coming.

Consequently, neither the English nor the Germans would part entirely with Parliamentary action; they still had faith in it, and they put in the English and German text of the same statutes: “*All political action must be subordinated to the economic as a means.*”

The old idea of trusting to bourgeois Parliaments had thus reappeared!

The result was that when Germany had triumphed over France in the war of 1870–71, when France lay helpless after a crushing defeat, and 35,000 of the Paris proletarians, the flower of the French workers, had been murdered by the bourgeois armies after the fall

of the Commune, when the International Working Men's Association was forbidden in France—Marx and Engels and their supporters tried to introduce the old political action into the life of the International, in the shape of the *Labour candidature*.

Thereupon a cleavage took place in the International, which hitherto had inspired such enthusiastic hopes in the

proletarians and such terror in the rich.

The Latin Federations—Italy, Spain, the Jura, and Eastern Belgium (France was represented by a few refugees only)—refused to accept the new course. They then constituted their own Federated Union, and since that time these Federations inclined more and more towards Revolutionary

Unionism (later on
Syndicalism) and towards
Anarchism; while Germany
took the lead in the
development of a political
Social Democratic Party—the
more so as Bismarck had
introduced universal suffrage
for the elections to the
Parliament of the German
Empire, constituted by the
victorious war.

Forty years have now passed since that division took place in the International, and we can judge its results. We shall analyse them more in detail in a next issue. But already here we can point out the striking sterility of all that was done during these forty years by those who pinned their faith to what they described as the Conquest of Power in the present middle-class State.

Instead of conquering the State, as they believed they would, *they have been conquered by the bourgeois State*. They are its tools: they serve to maintain the power of the upper and middle classes over the workers. They are the docile tools of Church and State, of Capitalism and Monopoly.

And all over Europe and America we see growing a

new movement, a new force in the Labour movement; a force which reverts to the old principles of the International: Direct Action, direct struggle of Labour against Capital; and the workers recognising that it is *they* who have to free themselves—not the Parliaments to free them.

Of course, this is not Anarchism. We go further. We say that the workers will never

attain their emancipation if they do not abandon the fallacy of the State. We say that they must throw overboard the fallacy of centralisation and hierarchy, and the fallacy of State-nominated functionaries maintaining Law and Order —*the Law made by the rich against the poor, and the Order which means submission of the poor to the*

rich.

But during all these forty years the Anarchists have worked in common with those workers who took their emancipation in their own hands and who resorted to the direct struggle as a means of preparing for the final struggle of exploited Labour against the hitherto triumphant rule of Capital. For the last forty years the Anarchists have

combated those who amused the workers with resultless electoral agitation. And they have worked all the time to awaken amongst the toiling masses a desire to work out those principles upon which the trade organisations could take possession of the docks, the railways, the mines, the factories, the land, and the stores, and work them in the interest, no more of a few

capitalists, but of society as a whole.[[191](#)]

Many episodes of this action of ours were given in the aforementioned *Freedom* article of November 1911. But we hope to return once more to this interesting subject.

II

In our first article on “Syndicalism and Anarchism,” it was shown how, in this

country since the years 1820–1830, and in France after the unsuccessful political revolution of 1848, the efforts of a considerable section of the workers were directed towards a direct struggle of Labour against Capital, and to an endeavour to create for that purpose the necessary Labour organisations.

It was also shown how this idea became, in the years

1866–1870, the leading idea of the newly created International Working Men's Association; but how, after the defeat of France in 1870, the paralysis of its revolutionary forces after the fall of the Paris Commune, and the triumph of Germany, the political element got the upper hand in the International, and became for a time the dominating element in the Labour movement.

Since that time, the two currents have continued to develop, each of them in that direction which was already implied in its programme. Political Labour Parties were organised in all Constitutional States. They did their best to increase as rapidly as possible the number of their representatives in their respective Parliaments, and as was foreseen from the outset,

their representatives, hunting for votes, inevitably reduced their economic programmes, so as to have them limited by this time to such minor restrictions of the rights of the employers as only give a new force to the capitalists and help them to maintain the present conditions. At the same time, as the Socialist politicians combated the representatives of the political

bourgeois Radicalism, who competed with them for Labour votes, they helped—against their own will—to give a new lease to triumphant reaction all over Europe.

Their ideology itself—that is, the ideas and the ideals they were spreading among the masses—was modelled in accordance. They were resolute partisans of State centralisation, as against local

autonomy and the independence of the smaller nations; and they worked out a philosophy of history to support these foregone conclusions. They threw cold water on the hopes of the masses—preaching to them, in the name of “historical materialism,” that no substantial change is possible in the Socialist direction until the number of capitalists has

been reduced by their mutual competition,[[192](#)] and they left unnoticed the fact, which becomes so striking now in all industrial countries, that, owing to the growing facilities for exploiting the peoples that are backward in industries, the English, the French, the Belgian, and other capitalists are now exploiting the labour of hundreds of millions of men in Eastern Europe, Asia, and

Africa; the result being that the number of people living upon the work of other people, far from being gradually reduced in the chief industrial countries of Europe, goes on *increasing* in an appalling proportion. And with the increase of their numbers grow also the numbers of those who are interested in the maintenance of the present capitalistic State. Finally, the advocates of

political agitation for the conquest of power in the present State bitterly opposed everything that could spoil their chances of acquiring political power. They excluded from the International Socialist Congresses all those who dared to criticise the results of their Parliamentary tactics; [193] they deprecated strikes; and later on, when the idea of the General Strike began to

penetrate even into their Congresses, they wildly opposed it by all possible means.

For full forty years these tactics have been pursued, and now it is evident to every one that all over Europe the working men have had enough of it: many turn away from it in disgust. This is the reason why we hear so much now of

“Syndicalism.”

However, during these forty years the other current—the direct struggle of Labour against Capital—also continued to develop, notwithstanding all the persecutions of the Governments and the denunciations of the capitalist politicians. It would be an extremely interesting history to show the steady development

of this current and to analyse its relations, intellectual and personal, with the political Social Democratic parties on the one hand and the Anarchists on the other. But the time has not yet come to write such a work, and, after all, perhaps it is better that it should not be written now. It would divert attention towards personal influences, while it is the influence of the great

currents of modern thought and the growth of self-consciousness among the working men of America and Europe, independent of the influence of the intellectual leaders, which has to be examined, if a real history of the Syndicalist movement be written.

All we need say at the present moment is, that quite independently of the teaching

of the Socialists—in virtue of the very fact that masses of working men were brought together in the industrial centres, and that they had retained from times past the tradition of their professional [i.e., trade] Unions, both open and secret—they continually organised Unions, in order to put a bridle on the ever-growing exploitation and on the haughtiness of the

employers. And in proportion as the organised masses of workers grew larger and stronger, and more conscious of the great struggle that is the very essence of the life of civilised nations since the Great French Revolution, their anti-capitalist tendencies became more and more definite.

During the last forty years, while all possible effort was

made by the political leaders in different countries to prevent the revolts of Labour, and to subdue those of them which were of a menacing character—precisely during these years we saw the Labour revolts growing more widely spread, more violent, and more significant of the intentions of the workers. More and more they lost the character of mere outbursts of

despair; more and more, when we came into contact with the workers, we saw ripening among them a dominating thought, which could be expressed almost in a word, full of deep sense: "Go! Leave us, you 'captains of industry,' if you cannot manage the industries so as to give us a living wage and security of employment. Go! if you are so shortsighted and so incapable

of coming to a common understanding among yourselves, that you rush like a flock of sheep into every new branch of production which promises you the greatest momentary profits, regardless of the usefulness or noxiousness of the goods you produce in that branch. Go! if you are incapable of building your fortunes otherwise than by preparing interminable

wars, and squandering a good third of what is produced by every nation in armaments for robbing other robbers. Go! if all that you have learned from the marvellous discoveries of modern science is that you see no other way of obtaining one's well-being but out of that squalid misery to which *one-third* of the population of the great cities of this extremely wealthy country are

condemned. Go! and ‘a plague
o’ both your houses’ if that is
the only way you can find to
manage industry and trade.
We, workmen, will know
better how to organise
production, if we only succeed
in getting rid of you, the
capitalist pest!”

These are the ideas which
were budding, were thought
over, and were discussed in
the workers’ dwellings all over

the civilised world; and these were the ideas which resulted in those tremendous upheavals of Labour which we saw every year in Europe and the United States, in the shape of dockers' strikes, railway strikes, miners' strikes, and weavers' strikes, until at last they began to take the shape of general strikes—general strikes which soon took the character of great struggles of

the elements of Nature, and in comparison with which all the petty Parliamentary struggles were such pitiful child's play.

And while the Germans were jubilating with red flags and torchlights at their steadily increasing electoral successes, the more experienced nations of the West were silently pursuing an infinitely more serious task—the task of the *inner* organisation of Labour;

and the thoughts which worried them were of a far more serious nature. They asked themselves: What would be the outcome of the now inevitable world-conflict between Labour and Capital? *What new forms of industrial life and social organisation would come out of this conflict?*

This is the true origin of the Syndicalist movement, which

the ignorant politicians
discover now as something
new to them.

For us, this movement is not
new. We greeted it when its
tendencies were expressed in
the programme of the
International Working Men's
Association. We defended it in
the International, when the
German political revolutionists
assailed it and saw in it an

obstacle to their conquest of political power. We advised the workmen of all nations to do as the Spaniards did when they kept the Trade Unionist organisations in close touch with the “Sections” of the International. And since that time we have followed with deep sympathy all the phases of the Labour movement, knowing that, whatever the conflicts between Labour and

Capital may be in the near future, it is this movement which will open the eyes of society at large to its duty towards the producers of all riches, the only movement that will induce thinking men to find a way out of the blind alley into which the recent development of Capitalism has been driving our generation.

Of course, the Anarchists have never imagined that it

was they who gave to the Syndicalist movement its present conception of its duties towards the regeneration of society. They have never put forward the absurd pretension of being the leaders of the great movements of thought which lead mankind to a progressive development. But what we may claim for ourselves in full confidence is, that we understood from its

beginnings the immense importance of the ideas which now constitute the leading aim of Syndicalism. These are the ideas which were developed in this country by Godwin, Hodgskin, Gray, and their followers, and in France by Proudhon—namely, the idea that Labour organisations for production, exchange, and consumption must take the place of the present capitalist

exploitation and of the State; and that other idea, that it is the duty, the function, of the Labour organisations to work out this new form of society.

These two fundamental ideas are not our inventions. They are nobody's invention. Life itself has dictated them to nineteenth century civilisation, and upon us lies the duty of realising them in life. Our pride is only that we have

understood them; that we defended them through those dark years when they were trampled under foot by the Social Democratic politicians and their would-be philosophers; and that we still intend to remain true to them.

[190](#)[] Ferdinand Johann Gottlieb Lassalle (1825–1864) was a German State socialist. He helped create the *General German Workers' Association* in 1863 and was the first president of the first German labour

party. It aimed to win universal suffrage by peaceful and legal means as well as State aid for co-operatives. He considered the State as an instrument of justice essential for the achievement of the socialism, willing to work and compromise with the Imperial powers to achieve reforms. (Editor)

[191](#)[] In this connection, we recommend those of our readers who understand French to read the recently published book by Pataud and Pouget, *Comment nous ferons la Revolution (How we Shall Make the Revolution)*, with a preface by Kropotkin. They will see from it how a number of French workers understand the coming

Syndicalist revolution. [In 1913 this book was translated as *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*. Kropotkin's preface is included in this volume. (Editor)]

[192](#)[] Another reference to the Marxist “concentration of capital” thesis. (Editor)

[193](#)[] The 1891 conference of the Second International in Brussels started this process, much to the joy of Engels. The 1893 conference at Zurich passed a resolution limiting membership to only those socialists who accepted the need to win power using political (electoral) means or sought to win those rights. After anarchists sought to attend the

conference as delegates from trade unions, the 1896 conference in London saw the final, definitive, exclusion of libertarian socialists from the Second International. The authoritarian activities of the German Social Democrats alienated many of the British delegates who attended the protest meeting organised by the anarchists. (Editor)

Revolutions

“In any case, what we learn to-day from the study of the Great Revolution is, that it was the source and origin of all the present communist, anarchist, and socialist conceptions. We have but badly understood our common mother, but now we have found her again in the midst of the sans-culottes, and we see we have to learn from her.

“Humanity advances by stages and these stages have been marked for several hundred years by great revolutions. After the Netherlands came England with her revolution in 1648–1657, and then it was the turn of France. Each great revolution has in it, besides, something special and original [...]

“Which of the nations will

*take upon herself the terrible
but glorious task of the next
great revolution? One may
have thought for a time that it
would be Russia. But if she
should push her revolution
further than the mere
limitation of the imperial
power; if she touches the land
question in revolutionary
spirit—how far will she go?
Will she know how to avoid
the mistake made by the*

French Assemblies, and will she socialise the land and give it only to those who want to cultivate it with their own hands? We know not: any answer to this question would belong to the domain of prophecy.

“The one thing certain is, that whatsoever nation enters on the path of revolution in our own day, it will be heir to all our forefathers have done in

France. The blood they shed was shed for humanity—the sufferings they endured were borne for the entire human race; their struggles, the ideas they gave to the world, the shock of those ideas, are all included in the heritage of mankind. All have borne fruit and will bear more, still finer, as we advance towards those wide horizons opening out before us, where, like some

*great beacon to point the way,
flame the words—LIBERTY,
EQUALITY, FRATERNITY.”*

*—“Conclusion,” The Great
French Revolution*

From *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1793*

These three chapters of Kropotkin's classic history of the French Revolution express the core aspects of his ideas. The first (chapter II) shows its focus as a popular account, with the working people taking centre stage. The next two (XXIV and XXV) discuss

*the directly democratic
neighbourhood assemblies
created in the struggle and
their relation to subsequent
libertarian ideas. They show
Kropotkin's desire to present
history from the bottom up as
well as learning lessons for
future revolts.*

Action

But what of the people? What
was their idea?

The people, too, had felt to a certain extent the influence of the current philosophy. By a thousand indirect channels the great principles of liberty and enfranchisement had filtered down to the villages and the suburbs of the large towns. Respect for royalty and aristocracy was passing away. Ideas of equality were penetrating to the very lowest ranks. Gleams of revolt flashed

through many minds. The hope of an approaching change throbbed in the hearts of the humblest. “Something was to be done by some great folk for such poor ones”; she did not know who, nor how; “but God send us better,” said an old woman, in 1789, to Arthur Young,[[194](#)] who travelled through France on the eve of the Revolution. That “something” was bound to

bring an alleviation of the people's misery.

The question whether the movement which preceded the Revolution, and the Revolution itself, contained any element of Socialism has been recently discussed. The word "Socialism" was certainly not in either, because it dates only from the middle of the nineteenth century. The idea of the State as Capitalist, to

which the Social-Democratic fraction of the great Socialist party is now trying to reduce Socialism, was certainly not so much in evidence as it is today, because the founders of Social-Democratic “Collectivism,” Vidal and Pecqueur, did not write until the period between 1840 and 1849. But it is impossible to read the works of the pre-Revolutionary writers without

being struck by the fact that they are imbued with ideas which are the very essence of modern Socialism.

Two fundamental ideas—the equal rights of all citizens to the land, and what we know today under the name of communism—found devoted adherents among the more popular writers of that time, Mably, d'Argenson, and others of less importance.[[195](#)]

Manufacturing production on a large scale was in its infancy, so that land was at that time the main form of capital and the chief instrument for exploiting human labour, while the factory was hardly developed at all. It was natural, therefore, that the thoughts of the philosophers, and later on the thoughts of the revolutionists, should turn towards *communal possession*

of the land. Did not Mably, who, much more than Rousseau, inspired the men of the Revolution, declare about 1768, in his *Doutes sur l'ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés*, that there should be equal rights to the land for all, and communist possession of it? The rights of the nation to all landed property, and to all natural wealth—forests, rivers, waterfalls, &c.—was not this

the dominant idea of the pre-Revolutionary writers, as well as of the left wing of the revolutionary masses during the period of upheaval?

Unfortunately, these communistic aspirations were not formulated clearly and concretely in the minds of those who desired the people's happiness. While among the educated middle classes, the ideas of emancipation had

taken the form of a complete programme for political and economic organisation, these ideas were presented to the people only in the form of vague aspirations. Often they were mere negations. Those who addressed the people did not try to embody the concrete form in which their *desiderata* could be realised. It is even probable that they avoided being precise. Consciously or

not, they seemed to say: “What good is there in speaking to the people of the way in which they will be organised later on? It would only chill their revolutionary ardour. All they want is the strength to attack and to march to the assault of the old institutions. Later on we shall see what can be done for them.”

Are there not many

Socialists and Anarchists who act still in the same way? In their hurry to push on to the day of revolt they treat as soporific theorising every attempt to throw some light on what ought to be the aim of the Revolution.

It must be said, also, that the ignorance of the writers—city men and bookmen for the most part—counted for much in this. Thus, in the whole of

that gathering of learned or experienced business men who composed the National Assembly—lawyers, journalists, tradesmen, and so forth—there were only two or three legal members who had studied the feudal laws, and we know there were among them but very few representatives of the peasants who were familiar by personal experience with the needs of

village life.

For these reasons the ideas of the masses were expressed chiefly by simple negations. “Let us burn the registers in which the feudal dues are recorded! Down with the tithes! Down with ‘Madame Veto’! [[196](#)] Hang the aristocrats!” But to whom was the freed land to go? Who were to be the heirs of the guillotined nobles? Who was

to grasp the political power when it should fall from the hands of “Monsieur Veto,” the power which became in the hands of the middle classes a much more formidable weapon than it had been under the old *régime*?

This want of clearness in the mind of the people as to what they should hope from the Revolution left its imprint on the whole movement. While

the middle classes were marching with firm and decided steps towards the establishment of their political power in a State which they were trying to mould according to their preconceived ideas, the people were hesitating. In the towns, especially, they did not seem to know how to turn to their own advantage the power they had conquered. And later,

when ideas concerning agrarian laws and the equalising of incomes began to take definite form, they ran foul of a mass of property prejudices, with which even those sincerely devoted to the cause of the people were imbued.

A similar conflict was evoked by the conceptions of the political organisation of the State. We see it chiefly in the

antagonism which arose between the governmental prejudices of the democrats of that time and the ideas that dawned in the hearts of the people as to political decentralisation, and the prominent place which the people wished their municipalities to take both in the division of the large towns and in the village assemblies. This was the starting-point of

the whole series of fierce contests which broke out in the Convention. Thence, too, arose the indefiniteness of the results obtained by the Revolution for the great mass of the people in all directions, except in the recovery of part of the land from the lords, lay and clerical, and the freeing of all land from the feudal taxes it formerly had to pay.

But if the people's ideas

were confused on constructive lines, they were, on the other hand, extremely clear on certain points in their negations.

First of all, the hatred felt by the poor for the whole of the idle, lazy, perverted aristocracy who ruled them, while black misery reigned in the villages and in the dark lanes of the great towns. Next, hatred towards the clergy, who

by sympathy belonged more to the aristocracy than to the people who fed them. Then, hatred of all the institutions under the old *régime*, which made poverty still harder to bear because they denied the rights of humanity to the poor. Hatred for the feudal system and its exactions, which kept the labourer in a state of servitude to the landowners long after personal serfdom

had ceased to exist. Lastly, the despair of the peasant who in those years of scarcity saw land lying uncultivated in the hands of the lord, or serving merely as a pleasure-ground for the nobility while famine pressed hard on the villages.

It was all this hatred, coming to a head after long years as the selfishness of the rich became more and more apparent in the course of the

eighteenth century. And it was this need of land—this land hunger, the cry of the starving in revolt against the lord who refused them access to it—that awoke the spirit of revolt ever since 1788. And it was the same hatred, and the same need, mingled with the hope of success, which stimulated the incessant revolts of the peasants in the years 1789–1793, revolts which enabled

the middle class to overthrow the old *régime* and to organise its own power under the new one, that representative government.

Without those risings, without that disorganisation of authority in the provinces which resulted in never-ceasing *jacqueries*, without that promptitude of the people of Paris and other towns in taking up arms, and in

marching against the strongholds of royalty whenever an appeal to the people was made by the revolutionaries, the middle classes would certainly not have accomplished anything. But it is to this true fount and origin of the Revolution—the people's readiness to take up arms—that the historians of the Revolution have not yet done justice—the justice owed

to it by the history of civilisation.

The “Districts” and the “Sections” of Paris

We have seen how the Revolution began with popular risings ever since the first months of 1789. To make a revolution it is not, however, enough that there should be

such risings—more or less successful. It is necessary that after the risings there should be left something new in the institutions, which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established.

The French people seem to have understood this need wonderfully well, and the something new, which was introduced into the life of France, since the first risings,

was the popular Commune. Governmental centralisation came later, but the Revolution began by creating the Commune—autonomous to a very great degree—and through this institution it gained, as we shall see, immense power.

In the villages it was, in fact, the peasants' Commune which insisted upon the abolition of feudal dues, and legalised the

refusal to pay them; it was the Commune which took back from the lords the lands that were formerly communal, resisted the nobles, struggled against the priests, protected the patriots and later on the *sans-culottes*, arrested the returning *émigrés*, and stopped the runaway king.

In the towns it was the municipal Commune which reconstructed the entire aspect

of life, arrogated to itself the appointing of the judges, changed on its own initiative the apportioning of the taxes, and further on, according as the Revolution developed, became the weapon of sans-culottism in its struggle against royalty and against the royalist conspirators, the German invaders. Later still, in the Year II of the Republic, it was the Communes that undertook

to work out equalisation of wealth.

And it was the Commune of Paris, as we know, that dethroned the King, and after 10th August became the real centre and the real power of the Revolution, which maintained its vigour so long only as that Commune existed.

The soul of the Revolution was therefore in the Communes, and without these

centres, scattered all over the land, the Revolution never would have had the power to overthrow the old *régime*, to repel the German invasion, and to regenerate France.

It would, however, be erroneous to represent the Communes of that time as modern municipal bodies, to which the citizens, after a few days of excitement during the elections, innocently confide

the administration of all their business, without taking themselves any further part in it. The foolish confidence in representative government, which characterises our own epoch, did not exist during the Great Revolution. The Commune which sprang from the popular movement was not separated from the people. By the intervention of its “districts,” “sections,” or

“tribes,” constituted as so many mediums of popular administration, it remained of the people, and this is what made the revolutionary power of these organisations.

Since the organisation and the life of the “districts” and the “sections” is best known for Paris,[\[197\]](#) it is of the City of Paris that we shall speak, the more so as in studying the life of the Paris “sections” we

learn to know pretty well the life of the thousands of provincial Communes.

From the very beginning of the Revolution, and especially since events had roused Paris to take the initiative of rebellion in the first days of July 1789, the people, with their marvellous gift for revolutionary organisation, were already organising in view of the struggle which

they would have to maintain, and of which they at once felt the import.

The City of Paris had been divided for electoral purposes into sixty districts, which were to nominate the electors of the second degree. Once these were nominated, the districts ought to have disappeared; but they remained and organised themselves, on their own initiative, as permanent organs

of the municipal administration, by appropriating various functions and attributes which formerly belonged to the police, or to the law courts, or even to different government departments under the old *régime*.

Thus they rendered themselves necessary, and at a time when all Paris was effervescing at the approach of

14th July they began to arm the people and to act as independent authorities; so much so that the Permanent Committee, which was formed at the Hôtel de Ville by the influential middle classes, had to convoke the districts to come to an understanding with them. The districts proved their usefulness and displayed a great activity in arming the people, in organising the

National Guard, and especially in enabling the capital to repulse an attack upon it.

After the taking of the Bastille, we see the districts already acting as accepted organs of the municipal administration. Each district was appointing its Civil Committee, of from sixteen to twenty-four members, for the carrying out of its affairs. However, as Sigismond

Lacroix has said in the first volume of his *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*,[\[198\]](#) each district constituted itself “how it liked.” There was even a great variety in their organisation. One district, “anticipating the resolutions of the National Assembly concerning judicial organisation, appointed its justices of peace and arbitration.” But to create a

common understanding between them, “they formed a central corresponding bureau where special delegates met and exchanged communications.” The first attempt at constituting a Commune was thus made *from below upward*, by the federation of the district organisms; it sprang up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative. The

Commune of 10th August was thus appearing in germ from this time, and especially since December 1789, when the delegates of the districts tried to form a Central Committee the Bishop's palace.[[199](#)]

It was by means of the “districts” that henceforth Danton, Marat and so many others were able to inspire the masses of the people in Paris with the breath of revolt, and

the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was described later on as Direct Self-Government.[[200](#)]

Immediately after the taking of the Bastille, the districts had ordered their delegates to prepare, in consultation with the Mayor of Paris, Bailly, a plan of municipal organisation,

which should be afterwards submitted to the districts themselves. But while waiting for this scheme, the districts went on widening the sphere of their functions as it became necessary.

When the National Assembly began to discuss municipal law, they did so with painful slowness. "At the end of two months," says Lacroix, "the first article of the new

Municipality scheme had still to be written.”[[201](#)] These delays naturally seemed suspicious to the districts, and from this time began to develop a certain hostility, which became more and more apparent, on behalf of part of the population of Paris and the official Council of its Commune. It is also important to note that while trying to give a legal form to the Municipal

Government, the districts strove to maintain their own independence. They sought for unity of action, not in subjection to a Central Committee, but in a federative union.

Lacroix says: "The state of mind of the districts... displays itself both by a very strong sentiment of communal unity and by a no less strong tendency towards direct self-

government. Paris did not want to be a federation of sixty republics cut off haphazard each in its territory; the Commune is a unity composed of its united districts... Nowhere is there found a single example of a district setting itself up to live apart from the others... But side by side with this undisputed principle, another principle is disclosed... which

is, that the Commune must legislate and administer for itself, directly, as much as possible. Government by representation must be reduced to a minimum; everything that the Commune can do directly must be done by it, without any intermediary, without any delegation, or else it may be done by delegates reduced to the *rôle* of special

commissioners, acting under the uninterrupted control of those who have commissioned them... the final right of legislating and administering for the Commune belongs to the districts—to the citizens, who come together in the general assemblies of the districts.”

We thus see that the principles of anarchism, expressed some years later in

England by W. Godwin, already dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretic speculations, but in the *deeds* of the Great French Revolution.

There is still another striking fact pointed out by Lacroix, which shows up to what point the districts knew how to distinguish themselves from the Municipality and how to prevent it from encroaching

upon their rights. When
Brissot came forward on 30th
November 1789 with a
scheme of municipal
constitution for Paris,
concocted between the
National Assembly and a
committee elected by the
Assembly of Representatives
(the Permanent Committee of
the Paris Commune, founded
on 12th July, 1789), the
districts at once opposed it.

Nothing was to be done without the direct sanction of the districts themselves,[[202](#)] and Brissot's scheme had to be abandoned. Later on, in April 1790, when the National Assembly began to discuss the municipal law, it had to choose between two proposals: that of an assembly—free and illegal, after all—of delegates from the districts, who met at the Bishop's palace, a proposal

which was adopted by the majority of the districts and signed by Bailly, and that of the legal Council of the Commune, which was supported by some of the districts only. The National Assembly decided in favour of the first. Needless to say that the districts did not limit themselves municipal affairs. They always took part in the great political questions of the

day. The royal *veto*, the imperative date, poor-relief, the Jewish question, that of the “marc silver”[[203](#)]*—all of these were discussed by the districts. As the “marc of silver,” they themselves took the initiative in the matter, by convoking each other for discussion and appointing committees. “They vote their own resolutions,” says Lacroix, “and ignoring the*

official representatives of the Commune, they are going themselves on 8th February (1790) to present to the National Assembly the first *Address of the Paris Commune in its sections*. It is a personal demonstration of the districts, made independently of any official representation, to support Robespierre's motion in the National Assembly against the

“marc of silver.”[[204](#)]

What is still more interesting is that from this time the provincial towns began to put themselves in communication with the Commune of Paris concerning all things. From this there developed a tendency to establish a *direct link* between the towns and villages of France, outside the National Parliament, and this direct and spontaneous action,

which later became even more manifest, gave irresistible force to the Revolution.

It was especially in an affair of capital importance—the liquidation of the Church property—that the districts made their influence felt, and proved their capacity for organisation. The National Assembly had ordained on paper the seizing of the Church property and the

putting it up for sale, for the benefit of the nation; but it had not indicated any practical means for carrying this law into effect. At this juncture it was the Paris districts that proposed to serve as intermediaries for the purchase of the property, and invited all the municipalities of France to do the same. They thus found a practical method of applying the law.

The editor of the *Actes de la Commune* has fully described how the districts managed to induce the Assembly to entrust them with this important business: “Who speaks and acts in the name of that great personality, the Commune of Paris?” demands Lacroix. And he replies: “The Bureau de Ville (Town Council) in the first place, from whom this idea emanated; and afterwards

the districts, who have approved it, and who, having approved it, have got hold of the matter *in lieu* of the Town Council, for carrying it out, *have negotiated and treated directly with the State*, that is to say, with the National Assembly, and at last *effected the proposed purchase directly*, all contrarily to a formal decree, but with, the consent of the Sovereign

Assembly.”

What is even more interesting is that the districts, having once taken over this business, also took no heed of the old Assembly of Representatives of the Commune, which was already too old for serious action, and also they twice dismissed the Town Council that wanted to interfere. “The districts,” Lacroix says, “prefer to

constitute, with a view to this special object, a special deliberate assembly, composed of sixty delegates, and a small executive council of twelve members chosen by these sixty representatives.”[[205](#)]

By acting in this way—and the libertarians would no doubt do the same today—the districts of Paris laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation.[[206](#)]

We thus see that while reaction was gaining more and more ground in 1790, on the other side the districts of Paris were acquiring more and more influence upon the progress of the Revolution. While the Assembly was sapping by degrees the power, the districts and afterwards the “sections” of Paris were widening by degrees the sphere of their functions in the

midst of the people. They thus prepared the ground for the revolutionary Commune of 10th August, and they soldered at the same time the link between Paris and the provinces.

“Municipal history,” says Lacroix, “is made outside official assemblies. It is by means of the districts that the important acts in the communal life, both political

and administrative, are accomplished: the acquisition and selling the national estates (*biens nationaux*) goes on, as the districts had wished, through the intermediary of their special commissioners; the national federation is prepared by a meeting of delegates to whom the districts have given a special mandate... The federation of 14th July is also the exclusive

and direct work of the districts,” their intermediary in this case being an assembly of delegates from the sections for concluding a federative compact.[[207](#)]

It has often been said that the National Assembly represented the national unity of France. When, however, the question of the *Fête* of the Federation[[208](#)] came up, the politicians, as [Jules] Michelet

has observed, were terrified as they saw men surging from all parts of France towards Paris for the festival, and the Commune of Paris had to burst in the door of the National Assembly to obtain its consent to the *fête*. “Whether it liked or not, the Assembly had to consent,” Michelet adds.

Besides, it is important to note that the movement was

born first (as Buchez and Roux had already remarked[[209](#)]) from the need of assuring the food-supply to Paris, and to take measures against the fears of a foreign invasion; that is to say, this movement was partly the outcome of an act of local administration, and yet it took, in the sections of Paris,[[210](#)] *the character of a national confederation*, wherein all the

cantons of the departments of France and all the regiments of the army were represented. The sections, which were created for the individualisation of the various quarters of Paris became thus the instrument for the federated union of the whole nation.

The Sections of Paris under the New

Municipal Law

Our contemporaries have allowed themselves to be so won over to ideas of subjection to the centralised State that the very idea of communal independence—to call it “autonomy” would not be enough—which was current in 1789, seems strange nowadays. M. L. Foubert, [[211](#)] when speaking of the scheme of municipal

organisation decreed by the National assembly on 21st May 1790, was quite right in saying that “the application of this scheme would seem today a revolutionary act, even anarchic—so much the ideas have changed”; and he adds that at the time this municipal law was considered insufficient by the Parisians who were accustomed, since 14th July 1789, to a very great

independence of their
“districts.”

The exact delimitation of powers in the State, to which so much importance is attached today, seemed at that time to the Parisians, and even to the legislators in the National Assembly, a question not worth discussing and an encroachment on liberty. Like Proudhon, who said “The Commune will be all or

nothing,”[[212](#)] the districts of Paris did not understand that the Commune was not *all*. “A Commune,” they said, “is a society of joint-owners and fellow inhabitants enclosed by a circumscribed and limited boundary, and it has collectively the same rights as a citizen.” And, starting from this definition, they maintained that the Commune of Paris, like every other citizen,

“having liberty, property, security and the right to resist oppression, has consequently every power to dispose of its property, as well as that of guaranteeing the administration of this property, the security of the individuals, the police, the military force —*all*.” The Commune, in fact, must be sovereign within its own territory: the only condition, I may add, of real

liberty for a Commune.

The third part of the preamble to the municipal law of May 1790 established, moreover, a principle which is scarcely understood today, but was much appreciated at that time. It deals with the direct exercise of powers, without intermediaries. “The

Commune of Paris”—so says this preamble—“in consequence of its freedom,

being possessed of all its rights and powers, exercises them always itself—directly as much as possible, and as little as possible by delegation.”

In other words, the Commune of Paris was not to be a governed State, but a people governing itself directly—when possible—without intermediaries, without masters.

It was the General Assembly

of the section, and not the elected Communal Council, which was to be the supreme authority for all that concerned the inhabitants of Paris. And if the sections decided to submit to the decision of a majority amongst themselves in general questions, they did not for all that abdicate either their right to federate by means of freely contracted alliances, or that of passing from one section to

another for the purpose of influencing their neighbours' decisions, and thus trying by every means to arrive at unanimity.

The “permanence” of the general assemblies of the sections—that is, the possibility of calling the general assembly whenever it was wanted by the members of the section and of discussing everything in the

general assembly—this, they said, will educate every citizen politically, and allow him, when it is necessary, “to elect, with full knowledge, those whose zeal he will have remarked, and whose intelligence he will have appreciated.”[[213](#)]

The section in permanence—the forum always open—is the only way, they maintained, to assure an honest and

intelligent administration.

Finally, as Foubert also says, distrust inspired the sections: *distrust of all executive power*. “He who has the executive power, being the depository of force, must necessarily abuse it.” “This is the opinion of Montesquieu and Rousseau,” adds Foubert—it is also mine!

The strength which this point of view gave to the Revolution

can be easily understood, the more so as it was combined with another one, also pointed out by Foubert. "The revolutionary movement," he writes, "is just as much against centralisation as against despotism." The French people thus seem to have comprehended from the outset of the Revolution that the immense work of transformation laid upon them

could not be accomplished either constitutionally or by a central power; it had to be done by the local powers, and to carry it out they must be free.

Perhaps they also thought that enfranchisement, the conquest of liberty, must begin in each village and each town. The limitation of the royal power would thus be rendered only the more easy.

The National Assembly evidently tried all it could to lessen the power of the districts, and to put them under the tutelage of a communal government, which the national representatives might be able to control. Thus the municipal law of 27th May to 27th June 1790 suppressed the districts. It was intended to put an end to those hotbeds of Revolution, and for that

purpose the new law introduced a new subdivision of Paris into forty-eight sections—*active* citizens only being allowed to take part in the electoral and administrative assemblies of the new “sections.”

The law had, moreover, taken good care to limit the duties of the sections by declaring that in their assemblies they should occupy

themselves “with no other business than that of the elections and the administration of the civic oath.”[[214](#)] But this was not obeyed. The furrow had been ploughed more than a year before, and the “sections” went on to act the “districts” had acted. After all, the municipal law was itself obliged to grant to the sections the administrative attributes

that the districts had already arrogated to themselves. We find, therefore, under the new law the same sixteen commissioners whom we saw in the districts—elected and charged not only with police and even judicial functions, but also trusted by the administration of the department “with the reassessment of the taxes in their respective

sections.”[[215](#)] Furthermore, if the Constituent Assembly abolished the “permanence”—that is to say, the right of the sections to meet without a special convocation—it was compelled nevertheless to recognise their right of holding general assemblies, at the demand of fifty active citizens. [[216](#)]

That was sufficient, and the citizens did not fail to take

advantage of it. For instance, scarcely a month after the installation of the new municipality, Danton and Bailly went to the National Assembly, on behalf of forty-three out of the forty-eight sections, to demand the instant dismissal of the ministers and their arraignment before a national tribunal.

The sections parted with none of their sovereign power.

Although they had been deprived of it by law, they retained it, and proudly displayed it. Their petition had, in fact, nothing municipal about it, but they took action, and that was all. Besides, the sections, on account of the various functions they had assumed, became of such importance that the National Assembly listened to them and replied graciously.

It was the same with the clause of the municipal law of 1790, which entirely subjected the municipalities “to the administration of the department and the district for all that concerned the functions they should have to exercise by delegation from the general administration.”[[217](#)] Neither the sections nor the Commune of Paris nor the provincial

Communes would accept this clause. They simply ignored it and maintained their independence.

Generally speaking, the sections gradually took upon themselves the part of being centres of revolutionary initiative, which had belonged to the “districts”; and if their activity relaxed during the reactionary period which France lived through in 1790

and 1791, it was still, as we shall see by the sequel, the sections which roused Paris in 1792 and prepared the revolutionary Commune of 10th August.

By virtue of the law of 21st May 1790, each section had to appoint sixteen commissioners to constitute their civic committees, and these committees entrusted at first with police functions only,

never *ceased*, during the whole time of the Revolution, extending their functions in every direction. Thus, in September 1790, the Assembly was forced to grant to the sections the right which the Strasbourg sections had assumed in August 1789, namely, the right to appoint the justices of the peace and their assistants, as well as the *prud'hommes* (conciliation

judges). And this right was retained by the sections until it was abolished by the revolutionary Jacobin government, which was instituted on 4th December, 1793.

On the other hand, these same civic committees of the sections succeeded, towards the end of 1790, after a severe struggle, in obtaining the power of administering the

affairs of the charity-bureaux, as well as the very important right of inspecting and organising the distribution of relief, which enabled them to replace the charity workshops of the old *régime* by relief-works, under the direction of the sections themselves. In this way they obtained a great deal. They undertook by degrees to supply clothes and boots to the army. They

organised milling and other industries so well that in 1793 any citizen, domiciled in a section, had only to present him or her-self at the sectional workshop to be given work. [218] A vast powerful organisation sprang up later on from these first attempts, so that in the Year II (1793–1794) the section tried to take over completely the manufacture as well as the

supply of clothing for the army.

The “Right to Work,” which the people of the large towns demanded in 1848, was therefore only a reminiscence of what had existed during the Great Revolution in Paris. But then in 1792–93, it was organised from below, not from above, as Louis Blanc, Vidal and other authoritarians who sat in the Luxembourg

from March till June 1848
intended it to be.[[219](#)]

There was something even better than this. Not only did the sections throughout the Revolution supervise the supply and the sale of bread, the price of objects of prime necessity, and the application of the maximum when fixed by law, but they also set on foot the cultivation of the waste lands of Paris, so as to

increase agricultural produce by market gardening.

This may seem paltry to those who think only of bullets and barricades in time of revolution, but it was precisely by entering into the petty details of the toilers' daily life that the sections of Paris developed their political power and their revolutionary initiative.

But we must not anticipate.

Let us resume the current of events. We shall return again to the sections of Paris when we speak of the Commune of 10th August.

[194](#)[] Arthur Young, *Travels in France*. p. 167 (London, 1892).

[195](#)[] Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709–1785), sometimes known as Abbé de Mably, was a French philosopher and politician. His ideas had a profound effect on the early deliberations of the assembly of the Estates-General of 1789. As well as contributing to republicanism, he also influenced socialism by advocating the abolition

of private property which he saw as being incompatible with sympathy and altruism and conducive only to a person's antisocial or egotistical instincts; René-Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, Marquis d'Argenson (1694–1757) was a French statesman. A friend of Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists, he turned to writing scientific tracts, among them *Considérations sur le gouvernement ancien et présent de la France* (1764), while his *Journal et mémoires* (1859–1867) forms one of the major sources for the literary and political history of Louis XV's reign. His works were cited by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social*

Contract. (Editor)

[196](#)[] The king and queen were popularly denounced as “Monsieur Veto” and “Madame Veto” after the Constituent Assembly gave the king the power to veto any decrees—epithets immortalised in the lyrics to the revolutionary song “La Carmagnole.” (Editor)

[197](#)[] The “districts” were described as “sections” after the municipal law of June 1790 was passed.

[198](#)[] Vol. I, Paris, 1894, p. vii.

[199](#)[] Most of the “sections” held their general assemblies in churches, and their committees and schools were often lodged in buildings which formerly belonged to the clergy or to

monastic orders. The Bishopric became a central place for the meetings of delegates from the sections.

[200](#)[] Sigismond Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune*, Vol. III, p. 625; Ernest Mellié, *Les Sections de Paris pendant la Révolution*, Paris, 1898, p. 9.

[201](#)[] Lacroix, *Actes*, Vol. II, p. xiv.

[202](#)[] Lacroix, *Actes*, Vol. III. p. iv.

[203](#)[] *Vide* chap. XXI.

[204](#)[] Lacroix, *Actes*, Vol. III, pp. xii. and xiii.

[205](#)[] Lacroix, *Actes*, Vol. IV. p. xix.

[206](#)[] S. Lacroix, in his Introduction to the fourth volume of the *Actes de la Commune*, gives a full account of this

affair. But I cannot resist reproducing here the following lines of the “Address to the National Assembly by the deputies of the sixty sections of Paris, relative to the acquisition to be made, in the name of the Commune, of national domains.” When the members of the Town Council wanted to act in this affair of the purchases, instead of the sections, the sections protested and they expressed the following very just idea concerning the representatives of a people: “How would it be possible for the acquisition consummated *by the Commune itself, through the medium of its commissioners, specially appointed ‘ad hoc,’ to be less legal*

than if it were made by the general representatives... Are you no longer recognising the principle that the functions of the deputy cease in the presence of the deputer?" Proud and true words, unfortunately buried nowadays under governmental fictions.

[207](#)[] Lacroix, Vol. I, pp. ii, iv, and 729, note.

[208](#)[] The Feast of the Federation, a grand celebration of the triumph of the Revolution, held on 14th July, 1790. (Editor)

[209](#)[] A reference to *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française, ou Journal des assemblées nationales, depuis 1789*

jusqu'en 1815 (1833–1838), edited by Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez (1796–1865) and Roux-Lavergne (1802–1874). This was a 40 volume history of the French Parliament and its editors strongly admired the principles of Robespierre and the Jacobins. (Editor)

[210](#)[] S. Lacroix, *Les Actes de la Commune*, 1st edition, Vol. VI, 1897, pp. 273 *et seq.*

[211](#)[] “L’idée autonomiste dans les districts de Paris en 1789 et en 1790,” in the review *La Révolution française*, Year XIV, No. 8, 14th February 1895, p. 141 *et seq.*

[212](#)[] Third Part, Chapter IV of *De la Capacité Politique des Classes*

Ouvrières (1865), included in *Property is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (AK Press, 2011): “There is no middle term: the commune will be sovereign or a subsidiary, all or nothing” (p. 769). (Editor)

[213](#)[] Section des Mathurins, quoted by Foubert, p. 155

[214](#)[] Division I., Article 2.

[215](#)[] Division IV., Article 12.

[216](#)[] Danton understood thoroughly the necessity of guarding for the sections all the rights which they had attributed to themselves during the first year of the Revolution, and this is why the *General Ruling for the Commune of Paris*, which was by the deputies of

the sections at the Bishopric, partly under the influence of Danton, and adopted on 7th April 1790, by forty districts, abolished the General Council of the Commune. It left all decisions to the *citizens assembled in their sections*, and the sections retained the right of *permanence*. On the contrary, Condorcet, in his “municipality scheme,” remaining true to the idea of representative government, personified the Commune in its elected General Council, to which he gave all the rights (Lacroix, *Actes*, 2nd series, Vol. I, p. xii).

[217](#)[] Article 55.

[218](#)[] Meillé, p. 289.

[219](#)[] We must say “intended,” because in 1848 nothing was *done* besides talk and discussion.

1848–1871

In this speech, delivered by Kropotkin at the Commune Celebration in March 1898, he sketches the two key revolutions of nineteenth century France, that of 1848 and of 1871. Kropotkin draws from these popular revolts the lessons anarchists learned from them. It was published in Freedom in April 1898.

We are here tonight to commemorate two great events: the 50th anniversary of the revolution of 1848 in Europe and the 27th anniversary of the Commune revolution of 1871 at Paris.

We have so often commemorated the 18th of March, so often spoken of this uprising that he who will consult our papers for the last ten or eleven years will find in

the commemoration articles and speeches nearly all that can be said about that great event. A most instructive booklet could be made of these Commune speeches and papers.

I will say, therefore, a few words on the Revolution of 1848.

To begin with, *no proper history of that movement has ever been written*—not even

by Radicals, not even by Socialists.

Up till now all histories of revolutionary movements were written according to the following *receipt*:

The misery of the people was great; the people revolted. It was partially successful, but ultimately defeated: there was great bloodshed—quite useless. The people was defeated because it was not

organised, was not sufficiently disciplined. They went too far in their demands.

What can be deduced from such books and pamphlets?— Be disciplined! Don't go too far in your demands. Obey your leaders! Make no unsuccessful movement!

Such a view, however, is utterly false in three respects.

False as regards the time

before the revolution. False as regards the revolution itself. False as regards its consequences.

Before every revolution times are undoubtedly bad. Popular misery *is* a source of discontent. But every thing is not bad all round during the years which precede a revolution.

Revolutions have never been and *never will be a result of*

sheer despair. Sudden misery and crises may prevail in the years which precede a revolution, but these years are also always years of *hope*. *It is hope—not despair—which prepares revolutions.*

The down-trodden peasants, workers, or nationalities begin to hope in the possibility of a better future. In the name of that hope, agitation spreads amidst the peasants, the

workers, the citizens, the down-trodden nationalities.

It was the *hope* of getting rid of British rule which inspired the Irish a hundred years ago, in 1798. Hope which took hold of the minds in Europe in 1848. Hope which moved the Paris workers in 1871.

Another feature. No revolution falls upon us from the skies. *Each of them has been prepared in two ways.*

The revolution may be purely political in its course and results—as the March revolution in Berlin was to a great extent. But be it purely political or even purely nationalist—it was a *Social*, a *Socialist*, a *Communist* movement of ideas, a movement in the *economical* sphere which in every case has prepared it. *Masses of people have never been nor*

will be set into motion on merely political grounds. This is a lesson of history which ought to be impressed upon all those who live under the illusion that the political institutions of a country may be changed, or independence may be won, in the name of political liberty alone. There must be a distinct economical issue in view for the people if you expect that people to act

in a revolutionary way. The clearer the issue—the better, but it *must* be there.

So it was in France in 1789—the abolition of rural and municipal serfdom and of obligations resulting therefrom. So it was in 1848.

The years 1830–1848 were years of a most extensive Socialist propaganda in Western Europe. The number of Socialist and especially

Communist books, papers and pamphlets which were circulated during those years in this country and in France was enormous. These books, papers and pamphlets are forgotten, ignored by our generation; this ignorance is the only reason why we hear so much of “scientific Socialism” as being of recent creation, whilst there is not, in the *so-called scientific*

Socialism, one single assertion, general or of detail, which would not have been developed, even more scientifically, and always with more lucidity, in the English and French literature of 1830—1848. Every year we discover in Robert Owen, in [William] Thompson, in Proudhon and in a mass of writers unearthed but lately, every one of the ideas which are enunciated

now as new discoveries, in a less metaphysic garb but in a more scientific shape.

These were wonderful years, when an immense amount of Socialist and Anarchist thought were thrown out into the world, and circulated in scores of thousands of copies.

And these ideas bore their fruit. Not one single revolution has ever broken out in the

world without having been prepared by scores of partial outbreaks. Revolutions are not military parades. It is the mass of the people which comes on the scene in a revolution, and masses of people have never been moved except by scores of partial, preliminary outbreaks.

Hundreds of partial peasants' outbreaks took place in France before the people of

Paris took the Bastille on 14th July, 1789.

Scores of small outbreaks and machine wars took place in this country before '48, and even in down-trodden Germany, the little fighting which took place at Berlin on the 18th of March 1848 was preceded by several outbreaks of weavers and coal miners, only now brought to the memory of our generation by

our friend Hauptmann.[[220](#)]

In France, the reign of Louis-Philippe was an uninterrupted series of political conspiracies of the Blanquists, and of labourers' outbreaks of which the Lyon insurrection broke out with the watchword:

To live working,

[or] To die fighting![[221](#)]

As to Italy I hardly need to mention the countless attempts of Mazzini and his followers to

shake off the Austrian yoke and the hundreds of popular outbreaks which took place in the provinces belonging to the Pope or ruled by the Austrians.

The leading feature of the revolution of 1848 was, first of all, that it was *European*—not merely national. No sooner had it broken out in Rome than it spread to France, to Vienna, to Berlin. It began a

new era. It showed that henceforward insurrections may still remain local and national, but that revolutions of any serious moment will henceforward be international. They will spread, like wild fire, to several countries at once. Even insular England was in 1848 on the verge of a revolution, which was only averted by rapid concessions to popular agitation.

Henceforward, revolution will not be kept back by frontiers. In each country, of course, they will take their own character, but they will be European—not local. At the next revolutionary outburst, Germany, which is now in the state that France was fifty years ago, will probably make its revolution of 1848; she will try State Socialism in a Unitarian, centralised republic.

Russia may make her revolution of 1789, but France, owing to the beacon that was planted by the Commune of Paris in 1871, and to the subsequent growth of Communist ideas, will already proceed with the dismemberment of the State, and will try something better than State Socialism: her revolution will bear traces of Anarchist ideas; Spain, and

also possibility Italy, will follow her more or less in that new phase of human development.

When we now read the French republican literature of the “forties,” we clearly see that for the republican of those times, the republic was not a mere change in the forms of government. People lived then under the illusion that the *moment that France would get*

rid of Kings, and have a national parliament elected by universal suffrage—convinced Equality would come out by itself, through legislation, through the “Popular Government,” in the “Popular State”—the Volks-Staat as German Social Democrats say up to the present date.

The State would put an end to the prevailing misery. The

State—that is the National Parliament—would reorganise industry, by aiding the workingmen's associations to become the owners of the factories. The State would send “armies” of workers to bring under culture new lands and cultivate them in accordance with science—you know well these fancies, be it only through Marx and Engels’ “Communist

Manifesto” which remains a sort of bible for the German Social-Democrats. Fifty years ago, these illusions were shared in France by nearly all Socialists, as they are now shared in Germany.

Federalist ideas were then repudiated in France as an incarnation of reaction—just as they are now repudiated in Germany. The worship of the Convention of 1793, and the

Jacobin Club, which were represented as having *made* the Great Revolution, while in reality they were obstacles to whatever really had been achieved in the economic field by the French peasants and workers—the worship of what they described as the *dictature of the people* but what was really a dictatorship of the few against the people, was supreme. Whatever has been

done by the people itself in the country or in the revolutionary municipalities (the taking of the land and the destruction of feudal servitude) was either totally ignored, or represented as the work of paid agents of reaction.

In this state of mind, Frenchmen nominated their revolutionary Provisory Government [in 1848]; in this state of mind, they elected a

National Assembly.

The disappointment was terrible. No revolution in the facts of real life having taken place in the provinces, no revolution whatever in economical relations having taken place even in Paris, the revolutionary work having been left to a National Representation—this representation became the weapon of the anti-Socialist

reaction.

In vain the people of Paris tried to impress more advanced ideas upon that body. Once in power, it organised the middle-class volunteers, and while it relegated the two Socialist members of the Provisional Government—Louis Blanc and Albert [l'Ouvrier][[222](#)]
—to a Ministry or Committee of Reforms in the Luxembourg

palace, it lost no time in organising the military power which was to be used to crush a possible outbreak.

Louis Blanc and Albert, supported by a committee of workers, had to face the insoluble problem of organising State production. Isolated as they were from the masses, which alone would have given the inspiration for a revolutionary change in the

ways and means of production, they soon were driven to simply organise relief works. Unemployed from all provinces rushed in scores of thousands to Paris. Revolutionists would have seen in the mass of the best workers of Paris the element for taking possession—*de facto*, irrespective of the sanction of the Chamber—of all that was necessary for

living and producing, to *vivre en travaillant* (to live working), as the Lyon weavers said. But the State Socialist Louis Blanc—a worshipper of order and discipline—gradually dropped into relief works for unemployed and into State's aid to co-operative societies, while the government adroitly sent its own man (Thomas) to render even these relief works as

unpopular as possible.[[223](#)]

The workers of Paris, on the proclamation of the Republic, had sent a deputation to the government “to offer three months of misery to the service of the Republic.” They hoped that something would be made for them in the meantime. But when the government felt itself strong enough, it discharged the relief works’ brigades, and ordered

part of them to be marched to Algeria...

“The alarm-bell began to ring on the tower of St. Sulpice, calling the proletarians to arms,” as Herzen wrote. Barricades grew up; General Cavaignac reconnoitred the position. The fight began. The proletarians fought with the energy of despair, but the troops, gorged with brandy, excited against

the “robbers,” fought this time and, after a bloody fight which lasted for three days, the proletarians were defeated.
[[224](#)]

Massacres and transportations by the thousand began. Men, women and children were shot by the hundred. A dark, gloomy night set over Europe. A wild, black reaction began. Even Socialist ideas were wiped out of the

minds of the next generation. We began re-building that glorious building like men who come to the buried site of an old city and begin to build a new one, almost unconscious of the treasures of architecture buried under the loam and rubbish accumulated above them.

*Another unsuccessful
revolution!* the wiseacres say
...

But there is no such thing as an unsuccessful revolution! We were told all sort of nonsense about that revolution. But here we are now, several hundred thousand in Europe and America, commemorating today that revolution, inspiring us with its ideals, with its heroism, and how many hundreds of young ones amongst us will take tonight the silent catch *to live for it*,

and to die for it.

And then, how many men fell in the street battle in Berlin?—Not a hundred. Much less than the Russian youth lost within the last twenty years. And what was the result? Serfdom was done away with in Germany. After 1848, it could be withheld no longer. Personal servitude was abolished and, by the way, a blow was given to absolute

rule.

In Italy, where pre-revolutionary movements were far more important, the result was infinitely greater. The rule of the Pope and Church over large populations was done away with. But do you know what the rule of the priests meant? Read Lilly's article in the last number of the *Nineteenth Century*. [[225](#)] Inquisition reigned in full, up

to the revolution in the Pope's States. For a blasphemous word the tortures of the church, strappado[[226](#)] and fire, were applied. Why! even in Switzerland, in the German cantons which had not been touched by the Great French Revolution of the last century, physical torture—the thumbscrew—was officially recognised as a necessary part of the preliminary inquest.

And I will ask the Russians who may be in this hall—how many more years serfdom would have lasted in Russia, if our best men—Herzen and Bakunin—had not lived through the revolution of 1848 and taken in it a lively part? If a whole generation—“the men of the forties”—had not grown up out of that revolution from which our next generation—the Chernyshevskys, the

Mikhailovs, the
Dobrolyubovs[[227](#)]
—drew
their inspiration?

*That revolution has changed
the very face of Europe—the
way of thinking itself on the
Continent. And they—the
formalists—talk of
unsuccessful revolutions!*

But new ideas had to
germinate in order to make
Communism realisable. Before
1848, Communism too much

appealed to sentiment, to brotherly feelings, to moral principles. It required a Proudhon to come forward and to say: I don't ask you to love your brothers—you won't: you hate those whom you exploit. I ask you to count. I speak to you in the name of arithmetic, and prove to you by arithmetic that your system is wrong—an idea still fuller developed, as you know,

by Marx.

And it required again a Proudhon to come forward with his *General Idea of the Revolution of the XIX Century* and his *Federative Principle*, and, analysing that revolution of 1848, to prove that it must have failed because it undertook the impossible—to make the social revolution through a governing body.

[[228](#)]

The social revolution is an economic revolution and not a political one; he proved *it must attack the system of property, not the system of elections*. And when the self-government question came under discussion, he exclaimed and proved: “The Commune will be all or she will be nothing.”[[229](#)]

This was what the Commune of Paris of 1871

attempted to realise.

At a time when the Jacobinist centralisation ideas were revived and made a fearful havoc even within the International Workingmen's Association—everyone paying a tribute to them, the Paris workers made a new step and planted a new banner in the revolutionary movement: the Commune!

The commune, supreme in

its entire economical and political life. The commune becoming *all*, after having so long been *nothing*, nothing but a parcel of the State.

“Let every other part of France do as they like: call in a king if they believe still in his divine powers. Let them support any Church and all Churches they like—we, Paris, don’t want to be governed by them nor do we

pretend to govern them!”

This principle was so new that even in the advanced camp of the Socialists it was not understood. And yet, it was the principle of the revolution of the communes in the twelfth century which was now proclaimed by the workers of Paris, and was to become henceforward the watchword of the Social revolution.

Why should Paris, Lyon, St. Étienne be kept back in their progress towards Communism by the backward stay of the populations of Brittany and Western France altogether? Why should it be dragged backwards, obey a king whom you believe in, give up our children to the priest, and never make a move in the Communist direction, only for the sake of belonging to the

same State as you!

To exchange with you our produce; to federate with you for building a railway or a canal; or for repulsing a common enemy—well and good! But why should we obey the rulers whom you choose still to impose upon yourselves? We are strong enough to live by ourselves!

This was the new principle which proclaimed the people

of Paris on the 18th of March in 1871. A principle so little understood at that time that for years after the Commune, we Anarchists had to sustain the most bitter polemics—and have partly still—against the leaders of Social Democracy who treated us as fools for expressing such ideas. Even now, how many will not see that this was the fundamental idea of the March uprising of

Paris—so admirably well worded in the proclamation of the Committee of the National Guard.

The conditions in which the Commune was proclaimed—with German armies at its door, after a crushing national defeat—and with the mistake of a centralised power for Paris which was made at the outset, the Commune could not live long enough to pass

from the principle it had proclaimed to its application. *Quite a forest of State prejudices had to be cleared in Paris itself*; they had to be weeded out of the hearts of the very best men who gave themselves heart and soul to the movement, before the principle could produce what it was worth.

The Commune lived but seventy days, and a fortnight

after its proclamation, the Versailles government already began to massacre all prisoners whom its soldiers could occasionally lay hands on, in the battle or by treachery.

A desperate fight against the “Prussians of Versailles” absorbing all the thoughts of the population, it necessarily brought into prominence men of a military turn of mind in

preference to those who saw the salvation of the Commune in sweeping Communist measures for the masses.

Some such measures were taken, nevertheless, and the general approval they met with on behalf of the toilers of Paris only proved how much more popular the Commune would have been had she resorted to measures of that sort from the outset. But the Socialist

movement was so young yet! It only began to revive within the last three or four years to '71.

But that wild beast, Gallifet, [230] who has on his own conscience—if he has any, which I doubt—the massacre of at least some ten thousand men, women and children, this “sword” of France which is still alive, understood perfectly well the filiation between 1848

and 1871. When he ordered the massacre of columns of prisoners—of workers, of course—he always ordered the “grey beards” to be shot first. “They have seen June ’48” he said.

I will not speak of these massacres. You must read them yourselves.

And now, looking upon the 27 years which we have lived since, I see two things: a

revolution which would try to establish State Socialism in France, by means of a central government, as it was done in '48, is no more possible. No such attempt will be made. The next revolution in France, whose date no one can foresee, will break out in many centres at once. It will start with the proclamation of Communes, each of which will try to find its own solution for

the Social Question. The same in Spain, and very much the same in Italy.

As to the growth of Socialist and Anarchist ideas, you know it. They spread everywhere, penetrate in all classes of society, pervade European thought. And more and more the idea which we are preaching becomes generally accepted. The Social Revolution must begin with

organising *Consumption*, not *Production*. Well-being must be secured for every inhabitant of the territory, and production must be regulated in accordance with the needs of consumption, not *vice-versa*.

These are the conquests which we owe to our fathers of 1848, to our predecessors of 1871.

[220](#)[] Gerhart Johann Robert Hauptmann (1862–1946) was German playwright, poet, and novelist who

was a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1912. In 1889, his social drama *Vor Sonnenaufgang* (*Before Dawn*) made him famous overnight, though it shocked the theatre-going public by its starkly realistic tragedy dealing with contemporary social problems. Most gripping and humane, as well as most objectionable to the political authorities, was *Die Weber* (*The Weavers*) in 1892, a compassionate dramatisation of the Silesian weavers' revolt of 1844, to which Kropotkin is referring. (Editor)

[221](#)[] In 1831, workers in Lyon, France, rose in revolt under both the red and black flags, seizing control of the town for a short period. During the

rebellion they proclaimed “Vivre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant!” (Live working or die by fighting!). Proudhon stayed there in 1843–1844 and took up the workers’ term for their associative socialism: *mutuellisme* (mutualism). See my “Appendix —The Symbols of Anarchy,” *An Anarchist FAQ*, volume 1 (AK Press, 2008). (Editor)

[222](#)[] Albert l’Ouvrier (“Albert the Worker”) was the *nom de guerre* of Alexandre Martin (1815–1895). A close associate of Louis Blanc, he fought on the barricades in the revolution of 1848 and became a member of the socialist government created at the Hôtel de Ville (so

becoming the first member of the industrial working class to be in French government). When the socialists were included into the provisional government, Louis Blanc made Albert a secretary and vice-president of the Luxembourg Commission. After the rejection of Blanc's proposal for a fully fledged Ministry of Labour, Albert together with Blanqui and Armand Barbès attempted an insurrection on the 15th of May, which was crushed. Albert was captured and imprisoned until he was released by the general amnesty of 1859. (Editor)

[223](#)[] When the National Workshop program was ratified in the national

assembly, Blanc's chief rival, Émile Thomas (1822–1880) was put in control of the project. He centralised the workshops in a semi-military fashion and so rather than workers having jobs and a working environment they controlled, they received government funded work parties for hard manual labour for meager wages or paid to remain idle. The failure of these policies was used to close the workshops in June, at which the workers rebelled again and were put down by force. Blanc was blamed for the failure of the workshops and his ideas discredited. (Editor)

1857) was a French general who was given full powers by the National Assembly to crush the June Days revolt provoked by the closing of the National Workshops. This made him France's de facto head of State and dictator. After crushing the rebel workers, killing some 1,500 of them, he laid down his dictatorial powers but continued to preside over the Executive Committee until the election of a regular president of the republic. He was expected to win the Presidential election of 10th December 1848, but lost massively to Louis-Napoleon. (Editor)

[225](#)[] W.S. Lilly, "The Methods of the Inquisition," *The Nineteenth*

Century: A Monthly Review No. 253,
March 1898. (Editor)

[226](#)[] Strappado is a form of torture in which the victim's hands are first tied behind their back and then suspended in the air by means of a rope attached to wrists, which usually dislocates both arms. (Editor)

[227](#)[] Three Revolutionary Russian Populists: Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky (see glossary); Timofei Mikhailovich Mikhailov (1859–1881) was a *Narodnik* (populist) who came from a peasant family and became an industrial worker in St. Petersburg plants. He attended Land and Liberty workers' circles and joined the *People's Will*

organisation in St. Petersburg in 1880. In January 1881, he joined the bomb throwers that its Executive Committee created in its successful attempt to assassinate Alexander II and was hanged as a result; Nikolay Alexandrovich Dobrolyubov (1836–1861) was a Russian literary critic, journalist, poet and revolutionary democrat. During his years at the University he organised an underground democratic circle, issued a manuscript newspaper, and led the students' struggle against the reactionary University administration. (Editor)

[228](#)[] Extracts from Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution in the*

Nineteenth Century (1851) and *The Federative Principle* (1863) are included in *Property is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (AK Press, 2011) as are chapters from his account of the 1848 Revolution, *Confessions of a Revolutionary* (1849). (Editor)

[229](#)[] Third Part, Chapter IV of *De la Capacité Politique des Classes Ouvrières* (1865), included in *Property is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (AK Press, 2011): “There is no middle term: the commune will be sovereign or a subsidiary, all or nothing” (page 769). (Editor)

[230](#)[] Gaston Alexandre Auguste,

Marquis de Galliffet, Prince de Martigues (1830–1909), was a French general infamous for his part in the bloody repression of the Paris Commune. He was Minister of War in Waldeck-Rousseau's cabinet when socialist Alexandre Millerand joined it, provoking deep controversy in the socialist movement. (Editor)

The Paris Commune

Translation by Nicholas Walter

This famous text summarises what Kropotkin considered the key lessons of the revolt of 1871. Based on three articles from Le Révolté (1880, 1881 and 1882), it was published in Words of a Rebel and its conclusions were that political and economic

transformation must occur at the same time and that even local government was not capable of handling the many problems facing a popular revolt or the creation of a new social system. Only mass activity and participation could achieve lasting change.

The theory of the
State and the practice

of the Commune

On 18th March, 1871, the people of Paris rose against a despised and detested government, and proclaimed the city independent, free, belonging to itself.

This overthrow of the central power took place without the usual stage effects of revolution, without the firing of guns, without the shedding of blood upon barricades. When

the armed people came out into the streets, the rulers fled away, the troops evacuated the town, the civil servants hurriedly retreated to Versailles carrying everything they could with them. The government evaporated like a pond of stagnant water in the spring breeze, and on 19th March, the great city of Paris found herself free from the impurity which had defiled

her, with the loss of scarcely a drop of her children's blood.

Yet the change thus accomplished began a new era in that long series of revolutions by which the peoples are marching from slavery to freedom. Under the name of the *Paris Commune* a new *idea* was born, to become the starting point for future revolutions.

As is always the case, this

fruitful idea was not the product of some individual's brain, of the conceptions of some philosopher; it was born of the collective spirit, it sprang from the heart of a whole community. But at first it was vague, and many of those who acted upon and gave their lives for it did not look at it in the light in which we see it today; they did not realise the full extent of the

revolution they were inaugurating; of the fertility of the new principle they were trying to put into practice. It was only after they had begun to apply it that its future significance slowly dawned upon them; it was only afterwards, when the new principle came to be thought out, that it grew definite and precise and was seen in all its clearness, in all its beauty, its

justice, and the importance of its results.

From the time that socialism had taken a new leap forward during the five or six years which preceded the Commune, one question above all preoccupied the theoreticians of the approaching social revolution. This was the question of knowing what would be the form of political organisation

of society most favourable for that great economic revolution which the present development of industry is forcing upon our generation, and which must bring about the abolition of individual property and the taking into common of all the capital accumulated by previous generations.

The International Working Men's Association gave this

reply. The organisation, it said, must not be confined to a single nation; it must extend over artificial frontiers. And soon this great idea sank into the hearts of the people and took fast hold of their minds. Though it has been hunted down ever since by the united efforts of every kind of reactionary, it is alive nevertheless, and when the voice of the rebellious peoples

destroys the obstacles to its development, it will reappear stronger than ever before.

But it still remained to know what should be the component parts of this vast association.

To this question, two answers were given, each the expression of a distinct current of thought: one said the *people's State*; the other said *anarchy*.

The German socialists

advocated that the State should take possession of all accumulated wealth and give it to workers' associations and, further, should organise production and exchange, and generally watch over the life and activities of society.

To which the socialists of the Latin race, strong in revolutionary experience, replied that it would be a miracle if such a State could

ever exist, but if it could, it would surely be the worst of tyrannies. This ideal of the omnipotent and beneficent State is merely a copy from the past, they said, and they opposed it with a new ideal—*an-archy*: that is, the total abolition of the State and social organisation from the simple to the complex by means of the free federation of popular forces, of producers

and consumers.

It was soon admitted, even by a few “statists” less imbued with governmental prejudices, that anarchy certainly represents a much better sort of organisation than that aimed at by the people’s State, but, they said, the anarchist ideal is so far off that just now we cannot trouble about it. On the other hand, the anarchist theory lacked a concrete and

at the same time simple formula to show plainly its point of departure, to embody its conceptions, and to indicate that it was supported by a tendency actually existing among the people. The federation of workers' unions and consumers' groups extending over frontiers and independent of existing States still seemed too vague, and at the same time it was easy to

see that it could not take in the whole diversity of human requirements. A clearer formula was needed, one more easily grasped, one which had a firm foundation in the realities of life.

If the question had merely been how best to elaborate a theory, we should have said that theories, as theories, are not of so much importance. But so long as a new idea has

not found a clear, precise form of statement, growing naturally out of things as they actually exist, it does not take hold of men's minds, does not inspire them to enter upon a decisive struggle. The people do not fling themselves into the unknown without some positive and clearly formulated idea to serve them, so to speak, as a springboard at the starting-point.

As for this starting-point, they must be led up to it by life itself.

For five months Paris, isolated by the siege, had drawn on its own livelihood, and had learnt to know the immense economic, intellectual, and moral resources it disposes of; it had caught a glimpse of its strength of initiative and understood what it meant. At the same

time it had seen that the chattering gang which had seized power had no idea how to organise either the defence of France or its internal development. It had seen the central government at cross purposes with every manifestation of the intelligence of the great city. It had understood more than that: the powerlessness of any government to guard against

great disasters or to smooth the path of rapid revolution. During the siege it had suffered frightful privations, privations of the workers and defenders of the city, alongside the insolent luxury of the idlers, and thanks to the central government it had seen the failure of every attempt to put an end to this scandalous system. Each time that the people wished to take a free

leap forward, the government added weight to their chains and tied on a ball, and naturally the idea was born that Paris should set itself up as an independent commune, able to put into practice within its walls what was dictated by the will of the people!

This word, the *Commune*, then came from all lips.

The Commune of 1871 could be nothing but a first

attempt. Beginning at the close of a war, hemmed in between two armies ready to join hands and crush the people, it dared not unhesitatingly set forth upon the path of economic revolution; it neither boldly declared itself socialist, nor proceeded with the expropriation of capital or the organisation of labour; nor did it even take stock of the general resources of the city.

Neither did it break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not seek to establish within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex which it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the communes. Yet it is certain that if the Paris Commune had lived a few months longer it would

inevitably have been driven by the force of circumstances towards both these revolutions. Let us not forget that the bourgeoisie took four years of a revolutionary period to change a limited monarchy into a bourgeois republic, and we should not be astonished that the people of Paris did not cross with a single bound the space between the anarchist commune and the government

of robbers. But let us also bear in mind that the next revolution, which in France and certainly in Spain as well will be communalist, will take up the work of the Paris Commune where it was checked by the massacres of the Versailles army.

The Commune was defeated, and we know how the bourgeoisie avenged itself for the fright the people had

given it in shaking off the yoke of their rulers. It proved that there really are two classes in modern society: on one side, the man who works and gives up to the capitalist more than half of what he produces, and passes too easily over the crimes of his masters; on the other, the idler, the well-fed, animated by the instincts of a wild beast, hating his slave, ready to massacre him like

game.

After shutting the people of Paris in and blocking up all the exits, they let loose the soldiers, brutalised by barrack life and drink, and told them publicly: “Kill these wolves and their young!” And they said to the people:

“Whatever you do, you shall perish! If you are caught with arms in your hands—*death!* If you lay down your arms

—*death!* If you use them
—*death!* If you beg for mercy
death! Whichever way you
turn, right, left, forward, back,
up, down *death!* *You* are not
merely outside the law, but
outside mankind. Neither age
nor sex shall save you or
yours. You shall die, but first
you shall taste the agony of
your wife, your sister, your
mother, your daughters, your
sons, even in the cradle!

Before your eyes the wounded man shall be taken out of the ambulance and hacked with bayonets or beaten with rifle-butts. He shall be dragged alive by his broken leg or bleeding arm and flung into the gutter as a groaning, suffering bundle of rubbish.

“Death!

Death!

Death!”[[231](#)]

And then, after this insane
orgy over the piles of corpses,

after this mass extermination, came the petty yet atrocious vengeance which is still going on—the cat-o'-nine-tails, the thumbscrews, the irons in the ship's hold, the whips and truncheons of the warders, insults, hunger, all the refinements of cruelty.

Will the people forget this hangman's work?

Overthrown, but not conquered, the Commune is

reborn today. It is no longer only a dream of the vanquished, caressing in their imagination the lovely mirage of hope; no! the “Commune” is today becoming the visible and definite aim of the revolution rumbling beneath our feet. The idea is sinking into the masses, it is giving them a rallying cry, and we firmly count on the present generation to bring about *the*

social revolution within the commune, to put an end to the ignoble bourgeois exploitation, to rid the people of the tutelage of the State, and to inaugurate in the evolution of the human race a new era of liberty, equality, and solidarity.

Popular aspirations
and popular
prejudices in the

Commune

Ten years already separate us from the day when the people of Paris, overthrowing the traitor government which had seized power at the downfall of the Empire, set themselves up as a Commune and proclaimed their absolute independence.[[232](#)] And yet it is still towards that date of 18th March, 1871, that we turn our gaze, it is to it that

our best memories are attached; it is the anniversary of that memorable day that the proletariat of both hemispheres intends to celebrate solemnly, and tomorrow night hundreds of thousands of workers' hearts will beat in unison, fraternising across frontiers and oceans, in Europe, in the United States, in South America, in memory of the rebellion of the Paris

proletariat.

The fact is that the idea for which the French proletariat spilt its blood in Paris, and for which it suffered in the swamps of New Caledonia, is one of those ideas which contain a whole revolution in themselves, a broad idea which can cover with the folds of its flag all the revolutionary tendencies of the peoples marching towards their

emancipation.

To be sure, if we confined ourselves to observing only the concrete and palpable deeds achieved by the Paris Commune, we would have to say that this idea was not wide enough, that it covered only a very small part of the revolutionary programme. But if on the contrary we observe the spirit which inspired the masses of the people at the

time of the movement of 18th March, the tendencies which were trying to come to the surface and didn't have time to enter the realm of reality because, before coming into the open, they were already smothered under the piles of corpses—we shall then understand the whole significance of the movement and the sympathy it arouses within the masses of both

hemispheres. The Commune enraptures hearts not by what it did but by what it intended to do one day.

What was the origin of this irresistible force which draws towards the movement of 1871 the sympathy of all the oppressed masses? What idea does the Paris Commune represent? And why is this idea so attractive to the workers of every land, of

every nationality?

The answer is easy. The revolution of 1871 was, above all, a popular one. It was made by the people themselves, it sprang spontaneously from within the masses, and it was among the great mass of the people that it found its defenders, its heroes, its martyrs—and it is exactly for this “mob” character that the bourgeoisie will never forgive

it. And at the same time the moving idea of this revolution—vague, it is true, unconscious perhaps, but nevertheless pronounced and running through all its actions—is the idea of the social revolution, trying at last to establish after so many centuries of struggle real liberty and real equality for all.

It was the revolution of “the mob” marching forward to

conquer its rights.

Attempts have been made, it is true, and are still being made to change the real direction of this revolution and to represent it as a simple attempt to regain the independence of Paris and thus to constitute a little State within France. But nothing can be less true. Paris did not try to isolate itself from France, any more than to conquer it by

force of arms; it did not try to shut itself up within its walls like a monk in a cloister; it was not inspired by a narrow, parochial spirit. If it claimed its independence, if it wished to prevent the interference of the central power in its affairs, it was because it saw in that independence a means of quietly working out the bases of future organisation and bringing about within itself a

social revolution—a revolution which would have completely transformed the whole system of production and exchange by basing them on justice, which would have completely modified human relations by putting them on a footing of equality, and which would have remade the morality of our society by giving it a basis in the principles of equity and solidarity.

Communal independence was then but a means for the people of Paris, and the social revolution was their end.

This end would have certainly been attained if the revolution of 18th March had been able to take its natural course, if the people of Paris had not been slashed, stabbed, shot and disembowelled by the murderers of Versailles. To find a clear and precise idea,

comprehensible to everyone and summing up in a few words what had to be done to bring about the revolution—such was indeed the preoccupation of the people of Paris from the earliest days of their independence. But a great idea does not germinate in a day, however rapid the elaboration and propagation of ideas during revolutionary periods. It always needs a

certain time to develop, to spread throughout the masses, and to translate itself into action, and the Paris Commune lacked this time.

It lacked more than this, because ten years ago the ideas of modern socialism were themselves passing through a period of transition. The Commune was born, so to speak, between two eras in the development of modern

socialism. In 1871 the authoritarian, governmental, and more or less religious communism of 1848 no longer had any hold over the practical and libertarian minds of our era. Where could you find today a Parisian who would agree to shut himself up in a Phalansterian barracks?[[233](#)] On the other hand, the collectivism which wished to yoke together the wage system

and collective property remained incomprehensible, unattractive, and bristling with difficulties in its practical application. And free communism, anarchist communism, was scarcely dawning; it scarcely ventured to provoke the attacks of the worshippers of governmentalism.

Minds were undecided, and the socialists themselves didn't

feel bold enough to begin the demolition of individual property, having no definite end in view. Then they let themselves be fooled by the argument which humbugs have repeated for centuries: “Let us first make sure of victory; after that we shall see what can be done.”

First make sure of victory!
As if there were any way of forming a free commune so

long as you don't touch property! As if there were any way of defeating the enemy so long as the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, by seeing that it will bring material, intellectual, and moral well-being for everyone! They tried to consolidate the Commune first and put off the social revolution until later, whereas

the only way to proceed was
*to consolidate the Commune
by means of the social
revolution!*

The same thing happened
with the principle of
government. By proclaiming
the free commune, the people
of Paris were proclaiming an
essentially anarchist principle,
but, since the idea of
anarchism had at that time
only faintly dawned in men's

minds, it was checked half-way, and within the Commune people decided in favour of the old principle of authority, giving themselves a Commune Council, copied from the municipal councils.

If, indeed, we admit that a central government is absolutely useless to regulate the relations of communes between themselves, why should we admit its necessity

to regulate the mutual relations of the groups which make up the commune? And if we leave to the free initiative of the communes the business of coming to a common understanding with regard to enterprises concerning several cities at once, why refuse this same initiative to the groups composing a commune? There is no more reason for a government inside a commune

than for a government above the commune.

But in 1871 the people of Paris, who have overthrown so many governments, were making only their first attempt to rebel against the governmental system itself; so they let themselves be carried away by governmental fetishism and gave themselves a government. The consequences of that are

known. The people sent their devoted sons to the town hall. There, immobilised, in the midst of paperwork, forced to rule when their instincts prompted them to be and to move among the people, forced to discuss when it was necessary to act, and losing the inspiration which comes from continual contact with the masses, they found themselves reduced to

impotence. Paralysed by their removal from the revolutionary source, the people, they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.

Born during a period of transition, at a time when the ideas of socialism and authority were undergoing a profound modification, emerging from a war, in an isolated centre, under the guns of the Prussians, the Paris

Commune was bound to perish.

But by its eminently popular character, it began a new era in the series of revolutions, and through its ideas, it was the precursor of a great social revolution. The unheard of, cowardly, and ferocious massacres with which the bourgeoisie celebrated its fall, the mean vengeance which the torturers have perpetrated on

their prisoners for nine years, these cannibalistic orgies have opened up between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat a chasm which will never be filled. At the time of the next revolution, the people will know what has to be done; they will know what awaits them if they don't gain a decisive victory, and they will act accordingly.

Indeed, we now know that

on the day when France
bristles with insurgent
communes, the people must
no longer give themselves a
government and expect that
government to initiate
revolutionary measures. When
they have made a clean sweep
of the parasites who devour
them, they will themselves
take possession of all social
wealth so as to put it into
common according to the

principles of anarchist communism. And when they have entirely abolished property, government, and the State, they will form themselves freely according to the necessities dictated to them by life itself. Breaking its chains and overthrowing its idols, mankind will march them towards a better future, no longer knowing either masters or slaves, keeping its

veneration only for the noble martyrs who paid with their blood and sufferings for those first attempts at emancipation which have lighted our way in our march towards the conquest of freedom.

From the Paris
Commune to
anarchist communism

The celebrations and public

meetings organised on 18th March in all the towns where there are socialist groups deserve all our attention, not merely because they are a demonstration of the army of the proletariat, but more as an expression of the feelings which inspire the socialists of both hemispheres. They are “polled” in this way better than by all imaginable methods of voting, and they formulate

their aspirations in full freedom, without letting themselves be influenced by electoral tactics.

Indeed the proletarians meeting on this day no longer confine themselves to praising the heroism of the Paris proletariat, or to calling for vengeance for the May massacres. While refreshing themselves with the memory of the heroic struggle in Paris,

they have gone further. They are discussing what lessons for the next revolution must be drawn from the Commune of 1871; they are asking what the mistakes of the Commune were, not to criticise the men who made them, but to bring out how the prejudices about property and authority, which were at that time prevalent in the workers' organisations, prevented the revolutionary

idea from coming to light, being developed, and illuminating the whole world with its life-giving light.

The lesson of 1871 has benefited the proletariat of the whole world, and, breaking with their old prejudices, the proletarians have said clearly and simply what they understand *their* revolution to be.

It is certain from now on

that the next rising of communes will not be merely a *communalist* movement. Those who still think that it is necessary to establish the independent commune and then within this commune attempt to carry out economic reforms are being left behind by the development of the popular mind. It is through revolutionary socialist actions, abolishing individual property,

that the communes of the next revolution will assert and establish their independence.

On the day when, as a result of the development of the revolutionary situation, governments are swept away by the people, and the camp of the bourgeoisie, which is maintained only by the protection of the State, is thrown into disorder—on that day (and it is not far off), the

insurgent people will not wait until some government decrees in its amazing wisdom some economic reforms. They will themselves abolish individual property by a violent expropriation, taking possession in the name of the whole people of all the social wealth accumulated by the labour of the previous generations. They will not confine themselves to

expropriating the holders of social capital by a decree which would remain a dead letter; they will take possession of it on the spot and will establish their rights by making use of it without delay. They will organise themselves in the factories to keep them working; they will exchange their hovels for salubrious dwellings in the houses of the bourgeoisie; they

will organise themselves to make immediate use of all the wealth stored up in the towns; they will take possession of it as if it had never been stolen from them by the bourgeoisie. Once the industrial baron who deducts profits from the worker has been evicted, production will continue, shaking off the restraints which obstruct it, abolishing the speculations which kill it

and the muddle which disorganises it, and transforming itself according to the needs of the moment under the impulse which will be given to it by free labour. “People never worked in France as they did in 1793, after the land was snatched from the hands of the nobles,” says [Jules] Michelet. People have never worked as they will on the day when work has

become free, when every advance by the worker will be a source of well-being for the whole commune.

On the subject of social wealth, an attempt has been made to establish a distinction between two kinds, and has even managed to divide the socialist party over this distinction. The school which today is called *collectivist*, substituting for the collectivism

of the old International (which was only anti-authoritarian communism) a sort of doctrinaire collectivism, has tried to establish a distinction between capital which is used for production and wealth which is used to supply the necessities of life. Machinery, factories, raw materials, means of communication, and land on one side, and homes, manufactured goods, clothing,

foodstuffs on the other, the former becoming collective property, the latter intended, according to the learned representatives of this school, to remain individual property.

An attempt has been made to establish this distinction. But the good sense of the people has quickly got the better of it. They have realised that this distinction is illusory and impossible to establish.

Unsound in theory, it fails before the reality of life. The workers have realised that the house which shelters us, the coal and gas which we burn, the nourishment which the human machine burns to maintain life, the clothing which man covers himself with to protect his existence, the book which he reads for instruction, even the pleasure which he gets, are so many

integral parts of his existence, are just as necessary for the success of production and for the progressive development of mankind as machines, factories, raw materials and other media of production. They have realised that to maintain individual property for this kind of wealth would be to maintain inequality, oppression, exploitation, to paralyse in advance the results

of partial expropriation. Leaping the hurdles put in their way by theoretical collectivism, they are going straight for the simplest and most practical form of anti-authoritarian communism.

In fact in their meetings the proletarians are clearly asserting their right to all social wealth and the necessity of abolishing individual property as much in consumer goods as

in those for further production. “On the day of the revolution, we shall seize *all* wealth, *all* goods stored up in the towns, and we shall put them in common,” say the spokesmen of the working masses, and the audiences confirm this by their unanimous approval.

“Let each person take from the store what he needs, and we may be sure that in the warehouses of our towns there

will be enough food to feed everyone until the day when free production makes a new start. In the shops of our towns there are enough clothes to clothe everyone, stored there unsold, next to general poverty. There are even enough luxury goods for everyone to choose according to taste.”

That—judging by what is said at the meetings—is how

the proletarian mass imagines the revolution: the immediate introduction of anarchist communism and the free organisation of production. These two points are settled, and in this respect the communes of the revolution which is knocking on the door will no longer repeat the errors of their forerunners, which, by shedding their blood so generously, have cleared the

way for the future.

The same agreement has not yet been reached—though it is not far away—on another point, no less important, on the question of *government*.

It is known that there are two schools of thought face to face, completely divided on this question. “It is necessary,” says one, “on the very day of the revolution to set up a government to take power.

This strong, powerful and resolute government will *make* the revolution by decreeing this and that and by imposing obedience to its decrees.” “A sad delusion!” says the other. “Every central government, taking it on itself to rule a nation, being formed inevitably from disparate elements and being conservative by virtue of its governmental essence, would only be a hindrance to

the revolution. It would only obstruct the revolution in the communes ready to go ahead, without being able to inspire backward communes with the spirit of revolution. The same within a commune in revolt. Either the commune government will only sanction things already done, and then it will be a useless and dangerous mechanism; or else it will want to take the lead: it

will make rules for what has still to be worked out freely by the people themselves if it is to be viable; it will apply theories where the whole of society must work out new forms of common life with that creative force which arises in the social organism when it breaks its chains and sees new and wider horizons opening up in front of it. The men in power will obstruct this enthusiasm,

without carrying out any of the things which they would have been capable of themselves if they had remained within the people, working out the new organisation with them instead of shutting themselves up in government ministries and wearing themselves out in idle debates. A government will be a hindrance and a danger; powerless to do good, full of strength to do evil; so what is

the point of it?”

However natural and correct this argument is, it nevertheless runs up against age-old prejudices stored up and given credit by those who have had an interest in maintaining the religion of government side by side with the religion of property and the religion of god.

This prejudice—the last of the series, God, Property,

Government—still exists and is a danger to the next revolution. But it can already be stated that it is in decline. “We shall manage our business ourselves, without waiting for orders from a government, and we shall take no notice of those who try to force themselves on us as priests, proprietors, or government,” the proletarians are already saying. So it is to

be hoped that if the anarchist party continues to struggle vigorously against the religion of governmentalism, and if it does not itself stray from the path by letting itself be drawn into struggles for power—it is to be hoped, we say, that in the few years which still remain to us before the revolution the governmental prejudice will be shaken sufficiently not to be able any

more to draw the proletarian masses into a false road.

There is however a regrettable omission in the popular meetings which we want to point out. This is that nothing, or almost nothing, is done about the countryside. Everything is confined to the towns. The countryside might not exist for the workers in the towns. Even the speakers who talk about the character of the

next revolution avoid
mentioning the countryside
and the land. They do not
know the peasant or his
desires, and they don't venture
to speak in his name. Is it
necessary to insist at length on
the danger arising from this?
The emancipation of the
proletariat will not be even
possible so long as the
revolutionary movement does
not include the villages. The

insurgent communes will not be able to hold out for even a year if the insurrection is not at the same time spread in the villages. When taxes, mortgages and rents are abolished, when the institutions which levy them are scattered to the four winds, it is certain that the villages will understand the advantages of this revolution. But in any case it would be

unwise to count on the diffusion of the revolutionary idea from the towns into the countryside without preparing ideas in advance. It is necessary to know here and now what the peasant wants, how the revolution in the villages is to be understood, how the thorny question of property in land is to be resolved. It is necessary to say to the peasant in advance what

the town proletarian and his allies propose to do, that he has nothing to fear from the measures which will be harmful to the landowner. It is necessary that on his side the town worker gets used to respecting the peasant and to working in agreement with him.

But for this the workers must take on *the task of spreading propaganda in the*

villages. It is important that in each town there should be a small special organisation, a branch of the Land League, [[234](#)] for propaganda among the peasants. It is necessary that this kind of propaganda should be considered as a duty under the same heading as propaganda in the industrial centres.

The beginning will be difficult, but let us remember

that the success of the revolution is at stake. It will only be victorious on the day when the factory worker and the field labourer proceed hand in hand to the conquest of equality for all, bringing happiness to the country cottage as well as to the building of the large industrial areas.

[231](#)[] We take these lines from the *Popular and Parliamentary History of the Paris Commune* by Arthur

Arnould, a work which we have pleasure in bringing to the attention of our readers.

[232](#)[] Originally written in March 1881.
(Editor)

[233](#)[] A phalanstery (*phalanstère*) was a self-contained structure which housed a co-operative community. It was developed in the early 1800s by Charles Fourier who envisioned a highly organised and regulated community living under one roof and working together for mutual benefit. A member's quality of life would vary with their work, "talent," and "capital" (amount invested). Everyone would work while a spirit of competition would exist in the

shape of emulation. (Editor)

[234](#)[] A reference to the *Irish National Land League*. (Editor)

Commune of Paris

This speech, delivered by Kropotkin at South Place Institute on 18th March, 1891, was published in Freedom in April 1891. In it, he stresses that while the Commune was anarchistic and communistic, it was neither anarchist nor communist enough to overcome the many problems it faced.

Three separate periods must be distinguished in the history of the Commune: the first week before the elections, the two months of Communal rule, and the last ten days of popular rising—"the bloody week." During the first and last we see the *people* at work. The middle is a period of Parliamentary government.

The first week is a period of great enthusiasm. The

Government is overthrown.
Paris is free. She will follow
her own lines of development.
If the country follows her, so
much the better, but if not, she
will organise herself as she
likes.

The greatest hopes are
roused in the downtrodden
masses by the new conditions.
It is a *popular movement*,
without orders from above,
without direction. One of the

most radical revolutions in history has been accomplished.

The revolutionary leaders, however, *do not* believe in the movement. They follow it because they are leaders, but without putting *their hearts* into it. They will remain true to it, to the last, to the bitter end. They will die like heroes. But they do not share the hopes of the masses, and what

makes the movement great, like a great festival of emancipation, is the part taken in it by the whole population—that intelligent, artistic populace full of hope.

For the next two months the people disappear. They have their government and leave it to arrange everything.

The government is the most democratic imaginable. Workers, working-class

leaders, political revolutionists well known for their hatred of the Imperial rule and the rule of Versailles, are gathered in the Council of the Commune. They are honest, they are devoted to the Revolution.

But what a frightful confusion in this heterogeneous assemblage gathered in the Hôtel de Ville! Like all revolutionary governments, be they elected

or self-nominated—the Government of the Commune stands with one foot in the past, and the other in the future. Even those who look into the future do not trust it, they are timid, and, what is worse, they are overpowered by those who belong to the past.

The city is without work. The workshops are silent, food is scarce and prices high.

What must they do?

Think of the million or so of people who have trusted their destinies to them! Feed them! Lodge them! Think of food supplies when those in stock are exhausted! But the majority of the government are men of the past, and they never have thought of that great problem, the problem of bread for the masses. They have fought in politics. They

have fought against Imperial oppression, against forms of government. They never have once thought how one million people live, work, produce and consume. Political liberty is all they know about. Food with them is a secondary question.

And when the minority intends doing something to push forward the social problem, they are told by the majority: “Not now! Not under

the Prussian guns! Not in the face of a Versailles army!” But when then if not precisely at this moment? And the minority spend the precious days and weeks in trying to convert the majority. Or they discuss the *political* measures which the majority presses upon them. Majority rule overrules them in the Council of the Commune.

Remark, I do not criticise the majority or the minority. If

I speak, it is for the future. The question is not whether the Commune was right or not, but what we shall have to do if we are in a similar movement.

We know what the Authoritarian Socialist would say. He would say that the minority ought to have made a new *coup d'état*, a new change of Government within the Commune: called the

people to arms, overthrown the majority of politicians, arrested them, taken their place. So the Jacobins did in 1793, when they overthrew the Girondists.

But that was impossible. That would have meant war *within* the Commune in the face of the German and Versailles enemies—ready to take advantage of any dissention within the walls.

Our answer is quite different. What men of initiative have to do when a like opportunity occurs is to remain with the people. They have no business in a Council. Among the masses their initiative will be a thousand times more powerful than if they had been mewed up in a Revolutionary Government. The masses, as I just said, were during the first weeks,

inspired by some vague foresight of the future. They expected from the Commune a new move, an attempt at least at solving the great problem of Bread for All. It was to aid the masses to make this next move that the energies of any man of initiative ought to have been devoted: to provoke *in the masses* a conception of what must be done to solve that

question, and leaving unnoticed the rulers in the Communal House, the men with the red scarf, to start amidst the masses and within the masses the work which might have been a new departure towards a Socialist future.

They did not do it. They did not feel the necessity of the move. They had not yet parted with the idea of Government.

They were not *Anarchist* enough to be revolutionary. They were not *Socialist* enough to care for the Bread for All above all grand and beautiful things. They were children of the last century's Great Revolution, the Middle-Class Revolution, not of the Revolution of the Nineteenth Century, not of the popular Revolution of our times. That Revolution itself had not

sufficiently ripened in men's minds.

The defeat of the Commune was certain. She could not conquer, surrounded as she was by two armies, Prussian and French, joining hands before the common enemy—the Hydra of socialism.

But the defeat might have been less crushing. But the legacy of the Commune might have been greater than it was.

If the defeat was so crushing and the legacy to future generations so small, as we must frankly admit it was, this was because the Commune was not *Communistic enough*, because the Commune was not *Anarchist enough*.

Socialist she was to a certain extent, but her Socialism was that Socialism which is now patronised by the middle-classes, the Socialism which

simply works to diminish the hours of labour and to increase the wages of labour, without attacking capitalist rule at the root—the Wage System.

Anarchist she was to some extent—against the State. She did not recognise the supremacy of a National Parliament. She was Anarchist too in the manner in which the people undertook her defence.

Some free scope to popular initiative was left, and the battalions of the Federalists, when they went to the fortifications, were simply a population in arms.

But the Commune was not Communist. She had not risen to the idea that everyone has the right to live, to have food and shelter. And she was not Anarchist enough to understand that the only

salvation of the great city was in popular initiative.

France had been defeated by the Germans, not because of the superiority of the German organisation, as State Socialists say, but because she had *no fighters* to oppose the German invaders, no *inspiration* amongst her defenders.

The Commune repeated the same error. She had no fighters and not the inspiration

which might have trebled the numbers. She had to fight the Versailles bands: but there are two methods of warfare. The warfare organised from above, by officers and chiefs, and popular warfare.

The Commune took to the first, she only tolerated the second. But even when the people did go and fight, their improvised military commanders were meddling

all the time, and paralysing the popular efforts.

The months of Communal rule are the dullest, and most unproductive in revolutionary history. Not one single great idea coming to the front. Not one act of greatness. The government of the Commune hardly differs from any government engaged in the military defence of a city, and if it were not for the last week

of the life of the Commune, when the people of Paris rose again with the same enthusiasm as during the first week, we should never have come together to celebrate the Anniversary of the Commune.

You know what that last week was. As soon as the news spread that the Versailles army had entered Paris, the people undertook themselves the defence of the city in their

own suburbs.

“Enough of galloons!”
Delescluze wrote in his
memorable proclamation.
“Enough of gold embroidered
military caps! [Make a] Place
for the people!”

And the people took their
place. The big barricades
erected in the centre of Paris
by the would-be military
geniuses of the Commune
were abandoned. They could

not be defended at all. And the workers, with their wives and children, fought like lions behind improvised barricades not higher than a man's breast.

This was, again, the *people* of Paris in their desperate battle against the middle classes, and were it not for this fight, unorganised, free, full of personal initiative and heroism, without chiefs and without gold-embroidered caps, we

should never have come together to commemorate that Revolution.

It is considered good taste not to speak of the horrors which the middle-classes perpetrated when they retook Paris; of the pools, the ponds of workers' blood, which they did shed; of the cold-blooded massacres of thousands of prisoners by means of the *mitrailleuse*;[[235](#)] of how

they shot the wounded in their beds.

But we *must* speak of that. We *must* remember it, because you, workers, must know that if you make the most insignificant rising, you will be shot and murdered and tortured in the same way if you do not succeed in abolishing middle-class rule.

Remember well, that in case of your defeat, the middle-

classes [will have] revenge upon you—not for what you will have done, but what they will have feared that you might have done.

Seize their property or not, you will be treated as if you had seized it. Destroy their wealth or not, you will be shot down as if you had destroyed it.

So the future Commune had better seize that property at

once. Seize it and use it for the common well-being; for giving to all human beings without exception, a road to the great harmonious development of mankind which they will find in common work, in common organisation of labour, in full freedom—in Anarchist Communism, in a word.

[235](#)[] *Mitrailleuse* is the French word used to describe all mounted rapid-firing weapons of rifle calibre. In French, it applies to all machine guns. (Editor)

The Revolution in Russia

This letter, addressed to a meeting in Whitechapel, was published in Freedom (November–December 1905).

In it, Kropotkin stresses the need for the worker to raise class demands and issues during the Russian Revolution of 1905.

Comrades,

When you decided to convoke this meeting, the revolutionary movement in Russia was only just beginning. And tonight we can already speak of the first victory of the Russian people.

True, that up till now the net result of the victory consists chiefly of promises. And promises of the Russian Tsar can as easily be broken as were broken the promises which the Austrian emperor

gave to his people after the Vienna insurrection of 18th March 1848.

However, the main point is that these promises were wrested by the people. And still more so that they were wrested by means of a general strike, which yesterday was considered an impossibility, but has proved to be so powerful a weapon for the revolution that the working

men of other countries in Europe and America surely will not fail to resort to it.

What is most promising in the Russian movement is that the people has not been misled by mere promises.

At St. Petersburg, at Moscow, at Warsaw, and in all other cities, it was understood at once that only certain vague promises of certain political rights had been given, but that

nothing had yet been made, or even said, which would give a hope of a new departure in the economical life of the peasants and the working men. And even as regards the political promises, the Romanovs, till now, have given no pledge of their sincerity.

In Western Europe, each time the ruling classes endeavoured to make peace with the people, and intended

to assert that a new move in politics was going to be made, they promulgated a general amnesty. Not longer ago than last Monday, they have done something similar in France, and so it was done always and everywhere. But till now in Russia our brothers remain imprisoned—over twenty years already—in that terrible Russian Bastille, the Schlüsselburg fortress.

What fête of Liberty can there be so long as our brothers remain in Schlüsselburg and in the jails all over Russia? When more than 20,000 persons are still in exile, in the hamlets of the Far East and the Far North, in Russia and Siberia!

There is no need to write long-worded laws to put an end to this. A long-worded amnesty is no amnesty at all; it

is a lie! A real amnesty can be written in three or four lines: All condemned for political crimes, for strikes, for agrarian disturbances, for armed resistance, and for breach of laws about military service, strikes, press, etc., are set free. All prosecutions for such affairs are terminated. That is all.

But this unavoidable first step has not yet been made.

No pledge of sincerity has yet been given. And if the amnesty is not enforced upon them, they won't give it.

Then all promises of political liberties will remain a dead letter so long as garrisons of from twenty to fifty thousand men remain in the big towns. Not only the state of siege, great and small, has to be abolished at once (and again this does not require long-

worded laws), but the garrisons must not remain in the cities. They are a menace to the people. Eighty thousand of the Guard of St. Petersburg are the stronghold of autocracy and of all political oppression.

At the same time they are the stronghold of the most reckless industrial exploiting of the working man.

Against Capital the working

man has only one arm—the strike. But no strike can be successful when tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of guns are brought out in the streets as soon as the working man decides rather to starve than to submit to the arrogant demands of the capitalists.

The Russian people—the working men—having compelled the autocrat to

abdicate his despotic power, must compel him now to give body to his abdication by sending away the troops upon which rest his power and the power of bureaucracy, the power of unbridled capitalism.

The people must arm itself; otherwise the Tsar, the bureaucrats and the capitalists will crush it down.

They are right, therefore, those who now carry the red

flag in the streets, claiming an amnesty, the sending away of the troops, and the arming of the people.

However, at the same time, the Russian working men must not forget *their own demands*. To guarantee the individual against police arbitrariness is necessary for all. But he who works and produces riches with his own hands requires something else.

When the working men began their general strike, they demanded the eight-hour day, an increase of their wages, insurance against illness and old age, and schools for their children. These demands are very modest. The working man's rights are wider than that. But why are even these modest demands already forgotten?

In the year 1848 the working

men of Paris and Vienna also trusted the [middle] classes. Once they had obtained the promulgation of a Constitution in ruling Vienna and a Republic in France, they agreed to wait three months in the expectation that measures would be taken which would grant them something besides the freedom of speech and meeting which they had already taken themselves *de*

facto.

And three months later the blood of the working men was freely running in the streets of both Paris and Vienna. And upon their corpses the middle classes built their power, which lasts till this day.

Russian working men! Don't forget this lesson! If you are compelled tomorrow, after the Constitution has been proclaimed, to return to the

factories the same slaves as you have been before, then you will have been betrayed in the same way as your brothers were betrayed in Vienna and in Paris.

Don't expect anything from would-be saviours. But in every factory, every building yard, every workshop, and every mine, *establish yourselves the order of things which, by common accord,*

you will find proper to establish. But remember this: Don't allow others to interfere! It is *your* affair, and *you* have to settle it.

Accomplish yourselves a revolution in the organisation of labour as you have accomplished it in the general administration of the Russian State.

Don't trust those who will tell you: "Not yet! It is too

soon!” No, it is not too soon; it is just the time for it.

The working men of all the civilised world will be with you if you bodily take upon yourselves that great task.

Long live the Social Revolution—in Russia and everywhere!

Peter Kropotkin
Bromley, Kent, Nov. 3, 1905

The Russian Revolution and Anarchism

**Presentations and
Conclusions, 1906**

**Translation by
Josephien van
Kessel[[236](#)]**

In October 1906, Russian

*communist-anarchists
assembled in order to discuss
various problems facing their
movement in light of the 1905
revolution. Kropotkin
participated in this
conference, presenting two
papers. The conference
papers were published as a
pamphlet in 1907 along with
the conclusions of the
congress, which were written
by Kropotkin and are*

representative of his ideas.

Political and Economic Revolution

In the 14th issue of *Khleb i Volia* [*Bread and Freedom*] the conclusions of a small conference were published. The conference took place in December 1904 and several anarchist-communist comrades discussed the necessity of the formation of

an anarchist party in Russia and briefly pointed out the basic principles on which such a party might be formed.

Since this time a whole series of great events have taken place that have changed the whole life of the country at its foundations, and that will have a deep influence on its further development. The revolution has spread like a huge wave across all of

Russia, Siberia, Poland, the Caucasus and so on, and we have gone through almost two years of revolutionary experience. This is why, now we have renewed our temporarily halted publication of *Listki "Khleb i Volia"* [*Leaflets from Bread and Freedom*], we decided to come together with comrades and discuss in detail the experiences of these years.

First we want to remark that we had not erred at that time concerning our basic position. The transition from autocracy to some form of representative government that was the outcome of the development in the whole of Europe in the nineteenth century, and towards which Russia was tending at that time, was not realised in our country in the way it was in the German

States in 1848, nor in the way
theoreticians who were
educated on German social-
democratic literature
expected. The transition will
be realised in our country in
the way it happened in
England in the years 1648–
1688, and in France in 1789–
1794; that is, *through a
revolution of the people that
will last several years and
will deeply change existing*

structures—economic as well as political structures, a revolution that will throw down the old order and will install a new one.

The demands of the popular masses in Russia were much greater than the reforms that were accepted by the Berlin workers in 1848. Russia's urban workers have already put forward many economic demands, but have not spoken

their last word in this respect; the peasants declared their right not only to the lands that were taken from them in 1861 during the liberation from serfdom but also to all lands that had been taken from the people earlier by the nobility [*boiary*] and authorities, by force or by Tsarist laws.

All measures undertaken to limit the Russian revolution were blown away like houses

of cards as soon as the people started to take part in the struggle.

The most powerful forces in the Russian revolution were the urban workers and the peasants. They were immediately more powerful than the revolutionaries from the rich classes. If the autocracy was forced to withdraw, it was forced to do so by mass events like the

demonstration of 9th January 1905, the near general strike in May of the same year in Poland, the general strike in October, the riots everywhere in the cities, and finally the broadly spread peasant uprising that started in Autumn 1904 and is still continuing. Furthermore, it is clear that the extremely agitated peasant masses will not be appeased as long as their right to all the

above, mentioned lands is not recognised.

Thanks to these facts the Russian revolution is such that the revolution cannot be restricted to creating another form of government and the replacement of the Peterhof Court[[237](#)] by the representative Duma. *In our country the revolution will be economic and at the same time political. The economic*

transformation will not be achieved by governmental structures, as our bourgeois-democratic party is demanding, but by the rising people itself.

Life itself demonstrated, therefore, that we had been right to declare, two years ago, that we did not think it was possible to divide the struggle into two consecutive periods: one for the political

revolution, the other for economic reforms that would be implemented by the Russian parliament. Together with the whole Russian people we fight against autocracy. At the same time, we have to work in order *to broaden our struggle and fight simultaneously against capital and against the government.*

This is not all. We declare

that all that can be done for the improvement of the material life of peasants and workers, in order to stop hunger in Russia and the deaths of millions of the Russian people, and to give them the possibility to move further along their path to complete liberation, *can be reached solely by peasants and workers themselves in a revolutionary manner.* The

Tsars do not give liberty for free; parliaments do not give it either. We have to take it ourselves.

It is therefore a criminal act in our eyes to convince the workers to leave their economic demands for the time being and to convince them that they can best get all that through the Duma, or to convince the peasants that they need to rise in order to

install the Constituent Assembly and that it will give them their lands and freedom. People that use this strategy have to know that never, nowhere, has any parliament, even in times of revolution, taken or can take the responsibility to implement serious economic reforms through law-giving.

Every Parliament, every Duma and every Constituent

Assembly is *in essence* a compromise between the parties of the future and the parties of the past. This is why it can not take any *revolutionary measures*. The most revolutionary parliament can only confirm and make lawful what has already been accomplished by the people. The most that it might do is the spreading (at least on paper) in the whole country

what has already been done in a large part of the country. It will only do so under pressure from the outside and this kind of spreading will only proceed and be realised when *on the spot and in fact* the people are accomplishing a revolution.
[[238](#)]

We realise perfectly that even in the apparently good conditions of the present revolution in Russia, it will not

be a social revolution. But it can be a step that makes the success of a social revolution in the future easier, *if the improvement of the material and legal position of the peasants and workers is accomplished in a revolutionary way and not through lawful half-measures.*

If the Russian revolution will really have such a character—and a lot depends on our own

actions in this respect—then a strong and powerful feudal-bourgeois government will not be constituted, as was the case in the seventeenth century in England and in 1848 in Germany and which hindered the further liberation of workers and peasants for a long time.

If the Russian peasants *win* back their lands and both their personal and communal

freedom; if they confirm the right to land for all those who want to work it with their own hands and force the Duma to recognise this accomplished fact; if the Russian workers at this moment, during the revolution that has started, conquer those conditions that give them the possibility for universal human development, not only by shortening the working day, but also through

the recognition of their right and ability to organise and manage industrial production—if only they would accomplish this, although in the current situation they could accomplish more—then whatever form the representative government will take in Russia, it will lack the power that Napoleon I had after the [French] Revolution, or Bismarck after the street

uprisings in Berlin that forced the Prussian king to establish a parliament. In this case, the Russian parliament will no longer be a powerful bulwark of the bourgeoisie. At worst, it will only be a stillborn structure of a transitional period.[[239](#)]

The experience of the last two years convinces us even more that we have to

constantly keep in mind our ultimate goal, the destruction of capitalism and its loyal servant, the State, and their replacement by free communism, however far away its realisation. Only this can give us a reliable criterion to measure the ongoing events and our own actions in times of revolution.

But we would not act rationally if we were to restrict

our fight to an exclusively economic program and not take part in the ongoing political struggle against autocracy. Autocracy is one of the most harmful forms of statehood because it gives the State such enormous powers that the fight against it demands incredible efforts and victims—in Russia the fight has already lasted fifty years, if not longer. Serfdom, which

supported the State, has brought rural Russia to its current terrible and poor situation and keeps it there; serfdom and economic destitution supported the State everywhere in Europe. Autocratic Russia was the gendarme of Europe against the people's revolutions of the year 1848. It helped—more than any other State—to smother the socialism of the

year 1848, and together with England it was at the head of the coalition against revolutionary France in 1793.

While we recognise the ideal of a future order without the State, we cannot forget the reality of the current situation in the expectation of the coming of a new order. We do not fight abstract concepts of the State but the existing governments that oppress

nations. This is why our comrades in Western Europe and America, who know that whatever disguise State power dresses itself in, it is always the defender of the interests of the exploiters of the land, industry, trade and stock markets, engage in a continuous struggle against it, whatever form it may take.

As a consequence of this, we are destined to fight against

State power in Russia where, thanks to a whole series of historical circumstances, autocracy is not only the enemy of all personal freedom of men but also erects and protects the most horrible forms of exploitation of the labour of the people and moreover, in a form that is forced upon the Russian people from the outside.

Historical life does not keep

itself to the limits that theorists of every hue try to confine it to. If the political form that in Russia will take the place of autocracy is some form of representative government, it does not follow at all that the Russian representative institutions necessarily have to be similar to the Prussian or German Imperial parliament [the Reichstag]. If the Russian people are successful at this

moment to clip the wings of capitalism and the landed aristocracy it will by the same act clip the wings of State power. This would make a feudal-bourgeois parliament in the German manner impossible, but it will also render impossible a centralised republic in the French manner. If the uprising of the people in Russia is successful in undermining the power of the

central government, they will carry out much of what in Europe is considered to be the task of ministerial civil servants; if the Russian people secure more economic and political rights *in the peasant commune, in the agricultural society, in the volosti*[\[240\]](#) *and the regions*, if the people takes *into its own hands* the management of agriculture, production, education,

infrastructure, mines, etc., and takes all these affairs out of the hands of the Petersburg civil servants, then the shape that the Russian State takes after the revolution will have a totally different character from those that followed the revolutions in England, France and the United States. In this way, the further struggle against capitalism will be easier for the Russian people.

In general, our socialist theorists were too hasty in their conclusion that Russia has to go through a phase with the same parliamentary form as the Germans received. Germany has not lived through a revolution yet. Its constitution was bestowed—a gift of kings who were frightened by the French revolution of 1848; it was *not the fruit of revolution*.

We can therefore boldly declare that the extent of State power, that is the power of the bureaucracy, but also the extent of the subjugation of the individual and of the political freedom that Russia wins will depend on the level of activity that will be displayed in the current revolution by the extreme anti-governmental parties. And, in addition to this, the robustness of the rule

of the bourgeoisie as well.

If anarchists and factions close to them hand over the political revolution to the bourgeois Jacobins and their natural allies—the social-democrats who dream of the dictatorship of their party—they will betray the cause of the people, and their doing nothing will have consequences for the further course of history. The

anarchist understanding of political relations is very close to Russian life, but the State—that is, the centralisation of bureaucracy—is so foreign and far from Russian life and mentality that *in this respect we face an enormous task* exactly at the moment when the centralisers and the bureaucrats of all parties want to confirm their power on the ruins of the decayed autocratic

order.

There is nothing for us to do in the Duma. We will not enter the camp of the rulers. We will not expend our best energies in the erection of State power. But we would betray our programme if, with only the reason that the Duma does not represent anarchist kinds of political relations, we would step aside and cease to be interested in its activities. On

the contrary, before and after the establishment of the Duma we are obliged to clarify any unclear demands and calls for independence among the people; we will defend these demands stubbornly, try to realise them and demand their recognition from those who want to enter the Duma and, regardless of the way the members of the Duma imagine that they will decide on the

problems of the life of the people, we have to insist on the following:

Land—all lands—to the people, to those who work it with their own hands. *Not as private ownership like the bourgeois parliaments of the French revolution did, but as communal ownership.* And transfer of the distribution of lands not into the hands of the Ministry of State Property,

even if this would be a social-democratic organ, but of the village communes themselves and of unions of village communes.[[241](#)]

Factories and manufacturing companies, coal mines, railways—not into the hands of the Ministry of Labour, but of the workers who themselves work in them, organised in free unions.

Post and Communications—

not into the hands of the Postal Directorate, but of those who, in person, at a certain time and place, execute postal communications.

Education of the people—not into the hands of Bogolepov's men[[242](#)] dressed in new costumes, but into the hands of the people itself, the peasants and workers themselves, the inhabitants [of communities] who will

organise themselves for this reason into educational unions.

And it is in this way we have to act in all matters. On every issue we will stand side by side with the people and fight together with them against the centralising efforts of the Jacobin bourgeoisie and social-democratic theorists.

The more powerfully we act to defend our principles in every practical matter—

precisely at this moment of general collapse—the more we will do for the further development of Anarchism. The revolution has provided us with the opportunity for us to step out of the realm of theory into practical agitation. It would be shameful to step away from this responsibility. A few more words.

Looking at what has been accomplished in Russia by the

anarchists so far, we have to admit that our comrades have hardly understood the full importance of the task facing us.

A great deal of personal heroism has been exhibited in those two years. But it expressed itself in a way as if we thought it were possible to boldly declare war on the old order with a few individuals, to commit a few acts of terror

and some thefts of money from the rich, in order to make the people rise, overturn the old order immediately and start the communist expropriation of riches. The revolution is, however, not such a simple affair. Without the people, without the masses, a revolution is impossible. But the masses, even if heroic acts cause them to think, will fail to rise if no

serious preparatory agitation has been done amongst them.

On the whole, the anarchists have to do a much more serious task in the revolution—we resolutely declare it to be more enormous than the work of lonely adventurers who get involved in a shooting. We *have to become a revolutionary force, a force of the people*, that would be able to help the people discover

new ways for the revolutionary reconstruction of the whole of Russian life.

What we have to do is not merely carry out some acts of personal heroism. Together with the Russian people we have to find what the anarchists of 1793[[243](#)] could not find—new ways to create new forms of the political union of the people, and in this way to lay down the

foundations of a free, non-governmental and federal life.

France took the road to economic equality in its revolution. The United States, in the revolution of 1773, showed the way to federalism. Russia now has to have such a revolution and realise new ways to an economic federalism that is combined with the right to individual freedom.

Whatever comes out of the Russian revolution, some seeds of this new development have to be planted in it. But it is we anarchists who have to plant them. Otherwise we will not live up to the demands that history has placed upon us, and to the tasks given to us by our party. In order to execute this task, we have to come out of our isolation, understand our great historical mission

and always, everywhere, we have to be with the people, among the people.

Our relation with peasants and workers' unions

Amongst workers across the world at the present moment a deep movement is taking place with the goal to unite workers from various sectors into

broad trade unions[[244](#)] and to put down the foundations for broad international organisations that embrace not only the separate sectors of labour (miners, manufactures, weavers, dock-workers), but also national federations of workers—*outside the existing political parties, including the social-democratic parties.*

The effort to resurrect the International Working Men's

Association, which wages a *direct*, unmediated battle of labour against capital—not through parliament but directly by means that are generally available to all workers and only the workers—shows itself with new and impressive power at this moment.

The workers of Western Europe and America are starting to notice that the social revolution they awaited

at the end of the [eighteen-]
]sixties and for which they
founded the International is
moving further and further
away, in the same proportion
as the struggle of Labour
against Capital is transferred
into the hands of political
parties, which in theory, as
well as in practice, lead only
to the extinction of the
proletarians' revolutionary
energy, and which, although it

still keeps the name of “class war,” only teaches the workers how to make peace with their exploitation by the capitalists.

The workers of Western Europe understand, too, that in the first attempt at the foundation of the future order—whether in villages, amongst the peasantry, or in a city or province that declares the commune—the organisation of

life and production on general communist principles will be the responsibility of workers' unions, and that these alone can execute the tremendous task of the reconstruction of industry in the interests of the whole of society.

As a result of this, in Western Europe and in the United States, the so-called *syndicalist* movement, which consists of the self-

organisation of workers in trade unions with the goal of a *direct struggle and direct action* (*action directe*) against capitalism and capitalists, grows stronger every year.

Because they understood very well the importance of this movement, a section of our anarchist comrades in Western Europe has dedicated itself to this organisational work, and has won the trust of

worker comrades who, united in syndicates, have become a serious revolutionary force among the workers' unions in the Latin countries: France, Spain, French Switzerland, and part of Italy.[[245](#)]

While social democrats look to the workers' trade organisations for support in the fight *for political power* in parliaments, anarchists look to the workers' unions as cells of

the future social order and as a powerful means for the preparation of the social revolution, which is not confined to a change of political regime but also transforms the current forms of economic life, e.g. the distribution of the manufactured riches and their means of production.

The organisation of workers into trade unions is still young

in Russia, but a serious movement for the formation of broad workers' organisations has already started and the workers have already succeeded in showing their strength.

What this awareness of the strength of workers' unions consists of is shown by the experience of the Russian revolution. The workers' movement in January 1905 in

Petersburg, the general strikes in Poland in May and the general strike of October of the same year, the peasant uprisings that began in 1904, all proved to be the strongest of the powers in the Russian revolution and promoted the ends of the Russian revolution more than all other powers combined.

More than this, they also put the Russian revolutionary

cause on a new foundation.

The gains of the Russian revolutions are not the doing of any political party. They are primarily the result of the self-sacrifice of all the working masses. And only as a result of this is there ground to hope that the Russian revolution will not be limited to a simple change in the form of political regime but will make the first steps on the way to the

expropriation of land and the taking into common ownership of industrial capital.

The Russian anarchists could be of tremendous use if they understood their own task and helped to awaken in the workers and peasants an understanding of their own power, of their determining voice in the revolution and of what they can accomplish in their own interests.

With the convocation of the Duma, in which the Russian social-democrats and socialist-revolutionaries, who have so far determined the revolutionary tactics of all groups, will actively participate, the revolutionary forces will be side-tracked towards the establishment of a bourgeois-constitutional order. Here the workers' and peasants' organisations have to

act as a force that fights for the toilers' rights and to accomplish some real economic change in the ongoing revolution.

Only what peasants and workers succeed in accomplishing now, during the revolution—through direct action, and not through parliament—these alone will be the lasting gains of the Russian revolution.

In view of this, a heavy responsibility lies on the shoulders of the Russian anarchists. The time for theoretical discussions in separate small groups has passed. We have worked out our ideals and goals; we are people who are inspired by one common aim and who agree in general on the methods of action. But life is going forward quickly and

demands much from us, much more than mere individual acts of heroism in the struggle with capitalism and its defenders in the government. It demands from us an active involvement in the life of the peasant and worker masses.

Sometimes we are told that the social-democrats organise the urban workers and the socialist-revolutionaries organise the peasants. But

apart from the fact that both parties have only won over an insignificant part of the worker and peasant masses—the first primarily among the workers of the western part of Russia, the latter the peasants of only some districts [*guberniia*]—and that the greater part of the workers both in Petersburg and in Moscow are organised independently of any party—we have to remember that

both organisations have particular goals in mind. At the moment that a people's representation on broader principles is formed, they plan to dive into parliamentary activity. And it will be the death of the revolution *if the peasants and workers are convinced to wait for a change in economic conditions to arrive through parliament and not through*

their own activities.

It is the responsibility of anarchists to be amongst the workers and to prevent the political parties from exploiting the workers' movement for the benefit of parliamentary tranquillity. They have to produce revolutionary thought in workers' circles in order to make the peasant and worker unions into a force that could initiate, in practice and on the

spot, a well-planned mass expropriation.

The anarchists, when applying their ideas, will always be confronted with the question of whether to enter into existing workers' unions or to try to found new syndicates of an anarchist character.

Our Western European comrades do not follow any particular programme in this

respect and in every specific case base themselves on the facts prevailing at a given time and place, and even on their personal preferences. Some comrades succeeded in founding syndicates in Spain, France and even in London, which, although they do not consist of the greater masses of workers of a particular profession but only a few of them, nevertheless by their

zeal and active participation have had a great influence on all the workers of their profession. Always going in front in every strike and showing their organisational skills, they have succeeded in gaining a deep influence not only in their own circles but also in the federations of syndicates.

Others entered into already existing workers' unions,

especially in Spain, while remaining members of anarchist groups, and worked for the foundation of workers' unions without party loyalty. After having proven to be trustworthy to their comrades in a certain profession, they succeeded in having the workers' unions walk hand in hand with the anarchists and transfer the management of their trade union newspapers

to the anarchists, and as experience has shown the workers remained close to the anarchists, even during periods of extreme government persecution.

We are convinced that it is not wise to make a decision on this issue once and for all. It is only possible to say that if a workers' union demands of its members that they recognise a social democratic programme,

the anarchists can do only one thing: found a new and perhaps smaller but free workers' union for the same profession.

The anarchist who is fully conscious that workers' unions are a force for the future organisation [of society], and in the present revolutionary times have proven to be a revolutionary power, will normally discover in co-

operation with his comrades the form of activity amongst workers' unions that is closest to his mentality and temperament. He should, however, never lose sight of the fact that the workers' unions should never become a weapon for political parliamentary parties; that their purpose is the direct struggle with capital and its protectors in the government

and not to compromise with them in Parliament. Their goal is not to soften the relations between the exploiters-capitalists and the workers with fictional concessions, but to strive for the extinction of capitalism and the reorganisation of political life on the foundations of a free agreement between workers' unions.

When they keep these goals

in mind at all times—not only when first raising the theoretical points of the programme, but in order to implement them in life itself—anarchists who work in the syndicates will never risk losing themselves in the syndicates and becoming weapons in the hands of political bourgeois parties.

Conclusions of the

conference

I

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC
REVOLUTION

Our goal is the social revolution, the complete destruction of Capitalism and the State, and their replacement by Anarchist Communism. We must always keep this ultimate goal in mind and we have to stick to it as a basis to measure all that

happens.

The character of the revolution that started in Russia is clear. It is not a street uprising that ends with the convocation of parliament, but a revolution of the people that will last several years and that will completely tear down the old order and deeply *change all economic relations, together with the political structure.*

We will have to fight against the old order in both these directions. To distinguish in this fight two periods—one to gain representative rule and another to implement economic reforms—we see as fundamentally impossible. We think, on the contrary, that the people will only gain from the revolution in the economic area that which it takes with its own hands in a

revolutionary way. The most “revolutionary” Constituent Assembly will only be a compromise between the old and the new order and can only confirm on paper what the people has accomplished in reality.

This, however, does not mean that we can remain neutral in the struggle that is now being fought against autocracy. We fight against the

State not as an abstract idea, but in those forms that it takes in the life of nations. We fight against it always and everywhere and obviously we have to fight against the worst of its embodiments—autocracy, that is, the strongest and most enduring form of State—the strongest bulwark of great landownership and capitalism—the most terrible weapon of the rich and

powerful to impoverish and enslave the people. The harder we fight the Russian autocratic government at this moment the greater will be the improvement for the people, and our progress in bringing down the henchmen [*oprichnikov*] of the regime, [246] and the weaker will be the new form of State dominance that can install itself on the ruins of autocracy.

If the all-Russian parliament protects the position of autocracy, the mass of the people will act even more strongly for the abolition of the autocracy and the greater will be its part in the creation of new local forms in the life of the nation. The power of the bourgeoisie and of the landowners in parliament will be all the weaker and the easier it will be to continue the

fight.

We have nothing to do in the Duma: we have instead our own work to do. But our work is not to fight against those that favour the Duma and who fight against autocracy. Our task is *to promote in the people the idea of the people taking all that is necessary for life and production*—land, factories and manufacturing companies, railways, etc.—

and to fight together with the people against all laws that the lawmakers want to introduce in order to strengthen capitalism and State centralisation.

Our place is always and everywhere with the people and amongst the people, so that the Russian Revolution will be a step forward in comparison to the French and American revolutions.

II

ON THEFT AND EXPROPRIATION[[247](#)]

During our conference the problem of so called “expropriation”—individual and collective—was discussed in detail, and we wanted to explain our thoughts in the form of lessons and conclusions.

We wanted to stress the necessity of reserving the word “expropriation” for the

violent *transfer* of lands, factories, companies, houses, etc. [from their current owners], which is executed by the whole of society, village, city, etc., in the interests of the whole village, city, region or people, but not to use the word for the acts of individual or group *appropriation* of means or taking hold of property—even in a revolutionary way.

As we strive for the expropriation of land and other means of production by the Russian people, we should not, it seems to us, beforehand diminish the meaning of this great idea that is the foundation of the whole communist worldview.

We also wanted to point out the danger for every revolutionary party—especially in times of

revolution—if the confiscation of money, wherever it is possible and even for a strictly revolutionary goal, becomes part of the programme of activities of the party and thus broadly applied. Although we completely recognise the necessities of a period of fighting, we wanted to show how an increase in acts of robbery that allowed armies to survive in enemy land has

always degraded them and we would like to remind the reader of how during the Great French Revolution around the two extreme and revolutionary parties that had the *common good* in mind, a multitude of people gathered that aimed only at *personal gain* and that popular opinion in the end could not distinguish between them. This situation of course was used first by the moderate

party, but then by the reactionary party, against the extreme revolutionaries in order to suppress them and with them the Revolution as well.

We wanted to explain these and other considerations.

However, over the last two to three weeks the affairs in Russia have taken another turn. The imperial regime has introduced military field courts

and these courts have started to convict all revolutionaries without mercy and single out with zeal those who are arrested during a robbery or are only suspected of participation.

These convictions proceed every day and everywhere. In the prisons there are endless hangings, even of minors, without trial and investigation, on the accusation of robbery.

Every day our revolutionaries die a heroic death and give their young lives for the liberation of the Russian people.

At this moment, when the government is furiously arresting and convicting without investigation people for robbery, and even openly organising riots, robbery and murder on the streets through the Black Hundreds,[[248](#)] it is

impossible to deliberate quietly on the question of whether it is effective for the revolution to rob State and other institutions. When pogroms and stealing from the Jews are organised in the ministries with the permission of the Court at Peterhof and those murdered by the Black Hundreds do not even have weapons to defend themselves, in these circumstances any deliberation

is meaningless. By acting in this way, the government pushes everyone to general robbery and legitimises all violence in advance.

All that we can do, therefore, is to remind our comrades that we should never lose sight of the most important and greatest tasks of the Revolution.

When a war of life and death between the bureaucrats

who surround the autocratic throne and the Russian people has begun, and when the rulers of Russia resort to means such as the hanging of minors without a trial, the beating of women and children in the streets and the organisation of robbery and pogroms with State resources, in these circumstances it is difficult to deliberate on moral principles.

But, in any case, the crucial, all-powerful and all-conquering strength of the Revolution lies not in material means. In the material aspect, every Revolution is weaker than the State because every Revolution is made by a *minority*. The main strength of the Revolution lies in its moral greatness and in the greatness of the goals it tries to realise for the well-being of the whole

people, in the sympathies that it meets in the masses and in the impression that it makes on millions of people—in its powerful appeal. And this strength depends completely on the principles that it wants to create in real life.

Without this moral strength, no revolution is possible. We should preserve this power more than anything, whatever the circumstances at any given

moment of the struggle.

We are only capable of preserving this moral strength of the Revolution when we remember, always and everywhere, in the same way the Russian peasant does, that the goal of the revolution is not the transfer of riches from one private hand to another, but their transfer from private hands to *the hands of society, of the masses of the people.*

We have to strive first of all for this highest social goal, but we have to remember that it is impossible to reach it alone and that for this *the collective action of the masses of the people* is necessary. For this reason, it is necessary to adhere strictly to *the moral viewpoint that the Russian revolutionary has always shown the Russian people.*

III

ON ACTS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE PROTEST

In our literature it has been pointed out more than once the inevitability of individual and collective acts of protest against the buttresses of the contemporary social order that are called terrorist acts.[[249](#)]
In non-revolutionary times, these acts are often a sign of social upheaval and they raise the spirit of independence in the masses. They are an

example of personal heroism in serving the common cause and in this way they wake up the indifferent majority; at the same time they undermine the belief in the might of the political and economic oppressors. During a revolutionary period, these acts become a general phenomenon and it is not only heroic individuals who resist oppression with weapons. In

such a time a person does not have to be a principled revolutionary in order to be sympathetic to this kind of act. However, although we agree with this general position, we have to keep in mind that the purpose of every terrorist act has to be measured against its results and the impression produced by it.

These considerations may serve as a basis to decide

which acts support the revolution and which acts are a senseless loss of lives and strength. The first condition therefore is that a given terrorist act should be understandable by everyone without lengthy explanations and a complicated motivation.

There are individuals who are so infamous because of their activities in the whole country or for the population

of a certain locality that the news of an attack on one of them will make everybody, without the aid of revolutionary publications, remember their past, and the terrorist act will be accepted as completely logical. If, in order to understand such an act, an ordinary person from the masses, not a revolutionary, would have to do some hard thinking, the

influence of this act would be almost zero, or even negative; the act of protest will then become a murder in the eyes of the masses.

We think it is utterly artificial to distinguish between political and economic terror, between centralised terror and “diffuse” terror. We fight in the same way against economic and political oppression, as well as against the repression by the

central government and by local authorities.

There is however another side to the problem of terror—its organisation. We think that a terrorist act is a decision of one individual or of a circle of comrades who help the individual; that is why centralised terror in which the acting individual plays the role of the executor of decisions of other people is contrary to our

perspective. In the same way that we find it impossible to hold comrades back from revolutionary actions in the name of party discipline, we also think it is impossible to ask them to give their lives for an action that was not decided and planned by them.

The main difference between us and the political parties on the question of terror is that we do not think

that terror can be used as a means to change the existing order, but see it as a natural feeling of an angry conscience, or of self-defence, and we consider that exactly because of this, it has the function of propaganda as it promotes the development of the same feeling of anger in the people.

IV

THE PROBLEM OF ORGANISATION

Russian communist-anarchists—like their Western European comrades—deny every form of hierarchical organisation that is characteristic of the parties of the State socialists and try to realise in their midst another type of organisation on the foundation of the free agreement of independent groups amongst one another.

A necessary condition for the persistence and success of

this kind of organisation is the intimate association of all members within every individual group, which is why in the cities and big villages it is better to have a few smaller groups, united in a federation, than one big group.

Even in those cases when the individual groups take a special obligation upon themselves, they will not become [ruling] committees,

as their decisions are not obligatory for other groups who are not in agreement.

The connection between the different groups should not be reached through permanent committees of people that are chosen in advance for the management of the specific tasks of the federation. These committees always try to become, and very soon will become, a brake to further

development, like any government. Experience has proved that a much better connection between the groups can be attained through special conferences which the groups call periodically at a certain interval of time and which consist of comrades who are delegated by their groups *for a specific purpose*. Its conclusions are not obligatory for the groups but

can be accepted or rejected by them.

This kind of organisation prevents factions within the party better than the usual kind of hierarchical organisation, and the experience of many years has shown that—contrary to the dominant opinion—within a multitude of free anarchist groups, it is easier to reach agreement and unity in actions

through such means. Despite the absence of party discipline and compulsion, the different opinions on particular questions do not hinder agreement in practice, and on top of that, among the anarchists, a very important quality in revolutionary times is conserved—the capacity of individual initiative.

On the other hand, in hierarchical organisations that

are obedient to a central power, agreement is only apparent, and discipline is paid for by long-term internal disagreements, during which the disagreeing factions paralyse one another's activities, and what has long outlived its time and should have disappeared by now is artificially supported by [top-down] discipline, killing the party.

V

ON WORKERS' UNIONS

In Russia and abroad, the question arises among anarchists as to whether we should take an active part in workers' organisations. As the experience in Europe shows, this question deserves serious attention.

Among the workers of the world, at this moment, a deep movement is going on that

aims to create an enormous organisation comprising all categories of workers and organised internationally, outside the political parties. In other words, the workers are trying to breathe new life into the International of the [eighteen-]sixties in the form in which it existed until the intrigues of the German social-democrats, who wanted to turn the International into a

political party, hamstrung this powerful workers' organisation.

Workers understand that they have to play an important part when the revolution starts, and that only they have the power to give a social character to the revolution. They also understand that the powerful international trade unions that consist of all workers of a given

professional sector are the framework from which they can start to build the future [social and economic] order.

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

inherently necessary to achieve the workers' own goals. In this respect, the anarchists in Western Europe have been successful. No less successful is our propaganda for the general strike that is quickly spreading among the workers' unions in Europe, America and even Australia. [[250](#)]

We could all appreciate the importance of the general

strike for Russia last October, when even the unbelievers had to admit its revolutionary potential. But in the near future the workers' unions will prove even more necessary. With the convocation of the Duma, many revolutionary forces will be occupied with the creation of a bourgeois order, and the workers' unions have to act more and more as a socialist and communist

power, relying on themselves alone.

Considering this, we think that we should take an active part in the activities of the workers' unions in order to prevent them from being exploited by political parties, to infuse them with the revolutionary idea, and to try to mould them into a power capable of executing a planned and mass expropriation.

In practice, our question is whether anarchists should become part of already existing workers' unions, or whether we should try to create new unions on anarchist principles. Before we can answer this question, we would like to confirm our deliberations with the results of the work of local people in Russia. We think, however, that wherever the possibility

arises, anarchists should start building new workers' and anarchist unions that should participate in a federation with other unions of the same sector. Where unions without a party character already exist, anarchists should become members of those unions.

VI

THE GENERAL STRIKE

At the present time we can

boldly declare that the general strike, proclaimed by our Western European comrades as a means of producing a revolution, has proved to be a powerful weapon in the struggle, and that in the times we are living through in Russia, it can be applied with more unity of spirit and completeness than were deemed possible before.

We think, therefore, that in

the future the general strike has to be considered as a powerful method in the struggle.

When we look at the experience of last winter, however, we have to remember that the general strike is not an instrument that can be used by the will of central committees and that can simply be decreed by an order of the majority of

workers' delegates. Not to mention the fact that a general strike, for the mass of the workers, is accompanied by continuous deprivations and sufferings, and for this reason workers can only use this method [of struggle] with large periods of time between attempts. In general, a strike can only be successful when it is willed by a large majority of the workers [involved]. If, in

general, a majority of a small number of representatives making decisions on issues is a bad method [of organising], then it especially cannot be applied in this case, and every effort to *force* a general strike on workers with the goal of fighting against the autocracy can only produce heavy losses, defeat, and disillusionment, when the necessity for a general strike is

not recognised as appropriate at a given time by a large number of workers.

We want to add that although a general strike is a good method of struggle, it does not free the people that use it from the necessity of an armed struggle against the dominating order.

While confirming once again the importance of the general strike, we also want to point to

the necessity of not losing sight of the necessary preparatory work amongst the peasants and the workers to the end of *using immediately the first fruits of the victories that were gained through the general strike*, and not waiting for the further development of affairs but starting the expropriation of lands and means of production and consumption immediately,

even in the most distant localities and cities, wherever this seems possible.

[236](#)[] With editorial aid from Thomas Swann. (Editor)

[237](#)[] That is, the seat of the Tsarist government in the palace at St. Petersburg. (Editor)

[238](#)[] The most revolutionary parliament in history was the Assembly that was chosen in France in September 1792 right after the people of Paris took over the royal court and put the king in prison. This Assembly recognised, in June and July 1793, the abolition without compensation of serfdom and all feudal privileges and the return to

the agricultural communes of the lands that had been taken from them by landowners in the preceding 225 years only after the peasants already accomplished both in practice in the greater part of France. But, in order to have these two laws accepted by the Assembly, it was necessary for the revolutionary section of the Convention *to incite the people of Paris against the Assembly and with help of the Paris Commune arrest the other section of Assembly, in total 214 members*, of which 34 were convicted as traitors against the law and were executed and 180 were put in prison. And this in order to implement such a clearly just decision

that in a part of France was already realised and accomplished by the peasants.

[239](#)[] We remind the reader of how in France in the time of the Great Revolution, notwithstanding the incredible exhaustion that was caused by the wars that it declared against the monarchies (more than a million of the bravest people died in these revolutionary wars), and notwithstanding the desperate reaction which was possible because of this exhaustion, the feudal-bourgeois governments of the Bourbons and the Orléans were not in power for more than 15–18 years. Revolutions repeated themselves

every 15–18 years. France has already lived through one socialist revolution (1848) and one communalist revolution (1871).

[240](#)[] Groups of villages within a local government. (Translator)

[241](#)[] The Russian peasantry lived in communities known as *Obshchina* (commune) or *Mir* (society) as opposed to individual farmsteads. The term derives from the word *obshchiy* (common) and the vast majority of them held their land under communal ownership within a *mir*, which acted as the forum of village self-government and a co-operative. The land was worked by individual households, with the number of adults

determining how much they were allocated by the *mir*. The assembly of the *mir* consisted of all the peasant householders of the village. A number of *mirs* were united into a *volost*, which has an assembly consisting of elected delegates from the *mirs*. (Editor)

[242](#)[] Nikolai Pavlovich Bogolepov (1846–1901) was a Russian jurist and Minister of National Enlightenment, assassinated by a Socialist-Revolutionary activist. (Translator)

[243](#)[] “Anarchists” was already used in 1793. It was the name for those extreme parties that were involved in revolutionary activities for the well-being of the poor, on the spot, and

predominantly through local People's Associations [i.e., Sections in the towns and cities, peasant community assemblies].

[244](#)[] Trade unions in Russia were generally termed “professional unions.” We have decided to translate the term “professional” as “trade” to make it consistent with non-Russian terminology and the other works by Kropotkin included in this anthology.
(Editor)

[245](#)[] The French congress of workers in Amiens [in 1906] proved the foregoing words to be true. There an incredible number of resolutions put forward by the social democrats were brought to a vote but the resolutions

put forward by the anarchists were voted for almost unanimously [at the CGT conference].

[246](#)[] The term used here, *oprichnikov*, compares the government's forces to the *Oprichniki*, members of an organisation established by Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584) to govern the division of Russia known as the *Oprichnina* (1565–1572). In 1565, Ivan divided Russia into two parts: his private domain (or *oprichnina*) and the public realm (or *zemshchina*). The *Oprichniki* was responsible for the torture and murder of internal enemies of the Tsar, mass repressions, public executions, and confiscation of land from the Russian nobility. Due to

its negative impact on the economy, Ivan finally abandoned the practices of the *oprichnina* in 1572. According to Paul Avrich, in *The Russian Anarchists* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), Kropotkin's anarchist contemporaries "likened the *Okhrana* (political police) to the *oprichniki* who had brought swift death to the real and imaginary enemies of Ivan the Terrible" (113). (Editor)

[247](#)[] See Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, Chapter 2, for more on the debates among Russian anarchists concerning the politics of revolutionary violence at that time. (Editor)

[248](#)[] The Black Hundreds (*Chernyia*

sotni) were reactionary, anti-revolutionary and anti-semitic groups supported by the Tsarist authorities. (Translator)

[249](#)[] It must be stressed that by “terrorist acts,” Kropotkin is *not* referring to indiscriminate acts of violence directed towards the general public, quite the reverse. Rather, he is discussing directed acts against members of the State or ruling class who had acted in brutal ways against the Russian people. In short, acts of revenge in response to State terrorism. Such acts, it should be noted, were not limited to anarchists—all Russian revolutionary parties conducted them, although they were

most associated with the Socialist-
Revolutionaries and other Populists.
(Editor)

[250](#)[] If a general strike did not begin in France last 1st of May [as a result of the syndicalist CGT's campaign for the 8 hour day], it was prevented by the alarming situation in Europe. The French workers felt that any minute the war between France and Germany could be declared and that England was pressing on France to engage in such a conflict.

Enough of Illusions!

This article from Freedom (August 1907) sees Kropotkin discussing the necessity of turning the Russian Revolution from a political one to a social one, specifically the expropriation of land and workplaces by the masses. Originally published in Les Temps Nouveaux in July 1907, a different translation appeared in Emma

*Goldman's Mother Earth in
September 1907.*

The dissolution of the second Duma marks the close of the first period of the Revolution in Russia—the period of illusion.

These illusions began from the day when Nicholas II, terrified by the general strike of October 1905, signed a manifesto in which he promised to summon

representatives of the people and to govern Russia with their help.

It will, no doubt, be remembered under what conditions these promises were wrestled from the autocrat. The whole life of Russia, industrial, commercial, and administrative, had been brought to a standstill by the general strike. It was not the revolutionists, and still less was

it the political parties, who called forth this grand manifestation of the people's will. The strike began in Moscow, and spread spontaneously throughout all Russia, with one of those great popular thrills which sometimes rouse up millions of men, making them act with a single purpose and with a striking unanimity. In this way even miracles are

accomplished.

The mills and factories were silent. The railways were idle, and provisions of all kinds were heaped in the station yards, while in the towns, the bulk of the people were without food.

The total darkness and deathly silence of the streets sowed terror in the hearts of the ruling classes, who were left without news from the

interior of Russia, for the post and telegraph offices also had ceased to work.

Nothing but fear for himself and his family led Nicholas II to consent to [Count Sergei] Witte's proposals, and to summon the National Assembly—the Duma. And it was sheer fright at the sight of the crowd of 300,000 men flooding the streets of St. Petersburg, preparing to attack

the prisons, that decided him three days later to sign the amnesty.

As can be imagined, no confidence was to be placed in these first feeble signs of constitutional freedom extorted from an autocrat in this manner. The history of 1848 proves that such constitutional rights are worth nothing unless the people,

even at the price of blood, change the paper concessions into real concessions—unless the people themselves extend their rights by beginning the reconstruction of the whole of society on principles of communal independence.

If this is not done, the rulers let the spirit of the people wear itself out in rejoicings, and in the interval they get ready the loyal troops—they

make lists of the names of agitators to be arrested when convenient, or simply exterminated within a year or a few months—they retract their promises and shoot down the people, thus avenging upon them the terror and humiliations they have undergone.

But Russia suffered so much during this half century from hunger and all kinds of

Governmental oppression, and the intellectuals were so severely tried during those long years of unequal struggle, that the first concessions of the crafty Romanov were accepted in good faith. Russia rejoiced, and celebrated a new era of liberty.

And yet, the same day that Nicholas II signed the manifesto of 30th October, [\[251\]](#) and endorsed the Liberal

programme of the Ministry, he appointed a secret Government under the orders of Trepov,[[252](#)] with the purpose of paralysing these same reforms. We have told elsewhere how in these same days, while the people assembled in crowds in the streets, accepting in good faith the Tsar's promises, the secret police printed with all speed, by order of the secret

Government, proclamations in which it invited the hooligans of the larger towns to exterminate the intellectuals and the Jews, and sent its agents to organise the pogroms on the spot. We have told how these agents armed their men with revolvers paid for by the State, how at Tver and at Tomsk they set fire to the houses where Radical meetings were held, and how

they made the troops fire on the crowd of demonstrators, on their wives and children. And lastly, we know how Trepov—the right hand of the Tsar—ordered the troops “not to economise in cartridges” when they attacked the popular demonstrations.

One had a shrewd suspicion of the origin of these pogroms, yet at this point our Radicals again found themselves in a

familiar position. They knew so little of what was going on in Government circles (they know no more today) that the policy of the crafty Nicholas II did not begin to disclose itself until seven or eight months later, at the time of the statement made by Urussov in the first Duma.[[253](#)] But even then the simple good nature of Russia continued to say that it was not the fault of the Tsar,

but of his counsellors. “He is too weak to be so cunning as that,” they said; when in reality—and we begin at last to perceive it—he is too wicked not to be cunning.

And so while the secret Government of Peterhof sent agents into the towns, and hordes of Cossacks into the villages to flog and shoot the peasants, our Radicals and our Socialists were talking of a

“Parliament.” They formed Parliamentary parties, with all the inevitable intrigues of party politics, and already regarded themselves as living under constitutional forms such as England has elaborated by centuries of work.

Only here and there on the outskirts of Russia was it understood that advantage should be taken of the disorganisation of the

Government to rise in insurrection and break up the local institutions that help to maintain the Imperial authority.

The Baltic provinces, Guria with western Georgia and a part of the Transsiberian Railway, rose in this way. The Gurians and the Letts showed then how a popular insurrection should proceed. They began to introduce at

once, on the spot, their new revolutionary autonomous organisation.

Unhappily, these outbreaks were not supported by their immediate neighbours, and still less by Central Russia and Poland. There, even where the Russian villages revolted, the towns gave them no support. There was nothing similar to what happened in France in July 1789, especially in the

West, where the villages rose in insurrection, broke up their old municipalities and, beginning from the bottom upwards, organised their “sections,” and proceeded to reconstruct the whole municipal administration without waiting for the decrees of either the King or the Assembly. But the attempted insurrection in Moscow did not find enough support in the

mass of the people, and the organisers could not proclaim what has always been the strength of revolutions—the independent Commune.

During the preceding years the German ideas of Governmental centralisation and of discipline had been actively propagated among the Russian revolutionists, while at the same time the ideals of the Socialists dwindled to a

disheartening
commonplaceness. The result
now made itself felt. Our
revolutionists knew how to
march heroically to death, but
they did not know how to
extricate and uphold the ideas
of the revolution. If these ideas
were germinating among the
people, no one knew how to
formulate them.

These outbreaks were
crushed out. The trains that

transported the Semenovksy regiment from St. Petersburg to Moscow rolled on, and were allowed to pass by those who were waiting for directions from no one knows where! The punitive expedition of Meller-Zakomelski crossed the whole of Siberia and arrived without hindrances as far as Tchita, even when the whole of the TransSiberian line was on

strike. It was allowed to pass!
The expeditions of Orloff
behaved like hordes of
barbarians in the Baltic
provinces, but neither
Lithuania nor Poland came to
the aid of the peasants in
revolt. Guria was sacked by
the soldiers of the Tsar, and
there, where the Russian
peasants revolted, the
Cossacks behaved like the
minions of Ivan the

Terrible[[254](#)] in former times.

And yet the all too naïve faith in the Duma was maintained. Not that it was regarded as a possible obstacle to the arbitrariness of the Tsar's minions—as an institution which, in its limited sphere of action, might also help to curb those gentlemen of Peterhof. No, it was rather considered as the future

bulwark of legality.

And why? “Because,” said our intellectuals, “the autocracy could not be maintained without raising loans from foreigners, and the banks would not lend unless the loan was confirmed by the Duma.” And this was said at the very moment when the French and English Governments were guaranteeing a new loan,

simply because they wanted the support of Russia in the war they were contemplating against Germany.

As if Turkey, bankrupt ten times over, has not always been able to raise new loans, even for war purposes. As if the Western bankers themselves do not try to lead the greatest possible number of States into the present position of Greece and Egypt,

—that is to say, where a committee of bankers seizes, in guarantee of its loans, the administration of a part of the country or of the national revenues. And as if, lastly, the crowned pilferers have any objection to pawning the revenues or selling the State railways, the gold-mines, the brandy monopoly, and so forth!

Even the closing of the first

Duma and the horrors of the courts-martial, through which more than 2,000 men were executed in seven months, did not open the eyes of our politicians. They continued to believe in the magic powers of the Duma, in the possibility of obtaining constitutional liberties by means of it. The whole work of the representatives in the two Dumas goes to prove this.

There are some words, great words, that have gone round the world and inspired men, giving them strength to fight and to die if necessary. If the Duma could not make any law capable of changing the life of Russia, it could at least have uttered those words. In times of revolution, when everything has to be broken down and nothing constructive can be

attempted, enthusiasm is more powerful than anything else. And principles and words of inspiration are then of greater import than a stupid little law passed by Parliament—for a law cannot be more than a compromise between the spirit of the future and the mouldiness of the past.

The National Assembly of 1789 was one in spirit with Paris. They acted and reacted

upon each other. Would the wretched people of Paris have revolted on 14th July if the *Tiers-Etat* [Third Estate] had not, three weeks earlier, taken the oath of the Tennis Court? [[255](#)] Granted that there was something theatrical in this oath, granted that, if Paris had not risen in insurrection, the representatives of the people gathered at Versailles would have separated as quietly as

those of the Duma; granted all that, yet the words uttered on that day gave an impulse to the whole of France. And when the Assembly proclaimed the rights of man, the revolutionary spirit of the new era spread over the whole world.

Today we know that Louis XVI would never have passed a law for the expropriation of the nobles' feudal rights, even

with the powers of repurchase; we know that the Assembly itself (just like the Russian Cadets) did not desire such a law. Nevertheless, the Assembly threw out this watchword as the first article of its resolution of 4th August, *the feudal rights are abolished*, but the peasants, readily confusing a resolution with a law, decided never again to pay any feudal tenure.

These were *words*, but they gave a shock to the revolution and pushed it forward.

But they were not only words, for the French representatives, taking advantage of the confusion of government, began also to break down the old institutions, and, urged by the people, they substituted the old royal judges and the “rotten magistrates” by a

communal and municipal organisation which became a real force in the revolution.

“Other times, other conditions,” it will be said. It is true. But it is by illusions that Russia has been prevented from grasping the true situation.

Our politicians believe to such an extent in the magic power of the words “Representatives of the

People,” and they so little understand the strength of the old régime, that no one has asked himself the question: “What, then, ought the Russian Revolution to be?”

To tell the truth, they have not been the only ones to deceive themselves. Our Anarchist comrades fell into the same error when they believed that the heroic acts of a little handful of men would

be enough to rouse the people to insurrection and to demolish the fortress of the old régime. Thousands of heroes have perished, but the old order stands firm and continues to crush us.

Yes, the age of illusions has come to its end. The first assault is driven back; the next one must be prepared, but with a full realisation of the

strength of the old order, and on a broader basis than before.

Without the pressure of the people, no revolution! Every effort should now be made for the mass of the people to throw themselves into the struggle, for they alone can paralyse the armies of the old world and dismantle its fortresses.

In the whole of Russia, in

each of its smallest parts and over its entire breadth, this work must be done. Enough of illusions, enough of hopes, whether in the Duma or in a handful of hero-saviours. The work of demolition can only be accomplished by the direct participation of the whole of the people. And they will only act in the name of their immediate and popular needs.

The land—to the peasant;

the factory, the workshop, the railway and the rest—to the worker. And everywhere the Commune, free and revolutionary, taking into its hands the economic life of the people.

And all this, not managed up there at St. Petersburg by the bureaucrats or by the deputies, but at home, in every town and village by the people themselves—such should be

the watchword for the second period of the revolution now beginning.

[251](#)[] The October Manifesto, officially *The Manifesto on the Improvement of the State Order*, was issued by Tsar Nicholas II, under the influence of Count Sergei Witte, on 30th October 1905 as a response to the revolutionary struggles of earlier that year. It pledged to grant basic civil liberties, broad participation in the State by the introduction of universal male suffrage and that no law should come into force without the consent of the Duma. The Manifesto was a precursor to the Empire's first

constitution in 1906, although neither resulted in significant reform. The Tsar continued to exercise absolute veto power over parliamentary legislation and State repression continued. (Editor)

[252](#)[] Dmitri Feodorovich Trepov (1850–1906) was a lifelong reactionary, involved with the infamous “Third Section” (the Imperial regime’s secret police). He was Police Master of Moscow, repressing protestors. In January 1905, he was appointed Governor General of Moscow before being summoned to St. Petersburg (then the capital of the Russian Empire) to become its Governor General. In June

1905, he was appointed Assistant Minister of the Interior, appearing to acquiesce in Count Witte's reforms but, in reality, strongly believing in autocracy. When the Tsar appointed him Master of the Palace at Tsarskoe-Selo, he promoted a policy of repression and anti-Jewish persecution. Subject to many assassination threats (including by two of his nieces), he died in 1906. (Editor)

[253](#)[] Prince Sergei Dmitriyevich Urussov (1862–1937) was a liberal-minded Tsarist politician and supporter of a constitutional monarchy. In 1904, he resigned as Governor of Tver after the notorious

Trépoff, Chief of Police of Moscow, had been created Minister of Police with the rank of Vice-Minister. He returned to Razva, where was he elected to the first Duma in which he aimed to expose the legalised corruption of the State bureaucracy and the brutality of the military. His conduct there was noted for its frankness and in his maiden speech he declared that the pogroms were a uniform system of attacks carefully planned by the government as a matter of policy. (Editor)

[254](#)[] Ivan IV Vasilyevich (1530–1584), known in English as Ivan the Terrible, was Grand Prince of Moscow from 1533 until his death. His long reign

saw the conquest of the Khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siberia, transforming Russia from a medieval State into an empire. He was the first ruler to be crowned as Tsar of all Russia and was renowned as being violent both on an individual basis and as ruler. (Editor)

[255](#)[] 14th July 1789 saw the people of Paris storm the Bastille (a fortress-prison in Paris) and is usually considered as the start of the French Revolution (and today marked as a public holiday in France as a result).The representatives of the Third Estate (the urban bourgeoisie, in contrast to the Clergy of the First Estate and the Aristocrats of the

Second) refused the King's orders to disband and declared themselves a National Assembly. The Tennis Court Oath (20th June) marked their willingness to defy King Louis XVI and his soldiers by pledging to remain in session until France had a Constitution. (Editor)

Message to the Workers of the Western World

*This letter summaries
Kropotkin's views on the
Russian Revolution. It
reiterates the importance of
local action, working class
self-organisation and mass
participation in solving the
many problems which a social
revolution inevitably creates.*

This is the original English-language version published in the Labour Leader on 22nd July 1920.

Dmitrov

10th June 1920

I have been asked whether I have not some message to send to the working men of the Western world? Surely, there is much to say about the current events in Russia, and much to learn from them. The

message might be long. But I shall indicate only some main points.

First of all, the working men of the civilised world and their friends in the other classes ought to induce their Governments entirely to abandon the idea of an armed intervention in the affairs of Russia—whether open or disguised, whether military or in the shape of subventions to

different nations.

Russia is now living through a revolution of the same depth and the same importance as the British nation underwent in 1639–1648, and France in 1789–1794, and every nation should refuse to play the shameful part that Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia played during the French Revolution.

Moreover, it must be kept in

view that the Russian Revolution—while it is trying to build up a society where the whole produce of the joint efforts of Labour, technical skill and scientific knowledge should go entirely to the Commonwealth itself—is not a mere accident in the struggle of different parties. It is something that has been prepared by nearly a century of Communist and Socialist

propaganda, since the times of Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier, and although the attempt at introducing the new society by means of the dictatorship of one party is apparently doomed to be a failure, it nevertheless must be recognised that the Revolution has already introduced into our everyday life new conceptions about the rights of Labour, its true position in

society, and the duties of every citizen, which have come to stay.

Altogether, not only the working men, but all the progressive elements of the civilised nations ought to put a stop to the support hitherto given to the opponents of the Revolution. Not that there should be nothing to oppose in the methods of the Bolshevik

Government! Far from that! But because every armed intervention of a foreign Power necessarily results in a reinforcement of the dictatorial tendencies of the rulers, and paralyses the efforts of those Russians who are ready to aid Russia, independently of the Government, in the reconstruction of its life on new lines.

The evils naturally inherent

in party dictatorship have thus been increased by the war conditions under which this party maintained itself. The state of war has been an excuse for strengthening the dictatorial methods of the party, as well as its tendency to centralise every detail of life in the hands of the Government, with the result that immense branches of the usual activities of the nation

have been brought to a standstill. The natural evils of State Communism are thus increased tenfold under the excuse that all misfortunes of our life are due to the intervention of foreigners.

Besides, I must also mention that a military intervention of the Allies, if it is continued, will certainly develop in Russia a bitter feeling against the Western nations, and this will

some day be utilised by their enemies in possible future conflicts. Such a bitterness is already developing.

In short, it is high time that the West-European nations should enter into direct relations with the Russian nation. And in this direction you—the working classes and the advanced portions of all nations—ought to have your say.

One word more about the general question. A renewal of relations between the European and American nations and Russia certainly must not mean the admission of a supremacy of the Russian nation over those nationalities of which the empire of the Russian Tsars was composed. Imperial Russia is dead, and will not return to life. The future of the various provinces

of which the empire was composed lies in the direction of a great Federation. The natural territories of the different parts of that Federation are quite distinct for those of us who are acquainted with the history of Russia, its ethnography, and its economic life, and all attempts to bring the constituent parts of the Russian Empire—Finland, the Baltic Provinces,

Lithuania, the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Siberia, and so on—under one central rule are surely doomed to failure. The future of what was the Russian Empire is in the direction of a Federation of independent units. It would, therefore, be in the interest of all that the Western nations should declare beforehand that they are recognising the right of self-government for every

portion of what was once the Russian Empire.

As to my own views on the subject, they go still further. I see the coming, in a near future, of a time when every portion of that Federation will itself be a federation of free rural communes and free cities, and I believe still that portions of Western Europe will soon take the lead in that

direction.

Now, as regards our present economical and political situation—the Russian Revolution being a continuation of the two great Revolutions in England and in France—Russia is trying now to make a step in advance of where France stopped, when it came to realise in life what was described then as *real equality* (*égalité de fait*), that

is, economical equality.

Unfortunately, the attempt to make that step has been undertaken in Russia under the strongly-centralised *Dictatorship of one party*—the Social Democratic Maximalists, and the attempt was made on the lines taken in the utterly Centralist and Jacobinist conspiracy of Babeuf. About this attempt I am bound frankly to tell you

that, in my opinion, the attempt to build up a Communist Republic on the lines of strongly-centralised State Communism under the iron rule of the Dictatorship of a party is ending in a failure. We learn in Russia *how Communism cannot be introduced*, even though the populations, sick of the old regime, opposed no active resistance to the experiment

made by the new rulers.

The idea of Soviets, that is, of Labour and Peasant Councils, first promoted during the attempted revolution of 1905 and immediately realised by the revolution of February 1917, as soon as the Tsar's regime broke down—the idea of such councils controlling the political and economical life of the country is a grand idea.

The more so as it leads necessarily to the idea of these Councils being composed of all those who take a *real part* in the production of national wealth by their own personal effort.

But so long as a country is governed by the dictatorship of a party, the Labour and Peasant Councils evidently lose all their significance. They are reduced to the passive role

played in times past by
“States-General” and
Parliaments, when they were
convoked by the King and had
to oppose an all-powerful
King’s Council.

A Labour Council ceases to
be a free and valuable adviser
when there is no free Press in
the country, and we have been
in this position for nearly two
years, the excuse for such
conditions being the state of

war. More than that, the Peasant and Labour Councils lose all their significance when no free electoral agitation precedes the elections, and the elections are made under the pressure of party dictatorship. Of course, the usual excuse is that a dictatorial rule was unavoidable as a means of combating the old regime. But such a rule evidently becomes a formidable drawback as

soon as the Revolution proceeds towards the building up of a new society on a new economic basis: it becomes a death sentence on the new construction.

The ways to be followed for overthrowing an already weakened Government and taking its place are well known from history, old and modern. But when it comes to building up quite new forms of life—

especially new forms of production and exchange—without having any examples to imitate; when everything has to be worked out by men on the spot, then an all-powerful centralised Government which undertakes to supply every inhabitant with every lamp-glass and every match to light the lamp proves absolutely incapable of doing that through its functionaries,

no matter how countless they may be—it becomes a nuisance. It develops such a formidable bureaucracy that the French bureaucratic system, which requires the intervention of forty functionaries to sell a tree felled by a storm on a public road, becomes a trifle in comparison. This is what we now learn in Russia. And this is what you, the working men

of the West, can and must avoid by all means, since you care for the success of a social reconstruction, and sent here your delegates to see how a Social Revolution works in real life.

The immense constructive work that is required from a Social Revolution cannot be accomplished by a central Government, even if it had to guide it in its work something

more substantial than a few Socialist and Anarchist booklets. It requires the knowledge, the brains, and the willing collaboration of a mass of local and specialised forces, which alone can cope with the diversity of economical problems in their local aspects. To sweep away that collaboration and to trust to the genius of party dictators is to destroy all the independent

nuclei, such as Trade Unions (called in Russia “Professional Unions”) and the local distributive Co-operative organisations—turning them into bureaucratic organs of the party, as is being done now. But this is the way *not* to accomplish the Revolution; the way to render its realisation impossible. And this is why I consider it my duty earnestly to warn you from taking such

a line of action.

Imperialist conquerors of all nationalities may desire that the populations of the ex-empire of Russia should remain in miserable economic conditions as long as possible, and thus be doomed to supply Western and Middle Europe with raw stuffs, while the Western manufacturers, producing manufactured goods, should cash all the

benefits that the population of Russia might otherwise obtain from their work. But the working classes of Europe and America, and the intellectual nuclei of these countries, surely understand that only by the force of conquest could they keep Russia in that subordinate condition. At the same time, the sympathies with which our Revolution was met all over Europe and

America show that you were happy to greet in Russia a new member of the international comradeship of nations. And you surely soon see that it is in the interest of the working men of all the world that Russia should issue as soon as possible from the conditions that paralyse now her development.

A few words more. The last

war has inaugurated new conditions of life in the civilised world. Socialism is sure to make considerable progress, and new forms of a more independent life surely will be soon worked out on the lines of local political independence and free scope in social reconstruction, either in a pacific way, or by revolutionary means if the intelligent portions of the

civilised nations do not join in the task of an unavoidable reconstruction.

But the success of this reconstruction will depend to a great extent upon the possibility of a close co-operation of the different nations. For this co-operation the labouring classes of all nations must be closely united, and for that purpose the idea of a great International of all

working men of the world must be renewed; not in the shape of a Union directed by one single party, as was the case in the Second International, and is again in the Third. Such Unions have, of course, full reason to exist, but besides them and uniting them all there must be a Union of all the Trade Unions of the world—of all those who produce the wealth of the

world—united, in order to free the production of the world from its present enslavement to Capital.

Social Revolution

“History is there to tell us that those who have been a minority on the eve of the revolution, become the predominant force on the day of the revolution, if they truly express popular aspirations and if—the other essential condition—the revolution lasts long enough to allow the revolutionary idea to spread, to germinate and to bear its

fruit. For we must not forget that it is not by a revolution lasting a couple of days that we shall come to transform society in the direction posed by anarchist communism. An uprising of short duration can overthrow a government to put another in its place [...] but it changes nothing in the basic institutions of society.

“It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps

*five years that we must
traverse to accomplish our
revolution in the property
system and in social
organisation [...]*

*“[...] The idea of anarchist
communism, today
represented by feeble
minorities but increasingly
finding popular expression,
will make its way among the
mass of the people. Spreading
everywhere, the anarchist*

groups, however slight they may be, will take strength from the support they find among the people, and will raise the red flag of the revolution. And this kind of revolution, breaking out simultaneously in a thousand places, will prevent the establishment of any government that might hinder the unfolding of events, and the revolution will burn on

*until it has accomplished its
mission: the abolition of
individual property owning
and of the State.*

*“On that day, what is now the
minority will become the
People, the great mass, and
that mass rising up against
property and the State, will
march forward towards
anarchist communism.”*

*—“Revolutionary Minorities,”
Words of a Rebel*

From *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*

These extracts from the chapter “St. Petersburg—First Journey to Western Europe” of Kropotkin’s Memoirs summarise his thoughts on social revolution, noting the importance of current activity and theorising in ensuring the success of any future revolt.

[...]

I returned from this journey [to Western Europe] with distinct sociological ideas which I have retained since, doing my best to develop them in more and more definite, concrete forms.

There was, however, one point which I did not accept without having given to it a great deal of thinking and many hours of my nights. I clearly saw that the immense

change which would deliver everything that is necessary for life and production into the hands of society—be it the Folk State of the social democrats or the unions of freely associated groups, as the anarchists say—would imply a revolution far more profound than any of the revolutions which history had on record. Moreover, in such a revolution the workers would

have against them, not the rotten generation of aristocrats against whom the French peasants and republicans had to fight in the last century—and even that fight was a desperate one—but the far more powerful, intellectually and physically, middle-classes, which have at their service all the potent machinery of the modern State. However, I soon noticed that no

revolution, whether peaceful or violent, had ever taken place without the new ideals having deeply penetrated into the very class whose economical and political privileges were to be assailed. I had witnessed the abolition of serfdom in Russia, and I knew that if a consciousness of the injustice of their privileges had not spread widely within the serf-owners'

class itself (as a consequence of the previous evolution and revolutions accomplished in Western Europe), the emancipation of the serfs would never have been accomplished as easily as it was accomplished in 1861. And I saw that the idea of emancipating the workers from the present wage-system was making headway amongst the middle classes themselves.

The most ardent defenders of the present economical conditions had already abandoned the idea of *right* in defending their present privileges—questions as to the *opportuneness* of such a change having already taken its place. They did not deny the desirability of some such change, they only asked whether the new economical organisation advocated by the

socialists would really be better than the present one; whether a society in which the workers would have a dominant voice would be able to manage production better than the individual capitalists actuated by mere considerations of self-interest manage it at the present time.

Besides, I began gradually to understand that revolution, i.e., periods of accelerated

rapid evolution and rapid changes, are as much in the nature of human society as the slow evolution which incessantly goes on now among the civilised races of mankind. And each time that such a period of accelerated evolution and thorough reconstruction begins, civil war may break out on a small or on a grand scale. The question is, then, not so much

how to avoid revolutions, as how to attain the greatest results with the most limited amount of civil war, the least number of victims, and a minimum of mutual embitterment. For that end there is only one means; namely, that the oppressed part of society should obtain the clearest possible conception of what they intend to achieve and how, and that

they should be imbued with the enthusiasm which is necessary for that achievement—in which case they will be sure to attach to their cause the best and the freshest intellectual forces of the class which is possessed of historically grown-up privileges.

The Commune of Paris was a terrible example of an outbreak with yet

undetermined ideals. When the workers became, in March 1871, the masters of the great city, they did not attack the property rights vested in the middle classes. On the contrary, they took these rights under their protection. The leaders of the Commune covered the National Bank with their bodies, and notwithstanding the crisis which had paralysed industry

and the consequent absence of earnings for a mass of workers, they protected the rights of the owners of the factories, the trade establishments, and the dwelling-houses at Paris with their decrees. However, when the movement was crushed, no account was taken by the middle classes of the modesty of the Communalist claims of the insurgents. Having lived for

two months in fear that the workers would make an assault upon their property rights, the rich men of France took upon the workers just the same revenge as if they had made the assault in reality. Nearly thirty thousand workers were slaughtered, as is known, not in battle but after they had lost the battle. If the workers had taken steps towards the socialisation of

property, the revenge could not have been more terrible.

If, then, my conclusion was that there are periods in human development when a conflict is unavoidable, and civil war breaks out quite independently of the will of particular individuals, let, at least, these conflicts take place, not on the ground of vague aspirations, but upon definite issues; not upon

secondary points, the insignificance of which does not diminish the violence of the conflict, but upon broad ideas which inspire men by the grandness of the horizon which they bring into view. In this last case the conflict itself will depend much less upon the efficacy of firearms and guns than upon the force of the creative genius which will be brought into action in the

work of reconstruction of society. It will depend chiefly upon the constructive forces of society taking for the moment a free course; upon the inspirations being of a higher standard, and so winning more sympathy even from those who, as a class, are opposed to the change. The conflict, being thus engaged in on larger issues, will purify the social atmosphere itself, and

the numbers of victims on both sides will certainly be much smaller than if the fight had been fought upon matters of secondary importance in which the lower instincts of men find a free play.

With these ideas I returned to Russia.

[...]

The Anarchist Idea from the Point Of View of its Practical Realisation

Translation by
Nicholas Walter[[256](#)]

This report from 1879 is one of Kropotkin's earliest articles on libertarian revolution. It is notable in that he explicitly

links social revolution to the activities of anarchists within the labour movement, arguing that the organisations created to fight capitalism are also the means of replacing it.

1. An attentive study of the present economic and political situation leads us to the conviction that Europe is moving rapidly towards a revolution; that this revolution will not be

confined to a single country but, breaking out in some place, will spread—as in 1848—to the neighbouring countries, and will embrace more or less the whole of Europe, and that, while taking different forms among different peoples according to the historical stage they have reached and according to the local

conditions, it will nevertheless have a generally distinctive character—it will not be merely political, but will be an economic revolution as well and above all.

2. The economic revolution may take different forms and have different degrees of intensity among different peoples. But it is important

that, whatever its form may be, socialists of all countries, taking advantage of the disorganisation of the authorities during the revolutionary period, should apply all their strength to bring about on a vast scale the transformation of the property system by the expropriation pure and simple of the present

holders of the large landed estates, of the instruments of labour, and of capital of every kind, and by the seizure of all such capital by the cultivators, the workers' organisations, and the agricultural and municipal communes. The task of expropriation must be carried out by the workers themselves in the towns and the countryside.

To hope that any government can undertake it would be a profound error, for history teaches us that governments, even when they emerge from revolutions, have never done more than give legal sanction to revolutionary *deeds* which have already been carried out, and even then the people has had to put up a long struggle with

these governments to force assent to revolutionary measures which were loudly claimed during periods of ferment.

Besides, a measure of such importance would remain a dead letter if it were not freely put into effect in each commune, in each district, by those who are actually involved.

3. The expropriation and

communalisation of social capital must be accomplished everywhere where this becomes possible and as soon as the possibility emerges, without inquiring whether the whole or the greater part of Europe or of a particular country is ready to accept the ideas of collectivism. The disadvantages which might

result from a partial
realisation of collectivism
will be largely
compensated for by the
advantages. That the deed
has been done in a certain
place, will become the
most powerful way of
propagating the idea, and
the most powerful motive
for setting in motion places
where the workers, being
little prepared to accept

the ideas of collectivism, might still hesitate to proceed with expropriation. Besides, it would be idle to discuss whether it is necessary or not to wait until the ideas of collectivism are accepted by the majority of a nation before putting them into practice, for it is certain that, except where there is a government

prepared to shoot the people down, the doctrinaire socialists will not prevent expropriation taking place in districts which are most advanced in their socialist education, even though the great mass of the country is still lying inert.

4. Once the deed of expropriation is accomplished, and

strength of capitalist
resistance broken, there
will inevitably arise after a
certain period of fumbling
a new form of organisation
of production and
exchange, limited at first
but later widespread, and
this form will correspond
much more to popular
aspirations and to the
demands of life and of
mutual relations than to

any theory—however beautiful it may be—which is worked out either by the thought and imagination of reformers or by the labours of any kind of legislative body. However, we think we shall not be mistaken in foreseeing even today that the bases of this new organisation will be—at least in the Latin countries—the free

federation of producer groups and the free federation of communes and of groups of independent communes.

5. If the revolution immediately puts expropriation into effect, it will gain an inner strength which will enable it to resist the attempts to form a government which would try to stifle it, as well as

the attacks which may be made on it from outside. But even if the revolution were defeated, or expropriation were not extended as we foresee, a popular rising begun on this basis would render mankind the great service that it would hasten the coming of the social revolution. In bringing—like all revolutions—a

certain immediate
improvement in the lot of
the proletariat even if it
were defeated, it would
make impossible any other
rising in the future which
did not take as its point of
departure the
expropriation of the few
for the benefit of all. A
further explosion would
therefore inevitably bring
about the end of capitalist

exploitation, and consequently economic and political equality, work for all, solidarity, and freedom.

6. For the revolution to bring all the fruits which the proletariat has the right to expect, after centuries of increasing struggles and holocausts of sacrificed victims, it is necessary that the revolutionary period

should last several years,
so that the propagation of
new ideas is not confined
solely to the great
intellectual centres but
penetrates to the most
isolated hamlets, so as to
overcome the inertia which
is inevitably shown by the
masses before they fling
themselves towards a
fundamental reorganisation
of society, so that, finally,

the new ideas should have time to receive their ultimate development, which is necessary to the progress of mankind. So, far from seeking to set up immediately in place of the overthrown authority a new authority which, being born at the beginning of the revolution when ideas are only just beginning to awake, would

be fatally conservative by its very nature; far from seeking to create an authority which, representing the first stage of the revolution, could only hamper the free development of the later stages, and would tend to immobilise and circumscribe it fatally—it is the duty of socialists to prevent the creation of

every new government, and to awaken, on the contrary, the strength of the people, destroying the old system and at the same time creating a new organisation of society.

7. Such being our conception of the next revolution and the end which we intend to achieve, it is clear that, during the preparatory

period we are in today, we must concentrate all our efforts on a wide propagation of the ideas of expropriation and collectivism. Instead of pushing these principles into a corner of our brains, so as to go and talk to the people only about politics as mentioned above—which would hope to prepare minds for a largely

political revolution,
generally obliterating its
economic character, the
only thing which could
give it necessary strength
—we must, on the
contrary, at all times and in
all circumstances, explain
these principles widely,
demonstrate their practical
importance, prove their
necessity; we must make
every effort to prepare the

popular mind for the acceptance of these ideas which, strange as they may seem at first to those who are imbued with political and economic prejudices, soon become an incontestable truth to those who discuss them in good faith, a truth now confirmed by science, a truth often admitted even by those who are publicly

fighting it.

Working in this way, without letting ourselves be dazzled by the momentary and often artificial success of political parties, we are working for the infiltration of our ideas into the masses; we are imperceptibly bringing about a change of opinion favourable to our ideas; we are gathering the

necessary people for a wide propagation of these ideas during the period of ferment we are moving towards; and we know by the experience of human history that it is precisely during periods of ferment, when the transmission and transformation of ideas is brought about with a speed unknown in periods of tranquillity, that the

principles of expropriation and collectivism can spread in great waves and inspire the great masses of the people to put these principles into practice.

8. For the revolution to last several years and to bear its fruits, it is absolutely necessary that the next revolution should not be confined only to the large towns; the rising for

expropriation must be brought about above all *in the countryside*. It is therefore necessary—without relying on the revolutionary impulse which might in a period of ferment be able to radiate from the towns into the villages—to prepare the ground in the countryside already from today.

As a provisional measure

and as an experiment, the Jura Sections should adopt the task of undertaking in the villages around the towns a programme of propaganda following the line of the expropriation of the land by the rural communes. Attempts in this direction have been made already, and we can state they have borne more fruit than might have been

expected in the beginning. Experience will demonstrate what the best method to follow and what the means of spreading this propaganda may be. However difficult the start is, it must be made without delay. In addition, we cannot recommend too highly a study of the peasant risings in Italy and of the revolutionary

propaganda which is being carried out in the villages of Spain.

9. When recommending that we should concentrate our efforts on a wide propagation *in every way* of the ideas of expropriation, we do not mean by this that we should neglect opportunities of carrying out agitation on all the

questions of national life which are raised around us. On the contrary, we think that socialists must take advantage of all opportunities which may lead to an economic agitation, and we are convinced that each agitation, begun on the basis of the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters, however

circumscribed its sphere of action, the ends proposed, and the ideas advanced may be to begin with, may become a fruitful source of socialist agitation if it does not fall into the hands of ambitious intriguers. It would therefore be useful for the Sections not to pass proudly by the various questions which concern the workers in their

districts, for the sole reason that these questions have only very little to do with socialism. On the contrary, taking part in all questions and taking advantage of the interest which they arouse, we could work to spread agitation to a wider extent and, staying on the practical basis of the question, seek to enlarge

theoretical conceptions
and awaken the spirit of
independence and
rebellion in those who are
interested in the agitation
which is produced. This
participation is all the more
necessary because it
presents a unique method
of fighting the false
opinions which are spread
by the bourgeoisie at every
opportunity of this kind,

and of preventing the workers' agitation being directed—thanks to the tactics employed by the ambitious—along a path absolutely contrary to the workers' interests.

10. The efforts of the anarchists having the tendency of shaking the State in all its parts, we do not see the usefulness of forming ourselves into a

political party which would endeavour to insert itself into the machinery of government in the hope of one day taking its share of the legacy of the present governmental system. We think that the best method of shaking this edifice would be to stir up the economic struggle. But we also think that it would still be useful to keep an eye

on all the actions and exploits of our rulers, to make a careful study of those political questions which interest the working people, and to take advantage of every favourable opportunity to point out the incapacity, hypocrisy and class egoism of present governments, as well as the vicious and harmful

character of the governmental system. Let us make war on the State and its representatives, not in order to take a place in their councils, as the political parties do, but in order to shake the strength which they use against the aspirations of the workers, and to speed their inevitable downfall.

11. Persuaded that the

method of organisation
which will come about in
the near future—at least in
the Latin countries—will
be the commune,
independent of the State,
abolishing in itself the
representative system and
bringing about the
expropriation of the first
priorities—the instruments
of labour, and the capital
of use to the community—

we think it necessary to carry out a serious study of the collectivist commune and to discuss the part which the anarchists can play in the struggle which is now taking place, on the political and economic fronts, between the communes and State.

[256](#)[[1](#)] *Freedom*, Vol. 28, No. 6. (Editor)

Revolutionary Government

Translation by Paul
Sharkey[[257](#)]

*This 1882 article summaries
Kropotkin's arguments against
using the State to achieve a
revolution. Hierarchical,
centralised and top-down, any
so-called revolutionary
government becomes isolated*

*from the masses and becomes
a burden to social change.
Originally appearing in Le
Révolté, it was included in
Words of a Rebel as well as
published in pamphlet form.*

I

That existing governments
ought to be abolished, so that
liberty, equality and fraternity
may no longer be empty
words but become living

realities: that all forms of government tried to date have been only so many forms of oppression and ought to be replaced by some new form of association: upon that, everyone with a brain and of a temperament at all revolutionary is agreed. To tell the truth, one does not even have to be very innovative to arrive at this conclusion: the vices of existing governments

and impossibility of reforming them are too striking not to leap to the eyes of every reasonable onlooker. And as for overthrowing governments, it is common knowledge that at certain times this is accomplished without undue difficulty. There are times when governments collapse virtually unassisted, like a house of cards, under the breath of a rebellious people.

This we saw in 1848 and in 1870: and we shall see it anon.

Overthrowing a government is everything as far as a bourgeois revolutionary is concerned. For us, it marks only the beginning of the social revolution. Once the machinery of State has been derailed, the hierarchy of officials thrown into disarray and no longer knowing in what direction to go, soldiers having

lost confidence in their officers, in short, the army of capital's defenders once routed, then there looms before us the mammoth undertaking of demolishing the institutions which serve to perpetuate economic and political slavery. What are revolutionaries to do, once they have the opportunity to act freely?

To that question, the

anarchists alone answer: “No government, anarchy!” All the others say: “A revolutionary government!” They differ only upon the form to be given to this government: elected by universal suffrage in the State or in the Commune, the rest come down in favour of revolutionary dictatorship.

A “revolutionary government!” Those two words have a very curious ring

to them in the ears of those who understand what social revolution ought to signify and what government signifies. The two words are mutually contradictory, mutually destructive. We have indeed seen despotic governments—it is the essence of every government that it is for reaction and against revolution and that it should have a natural tendency towards

despotism: but a revolutionary government has never yet been seen, and with good reason. Because revolution, synonymous with “disorder,” the toppling and overthrow of age-old institutions within the space of a few days, with violent demolition of established forms of property, with the destruction of caste, with the rapid change of received thinking on morality,

or rather, on the hypocrisy which stands in its place, with individual liberty and spontaneous action, is the precise opposite, the negation of government, the latter being synonymous with the “established order,” conservatism, maintenance of existing institutions, and negation of individual initiative and individual action. And yet we continually hear talk of this

white blackbird, as if a “revolutionary government” was the most straightforward thing in the world, as commonplace and as familiar to everyone as royalty, empire or papacy!

That bourgeois so-called revolutionaries should peddle this notion is understandable. We know what they understand by Revolution. It is quite simply a fresh coat of

plaster upon the bourgeois republic: it is the assumption by so-called republicans, of the well-paid posts currently the preserve of Bonapartists or royalists. At most, it is the divorce of Church and State, replaced by the concubinage of them both, confiscation of clerical assets for the benefit of the State and primarily of the future administrators of those assets, and perhaps,

additionally, a *referendum* or some such device. But that revolutionary socialists should act as apostles of this notion, we cannot comprehend except by one or the other of two suppositions: either those who embrace it are imbued with bourgeois prejudices, which they have derived, unwittingly, from literature and especially history written by bourgeois for bourgeois consumption,

and, being still pervaded with the spirit of slavishness, the product of centuries of slavery, they cannot even imagine themselves free; or else they want no part of this Revolution whose name is forever upon their lips: they would be content with a mere plastering job upon existing institutions, provided that it carried them to power, even though they would have to wait to see what

had to be done to pacify “the beast,” which is to say, the people. Their only gripe with those in government today is that they covet their places. With these, we need not bandy words. So we shall address only those whose mistakes are honest ones.

Let us open with the first of the two forms of “revolutionary government” proposed—elected

government.

Royal or other authority having been overthrown, and the army of capital's defenders routed, ferment and discussion of public affairs and the urge to move forward are everywhere. New ideas crop up, the need for serious change understood: we must act and ruthlessly embark upon the task of demolition, so as to clear the way for the

new life. But what would they have us do? Summon the people to elections, to elect a government without delay, to entrust to it the task which each and every one of us ought to be carrying out on our own initiative!

This is what Paris did after 18th March 1871. “I shall never forget”—a friend told us—“those splendid moments of deliverance. I had climbed

down from my garret in the Latin Quarter to join that huge open air club which filled the boulevards from one end of Paris to the other. Everyone was debating public affairs; every personal preoccupation had been forgotten; buying and selling no longer came into it; everyone was ready to hurl himself body and soul into the future. Even some bourgeois, carried away by the

universal enthusiasm, were happy to see the new world ushered in. 'If it takes a social revolution, so be it! Let's hold everything in common: we are ready!' The elements of Revolution were present: it only remained now to set them in motion. Returning that evening to my room, I said to myself: 'How fine humanity is! It is unknown and has always been slandered!' Then came

the elections, the members of the Commune were appointed, and little by little the power of commitment, the enthusiasm for action faded. Everybody returned to his customary routine, saying: ‘Now we have an honest government, let it get on with it.’” We know what ensued.

Instead of shifting for itself, instead of striding ahead, instead of throwing itself

boldly in the direction of a new order of things, the people, trusting to its governors, handed the care of taking the initiative over to them. That is the first, the fatal consequence of elections. So what will they do, these governors invested with the confidence of everyone?

Never were elections more free than the March 1871 elections. Even the

Commune's adversaries have acknowledged that. The great mass of electors was never more imbued with the urge to hoist into power the best men, men of the future, revolutionaries. And it did just that. All revolutionaries of note were returned by formidable majorities: Jacobins, Blanquists, Internationalists, all three revolutionary factions were represented on the

Council of the Commune. The election could not have returned a finer government.

The upshot of it all we know. Ensconced in the City Hall, charged with following procedures laid down by preceding governments, these fervent revolutionaries, these reformers found themselves stricken by incompetence and sterility. For all their good will and courage, they were not

even able to organise Paris's defences. It is true that the blame for this is today being heaped upon the men, the individuals, but it was not the personnel that lay at the root of this failure, it was the system they followed.

Indeed, when it is free, universal suffrage can, at best, result in an assembly representative of the *mean* of the opinions current among

the masses at that point: and, at the start of the revolution, that mean has, generally, only a vague, the vaguest of notions of the task facing it, and no grasp of the manner in which it must be tackled. Ah, if only the bulk of the nation, of the Commune could agree, before the upheaval, upon what needs doing as soon as the government has been brought down! If that dream of the

desk-bound utopians could but be realised, we would never even have had bloody revolutions: the wishes of the bulk of the nation having been stated, the remainder would have bowed to them with good grace. But that is not how things work. The revolution erupts well before any broad agreement can be arrived at, and those who have a clear notion of what needs doing on

the morrow of the uprising are, at that point, only a tiny minority. The vast majority of the people still has only a vague notion of the goal it would like to achieve, and no great knowledge of how to march towards that goal, no great confidence in the route to take. Only once the change gets underway will the practical solution be found and clarified: and it will be a

product of the revolution itself, a product of the people in action—or else it will amount to nothing, as the brains of a few individuals absolutely cannot devise solutions which can only be thrown up by the life of the people.

This is the situation mirrored by the body elected through the ballot box, even should it not display all the vices inherent in representative

government generally. Those few men who stand for the revolutionary idea of the age find themselves swamped by representatives of past schools of revolution or of the established order. These men, who would be so sorely needed among the people, most especially in such times of revolution, for the widespread dissemination of their ideas and mobilising the

masses and demolishing the institutions of the past, are riveted there inside a room, debating endlessly in hope of wresting a few concessions from the moderates and to talk their enemies around, whereas there is but one way of changing their thinking, which is by getting on with practical efforts. The government turns into the parliament, with all of the vices of bourgeois

parliaments. Far from being a “revolutionary” government, it turns into the biggest obstacle to revolution and, unless it wishes to go on marking time, the people finds itself forced to dismiss it and to stand down men whom it was acclaiming as its chosen ones only the day before. But that is no longer an easy undertaking. The new government, which has wasted no time in organising a whole

new administrative network in order to extend its writ and enforce obedience, has no intention of going so quietly. Keen to maintain its power, it clings to it with all the vigour of an institution which has not yet had time to lapse into the decomposition of old age. It is determined to return blow for blow: and there is only one way to dislodge it—by taking up arms and making revolution

all over again, in order to dismiss those in whom it had once placed all its hopes.

And then what we have is the revolution divided against itself! Having wasted precious time on procrastination, it watches as its strength is sapped by internecine splits between friends of the young government and those who have grasped the necessity of doing away with it! All

because of failure to realise that a new life requires new formulas: that one does not carry out a revolution by clinging to the old formulas! All because of failure to appreciate that revolution and government are incompatible, the failure to discern that one of them, however presented, is still the *negation* of the other, and that there is no revolution unless there is anarchy.

The same holds for that other form of “revolutionary government” recommended to us, revolutionary dictatorship.

II

The dangers to which the Revolution is exposed if it allows itself to be bridled by an elected government are so apparent that a whole school of revolutionaries has turned its back upon that idea

completely. They realise that a risen people cannot, through the ballot box, saddle itself with a government that represents only the past and is only a ball and chain around the people's ankles, especially when there is this great economic, political and moral regeneration to be carried out, which we call Social Revolution. Thus they wash their hands of the idea of a

“lawful” government, for the duration of a revolt against legality at any rate, and they call instead for “revolutionary dictatorship.” They say: “The party which overthrows the government will forcibly supplant it. It will assume power and act in a revolutionary way. It will take the requisite steps to ensure the uprising’s success; it will tear down the old institutions;

it will see to territorial defence. For those unwilling to recognise its authority, there will be the guillotine, and those, be they people or bourgeois, who refuse to carry out the orders it will issue to set the revolution's course, will face the guillotine too!" So argue the budding Robespierres, those who have taken heed of nothing in the great epic of last century [i.e.,

the 18th century] except its days of decline, the ones who have learned nothing save the speechifying of the procurators of the Republic.

As far as we anarchists are concerned, dictatorship of a single individual or party—which boils down to the same thing—stands forever condemned. We know that a social revolution is not steered by the mind of just one man or

one group. That revolution and government are incompatible, we know: the one must do the other to death, and the name under which government may go—dictatorship, monarchy or parliament—is of little account. We know that the secret of our party's strength and truth resides in its quintessential maxim: "Nothing good or durable is achieved except by the free

initiative of the people, and all power tends to do that to death!” That is why the best of us, were their ideas no longer required to undergo the people’s acid test prior to implementation, and if they were to become masters of that redoubtable mechanism, government, which empowers them to act upon a whim, would, within the week, deserve to be cut down. We

know where all dictatorship, even the most well-meaning one, leads—to the death of revolution. And finally we know that this notion of dictatorship is still only a blighted by-product of that governmental fetishism which, like religious fetishism, has always perpetuated slavery.

But it is not to the anarchists that we are addressing ourselves today. We are

speaking to those among the governmentalist revolutionaries who, misled by the prejudices of their education, are honestly mistaken and ask nothing better than to talk. So it is to these that we shall address ourselves, in their own idiom.

And, first, one general observation. Those who peddle dictatorship generally fail to realise that, by

sustaining that prejudice, they are merely preparing the ground for those who will later cut their throats. There is, though, one phrase by Robespierre which his admirers would do well to remember. He never reneged upon the principle of dictatorship, but... “Heaven forbid!” he snapped at Mandar[[258](#)] when the latter broached the matter with him,

“Brissot would be a dictator!”

Yes, Brissot, that cunning Girondin, ferocious enemy of the people’s egalitarian tendencies, rabid champion of property (which he had once upon a time characterised as theft), Brissot, who would blithely have locked up in the Abbaye [prison] Hébert,[[259](#)] Marat, and all moderate Jacobins.

But those words were

spoken in 1792! By which time France had been three years already in revolution! In fact, the monarchy was no more: it only remained to deliver the *coup de grace*; in fact, the feudal system had been swept away. And yet, even at that point, when the revolution was surging freely ahead, there was this counter-revolutionary, Brissot, standing every chance of being

acclaimed dictator! And
earlier, in 1789? It was
Mirabeau who might have
been hoisted into power.[[260](#)]
The man who offered his
eloquence to the king for hire,
this was the man who might
have been hoisted into power
at that point, had the risen
people not imposed its
sovereignty at pike-point and
had they not forged ahead
through the *faits accomplis* of

the Jacquerie, exposing the insubstantiality of any constituted authority in Paris or in the departments.

But the governmental prejudice so blinkers those who talk about dictatorship that they prefer to pave the way for the dictatorship of some new Brissot or Napoleon, rather than turn away from the idea of awarding a new master to men

breaking free of their chains!

The secret societies, from the time of the Restoration and Louis-Philippe, have made a mighty contribution to the survival of the prejudice of dictatorship. Backed by the workers, the bourgeois republicans of the time mounted a long succession of conspiracies aiming at the overthrow of monarchy and proclamation of the Republic.

Not cognisant of the profound changes which were needed in France, even if a bourgeois republican regime was to be established, they deluded themselves that through a far-reaching conspiracy, they could some day topple the monarchy, seize power and proclaim the Republic. Over a period of almost thirty years, these secret societies toiled unceasingly, with unbounded

commitment and heroic perseverance and courage. If the Republic emerged quite naturally from the February 1848 insurrection, this was thanks to these societies, thanks to the propaganda by deed which they had mounted over those thirty years. But for their noble efforts, the Republic would even now be impossible.

Thus, their goal was to seize

power themselves and set themselves up as a republican dictatorship. But, with good reason, they never managed that. As ever, thanks to the ineluctable force of circumstance, it was not a conspiracy that brought down the monarchy. The conspirators had prepared the ground for its downfall. They had disseminated the republican idea far and near:

their martyrs had made it the popular ideal. But the final push, the one that brought down the bourgeoisie's king once and for all, was a lot broader and a long stronger than any secret society might mount: it emanated from the mass of the people.

The outcome, we know. The party which had paved the way for the downfall of monarchy found itself

excluded from events in City Hall. Others, too cautious to tread the paths of conspiracy, but likewise better known and more moderate, bided their time until they could seize power and occupy the position which the plotters intended to capture to the sound of cannon. The journalists, lawyers and good orators who worked on their good reputations while the real

republicans were forging themselves weapons or perishing in dungeons, captured power. Some, being famous already, were acclaimed by the gawkers: [\[261\]](#) others pushed themselves forward and were acceptable because their names stood for nothing other than a program of accommodation to everyone.

Let no one tell us that the

party of action is lacking in practical acumen and that others can outdo them. No, a thousand times, no! As much as the movements of the heavens, it is a law that the party of action is excluded while schemers and prattlers take power. The latter are more familiar to the broad masses which mount the final push. They poll more votes, for, with or without the

support of the news-sheets, and whether by acclamation or through the ballot box, there is, essentially, always a sort of unspoken choice made at that point by acclamation. They are acclaimed by all and sundry, especially by the revolution's enemies who prefer to push nonentities to the fore, and acclamation thus acknowledges as leaders persons who, deep down, are

inimical to the movement or indifferent to it.

The man who, more than anyone else, was the embodiment of this system of conspiracy, the man who paid with a life behind bars for his commitment to that system, just before he died uttered these words which amount to a complete program: *Neither God nor Master!*[\[262\]](#)

III

The illusion that government can be overthrown by a secret society, and that that society can install itself in its place, is a mistake made by every revolutionary organisation thrown up by the republican bourgeoisie since 1820. But there is evidence aplenty to expose this error. What commitment, what selflessness, what

perseverance have we not
seen deployed by the
republican secret societies of
Young Italy,[[263](#)] and indeed
all the enormous endeavour,
all of the sacrifices made by
Italian youth—alongside which
even those of Russian
revolutionary youth pale—all
of the corpses heaped in the
dungeons of Austrian
fortresses and victims of the
executioner's blade and

bullets, yet the beneficiaries of all that are the schemers from the bourgeoisie and the monarchy. Rarely in history does one come across a secret society which has, with such meagre resources, produced results as tremendous as those achieved by Russian youth, or displayed a vigour and an activity as potent as the Executive Committee.[[264](#)] It has rattled Tsarism, that

colossus which had seemed invulnerable: and it has rendered autocratic government, hereafter, an impossibility in Russia. And yet, how ingenuous they are who imagine that the Executive Committee is to become the master of power on the day that Alexander III's crown rolls in the mire. Others, the prudent ones who laboured to make their names

while revolutionaries were labouring in the mines or perishing in Siberia, others, schemers, prattlers, lawyers, hacks who from time to time shed a speedily wiped tear before the tomb of the heroes and who posed as the people's friends—they are the ones who will step forward to take up the place vacated by the government and cry *Halt!* to the “unknowns” who will have

done the spade-work of the revolution.

This is inevitable and ineluctable, and it cannot be otherwise. For it is not the secret societies, nor indeed the revolutionary organisations which will deliver the coup de grace against governments. Their task, their historical mission is to educate minds to their revolution. And once minds have been cultivated,

then, abetted by external circumstances, the final push comes, not from the pioneer group, but from the masses left outside of the structures of society. On 31st August [1870], Paris turned a deaf ear to Blanqui's appeals. Four days later, he proclaimed the downfall of the government: but by then it was no longer the Blanquists who were the cutting edge of the rising, it

was the people, the millions,
who deposed the
décembriseur[[265](#)] and
acclaimed the buffoons whose
names have echoed in their
ears for two years. When
revolution is ready to erupt,
when the scent of upheaval is
in the air, when success has
already become *assured*, then
a thousand newcomers, over
whom secret organisation has
never exercised any direct

influence, rally to the movement, like vultures flocking to the battlefield for their share of the remains of the fallen. These help in the mounting of the final push, and it is not from the ranks of honest, incorrigible conspirators, but rather from among the prattling nonsense-talkers that they will draw their leaders, so imbued are they with the notion that a

leader is necessary. The conspirators who cling to the prejudice of dictatorship are thus, unwittingly, labouring to hoist their own enemies into power.

But, if what we have just said holds true for revolutions or rather political uprisings, it is even more true of the revolution we want, the Social Revolution. Allowing some government to establish itself,

some strong power which commands obedience, is tantamount to stunting the progress of the revolution from the outset. The good which government might do is negligible and the harm immeasurable.

Indeed, what is it about and what do we take Revolution to mean? Not a straightforward change of government personnel. Rather, assumption

by the people of ownership of the whole of society's wealth. Abolition of all of the powers which have never ceased from hindering the development of humanity. But can this immense economic revolution be carried through by means of decrees emanating from a government? Last century, we saw the Polish revolutionary dictator Kościuszko[[266](#)] order the abolition of personal

serfdom: serfdom persisted for eighty years after that decree. [267] We saw the Convention, the all-powerful Convention, the terrible Convention, as its admirers call it, order that all the common lands recovered from the *seigneurs* be shared out *on an individual basis*. Like so many others, that order remained a dead letter, because, for it to be put into effect, it would have taken the

rural proletariat to mount a completely new revolution, and revolutions are not made by decree. For the people's assumption of ownership of social wealth to become an accomplished fact, the people must have room to work and shrug off the servitude to which it is only too accustomed, and be given its head and proceed without awaiting orders from anyone.

Now, it is precisely that which dictatorship—however well-meaning—will prevent, and at the same time it will be powerless to advance the revolution by one iota.

But while government—even an ideal revolutionary government—does not generate any new strength and represents no asset in the work of demolition we have to carry out, then all the less

should we depend upon it for the task of reorganisation which is to follow that demolition. The economic change that the social Revolution will bring will be so immense and far-reaching and will have to work such a change in all relationships currently based upon property and exchange that it will not be feasible for one individual or several to devise the social

forms which must take shape in the society of the future. The devising of new social forms can only be the collective undertaking of the masses. It will require the flexibility of the collective intelligence of the country to meet the tremendous diversity of conditions and needs which will sprout on the day that individual ownership will be done way with. Any external

authority cannot be anything other than an impediment, an obstacle to this organisational undertaking which has to be carried out, and, from the outset, a source of discord and hatred.

But it is high time that the oft rebutted illusion of *revolutionary* government, which has so often cost us so dear, was jettisoned. It is time to tell ourselves once and for

all and take to heart the political adage that *a government cannot be revolutionary*. The Convention is invoked: but let us not forget that the few mildly revolutionary measures taken by the Convention placed the seal upon acts carried out by the people which was at that point marching ahead, ignoring all government. As Victor Hugo said in his vivid style,

Danton pushed Robespierre, Marat monitored and pushed Danton, and Marat himself was pushed by Cimourdain, that embodiment of the clubs of the “*enragés*” and rebels. [268] Like every government before and after it, the Convention was merely a ball and chain about the people’s ankles.

The lessons of history here are so conclusive: the

impossibility of revolutionary government and the poisonousness of what goes under that name are so self-evident that it would be hard to account for the passion with which a certain self-styled socialist school clings to the idea of government. But there is a very straightforward explanation. Socialists though they profess to be, exponents of this school have a view that

differs very greatly from our own of the revolution we are called upon to carry out. For them as for all bourgeois radicals, the social revolution is rather a distant prospect not to be contemplated today. Though they dare not say it, what they have in mind, in their heart of hearts, is something quite different. What they have in mind is the installation of a government

similar to the one in Switzerland or in the United States, with a few attempts to take into State care what they ingeniously describe as “public services.” This is something akin to Bismarck’s ideal or the ideal of the tailor who has been elected to the presidency of the United States.[[269](#)] It is a ready-made compromise between the socialist aspirations of the masses and

the appetites of the bourgeois. They would like comprehensive expropriation, but have not the courage to attempt it and put it off until next century, and, even before battle is joined, they are locked in negotiations with the enemy.

For those of us who understand that the time to strike a mortal blow against the bourgeoisie is drawing

near: that the time is not far off when the people can lay hands upon the whole wealth of society and reduce the exploiter class to powerlessness: for us, as I say, there can be no hesitation. We shall throw ourselves into the *social* revolution body and soul, and since any government in our path, regardless of the hat it may be wearing, represents an

obstacle, we shall render the ambitious powerless and sweep them aside the moment they venture to reach for the reins of our fortunes.

Enough of governments. Make way for the people, for anarchy!

[257](#)[] Original translation in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), Daniel Guérin (ed.). (Editor)

[258](#)[] Michel-Philippe Mandar (1759–1823), known as Théophile Mandar,

was a politician and journalist during the French Revolution. He was an admirer of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and was for a time the secretary of the Cordeliers Club, embracing the cause of revolution, and was amongst the first to enter the Bastille on 14th July 1789. He is considered the voice of reason and humanity in opposition to the crimes that disgraced the cause of freedom. When Robespierre warned that Brissot aimed to be dictator, he replied “Oh Robespierre, it is not a dictator you fear, it is Brissot you hate!” (Editor)

[259](#)[] Jacques-René Hébert (1757–1794) was political journalist during the French Revolution who became

the chief spokesman for the Parisian *sans-culottes*. He and his followers, who were called Hébertists, pressured the Jacobin regime of 1793–94 into instituting the most radical measures of the Revolutionary period. The Committee of Public Safety came to regard Hébert and followers as dangerous and he and seventeen of his followers were guillotined. This cost the government the support of the *sans-culottes* and contributed to the collapse of the Jacobin dictatorship in July 1794. (Editor)

[260](#)[] Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau (1749–91) was a French politician. He was a popular orator

and statesman. In the first stage of the Estates-General, Mirabeau was soon recognised as a leader and after the storming of the Bastille, he warned the Assembly of the futility of passing fine-sounding decrees and urged the necessity of action. He was a moderate, favoring a constitutional monarchy built on the model of Great Britain. (Editor)

[261](#)[] The term Kropotkin uses, *badaud* (plural, *badauds*), comes from the French and has the basic meaning of “gawker” and carries the connotation of idle curiosity, gullibility, simpleminded foolishness and gaping ignorance. It refers to an urban type in the eighteenth and nineteenth century

and describes the street crowds that were an essential feature of the Parisian landscape. (Editor)

[262](#)[] A reference to French revolutionary Auguste Blanqui. (Editor)

[263](#)[] Founded by Giuseppe Mazzini in 1831, Young Italy was a nationalist organisation whose attempts at propaganda for a united Republican Italy succeeded where its insurrections failed. Bakunin combated Mazzini's influence in the Italian labour movement very successfully when Mazzini attacked the Paris Commune of 1871. (Editor)

[264](#)[] The Executive Committee was the activist core of the Russian Populist

movement *Narondnay Volya* (the People's Will). It planned and carried out the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 (an act often, falsely, attributed to anarchists). (Editor)

[265](#)[] A reference to Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, who had seized power in December 1851 and declared himself Emperor in December the following year. (Editor)

[266](#)[] Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kościuszko (1746–1817) was a Polish officer who fought on the rebel side during the American War of Independence and, after returning home, led an uprising in 1794 against the three powers (Russia, Prussia and

Austria) which had partitioned his country. (Editor)

[267](#)[] The Proclamation of 7th May 1794, promulgated on 30th May. Had this decree been put into effect, it would indeed have spelled the end of personal serfdom and patrimonial courts.

[268](#)[] Cimourdain was a character in Victor Hugo's novel *Ninety-Three* (1874), a committed revolutionary and former priest. (Editor)

[269](#)[] A reference to Andrew Johnson (1808–1875) who became President after Lincoln's assassination in 1865. (Editor)

From *Expropriation*

These extracts are from an 1886 Freedom Press pamphlet and reflect a core aspect of Kropotkin's ideas on revolution. It gives an overview of his vision of social revolution and the problems it would face. Explicitly rejecting the notion of an easy overnight revolution, he argues that only federalism,

decentralisation and mass participation can ensure a successful revolution. The pamphlet is made up of four chapters (Expropriation, Food, Dwellings, and Clothing) of The Conquest of Bread.

It is told of Rothschild that, seeing his fortune threatened by the Revolution of 1848, he hit upon the following stratagem: “I am quite willing

to admit," said he, "that my fortune has been accumulated at the expense of others, but if it were divided among the millions of Europe tomorrow the share of each would only amount to five shillings. Very well then, I undertake to render to each his five shillings if he asks me for it."

Having given due publicity to his promise, our millionaire proceeded as usual to stroll

quietly through the streets of Frankfort. Three or four passers-by asked for their five shillings, which he disbursed with a sardonic smile. His stratagem succeeded and the family of the millionaire is still in possession of its wealth.

It is in much the same fashion, that the shrewd heads among the middle classes reason when they say “Ah, Expropriation, I know what

that means. You take all the top-coats and lay them in a heap, and every one is free to help himself and fight for the best.”

But such jests are irrelevant as well as flippant. What we want is not a redistribution of top-coats. Besides, is it likely that in such a general scramble the shivering folk would come off any better? Nor do we want to divide up the wealth of

the Rothschilds. What we do want is so to arrange things so that every human being born into the world shall be ensured the opportunity in the first instance of learning some useful occupation, and of becoming skilled in it; next, that he shall be free to work at his trade without asking leave of master or owner, and without handing over to landlord or capitalist the lion's

share of what he produces. As to the wealth held by the Rothschild or the Vanderbilts, it will serve us to organise our system of communal production.

The day when the labourer may till the ground without paying away half of what he produces, the day when the machines necessary to prepare the soil for rich harvests are at the free disposal of the

cultivators, the day when the worker in the factory produces for the community and not for the monopolist—that day will see the workers clothed and fed, and there will be no more Rothschilds or other exploiters.

No one will then have to sell his working power for a wage that only represents a fraction of what he produces.

“So far so good,” say our

critics, “but you will have Rothschilds coming in from outside. How are you to prevent a person from amassing millions in China and then settling amongst you? How are you going to prevent such a one from surrounding himself with lackeys and wage-slaves—from exploiting them and enriching himself at their expense?

“You cannot bring about a

Revolution all over the world at the same time. Well then, are you going to establish Custom Houses on your frontiers, to search all who enter your country, and confiscate the, money they bring with them?—Anarchist policemen firing on travellers would be a fine spectacle!”

But at the root of this argument there is a great error. Those who propound it have

never paused to inquire whence come the fortunes of the rich. A little thought would suffice to show them that these fortunes have their beginnings in the poverty of the poor. When there are no longer any destitute there will no longer be any rich to exploit them.

[...]

[...] An Anarchist society need not fear the advent of an unknown Rothschild who

would seek to settle in its midst. If every member of the community knows that after a few hours of productive toil he will have a right to all the pleasures that civilisation procures, and to those deeper sources of enjoyment which art and science offer to all who seek them, he will not sell his strength for a starvation wage. No one will volunteer to work for the enrichment of your

Rothschild. His golden guineas will be only so many pieces of metal—useful for various purposes, but incapable of breeding more.

In answering the above objection we have at the same time indicated the scope of Expropriation. It must extend to all that permits anyone, no matter who—financier, mill-owner, or landlord—to appropriate the product of

others' toil. Our formula is simple and comprehensive.

We do not want to rob anyone of his coat, but we wish to *give* to the workers all those things the lack of which makes them fall an easy prey to the exploiter, and we will do our utmost that none shall lack aught, that not a single man shall be forced to sell the strength of his right arm to obtain a bare subsistence for

himself and his babes. That is what we mean when we talk of Expropriation; that will be our duty during the Revolution, for whose coming we look, not two hundred years hence, but soon, very soon.

[...]

There are, in fact, in a modern State established relations which it is practically impossible to modify if one

attacks them only in detail. There are wheels within wheels in our economic organisation—the machinery is so complex and interdependent that no one part can be modified without disturbing the whole. This will become clear as soon as an attempt is made to expropriate anything.

Let us suppose: that in a certain country a limited form

of Expropriation is effected; for example, that, as recently suggested by Henry George, only the property of the great landlords is confiscated, whilst the factories are left untouched; or that, in a certain city, house property is taken over by the commune, but merchandise is left in private ownership; or that, in some manufacturing centre, the factories are communalised,

but the land is not interfered with.

The same result would follow in each case—a terrible shattering of the industrial system, without the means of reorganising it on new lines.

Industry and commerce would be at a dead-lock, yet a return to the first principles of justice would not have been achieved, and society would find itself powerless to

construct a harmonious whole.

If agriculture could free itself from great landowners, while industry still remained the bond slave of the capitalist, the merchant and the banker, nothing would be accomplished. The farmer suffers to-day not only in having to pay rent to the landlord, he is oppressed on all hands by existing conditions. He is exploited by the

tradesman, who makes him pay half-a-crown for a spade which, measured by the labour spent on it, is not worth more than sixpence. He is taxed by the State, which cannot do without its formidable hierarchy of officials, and finds it necessary to maintain an expensive army, because the traders of all nations are perpetually fighting for the markets, and any day a little

quarrel arising from the exploitation of some part of Asia or Africa may result in war

Then again farmer and labourer suffer from the depopulation of country places: the young people are attracted to the large factory towns by the bait of high wages paid temporarily by the manufacturers of articles of luxury, or by the attractions of

a more stirring life. The artificial protection of industry, the industrial exploitation of foreign countries, the prevalence of stock-jobbing, the difficulty of improving the soil and the machinery of production—all these are causes which work together against agriculture, which indeed is burdened not only by rent, but by the whole complexity of conditions

developed in a society based on exploitation. Thus, even if the expropriation of land were accomplished, and every one were free to till the soil and cultivate it to the best advantage, without paying rent, agriculture, even though it should enjoy—which can by no means be taken for granted—a momentary prosperity, would soon fall back into the slough in which it finds itself

to-day. The whole thing would have to be begun over again, with increased difficulties.

The same holds true of industry. Take the converse case; make over the factories to those who work in them, but leave the agricultural labourers slaves to farmer and landlord. Abolish the master-manufacturers, but leave the landowner his land, the banker his money, the merchant his

Exchange, maintain still the swarm of idlers who live on the toil of the workmen, the thousand and one middlemen, the State with its numberless officials, and industry would come to a stand-still. Finding no purchasers in the mass of country people still as poor as ever, having no raw material, unable to export its products, and embarrassed by the stoppage of trade, industry

could only struggle on feebly, and thousands of workers would be thrown upon the streets. These starving crowds would be ready and willing to submit to the first schemer who came to exploit them, they would even consent to return to the old slavery, if only under promise of work.

Or, finally, suppose you oust the land-owners, and hand over the mills and factories to

the worker, without interfering with the swarm of middlemen who drain of the produce of our manufacturers and speculate in corn and flour, meat and groceries in our great centres of commerce. Well, when exchange is arrested and products cease to circulate, when London is without bread, and Yorkshire finds no buyers for her cloth, a terrible counter-revolution will

take place—a counter-revolution trampling upon heaps of slain, sweeping the towns and villages with shot and shell; there will be proscriptions, panic, flight, perhaps all the terrors of wholesale judicial massacre of the Guillotine, as in France in 1815, 1848, and 1871.

All is interdependent in a civilised society; it is impossible to reform any one

thing without altering the whole. On that day when we strike at private property, under any one of its forms, territorial or industrial, we shall be obliged to attack all its manifestations. The very success of the Revolution will demand it.

Besides, we could not if we would confine ourselves to a partial expropriation. Once the principle of the “Divine Right

of Property” is shaken, no amount of theorising will prevent its overthrow, here by the slaves of the soil, there by the slaves of the machine.

[...]

If the coming Revolution is to be a Social Revolution it will be distinguished from all former uprisings not only by its aim, but also by its methods. To attain a new end new means are required.

[...]

That we are utopians is well known. So utopian are we in fact that we go to the length of believing that the Revolution can and ought to assure shelter, food and clothes to all—an idea extremely displeasing to middle-class citizens, whatever their party colour, for they are quite alive to the fact that it is not easy to keep the upper hand of a

people whose hunger is satisfied.

All the same, we maintain our contention: bread must be found for the people during the Revolution, and the question of bread must take precedence of all other questions. If it is settled in the interests of the people, the Revolution will be on the right road; for in solving the question of Bread we must

accept the principle of equality, which will force itself upon us to the exclusion of every other solution.

It is certain that the coming Revolution—like in that respect to the Revolution of 1848—will burst upon us in the middle of a great industrial crisis. Things have been seething for more than a dozen years now, and can only go from bad to worse.

Everything tends that way; new nations entering the lists of international trade and fighting for possession of the world's markets, wars, taxes ever increasing, national debts, the insecurity of the morrow, and huge commercial undertakings in every quarter of the globe.

There are millions of unemployed workers in Europe at this moment. It will

be still worse when Revolution has burst upon us and spread like fire laid to a train of gunpowder. The number of the out-of-works will be doubled as soon as the barricades are erected in Europe and the United States. What is to be done to provide these multitudes with bread?

We do not know whether the folk who call themselves “practical people” have ever

asked themselves this question in all its nakedness. But we do know that they wish to maintain the wage system, and we must therefore expect to have “national workshops” and “public works” vaunted as a means of giving food to the unemployed.

[...]

A Revolution in Europe means the immediate stoppage of at least half the factories

and workshops. It means millions of workers and their families thrown on the streets.

And your “practical men” would seek to avert this truly terrible situation by means of national relief works, that is to say, by means of new industries created on the spot to give work to the unemployed!

It is evident, as Proudhon has already pointed out, that

the smallest attack upon property will bring in its train the complete disorganisation of the system based upon private enterprise and wage labour. Society itself will be forced to take production in hand, in its entirety, and to reorganise it to meet the needs of the whole people. But this cannot be accomplished in a day or a month; it must take a certain time thus to reorganise the

system of production, and during this time millions of men will be deprived of the means of subsistence—what then is to be done?

There is only one really *practical* solution of the problem—boldly to face the great task which awaits us, and instead of trying to patch up a situation which we ourselves have made untenable, to proceed to

reorganise production on a new basis.

Thus the really practical course of action, in our view, would be that the people should take immediate possession of all the food of the insurgent districts, keeping strict account of it all, that none might be wasted and that by the aid of these accumulated resources every one might be able to tide over

the crisis. During that time an agreement would have to be made with the factory workers, the necessary raw material given them and the means of subsistence assured to them while they worked to supply the needs of the agricultural population. For we must not forget that while France weaves silks and satins to deck the wives of German financiers, the Empress of

Russia and the Queen of the Sandwich Islands, and while Paris fashions wonderful trinkets and playthings for rich folk all the world over, two-thirds of the French peasantry have not proper lamps to give them light, or the implements necessary for modern agriculture. Lastly, unproductive land, of which there is plenty, would have to be turned to the best

advantage, poor soils enriched, and rich soils, which yet, under the present system, do not yield a quarter, no, nor a tenth of what they might produce, submitted to intensive culture and tilled with as much care as a market garden or a flower plot. It is impossible to imagine any other practical solution of the problem, and, whether we like it or not, sheer force of

circumstances will bring it to pass.

[...]

For even admitting that the Collectivist modification of the present system is possible, if introduced gradually during a period of prosperity and peace—though for my part I question its practicability even under such conditions—it would become impossible in a period of Revolution, when the

need of feeding hungry millions springs up with the first call to arms. A political revolution can be accomplished without shaking the foundations of industry, but a revolution where the people lay hands upon property will inevitably paralyse exchange and production. Millions of public money would not suffice for wages to the millions of out-

of-works.

This point cannot be too much insisted upon: the reorganisation of industry on a new basis (and we shall presently show how tremendous this problem is) cannot be accomplished in a few days, nor, on the other hand, will the people submit to be half-starved for years in order to oblige the theorists who uphold the wage-system.

To tide over the period of stress, they will demand what they have always demanded in such cases—communisation of supplies—the giving of rations.

[...]

But everything confirms us in the belief that the energy of the people will carry them far enough, and that, when the Revolution takes place, the idea of Anarchist Communism will have gained ground. It is

not an artificial idea. The people themselves have breathed it in our ear, and the number of Communists is ever increasing as the impossibility of any other solution becomes more and more evident.

[...]

In every block of houses, in every street, in every town ward, bands of volunteers will have been organised. These commissariat volunteers will

work in unison and keep in touch with each other. If only the Jacobin bayonets do not get in the way; if only the self-styled “scientific” theorists do not thrust themselves in to darken counsel! Or rather let them expound their muddle-headed theories as much as they like, provided they have no authority, no power! And that admirable spirit of organisation inherent in the

people, above all in every social grade of the French nation, but which they have so seldom been allowed to exercise, will initiate, even in so huge a city as Paris, and in the midst of a Revolution, an immense guild of free workers, ready to furnish to each and all the necessary food.

Give the people a free hand and in ten days the food

service will be conducted with admirable regularity. Only those who have never seen the people hard at work, only those who have passed their lives buried among documents, can doubt it. Speak of the organising genius of the “Great Misunderstood,” the people, to those who have seen it in Paris in the days of the barricades, or in London during the last great strike, when half-a-

million of starving folk had to be fed, and they will tell you how superior it is to the official ineptness of Bumbledom.

And even supposing we had to endure a certain amount of discomfort and confusion for a fortnight or a month; surely that would not matter very much. For the mass of the people it could not but be an improvement on their former condition, and, besides, in

times of Revolution one can dine contentedly enough on a bit of bread and cheese, while eagerly discussing events.

In any case, a system which springs up spontaneously, under stress of immediate need, will be infinitely preferable to anything invented between four walls, by hide-bound theorists sitting on any number of committees.

[...]

We have now to consider by what means a city in a state of revolution could supply itself with food. Before answering this question it should be pointed out that obviously the means resorted to will depend on the character of the revolution in the provinces, and in neighbouring countries. If the entire nation, or, better still, if all Europe should accomplish the Social

Revolution simultaneously, and start with thoroughgoing Communism, our procedure would be simplified, but if only a few communities in Europe make the attempt, other means will have to be chosen. The circumstances will dictate the measures.

We are thus led, before proceeding further, to glance at the state of Europe, and, without pretending to

prophecy, we ought to be able to foresee what course the Revolution will take, or at least what will be its essential features.

Certainly it would be very desirable that all Europe should rise at once, that expropriation should be general, and that Communistic principles should inspire all and sundry, Such a universal rising would do much to

simplify the task of our century.

But all the signs lead us to believe that it will not take place. That the Revolution will embrace Europe, we do not doubt. If one of the four great continental capitals—Paris, Vienna, Brussels or Berlin—rises in revolution and overturns its government, it is almost certain that the three others will follow its example

within a few weeks time. It is, moreover, highly probable that the Peninsulas and even London and St. Petersburg would not be long in following suit. But whether the revolution would have everywhere the same character is quite another question.

Though it is more than probable that expropriation will be everywhere carried

into effect on a larger or smaller scale, and that this policy carried out by any one of the great nations of Europe will influence all the rest, yet the beginnings of the Revolution will exhibit great local differences, and its course will vary in different countries. In 1789–1793, the French peasantry took four years to finally rid themselves of the redemption of feudal

rights and the bourgeois to overthrow royalty. Let us keep that in mind, therefore, and be prepared to see the Revolution develop itself somewhat gradually. Let us not be disheartened if here and there its steps should move less rapidly. Whether it would take an avowedly Socialist character in all European nations, at any rate at the beginning, is doubtful.

Germany, be it remembered, is still realising its dream of a United Empire. Its advanced parties see visions of a Jacobin Republic like that of 1848, and of the organisation of labour according to Louis Blanc; while the French people, on the other hand, want above all things a free Commune, whether it be a Communist Commune or not.

That, when the coming

Revolution takes place, Germany will go further than France, there is every reason to believe. The bourgeois Revolution in France in the eighteenth century was an advance on the English Revolution of the seventeenth, abolishing as it did at once the power of the throne and of the landed aristocracy, whose influence still survives in England. But, if Germany goes

further and does greater things than the France of 1848, there can be no doubt that the ideas which will foster the birth of the Revolution will be those of 1848, as the ideas which will inspire the Revolution in Russia will be those of 1789, modified somewhat by the intellectual movements of our own century.

Without, however, attaching to these forecasts a greater

importance than they merit, we may safely conclude this much: the Revolution will take a different character in each of the different European nations; the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the same.

Will it therefore be necessary, as is sometimes suggested, that the nations in the vanguard of the movement should adapt their pace to

those who lag behind? Must we wait till the Communist Revolution is ripe in all civilised countries? Clearly not! Even if it were a thing to be desired it is not possible. History does not wait for the laggards.

Besides, we do not believe that in any one country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of an eye, as

some Socialists dream. It is highly probable that if one of the five or six large towns of France—Paris, Lyon, Marseilles, Lille, Saint Etienne, Bordeaux—were to proclaim the Commune, the others would follow its example, and that many smaller towns would do the same. Probably also various mining districts and industrial centres would hasten to rid

themselves of “owners” and “masters,” and form themselves into free groups.

But many country places have not advanced to that point. Side by side with the revolutionised communes such places would remain in an expectant attitude and would go on living on the Individualist system. Undisturbed by visits of the bailiff or the tax-collector, the peasants would

not be hostile to the revolutionaries, and thus, while profiting by the new state of affairs, they would defer the settlement of accounts with the local exploiters. But with that practical enthusiasm which always characterises agrarian uprisings (witness the passionate toil of 1792) they would throw themselves into the task of cultivating the land,

which, freed from taxes and mortgages, would become so much dearer to them.

As to foreign countries, there would be Revolution everywhere, but Revolution under various aspects; here State Socialism, there Federation; everywhere more or less of Socialism, but uniformity nowhere.

[...]

To those who put their trust

in “authority,” the question [of providing food] will appear quite simple. They would begin by establishing a strongly centralised government, furnished with all the machinery of coercion: the police, the army, the guillotine. This government would draw up a statement of all the produce contained in France. It would divide the country into districts of supply, and

then *command* that a prescribed quantity of some particular food stuff be sent to such a place on such a day, and delivered at such a station, to be there received on a given day by a specified official and stored in particular warehouses.

Now, we declare with the fullest conviction, not merely that such a solution is undesirable, but that it never

could by any possibility be put into practice. It is wildly utopian!

Pen in hand, one may dream such a dream in the study, but in contact with reality it comes to nothing; for, like all such theories, it leaves out of account the spirit of independence that is in man. The attempt would lead to a universal uprising, three or four *Vendées* in one, the

villages warring against the towns, all France up in arms defying the city for its arrogance in attempting to impose such a system upon the country.

But enough of Jacobin utopias! Let us see if some other form of organisation will fit the case.

[...]

As long as worthless paper-money—whether called

assignats or labour notes[[270](#)]
—is offered to the peasant-producer it will always be the same. The country will withhold its produce, and the towns will suffer want, even if the recalcitrant peasants are drowned and guillotined as before. We must offer to the peasant in exchange for his toil not worthless paper money, but the manufactured articles of which he stands in

immediate need. He lacks the proper implements to till the land, clothes to protect him properly from the inclemencies of the weather, lamps and oil to replace his miserable rushlight or tallow dip, spades, rakes, ploughs. All these things, under present conditions, the peasant is forced to do without, not because he does not feel the need of them, but because, in

his life of struggle and privation, a thousand useful things are beyond his reach; because he has no money to buy them.

Let the town apply itself, without loss of time, to manufacturing all that the peasant needs, instead of fashioning gewgaws for the wives of rich citizens. Let the sewing machines of Paris be set to work on clothes for the

country folk: work-a-day clothes and clothes for Sunday too, instead of making wedding outfits; let the factories and foundries turn out agricultural implements, spades, rakes, and such like, instead of waiting till the English send them in exchange for French wines!

Let the towns send no more inspectors to the villages with red, blue, or rainbow-coloured

scarves, to convey to the peasant orders to take his produce to this place or that, but let them send friendly embassies to the country folk and bid them in brotherly fashion: “Bring us your produce, and take from our stores and shops all the manufactured articles you please.” Then provisions would pour in on every side. The peasant would only

withhold what he needed for his own use, and would send the rest into the cities, feeling *for the first time in the course of history*, that these toiling townsfolk were his comrades—his brethren and not his exploiters.

We shall be told, perhaps, that this would necessitate a complete transformation of industry. Well, yes, that is true of certain departments, but

there are other branches which could be rapidly modified in such a way as to furnish the peasant with clothes, watches, furniture, and the simple implements for which the towns make him pay such exorbitant prices at the present time. Weavers, tailors, shoemakers, tinsmiths, cabinet-makers, and many other trades and crafts could easily direct their energies to

the manufacture of useful and necessary articles, and abstain from producing mere luxuries. All that is needed is that the public mind should be thoroughly convinced of the necessity of this transformation, and should come to look upon it as an act of justice and of progress, and that it should no longer allow itself to be cheated by that dream so dear to the theorists

—the dream of a revolution confining itself to taking possession of the profits of industry, and leaving production and commerce just as they are now.

This, then, is our view of the whole question. Cheat the peasant no longer with scraps of paper—be the sums inscribed upon them ever so large, but offer him in exchange for his produce the

very things of which he, the tiller of the soil, stands in need. Then the fruits of the land will be poured into the towns. If this is not done there will be famine in our cities, and reaction and despair will follow in its train.

[...]

Before long, intensive culture would be within the reach of all. Improved machinery, chemical manures,

and all such matters would be common property. But everything tends to indicate that at the outset there would be a falling off in agricultural products, in France as elsewhere.

In any case it would be wisest to count upon such a falling off of contributions from the provinces as well as from abroad.

And how is this falling off to

be made good? Why, in heaven's name, by setting to work ourselves! No need to rack our brains for far-fetched panaceas when the remedy lies close at hand!

The large towns must undertake to till the soil, like the country districts. We must return to what biology calls "the integration of a functions": after the division of labour its integration—that is

the plan followed all through Nature. Besides, philosophy apart, the force of circumstances would bring about this result. Let Paris see at the end of eight months that it is running short of corn, and Paris will set to work to grow corn.

[...]

Of course the good folk in new uniforms, seated in the official armchairs of the *Hôtel*

de Ville, will be sure to busy themselves in heaping up obstacles. They will talk of giving compensation to the landlords, of preparing statistics, and drawing up long reports. Yes, they would be capable of drawing up reports long enough to outlast the hopes of the people, who, after waiting and starving in enforced idleness, and seeing nothing come of all these

official researches, would lose heart and faith in the Revolution and abandon the field to the reactionaries. The new bureaucracy would end by making expropriation hateful in the eyes of all.

Here, indeed, is a rock which might shipwreck our hopes. But if the people turn a deaf ear to the specious arguments used to dazzle them and realise that new life needs

new conditions, and if they undertake the task themselves, then expropriation can be effected without any great difficulty.

“But how? How can expropriation be achieved?” you ask us.

We are about to reply to that question, but with a reservation. We have no intention of tracing out the plans of expropriation in their

smallest details. We know beforehand that all that any man, or group of men, could suggest today would be far surpassed by the reality when it comes. The human spirit will accomplish greater things, and accomplish them better and in a simpler way than any one could dictate beforehand. Thus we are content to indicate the methods by which expropriation *might* be

accomplished without the intervention of government. We do not propose to go out of our way to answer those who declare that the thing is impossible. We confine ourselves to replying that we are not the upholders of any particular method of organisation. We are only concerned to demonstrate that expropriation *could* be effected by popular initiative,

and *could not* be effected by any other means whatever.

It seems very likely that, as soon as expropriation is fairly started, groups of volunteers will spring up in every district, street, and block of houses, and undertake to enquire into the number of flats and houses which are empty and of those which are overcrowded, the unwholesome slums and the houses which are too spacious

for their occupants, and might well be used to house those who are stifled in swarming tenements. In a few days, these volunteers would have drawn up complete lists for the street and the district, of all the flats, tenements, family mansions and villa residences, all the rooms and suites of rooms, healthy and unhealthy, small and large, foetid dens and homes of luxury.

Freely communicating with each other, these volunteers would soon have their statistics complete. False statistics can be manufactured in board rooms and offices, but true and exact statistics must begin with the individual, and mount up from the simple to the complex.

Then, without waiting for any one's leave, those citizens will probably go and find their

comrades who were living in miserable garrets and hovels and will say to them simply: "It is a real Revolution this time, comrades, and no mistake about it. Come to such a place this evening; all the neighbourhood will be there; we are going to re-distribute the dwelling houses. If you are tired of your slum garret come and choose one of the flats of five rooms that are to be

disposed of, and when you have once moved in you shall stay, never fear. The people are up in arms, and he who would venture to evict you will have to answer to them.”

[...]

We do not deny that there are plenty of egoistic instincts in isolated individuals in our societies. We are quite aware of it. But we contend that the very way to revive and nourish

these instincts would be to confine such questions as the housing of the people to any board or committee, in fact to the tender mercies of officialism in any shape or form. Then indeed all the evil passions spring up, and it becomes a case of who is the most influential person on the board. The least inequality causes wranglings and recriminations. If the smallest

advantage is given to any one
a tremendous hue and cry is
raised—and not without
reason!

But if the people themselves,
organised by streets, districts
and parishes, undertake to
move the inhabitants of the
slums into the half-empty
dwellings of the middle
classes, the trifling
inconveniences, the little
inequalities will be easily tided

over. Rarely has appeal been made to the good instincts of the masses—only as a last resort, to save the sinking ship in times of revolution—but, never has such an appeal been made in vain; the heroism, the self devotion, of the toiler has never failed to respond to it. And thus it will be in the coming Revolution.

But when all is said and done, some inequalities, some

inevitable injustices will remain. There are individuals in our societies whom no great crisis can lift out of the deep ruts of egoism in which they are sunk. The question, however, is not whether there will be injustices or no, but rather how to limit the number of them.

Now all history, all the experience of the human race, and all social psychology, unite

in showing that the best and fairest way is to trust the decision to those whom it concerns most nearly. It is they alone who can consider and allow for the hundred and one details which must necessarily be overlooked in any merely official redistribution.

[...]

When the masons, and carpenters, and all who are

concerned in house building, know that their daily bread is secured to them, they will ask nothing better than to work at their old trades a few hours a day. They will adapt the fine houses which absorbed the time of a whole staff of servants, and in a few months homes will have sprung up, infinitely healthier and more conveniently arranged than those of today. And to those

who are not yet comfortably housed the Anarchist Commune will be able to say: “Patience, comrades! Palaces fairer and finer than any the capitalists built for themselves will spring from the ground of our enfranchised city. They will belong to those who have most need of them. The Anarchist Commune does not build with an eye to revenues. These monuments erected to

its citizens, products of the collective spirit, will serve as models to all humanity, they will be yours.”

If the people of the Revolution expropriate the houses and proclaim free lodgings, the communalising of houses and the right of each family to a decent dwelling, then the Revolution will have assumed a Communistic character from the first, and

started on a course from which it will be by no means easy to turn it. It will have struck a fatal blow at individual property.

For the expropriation of dwellings contains in germ the whole social revolution. On the manner of its accomplishment depends the character of all that follows. Either we shall start on a good road leading straight to

Anarchist Communism, or we shall remain sticking in the mud of despotic individualism.

[...]

The so-called practical objections are not very formidable either. We are bidden to consider the hard case of some poor fellow who by dint of privation has contrived to buy a house just large enough to hold his family. And we are going to

deprive him of his hard-earned happiness to turn him into the street! Certainly not. If his house is only just large enough for his family, by all means let him stay there. Let him work in his little garden too; our “boys” will not hinder him—nay, they will lend him a helping hand if need be. But suppose he lets lodgings, suppose he has empty rooms in his house, the people will

make the lodger understand that he is not to pay his former landlord any more rent. Stay where you are, but rent free. No more rent-demanders and collectors; Socialism has abolished all that!

Or again, suppose that the landlord has a score of rooms all to himself and some poor woman lives near by with five children in one room. In that case the people would see

whether, with some alterations, these empty rooms could not be converted into a suitable home for the poor woman and her five children. Would not that be more just and fair than to leave the mother and her five little ones languishing in a garret, while Sir Gorgeous Midas sat at his ease in an empty mansion? Besides, good Sir Gorgeous would probably hasten to do it

of his own accord; his wife will be delighted to be freed from half her big unwieldy house when there is no longer a staff of servants to keep it in order.

“So you are going to turn everything upside down, it seems, and set everybody by the ears. There will be no end to the evictions and flittings. Would it not be better to start fresh by turning everybody out

of doors and redistributing the houses by lot?" Thus our critics; but we answer we are firmly persuaded that if only there is no sort of government interference in the matter, if all the changes are entrusted to those free groups which have sprung up to undertake the work, the evictions and removals will be less numerous than those which take place in one year under

the present system, owing to the rapacity of landlords.

[...]

Moreover, we must not miss the fact that every Revolution means a certain disturbance to every-day life, and those who expect this tremendous lift out of the old grooves to be accomplished without so much as jarring the dishes on their dinner tables will find themselves mistaken. It is true

that governments can change without disturbing worthy citizens at dinner, but the crimes of society towards those who have nourished and supported it are not to be redressed by any such political sleight of hand by parties.

Undoubtedly there will be a disturbance, but it must not be of pure destruction; it must be minimised. And again—it is impossible to lay too much

stress on this maxim—it will be by addressing ourselves to the interested parties, and not to boards and committees, that we shall best succeed in reducing the sum of inconveniences for everybody.

The people commit blunder on blunder when they have to choose by ballot some hare-brained candidate who solicits the honour of representing them, and takes upon himself

to know all, to do all, and to organise all. But when they take upon themselves to organise what they know, what touches them directly, they do it better than all the “talking shops” put together. Is not the Paris Commune an instance in point, and the last London strike, and have we not constant evidence of this fact in every village commune?

[...]

[...] Societies, like individuals, have their hours of cowardice, but also their heroic moments, and though the society of today cuts a very poor figure, sunk in the pursuit of narrow personal interests and second-rate ideas, it wears a different air when great crises come. It has its moments of greatness and enthusiasm. Men of generous nature will gain the power

which today is in the hand of swindlers. Self-devotion will spring up, and noble deeds beget their like; even the egoists will be ashamed to hang back, and will be drawn in spite of themselves to admire, if not to imitate, the generous and brave.

The great Revolution of 1793 abounds in examples of this kind, and it is ever during such times of spiritual revival

—as natural to societies as to individuals—that the spring-tide of enthusiasm sweeps humanity onwards.

We do not wish to exaggerate the part played by such noble passions, nor is it upon them that we would found our ideal of society. But we are not asking too much if we expect their aid in tiding over the first and most difficult moments. We cannot hope

that our daily life will be continuously inspired by such exalted enthusiasms, but we may expect their aid at the first, and that is all we need.

It is just to wash the earth clean, to sweep away the shards and refuse accumulated by centuries of slavery and oppression, that the new Anarchist society will have need of this wave of brotherly love. Later on, it can exist

without appealing to the spirit of self-sacrifice, because it will have eliminated oppression and thus created a new world instinct with all the feelings of solidarity.

Besides, should the character of the Revolution be such as we have sketched here, the free initiative of individuals would find an extensive field of action in thwarting the efforts of the

egoists. Groups would spring up in every street and quarter to undertake the charge of the clothing. They would make inventories of all that the city possessed, and would find out approximately what were the resources at their disposal. It is more than likely that in the matter of clothing the citizens would adopt the same principle as in the matter of provisions—that is to say, they

would offer freely from the common store everything which was to be found in abundance, and dole out whatever was limited in quantity.

[...]

[270](#)[¹] *Assignats* were notes issued as paper currency in France (1789–1796) by the revolutionary government and secured by confiscated lands. They were usually blamed for the hyperinflation during the revolutionary period as there was little control over how many were printed. *Labour notes* were

advocated by many socialists, starting with Robert Owen, as an alternative to specie-backed money and would reflect the time taken to produce goods, with workers receiving notes equal to the time they spent in work. Kropotkin critiqued this idea in his famous essay “The Wage Systems.” (Editor)

What Revolution Means

This article appeared in Freedom (November 1886) and summarises Kropotkin's vision of what a social revolution would involve. It argues that any social revolution needs mass participation to be successful, so necessitating libertarian means—local self-activity,

*decentralisation and
federalism—for a libertarian
end.*

We said, in our preceding article,[\[271\]](#) that a great revolution is growing up in Europe. We approach a time when the slow evolution which has been going on during the second part of our century, but is still prevented from finding its way into life, will break through the obstacles lying in

its path and will try to remodel society according to the new needs and tendencies. Such has been, until now, the law of development in societies, and the present unwillingness of the privileged classes to recognise the justice of the claims of the unprivileged, sufficiently shows that the lessons of the past have not profited them. Evolution will assume its feverish shape—

Revolution.

But what is a revolution?

If we ask our historians, we shall learn from them that it means much noise in the streets; wild speakers perorating in clubs; mobs breaking windows and wrecking houses; pillage, street warfare, and murders; exasperated struggle between parties; violent overthrow of existing governments, and

nomination of new ones as unable to solve the great impendent problems as the former ones; and then, the general discontent, the growth of misery; reaction stepping in under the blood-stained flag of the White Terror;[\[272\]](#) and finally, the reinstallation of a government worse than the former. Such is the picture drawn by most historians.

But *this* is not a revolution.

There are in the picture some of the accidental features of revolutions, but their essence is wanting. Window-breaking and street warfare may be as well distinctive of a riot; and a violent change of government may be the result of a simple insurrection. So it was, for instance, all over Europe in 1848.

A revolution has a much deeper meaning. There may

be street warfare, or there may not; there may be housewrecking, or there may not. But in a revolution, there *must* be a rapid modification of outgrown economical and political institutions, an overthrow of the injustices accumulated by centuries past, a displacement of wealth and political power. When we see, for instance, that during the years 1789 to 1793 the last

remnants of feudal institutions were abolished in France; that the peasant who formerly was—economically, if no longer legally—a serf of the landlord, became a free man; that the commons resumed possession of the soil enclosed by the landowners; that the absolute power of the King, or rather of his courtiers, was broken for ever in the course of a few years; and that the political

power was transferred from the hands of a few courtiers into those of the middle classes,—then we say, It was a Revolution. And we know that neither Restoration nor White Terror could reconstitute the feudal rights of the noblesse, nor those of the landed aristocracy, nor the absolute power of the King. It was so much a revolution that, although seemingly defeated, it

has compelled Europe at length to follow out its programme—that is, to abolish serfdom and to introduce representative government.

And to find its like we must not look to the smaller outbreaks of our times; we must revert to the seventeenth century—to the Revolution which took place in this country, with nearly the same programme, the same

tendencies and consequences.
[[273](#)]

As to street warfare and executions, which so much preoccupy historians, they are incidental to the great struggle. They do not constitute its essence and probably they would not have occurred at all if the ruling classes had understood at once the new force that had grown up among them, and instead of

plotting against it, had frankly set to work to help the new order of things to make its way into life.

A revolution is not a mere change of government, because a government, however powerful, cannot overthrow institutions by mere decrees. Its decrees would remain dead letters if in each part of the territory a demolition of decaying

institutions, economical and political, were not going on spontaneously.

Again, it is not the work of one day. It means a whole period, mostly lasting for several years, during which the country is in a state of effervescence; when thousands of formerly indifferent spectators take a lively part in public affairs; when the public mind,

throwing off the bonds that restrained it, freely discusses, criticises and repudiates the institutions which are a hindrance to free development; when it boldly enters upon problems which formerly seemed insoluble.

The chief problem which our century imposes upon us is an economic problem, and economic problems imply so deep a change in all branches

of public life that they cannot be solved by laws. The laws made even by revolutionary bodies have mostly sanctioned accomplished facts.

The working classes all over Europe loudly affirm that the riches produced by the combined efforts of generations past and present must not be appropriated by a few. They look on it as unjust that the millions ready to work

must depend for getting work on the good will, or rather on the greediness, of a few. They ask for a complete reorganisation of production; they deny the capitalist the right of pocketing the benefits of production because the State recognises him as proprietor of the soil, the field, the house, the colliery, or the machinery, without the use of which the millions can do no

useful work at all. They loudly require a more equitable organisation of distribution.

But this immense problem—the reorganisation of production, redistribution of wealth and exchange, according to the new principles—cannot be solved by parliamentary commissions nor by any kind of government. It must be a natural growth resulting from

the combined efforts of all interested in it, freed from the bonds of the present institutions. It must grow naturally, proceeding from the simplest up to complex federations, and it cannot be something schemed by a few men and ordered from above. In this last shape it surely would have no chance of living at all.

But this economical

reorganisation means also the recasting of all those institutions which we are now accustomed to call the political organisation of a country. A new economical organisation necessarily calls for a new political organisation. Feudal rights accommodated themselves perfectly to absolute monarchy; free exploitation by the middle classes has prospered under

representative government.
But new forms of economical
life will require also new forms
of political life, and these new
forms cannot be a
reinforcement of the power of
the State by giving up in its
hands the production and
distribution of wealth, and its
exchange.

Human progress is
advancing in an opposite
direction; it aims at the

limitation of the power of the State over the individual. And the revolution cannot but follow the same line. If the times are ripe for some substantial remodelling of life, such remodelling will be the result of the numberless spontaneous actions of millions of individuals; it will go in an anarchist direction, not in a governmental one; and it will result in a society giving

free play to the individual and the free grouping of individuals, instead of reinforcing submission to the State.

If the coming Revolution is not doomed to die out before anything has been realised by it, it will be anarchist, not authoritarian.

[271](#)[] “The Coming Revolution,” *Freedom*, October 1886 (reprinted in *Act For Yourself*). (Editor)

[272](#)[] This refers to the counter-revolutionary violence during the

French Revolution, so named because it was done under the white flag of the Royalists. (Editor)

[273](#)[] A reference to the English Revolution and Civil War (1642–1648), which produced a Republic, followed by the Dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell from 1653 to 1658. The Stuarts were restored to the throne in 1660 after Cromwell's death. (Editor)

Act For Yourselves

This article from Freedom (January 1887) discusses the importance of mass self-activity and participation in a revolution. It stresses that working class people need to liberate themselves and build a new society from below by their own efforts.

A question which we are often asked is: “How will you

organise the future society on Anarchist principles?" If the question were put to Herr Bismarck, or to somebody who fancies that a group of men is able to organise society as they like, it would seem very natural. But in the ears of an Anarchist it sounds very strangely, and the only answer we can give to it is: "We cannot organise you. It will depend upon *you* what sort of

organisation you will choose.” If the masses continue to cherish the idea that a government can do everything, and reorganise economical relations—the growth of centuries—by a few laws, then we may well wait whole centuries until the rule of Capital is abolished. But if there is among the working classes a strong minority of men who understand that no

government—however dictatorial its powers—is able to expropriate the owners of capital, and this minority acquires sufficient influence to induce the workmen to avail themselves of the first opportunity of taking possession of land and mines, of railways and factories—without paying much heed to the talking at Westminster—then we may expect that some

new kind of organisation will arise for the benefit of the commonwealth.

That is precisely the task we impose upon ourselves. To bring workmen and workmen's friends to the conviction that they must rely on themselves to get rid of the oppression of Capital, without expecting that the same thing can be done for them by anybody else. The

emancipation of the workmen must be the act of the workmen themselves.

The very words Anarchist-Communism show in what direction society, in our opinion, is already going, and on what lines it can get rid of the oppressive powers of Capital and Government, and it would be an easy task for us to draw a sketch of society in accordance with these

principles.[[274](#)] But what would be the use of such a scheme, if those who listen to it have never doubted the possibility of reorganising everything by homeopathic prescriptions from Westminster, if they have never imagined that they themselves are more powerful than their representatives, and if they are persuaded that everything can and must be

settled by a government, most men having only to obey and never to act for themselves?

One of the first delusions to get rid of, therefore, is the delusion that a few laws can modify the present economical system as by enchantment. The first conviction to acquire is that nothing short of expropriation on a vast scale, carried out by the workmen themselves, can be the first

step towards a reorganisation of our production on Socialist principles.

In fact, if we analyse the immense complexity of economical relations existing in a civilised nation, if we take into account the relatively small amount of real workmen in this country and the enormous number of parasites who live on their shoulders and are interested in the

maintenance of parasitic conditions, we cannot but recognise that no government will be able ever to undertake the reorganisation of industry, unless the People begin themselves to do it by taking possession of the mines and factories, of the land and the houses,—in short, of all those riches which are the produce of their own labour. It is only when the masses of the people

are ready to begin expropriating that we may expect that any government will move in the same direction.

Surely, it will not be the present Parliament which will ever take the initiative in dispossessing the owners of land and capital. Even if the workmen assume a really menacing attitude, our present middle-class rulers will not

become Socialists. They will try, first, to crush the movement, to disorganise it, and if they are unable to do so, they will do what all governments have done on like occasions. They will try to gain time, until the masses, reduced to still more dreadful misery by the increased depression of industry, will be ready to accept any concessions, however

delusive, rather than starve in the streets.

To expect that Socialist workmen will have a majority in Parliament is, again, to cherish a naive and vain delusion. We shall have long to wait before a Socialist majority is created in this country. But the thousands reduced to starvation by the enormities of the present social system cannot wait, and even if they

could, events will be precipitated by partial conflicts. Last winter we saw the whole of one of the mining basins in Belgium in open rebellion against Capital.[[275](#)] A few months ago we were very near to a general outbreak of workmen in some parts of the United States. [[276](#)] And although the treachery of a Powderly—the chief of the Knights of Labor

—may have paralysed the outbreak everybody in the United States—even the most stubborn politician—well understands that another time a Powderly may be powerless, especially in presence of the provocative attitude of the middle classes, who never fail on such occasions to increase the ranks of the discontented and to intensify the discontent.

The Social Question will be

put to Europe, in all its immensity, long before the Socialists have conquered a few seats in Parliament, and thus the solution of the question will be actually in the hands of the workmen themselves. They will have no choice: either they must resolve it themselves, or be reduced to a worse slavery than before.

Under the influence of

government worship, they may try to nominate a new government, instead of the old one which will be sent away, and they may entrust it with the solution of all difficulties. It is so simple, so easy, to throw a vote into the ballot-box, and to return home! So gratifying to know that there is somebody who will arrange your own affairs for the best, while you are quietly smoking

your pipe and waiting for orders which you will have only to execute, not to reason about. An admirable way, indeed, to have your affairs left as they were before, even if you are not cheated by your trustees!

History is full of such examples. The revolted people of Paris in 1871 also nominated a government, and hoped that this government—

which consisted, in fact, of the most devoted revolutionists belonging to all sections of the revolutionary world, all men ready to die for the emancipation of the people—would settle everything for the best.

They did the same thing at Paris in 1848, when they chose a Provisional Government by acclamation, and expected that this

Government—which also consisted of honest men—would resolve the social question.

But we know how dreadful was the awakening of the Paris proletarians, and we know by what hecatombs of slaughtered men, women, and children they paid for their confidence.

There was, however, another epoch, when these

same Frenchmen acted in another way. The peasants were serfs before 1789—in fact, if not by law. The land of their communes had been enclosed by landlords, and they had to pay these lords every possible kind of tax, survivals of, or redemption for, feudal servitude.

These peasants also voted in 1789, and nominated a government. But as they saw

that this government did not respond to their expectations, they revolted; in fact, they did so even before they saw their government at work. They went to the landlords and compelled them to abdicate their rights. They burned the charters where these rights were written down; they burned some of the castles of the most hated nobles. And, on the night of the 4th of

August, the nobility of France, moved by high patriotic feelings (so the historians say), which feelings were excited by the spectacle of burning castles, abdicated their rights for ever.

True that, four days later, they re-established the very same rights by imposing a redemption fee. But the peasants revolted again. They even took no notice at all of

what the Chamber had voted. They took possession of the enclosed lands and began to till them. They paid no redemption taxes. And when the authorities intervened—in the name of the sacred law—they revolted against the authorities. They revolted—M. Taine says—six times in the course of four years, and their revolts were so successful that by the end of the fourth year

the Convention—the great Convention, the ideal of all modern Jacobins—moved again by highest patriotic feelings (the middle classes' historians say so), finally abolished all feudal rights, in 1793, and ordered all papers relating to the feudal epoch to be burnt.

But what the historians forget to say is that the rights *were* already abolished by the

peasants, and that most papers dealing with feudal rights *were* already burned.

The terrible revolutionary body thus sanctioned only the accomplished fact. Feudalism was actually no longer in existence; the Convention did nothing but pronounce its funeral oration.

The workmen of the nineteenth century probably will *not* burn the factories, but

we fancy that their modes of action will bear a great likeness to those of the French peasants. They will not wait for orders from above before taking possession of land and capital. They will take them first, and *then*—already in possession of land and capital—they will organise their work. They will not consider these things as private property—it would be

impossible in the present complicated, interwoven, and interdependent state of our production. They will nationalise them.

[274](#)[] Our Parisian brother-in-arms *Le Révolté* is now publishing a series of articles showing how a commune, inspired with Anarchist ideas, might organise itself as a communist society without government. [Many of these articles were later revised and included in Kropotkin's book *The Conquest of Bread*, published in 1892. (Editor)]

[275](#)[] A reference to the Walloon

jacquerie of 1886 (see glossary).
(Editor)

[276](#)[] A reference to the Eight Hour Day movement and its strikes on 1st May 1886. The events at the Haymarket and subsequent framing of eight Chicago anarchists are the best known expression of this strike wave (see glossary). (Editor)

Local Action

This article from Freedom (May 1887) stresses that for a revolution to be successful it must be based on activity at the bottom of society, with every community and workplace taking responsibility for transforming itself before federating with others. In this way, social change will reflect the real needs of people and ensure

the spread of revolution by means of leading by example.

Before going further, let us sum up the conclusions at which we have arrived in our preceding articles. They are two, and each of them is of importance in enabling us to see what we have to do.

We have established—and if space permitted we might do so with a much greater display of arguments—that we must

rely, for the accomplishment of the Social Revolution which we feel approaching all over the civilised world, neither on the present parliaments, nor on any representative bodies which might be summoned during a more disturbed period than the present. A mere change of Government would not necessarily be a revolution, even though the overthrow of the Government might be

accompanied by acts of violence. European society is in need of a deep, thorough economical transformation, and this cannot be accomplished by mere decrees. To have any chance of life, any change accomplished in the economical conditions must come from the very depths of the popular life itself—it must result from the popular

initiative.

To accomplish an economical revolution is not the function of a body of representatives. All that can be hoped from such a body is that it will not oppose strong resistance to the action of the people but, under due popular pressure, give its final sanction to accomplished facts. Never will such a body be capable of taking the initiative, for it is

itself a compromise with the past and cannot even claim to be an outpost of the future. The French Convention of 1793—the ideal of so many Jacobinists—did not do more than give its sanction to what the peasants already had accomplished, since they had retaken possession of the communal lands enclosed by the landlords, had ceased to pay the redemption for the

feudal taxes, and had burned the charters by which they had formerly been bound. All these things being already done, the Convention—under due pressure of the Paris workmen and clubs—gave its sanction in the form of laws, consecrating the results of the peasants' revolt. It could not do more than that, because a body of representatives is a dead weight attached to the

revolution—not the leader of it.

Another conclusion which we arrived at was that the free action of the people towards the abolition of the existing monopolies on land, dwellings, railways, and capital will, in every way, be favoured by the movements which will necessarily break out all over Europe before this century has come to an end. The

immediate cause of these movements cannot be foreseen, and there is no need to know it beforehand. All we can and must know is, that thousands of causes contribute towards creating a revolutionary situation in Europe, and that there being such a situation, any cause may be the signal of widely spread revolts. The mass outbreaks which we have

witnessed during the last few years are unmistakable tokens of the approach of the disturbed period.

These two conclusions being kept in mind, we may proceed further, and add now a third conclusion to the above.

Although no revolutionary movement can break out in Europe—be it in France, Germany, Austria, or Russia—without being closely followed

by like outbreaks in other countries of Europe, we must be prepared to see these outbreaks taking very different characters in different countries. Germany most probably will try to overthrow the Monarchy and to introduce a Republican form of Government, and it is most probable that attempts at substituting the present private ownership of land and great

industrial concerns by State ownership will be made in the same country. But State ownership and State help to associations of workmen would not find much echo in this country, and still less in France, or in Spain. In France, the revolution will almost undoubtedly proceed by proclaiming independent Communes, which will endeavour to accomplish the

economical transformation within their walls, or rather within their respective surroundings. And in Spain, the whole history of the country is an unceasing struggle for the independence of provinces and municipalities—a struggle which has its causes deeply rooted both in the former history and in the present wide differences of economical conditions in

different parts of that country. State ownership and State's rule find no support even from the present political parties of Spain; still less will they find it in the new economical conditions. Add to these another example: while in this country we see the middle classes seeking the support of working men in order to break down the power of the landed aristocracy, no such coalition

is possible any longer in France. There, the upper middle classes stand in open and direct conflict with the Socialist working-men—a circumstance which obviously will impart, as it already has in 1848 and 1871, new and quite different features to the movement.

To dream that the next revolution may follow *one* single programme all over

Europe, is thus a fallacy.

But again, to imagine that in each separate State, all the nation will rise at a given moment as one man, with one uniform practical programme, would be also to cherish an illusive and dangerous dream. Of course, all that is possible will be done by Socialists to awaken everywhere, in their respective countries, the consciousness of the masses;

to enlighten them as to the bad effects of the present monopolisation of land and capital. When general interest in public affairs will be more awakened by great events, these ideas will spread still speedier than they spread now. But, nevertheless, there still will be wide differences in the views held in different parts of each country as to how far, and at what a speed,

the abolition of monopolies must go, and to what measures most urgently need to be taken in hand at once. A nation is a complex being, and to expect uniformity where multiformity reigns would be to take an utterly erroneous view of public affairs.

One of the deputies of the Scotch miners to the last Miners' Congress loudly proclaimed the other day that

whatever the palliative measures they might discuss at their Congresses, the Scotch miners consider that justice will be only done to their claims when they come to be in possession of the mines they are now working in.[[277](#)]

Suppose that after a serious discussion of the whole question in their small clubs and in the local congresses, the Scotch miners come to the

conclusion that the time has arrived to take possession of the Scotch mines, and elaborate some scheme as to the working out of these mines, sharing the produce of their labour with none of the land-grabbers, nor profit-grabbers. And suppose that the Northumbrian or the Welsh miners, the Sheffield cutlers, and the Manchester weavers, cannot yet be

brought to the same views. Must the Scotch miners wait until the whole of the British nation be converted to their ideas? Must they wait until a representative body, composed of heterogeneous elements mostly looking towards the past, happens to elaborate some scheme for the transfer of the mines into the miners' hands? Is it not preferable that they should act for themselves,

make a new start, lay down the basis of a new organisation, and preach by example? And is it not most probable that they really will do so? All human progress has been realised in this way. A practical application of new principles is the only possible means of convincing most people of their applicability, showing at once their advantages and their possible

defects.

Or, suppose again, the inhabitants of Paris, discussing the dwelling question with all the eagerness it deserves, come to this conclusion—that the houses of Paris cannot continue to belong to their present owners, not having been built by them, and deriving their immense value, *not* from the improvements the present owners have made in

these houses but from the labour which has been expended on Paris by generations past and present, as well as from the very presence of two million of people at Paris. Suppose they arrive at the conclusion that these houses must become, like the streets, the common property of all the inhabitants—and the probabilities are that they soon *will*—must they

wait until thirty-five millions of Frenchmen arrive at the same conclusion? Or, having proclaimed their independent Commune, will they not act much more wisely if they organise themselves in order to take possession of these houses and for making use of them in the most equitable way for the greatest benefit of all the community?

People may write as much

as they like about discipline; they may dream as much as they like about uniformity. Practical life takes another course. The inhabitants of Paris *will* take possession of the Paris houses, whatever be the course taken by the inhabitants of Bordeaux, and they will organise themselves for the best use of the houses, and if the above-mentioned ideas grow with the Scotch

miners, it is most probable that they will act in that direction. Separate cities, mining basins, and industrial regions will make independent starts, and then—but only then—they will enter into agreements with their neighbours, for deriving from their local action, the best possible advantages for the whole of the commonwealth.

We might multiply the

examples; we might go further on into this study; but what has already been said will probably convince most of our readers that during the next great movements separate cities and separate regions will make attempts at abolishing within their own spheres the monopolies of land and capital which are now so many obstacles in the way towards freedom and equality. The

abolition of these monopolies will not be done by acts of national Parliaments: it will be done, first, by the people of each locality, and the agreement between different localities will be the result of the accomplished facts.

As to the aims and the character which these movements may assume and ought to assume, they will form the subject of our next

article.

[277](#)[] Scotch is an old term for Scottish and is no longer used. (Editor)

Preface to *Words of a Rebel* (1904)

Translation by
Nicholas Walter

In 1904, Kropotkin wrote a preface for the Italian edition of his first collection of revolutionary essays, Words of a Rebel. In this preface he explains why despite his belief when that book was published

*that a social revolution was
close none had occurred.*

The first chapters of this book
[*Words of a Rebel*], written in
1879, speak of the social
revolution as an imminent fact.
The awakening of the
proletariat which was then
taking place in France after
the period of mourning for the
[Paris] Commune, the
expansion which the labour
movement was achieving in

the Latin countries, the spirit of the Russian youth, the rapid spread of socialist ideas which was then being carried out in Germany (though the Germans had remained resistant for a very long time to French socialism), and finally the economic conditions of Europe—all this seemed to presage the approaching arrival of a great social European revolution.

Revolutionaries and moderates agreed then in predicting that the bourgeois regime, shaken by the revolution of 1848 and the Commune of Paris, could not long resist the attack of the European proletariat. Before the end of the century the collapse would come. Even those who opposed our revolutionary tactic and put parliamentarianism in its place did not wish to get left behind,

and calculated with the voting figures in their hands that well before the end of the century they would have won a majority in the German parliament, decreed the expropriation [of capital], and accomplished the social revolution, by ballot, well before the Latin peoples.

And yet, we are now told—by some with regret, and by others in triumph—“here we

are already in the twentieth century, and the promised revolution still delays its arrival!" One might even believe—it has been said at least in the camp of the rich—that the triumph of the bourgeoisie is more assured today than ever before. The workers seem to have lost hope in a revolution.

They content themselves with sending some deputies to

parliament, and they hope in this way to obtain all kinds of favours from the State.

Even their demands are reduced to quite small concessions on the part of the exploiters. At the very most the worker who is converted to social democracy dares hope that one day he will become an employee of the State—a sort of very minor official who, after twenty-five

or thirty years of submission, will receive a small pension.

As for wider aims, as for the revolution which used to promise to stir up all ideas and to begin a new era of civilisation; as for this future of happiness, of dignity, of emancipation, of equality which the worker had once foreseen for his children—all this, we are told today, is fantasy. A whole school of

socialists has even been established who claim to possess a science of their own, according to which it can be proved that revolution is a misconception. “Discipline, submission to leaders—and every thing that can be done for the workers will be done in parliament. Forget the gun, forget 1793, 1848 and 1871, help the bourgeoisie to seize colonies in Africa and Asia,

exploit the Negro and the Chinese with them, and everything will be done for you that can be done—without upsetting the bourgeoisie too much. Just one condition: forget this word, this illusion of revolution!”

Well, aren't all these gentlemen triumphing too soon? To begin with, we have scarcely entered the twentieth century, and if ten or twenty

years count for a lot in the life of the individual, they count for only very little or nothing in historical events. Doesn't an event of such immense importance as the social revolution deserve to be granted the latitude of a few years?

No, we were not deceived when, twenty-five years ago, we saw the social revolution coming. Today it is just as

inevitable as it was a quarter of a century ago. Only we must recognise that we had not then plumbed the full depths of the reaction which would bring the defeat of France in 1870 and 1871, and the triumph of the German military empire. We had not measured the length of the delay which was going to be produced in the European revolutionary movement

following that defeat and that victory.

If the war of 1870–1871 had simply displaced military power from France to Germany, that would have had no consequence for the development of the revolutionary socialist movement. But the war had gone infinitely farther: for thirty years it was to paralyse France. With Metz two or

three days from Paris—not just a simple fortress, but a fortified camp from which half a million men, fully equipped to the last gun-sling, could be thrown against the capital twenty-four hours after (or rather, before) the declaration of war; with the Triple, and later the Quadruple, Alliance ready to tear France to pieces[[278](#)]²⁷⁸—and that danger has not stopped weighing on

France until the very last few years; with the flower of French youth decimated, whether on the battlefield or in the streets of Paris: in these conditions, how could France not pass through a quarter-century of militarism, not submit to Rome for fear of a civil war, not be infatuated by the Russian alliance? It was inevitable, it was fatal. And when today we look back—

we who have fought from day to day against clericalism and militarism, Caesarism and Boulangism—we may confess that we are astonished at one thing: it is that France was able to pass through this dark period without surrendering to a new Caesar.

If the Boulangist adventure, supported by all the power of the Anglo-American bankers, the clericals, and royalists of

all Europe, came despite everything to such a pitiful end; if France did not become clerical, when England is “catholicising” itself so well and when Germany seems to be moving in the same direction; if we are at last seeing France at the end of these dark years finding itself again, taking a new lease of life and producing this fine new generation which is going

to take the place which is its due in the movement for the renewal of the civilised world—it is because the strength of the revolutionary current was in fact much more powerful than it seemed to those who saw only the surface of events.

Let them deliver anathemas as long as they wish against the brave revolutionaries—above all against the anarchists who were able to raise high

the red flag, to keep France on its guard, and sometimes to remove from the political arena those who were keeping a place warm for other reactionaries even more open in their reaction; let them curse them as much as they like! History will record that it is to their energy, to the agitation which they fed with their blood that we owe the fact that European reaction is

being kept within bounds. The truth is that the revolutionary party, weak as it was in numbers, had to display an immense, fierce energy to put a curb on reaction both internal and external. We certainly had not exaggerated this strength; for without it what would have become of us now?

And the same thought may be applied word for word to

Spain and Italy. Which of us would have risked predicting that in Spain they would have tried to reintroduce the tortures of the Inquisition against the rebellious workers? [279] Who would have risked predicting the machine-gunnings in Milan?[280] Well, they dared do it! Dared only: for the reply of the workers was soon able to bring these “extremists” to reason.

Only today can we appreciate the extent of the check which was produced in Europe following the Franco-Prussian war. The worst of the defeats of 1870 and 1871 was that they led to the *intellectual obliteration* of France.

The necessity in which the French nation was placed, of dreaming before everything of preserving its existence, its popular genius, its civilising

influence, *its existence as a nation*, paralysed revolutionary thought. The idea of an insurrection evoked that of a civil war, which would be brought to an end by foreign guns coming to the rescue of bourgeois order. And on the other hand, everything in France that had been most energetic, most enthusiastic, most devoted—a whole generation had perished in the

great struggle which began after the siege of Paris. A whole generation of revolutionaries, drawn to Paris under the Empire, had perished at the time of the massacres which followed the fall of the Commune. The whole intellectual life of France felt the effect. It was lowered, diminished, and fell into the hands of the impotent, the sick, the fearful.

This collapse of France meant the collapse not only of a nation which had stood in the forefront of civilisation, but of the whole period Europe had lived through from 1848. Europe returned to 1849, to 1830. Victorious Germany was able to take the intellectual lead which until then had belonged to France and in great measure to Italy. But if Germany had indeed given to

the world a certain number of thinkers, of poets, and of scholars, it had no revolutionary past. And in its political and social development it was in the position that France had been in under Louis-Philippe. Representative government, introduced in Germany in 1871, had the attraction of novelty, and if it had had, in Weitling and his successors, a

few enthusiastic communists, mostly refugees, the socialist movement in Germany itself had just been recently imported, and for this reason it had to go through the same stages which it had passed through in France: the State socialism of Louis Blanc, and the State collectivism which Pecqueur and Vidal had formulated for the 1848 Republic.

In this way the spirit of Europe fell to the level which it had previously occupied under Louis-Philippe. Socialism itself, being turned back again, returned to the capitalist State of Louis Blanc, while losing the clearness and simplicity which the Latin spirit had given it. Further, it took a centralising character, hostile to the Latin spirit, which was imposed on it by

the German spirit, for which the union of the small German States into a single empire had been a dream for thirty years.
[[281](#)]

Several other causes could also be mentioned to explain the strength of the reaction. One of them is colonial expansion. Today the European bourgeoisie is enriching itself not only from the labour of the workers of its

own countries. Profiting from the facility of international transport, it has slaves and serfs everywhere—in Asia Minor, in Africa, in the Indies, in China. The tributaries are all backward States. The bourgeoisies of England, France, Holland and Belgium are becoming more and more the moneylenders of the world, living on their dividends. Whole States are

mortgaged by the bankers of London, Paris, New York, and Amsterdam. Examples are Greece, Egypt, Turkey, and China, and Japan is already being prepared for this role, a dear ally being lent to at 6 or rather 7 per cent, and all its customs revenues being mortgaged. In this way a few concessions can be gladly made to the European worker, the State can gladly maintain

his children at school, it can even give him a few francs' pension at the age of sixty—provided he helps the bourgeoisie conquer serfs and make vassal States of the stock exchange in Asia and Africa.

And finally, it would also be necessary to mention the counter revolutionary effort which was made by all the Christian churches, but which came above all from Rome, in

order to stem by all methods the revolution whose tide could be seen to be rising. The assault which was made against materialism, the campaign which was waged with so much skill against science in general, the putting on the Index[[282](#)] of works and men, which was practised so assiduously by so many secular, political and religious organisations—all that would

have to be mentioned to give an idea of the immense counter-revolutionary activity which was put in hand to combat the revolution. But all this is only secondary in the context of the dominant fact which we have just indicated: the collapse of France, its temporary exhaustion, and the intellectual domination of Germany which, despite all the admirable qualities of its

genius and its people, was, by the very virtue of its geographical position and of its whole past, thirty to forty years behind France.

In this way, the revolution was delayed. But—is this a reason for saying that it is postponed indefinitely? Nothing would be more contrary to the truth, nothing would be more absurd than such an assertion.

A striking phenomenon has appeared in the development of the socialist movement. As was once said of inflammatory diseases, it has been “driven in.” So many external remedies have been applied to kill it that it has been driven into the organism: it exists there in a latent form. The worker votes; he follows the banners in political processions; but his thoughts

are elsewhere. “All that isn’t it,” he says to himself. “That’s the outside, only the show.” As for the inside, the *substance*—he is considering; he is waiting before giving his opinion. And in the meantime he is setting up his trade unions—international, crossing frontiers. “Don’t trust these unions,” said a member of a commission named by one of the Canadian provinces the

other day. “Don’t trust them: what the workers are dreaming about in these federated unions is seizing an American state, a territory, one day and proclaiming the revolution there and expropriating—without any compensation—all they find necessary to live and work.”

“Yes, no doubt they vote, they obey you,” the German bourgeoisie says to the leaders

of the Social Democratic Party. “But don’t rely on them too far! They will disown you yourselves on the day of the revolution if you don’t become much more revolutionary than you are today. Let the smallest revolution come, and it is always the most advanced party which takes the lead and will force you to move. You are their leaders—you must follow them!”

And from all sides the same signs of the times force themselves on our attention. The worker votes, demonstrates, for lack of anything better—but all over the world another movement, much more serious, is being prepared and is maturing silently. Blanqui once said that in Paris there were 50,000 men, workers who never went to a single meeting; who

belonged to no organisation—but when the day came they would come out into the streets, would fight, and would carry out the revolution. The same thing seems to be happening today among the workers of the whole world.

They have *their* idea, an idea of their own, and to make this idea become real one day they are working with enthusiasm. They don't even

speak about it: they
understand one another. They
know that in one way or
another they will one day have
to shoulder their rifles and give
battle to the bourgeoisie.
How? When? Following what
event? Who knows! But that
day will come. It is not far
away. A few more years of
effort, and the idea of the
general strike will have gone
round the world. It will have

penetrated everywhere, found supporters everywhere, enthusiasts—and then?

Then, helped by some event or other, we shall see! And—*ça ira!*[\[283\]](#)—it will come, and they will dance to bring in a new world. Our enemies believe that they have buried all these dreams so well. Even our friends wonder whether in fact the burial has not been successful. Yet see how the

idea, still the same, the one which made our hearts beat thirty years ago, is reappearing, as alive, as young, as fine as ever: expropriation as an end, and the general strike as a means of paralysing the bourgeois world in all countries at once.

But then—is this the social revolution: coming now from the very inspiration of the people, from the “lower-

depths,” where all the great ideas have always germinated when a new idea became necessary to regenerate the world?

Yes, this is the social revolution. Get ready to make it succeed, to bear all its fruit, to sow all these great ideas which make your heart beat and which make the world go round.

May 1904

[278](#)[] The Triple Alliance was the

military alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy that lasted from 1882 until the start of World War I. Each member promised mutual support in the event of an attack by any other great powers, or for Germany and Italy, an attack by France alone. (Editor)

[279](#)[] A reference to the Montjuich tortures of 1897 (see glossary). (Editor)

[280](#)[] A series of “bread and work” riots broke out across Italy in 1898, climaxing with a general strike and street fighting in Milan in early May. The army proclaimed martial law, killing 118 civilians and wounding 450 (according to official figures).

(Editor)

[281](#)[] Interestingly, Kropotkin is repeating (unknowingly) Marx's hope, expressed at the start of the Franco-Prussian war, that the French needed "a good hiding" as a German victory would "shift the centre of gravity of West European labour movements from France to Germany" which would "mean the predominance of *our* theory over *Proudhon's*" (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 44, pp. 3–4). (Editor)

[282](#)[] The *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (List of Prohibited Books) was a list of publications prohibited by the Catholic Church. Its ostensible purpose was to protect the

faithful by preventing the reading of immoral books or works containing theological errors. (Editor)

[283](#)[] The phrase, “Ça ira!”—roughly, “That shall go [well]!”—was the refrain of a popular song from the French Revolution as well as a radical catchphrase, serving as the title for at least one anarchist newspaper (*Le Ça Ira*, 1888). (Editor)

Insurrections and Revolution

Translation by Paul Sharkey

In this article, which appeared in Les Temps Nouveaux (6th August 1910), Kropotkin stresses the need for local revolts as part of a revolution. He is clear that revolutions are not overnight

*events but rather a
revolutionary process which
can take years to blossom
from their initial stirrings.*

If the Revolution is ever to be feasible, local insurrections are called for. Indeed, huge numbers of them. Towns and agricultural regions must also have a tradition of insurrections.

Even when a revolution is under way, as was the case in

Russia in 1905, the series of insurrections in the towns and above all peasant uprisings must continue—the latter across great swathes of territory—so that the Revolution has time to grow and the reaction is prevented from marshalling its forces.

The whole of history is there for proof. And if the careerist leaders of the proletarian movement today—be they

intellectuals or workers—preach the opposite, it is because they want no truck with revolution at all. *They fear it.* The people taken to the streets frightens them and they despise it, every bit as much as the bourgeois back in 1789 despised the pike-men [the *sans-culottes*].

Well, in the absence of such insurrections, of a whole chain of insurrections, revolution

might never be within the bounds of possibility.

Which is understandable. For revolution to come to pass, discontent and the yearning to have done with oppression have to grow and spread to large segments of the masses—the only ones from whom revolutionary *action* emanates. And once that discontent and that yearning are in place, local disturbances become

inevitable. Nothing can stop them.

And let us not listen to talk of their being futile. That is a lie. Have there ever been *futile* insurrections? Isn't the recent uprising in Barcelona yet further proof to be added to the thousand others already provided by history?[[284](#)]

Didn't it take the transformation of the people's hatred of priestly rule into acts

of violence, the burning of monasteries, and the entire intelligentsia of Europe bristling with outrage at [Francisco] Ferrer's cowardly murderers—before the first few and very timid steps were made in Spain towards liberation from Rome's yoke?

When bourgeois and labour politicians denounce popular insurrections under another

pretext, that they are *mindless* [*inconscient*]
—let us be clear about this once and for all: it is because they find nothing so repugnant as the people armed and in the streets. Monarchies and their comical coronation rites, the ignorance perpetuated by the clergy and the exploitation upheld by the capitalist, the famine in the countryside, the shootings, the mass hangings, the rampages

of the White Terror—the politicians have no problems stomaching any of that! We need cast our minds no further back than the White Terror in France during the Bourbon restoration, the Blue Terror in the wake of 1848 and 1871, and the Black Terror in Russia since 1907.

They were able to stomach all of that wonderfully well, because there is something

they hate much more than all the furies of the reaction: namely, the woollen cap and pike of 1789, the proletarian's red flag, the sickle strapped by the peasant to the end of a stick as a makeshift pike, or, worse still, the expropriations carried out in orderly and systematic fashion, almost like some religious act, by the Russian peasants' communes in 1904.

It is with the intention of imparting their hatred of popular unrest to revolutionaries emerging from the workers' ranks that they are now whispering these jesuitical—these treacherous—words into their ears: “Give a wide berth to *mindless* disturbances [*mouvements inconscient*]!” They are now trying to emasculate [*sic*] the revolutionary proletarians of

the Latin countries by using that watchword, which has done such a fine job of bringing the German workers to heel.

And who has done more to spread among the workers a clear, thought-out, concrete consciousness [*conscience*] of the communist-anarchist goal that needs to be posed ahead of the coming revolution than

we anarchists have? Who, ever since Bakunin, has worked harder than the anarchist faction of the International to awaken in the working class—not just an intelligent consciousness [*conscience intelligente*] of the goal to be achieved, but also a knowledge of the historical, economic, moral and other factors making that goal desirable and attainable? And

who has been more insistent than us that the bourgeoisie is always going to have the upper hand until such time as the workers are sure of what they want to obtain from the coming revolution?

But precisely because we are well aware of our purpose and know that it cannot be achieved in a single day,—we speak out against jesuitical misuse of the word *mindless*

[*inconscient*] as applied to insurrections.

Precisely because we know that an *uprising* may well topple and change a government in one day, whereas a *revolution*, if it is to achieve a tangible outcome—a serious, lasting change in the distribution of economic forces—*takes three or four years of revolutionary upheaval*—for that very reason, we say to the

workers:

The first uprisings of a revolution *cannot* be mounted with the notion of carrying out the wide-ranging and far reaching changes that only a revolution can effect, *once it has had time to ripen*.

The initial disturbances can have no purpose other than to weaken the machinery of government: to stop it, to damage it, and render it

powerless, thereby creating an opening for subsequent developments in the upheaval.

Take the Paris Commune of 1871. [Eugène] Varlin was perfectly right to charge for the Hôtel de Ville [Town Hall] together with his battalion comrades at the first whisper of the 18th March insurrection. Was he supposed to have waited, as ordered by Engels and Marx from

London, for the rising to
proclaim its communist
principles!!!

The revolutionaries of Paris
were perfectly right to throw
themselves into that rising,
even though many of those
with rifles slung over their
shoulders certainly had no
idea of the communistic turn
that the *communalist*
republican rising *might*
subsequently take—a rising

upon which they had embarked in order to ensure the independence of Paris, but which might well have run deeper, had it lasted.

They understood that, in accordance with the revolutionary propaganda that they had been mounting against the established regime, they had a duty to throw themselves into an insurrectionary movement

against that system. The people had taken to the streets, having risen up against the very same Thiers, Ferry and the whole gang of opportunistic bourgeois whom they had so often attacked before. Was it not their duty to stand with the people—and to embark with them upon the task of demolition?

Where they went wrong was that *they too* were not

communist enough to push forward the economic reconstruction of society. And then they let themselves be hoisted into the Commune's government. It was not, as has so often been claimed in our ranks, in allowing the setting up of a Commune government. It was beyond their capability to prevent that, —given the authoritarian bent in the minds of the day. Their

offence was that *they* let themselves be hoisted into power, let themselves be locked into a government alongside the likes of Félix Pyat[[285](#)] and all the bourgeois who were hostile toward a people's economic revolution. Their duty was to remain on the streets, in their own districts, with the people—as propagandists and organisers of the de facto

equality that they all craved: joining in with the people as they looked to their food and their livelihoods and the city's defences; living alongside the poor, getting impassioned about *their* everyday issues, their interests, and rebuilding, in the sections, the life of society with them; *against* the Commune's government, obviously, which represented the Jacobin, Robespierist,

anti-communist bourgeoisie.

There is every chance, every likelihood, indeed, that one third of France being overrun by the Germans, the Commune's rebellion, launched in the immediate aftermath of a disastrous war, might have been defeated all the same. That was the danger—the inescapable fate, one might say—of every revolutionary upheaval that

erupts after a luckless war—a danger that would not have arisen had revolutionaries made it their business, from 1869 onwards, to push forward a movement against the Empire, which was already falling apart.

However, despite being defeated, the Commune might at least have bequeathed to posterity the notion of a communist revolution in

addition to a communalist or cantonalist revolution.

In any case, were we to wait for the Revolution to display an openly communist or indeed collectivist character right from its initial insurrections, that would be tantamount to throwing the idea of Revolution overboard once and for all. For that to be a possibility, it would require

that a large majority be already in agreement upon effecting a communist change, which is generally not the case, since it is primarily the turns taken by a revolution that can draw the masses over to communism, just as they did in 1793.[[286](#)] This is what our bourgeois and worker careerists are afraid of. They understand that a popular revolution, were it to last,

would bring the people over to communism. They know that the initial popular insurrections would rattle the government. But then that would bring the people—"undisciplined" proletarians—on to the streets and these would soon be demanding "de facto equality." And, were that period of "anarchy" to last, communist ideas would, of necessity, become more sharply defined

and would embed themselves during the upheaval as lessons taught by actual experience.

And that is precisely what they do not want! Minor adjustments to the present exploitation, a few concessions granted here and there by the exploiters, that is all they require. "Later, we shall see," they say. They have time to wait and see! Oh no! Even should it fall to

revolutionaries to perish in the initial popular uprisings, they have a duty not to stand aloof from them. If they cherish the purpose that their intellect and expertise have devised, they will be among the people—with the peasant insurgents in the countryside and with the proletarians in the towns.

Only after having shaken the government and the State to their deepest foundations will

anarchist-communist ideas make their way into the masses and crystallise there. So—once the first obstacles erected by organised force have been swept aside—only then will life come along and raise the major issues of economic equality and suggest how these might be resolved. Only then will minds emboldened by events be able to commit themselves bravely

to the destruction of old forms and to the construction of new forms of social life.

Only then will the Revolution that will embody our aspirations and live up to our wishes be able to blossom.

So let us miss no opportunity to volunteer our services to the people in its uprisings, so as to pave the way for that revolution. Let us help them to take their first few steps! And

away with the hypnotisers [*les endormeurs*][[287](#)].

[284](#)[] The Tragic Week (or *Semana Trágica*), taking place between 25th July and 2nd August 1909, was an uprising of the working classes of Barcelona and other cities of Catalonia (Spain), bloodily put down by the Spanish army. It began as a general strike called by the syndicalist *Solidaridad Obrera* union federation and was caused by the calling-up of reserve troops by the Prime Minister to be sent as reinforcements when Spain renewed military-colonial activity in Morocco (the Second Rif War). The revolt was used as an excuse by the Spanish

State to judicially murder libertarian educator Francisco Ferrer. (Editor)

[285](#)[] Félix Pyat (1810–1889) was a French Jacobin-Socialist journalist and politician. A participant in the 1848 revolution, he fought a duel with Proudhon, who had called him the aristocrat of democracy. He joined Ledru-Rollin in the attempted insurrection of 13th June 1849 and after its failure went into exile. He returned to France after the deposing of Napoleon III. During the Paris Commune, he joined the Committee of Public Safety and was blamed for the loss of the Fort of Issy. He escaped the vengeance of the Versailles government and went again into exile.

He was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in March 1888 and took his seat on the extreme Left. (Editor)

[286](#)[] Kropotkin discusses the activists and ideas of these “Anarchists” (as they were labeled by their enemies) in his classic history *The Great French Revolution* and well as the article “Anarchists in the French Revolution” in *Freedom* (December 1903 and January 1904). (Editor)

[287](#)[] Kropotkin is referring to those who seek to beguile, smooth-talk or otherwise pacify the working class with hopes of change by means of reforms legislated by politicians rather than, as anarchists argued, by direct action and economic self-

organisation. It should be noted that in June–July 1869, shortly after joining the *International Working Men's Association*, Bakunin wrote a series of articles for the Swiss newspaper *L'Égalité* on this issue entitled “Les endormeurs” (“The Hypnotizers,” *The Basic Bakunin: Writings, 1869–1871*, [Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1992], Robert M. Cutler [ed.]). (Editor)

Preface to *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*

This is the preface to the 1913 English translation of the book Comment nous ferons la Révolution (1909), a utopia written by two French revolutionary syndicalists, Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget. Kropotkin sketches his ideas on social revolution,

including the need for mass participation and defence of the revolution, and indicates his differences with pure syndicalism.

It is often said that plans ought not to be drawn up for a future society.

All such plans we are told, are of the nature of romances, and they have the disadvantage that some day they may hamper the creative

force of a people in Revolution.

There may be some truth in this. Doubtless a certain number of reasoning theorists were influenced in this way by [Étienne] Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie*.[288](#) But all sociological works that have made any deep impression have done this.

On the other hand, it is necessary to have a clear idea

of the actual concrete results that our Communist, Collectivist, or other aspirations might have on society. For this purpose we must picture to ourselves these various institutions at work.

Where do we want to get to by means of the Revolution? We need to know this. There must therefore be books which will enable the mass of the people to form for themselves

a more or less exact idea of what it is that they desire to see realised in a near future.

It has always happened that a concrete idea precedes its realisation. For instance, would the modern progress in aviation have been made if during the last fifty years a certain number of French physicists and engineers had not placed before themselves in a concrete fashion this aim

—this “romance” if you will
—“The conquest of the air by
a machine heavier than air.”

It is only necessary to
accustom oneself never to
attach more importance to a
book, to a treatise of any kind,
than such a book or treatise—
however good it may be—has
in reality.

A book is not a gospel to be
taken in its entirety or to be
left alone. It is a suggestion, a

proposal—nothing more. It is for us to reflect, to see what it contains that is good, and to reject whatever we find erroneous in it.

With this reservation then, we need—side by side with statements that tell us what past Revolutions have gained—sketches that will show in their main lines what the coming Revolution proposes to realise.

And when people who plume themselves on being “practical,” (because they are nothing of the kind, since they work to put a drag on progress), say to us: “All these sorts of things are romances, Utopias,” we have only to ask them whether they too have not their Utopias?

In truth, all of them, whoever they may be, have their own, a Utopia opposed to

progress. Napoleon I had his, that of a political and military World Empire; the General of the Jesuits has his Utopia, of an Empire based on superstition and religious submission. The good bourgeois sighs for a strong Government, protecting as the song says “Ceux qui mettent des queues aux Zéros [the cheaters].”[[289](#)] Briand has his Utopia, Millerand has his,

Lépine himself has one—that of knocking people on the head for the benefit of the bourgeois.[[290](#)]

This means that it is impossible, in fact, for a man to influence in any way the development of his epoch without having a more or less definite idea of what he wishes to see developing in society.

Only, it is necessary, when reading a social “Utopia,”

never to forget that the author does not offer us anything unchangeable, anything decreed in advance, like those plans of campaign drawn up by the German general staffs during the wars of 1793–1809, which were always upset by the spirit of the peoples, who were sympathetic to the sans-culottes.

The idea—“the general idea of the Revolution,” as

Proudhon said—that is what is needed, and not revolutionary recipes.

Now it is this *general idea* that Pataud and Pouget seek to develop in their book.

It is evident, when a book of this kind is written, that the author is obliged to give some precise details of events. But these details—the reader will readily perceive—are only given in order to materialise

the ideas, to avoid floating about in vague abstractions.

Whether the encounter between the rebels of a near future and the defenders of a past which is dying takes place in front of the statue by Dalou, or elsewhere; whether the first encounter decides the victory or not—matters little.[[291](#)]

That which does matter is, that we should try to gain a clear idea of the *general*

tendency to be impressed on the Revolution.

Will it be Bourgeois Individualism and the exploitation of man by man, only mitigated by a few laws? Will it be State Socialism that we shall seek to establish? Will it be Bureaucratic Centralisation, in the State, in the Commune, in the “Confédération du Travail” and in the Trade Unions, that

we shall establish by our votes, or will it be Independence and the Free Federation of groups of Producers and Consumers, formed through affinities of trade or of needs? Will it be Centralisation—the hierarchical scale of Governments—or will it be the definite abolition of the Government of man by man that we shall exert ourselves to realise? These are the

questions that the book of Pataud and Pouget places before us, and which it invites us to discuss—no longer in an abstract way, but in a concrete way, by starting from facts themselves, from the actual needs of society.

Without doubt, life is infinitely more complicated than anything that can be foreseen. It contains more of the unexpected than any

romance; we have just seen this during the last attempt at Revolution in Russia, but the *general aspect* of the coming society is already taking shape. What is germinating can already be seen; it is only necessary to observe it. The whole force of the desire for equality, for justice, for independence, for free association, which is manifesting itself in society,

can already be felt. And these social data enable us to foresee with sufficient accuracy where we are going—provided we study *what is really happening*, instead of discussing about what this or that one would *like to believe is happening*.

It was guided by these ideas that I endeavoured, some thirty years ago, to sketch a Communal Utopia in *The*

Conquest of Bread.

Pataud and Pouget write today a *Syndicalist Utopia*. They show us how the Trade Unions, groups formed for combat against Capital, could transform themselves, in a time of Revolution, into groups for production; how they could work, each within its own proper sphere, at the re-organisation of production and the social distribution of its

products, without waiting for orders coming from above. They tell, in a very attractive way, how the groups, Industrial, Communal, and Co-operative, could undertake the functions which up to the present have been appropriated by the State, [292] how the Trade Unions could draw up the necessary statistics and communicate them to one another, without

waiting for the intervention of the officialism of Statistical Committees; how they could make expropriation a reality—and so on.

True, it is not Anarchism that they picture for us. But the organisation of which they tell has already the advantage of being no longer based on a hierarchy of officials, as has been advocated up to the present by State Socialists. In

this book of Pataud's and Pouget's can be felt, on the contrary, the life-giving breath of Anarchism in their conceptions of the future, especially in the pages devoted to Production and Exchange. And what they say on this subject should be seriously considered by every worker who loves Freedom, Justice, and Equality, as well as by everyone anxious to avoid the

sanguinary struggles of a coming Revolution.

It is probable that Pataud and Pouget still pay too heavy a tribute to the past. That is inevitable in works of this kind. Their Trade Union Congress which discusses if the children, the sick, and the aged are to be made a charge on the community, concerns itself, in our opinion, with questions that will be settled

on the spot, and when they decide that no Union, no social service, shall be able “to separate itself from the community” they decide a question that the local life, alone, is in a position to solve. As to the “Confederal Committee,” it borrows a great deal too much from the Government that it has just overthrown.

Well, these great questions

are precisely matters for discussion. The authors have stated them for us; they have called our attention to a tendency; it is for us to reflect about it—before the Revolution calls upon us to act!—And whoever is inspired by the *spirit* of this book of Pataud's and Pouget's, will already be in a position to decide about these questions with a certain independence of

judgement. Very probably, they will decide that centralisation is useless, arid will at once be able to suggest means for avoiding it.

In this book, what also commends itself to the attention of the reader is the spirit, which runs through the whole book, of tolerance for diverse tendencies, different from those of the authors—a spirit of tolerance and of good

nature, quite characteristic of the mental state of the French working-class population, which contrasts so strongly with the love of regulation, of general laws, which still remains so ingrained in those nations which have not had the revolutionary experience of the French nation.

The tendency to conciliation is also seen in a new idea of the authors, who propose to

combine Communism for all objects of *first necessity*, with a book of “labour notes,” delivered to each member of society, for articles of luxury. This idea, which recalls Bellamy’s idea in “Looking Backwards,” is well worth discussion.

Finally, the same toleration is also found in their other proposal for expropriation and exploitation of the large landed

estates by Unions of Agricultural Workers on one side, and on the other side, the maintenance of the small and medium-sized farms, which would continue to be worked by their actual occupiers.

Faithful to this principle of toleration, the authors attach also, and with much reason, a fundamental importance to the *propaganda by example* instead of placing their hope in

the vote,—the law and the guillotine for the obstinate.

One would have liked, however, to have seen them apply this principle more widely to the prison population. One stroke of boldness, like Pinel's, after having served as an example somewhere, will one day remove all doubts from this subject.

The sole reproach that I

shall allow myself to address to the authors—an observation rather than a reproach—is that they have considerably attenuated the resistance that the Social Revolution will probably meet with on its way. The check of the attempt at Revolution in Russia [in 1905] has shown us all the danger that may follow from an illusion of this kind.

Certainly, there will be no

need to dread this resistance, if between now and then the *revolutionary spirit*—the courage to demolish institutions—spreads in the country districts, at the same time as the *spirit of revolt*. Then the success of the Revolution will be assured. Unfortunately, one cannot be sure that it will be so. How many excellent rebels do we not know ourselves, endowed

with a personal courage that could be relied upon in all cases, and yet lacking the courage of the revolutionary spirit?

It is to be feared this is the case with whole regions. And it is there above all that it is necessary to direct the efforts of all those who—like the authors of this book—conceive the Revolution, not as a reign of Terror and a

cutting off of human heads, but as a cutting down of the State and Capitalist forest.

For a Parliamentary party, which expects success from artificial electoral majorities—and for Jacobins who still count on the terror inspired by punitive expeditions backward regions may be a negligible quantity.

These forget—or rather they have never known—what

bleeding wounds the Midi and the Vendée were in 1793. [293] But for us who know that either the people will make the Revolution, or the Revolution will never be made—the intellectual conquest of future Vendées presents itself as an imperious duty.

And if we give ourselves to this work, we shall soon find in what directions Socialist ideas, as they have been

preached up to now, remain incomplete. We shall easily discover what represents the still unconscious ideal for these districts, and we shall know then what must be done to gain the whole of agricultural France for the Revolution.

This book of Pataud's and Pouget's makes us think about all these things, and that is why it should be spread

abroad everywhere, read
everywhere, discussed
everywhere.

The better we understand
what we want—and the fewer
the obstacles the Revolution
meets with on its way—the
fewer struggles it will have to
sustain, and the fewer victims
it will cost.

27th February 1911

Peter Kropotkin

[288](#)[] Translated into English as *Voyage
to Icaria* (1840). (Editor)

[289](#)[] *Mettre des queues aux zéros* [to put tails to the zeros]: in French slang, to overcharge. (Editor)

[290](#)[] Aristide Briand (1862–1932) was a French politician. Like Alexandre Millerand, Briand was one of the leaders of the French Socialist Party who, after being elected in 1902, accepted a position in a bourgeois ministry in 1906 as he believed that Socialists should co-operate actively with the Radicals in matters of reform. He was quickly expelled from the Socialist Party. He became Prime Minister in 1909, serving until 1911 (the first of eleven terms during the French Third Republic); Louis Jean-Baptiste Léprie (1846–1933) was an

eminent lawyer and politician who was Prefect of Police (*Préfet de Police*) for Paris from 1893 to 1897 and again from 1899 to 1913. He earned the nickname of “The Little Man with the Big Stick” for his activities in repressing crowds.

[291](#)[] Aimé-Jules Dalou (1838–1902) was a French sculptor. He was born in Paris, into a working-class family who raised him in an atmosphere of secularism and Republican socialism. Having identified himself too publicly with the Paris Commune of 1871, as curator at the *Musée du Louvre* under Gustave Courbet, he took refuge in Britain in July 1871. He was convicted in *absentia* by the French

government of participation in the Commune, and given a life sentence. He returned to France in 1879, after the declaration of amnesty, and produced a number of masterpieces. For the city of Paris he executed his most elaborate achievement, the vast monument *The Triumph of the Republic*. (Editor)

[292](#)[] Which of course includes local governing bodies, Town and County Councils, etc.

[293](#)[] The Midi and Vendée were both regions of France in which counter-revolutionary uprisings took place during the French Revolution. Kropotkin discusses both in his *The Great French Revolution* (chapters

XXXI and LIV, respectively). (Editor)

Anarchist Action in the Revolution

Translation by Paul
Sharkey

*This pamphlet was published
in May 1914 and contained
the final articles of a series
which originally appeared in
Le Révolte in 1891. These
appeared in the British
newspaper The*

Commonwealth in 1892
before being published as a
pamphlet. Kropotkin prefaced
the 1914 pamphlet with this
hope: “We are living in the
approach to great events.
Which is why the workers and
all who have the success of
the coming Revolution at
heart would do well to ponder
the ideas set out in these
pages and, should they
endorse them, seek to

implement them in life.”

I

Slaughtering the bourgeois so as to ensure that the Revolution succeeds is a nonsensical dream. Their very numbers counsel against it: for besides the millions of bourgeois who would have to go, according to the hypothesis of the modern Fouquier-Tinville,[\[294\]](#) there

would still be millions of semi-bourgeois workers left who would have to follow them. Actually, the latter ask nothing better than to have their turn at becoming bourgeois and they would make haste to do just that if the existence of the bourgeoisie is struck only in its results and not in its causes. As for organised and legalised Terror, in actual fact, it serves only to forge chains for the

people. It murders the individual initiative which is the very soul of revolutions: it perpetuates the notion of a strong, commanding government, it lays the groundwork for the dictatorship of whoever will grab control of the revolutionary tribunal and craftily and judiciously manipulate it in the interests of his party.

Being the weapon of those who govern, the Terror is of service primarily to the leaders of the governing classes: it prepares the ground so that the least scrupulous among them comes to power.

The Terror of Robespierre led on perforce to that of Tallien[[295](#)] and the latter—to Bonaparte's dictatorship. Robespierre hatched Bonaparte.

To defeat the bourgeoisie it will require something quite different from the source of its present power, elements other than those that it has learnt so well how to handle. Which is why we must first look to the source of its strength and counter that strength with a different, superior force.

In fact, what is it that has allowed the bourgeois to sideline every revolution since

the fifteenth century and to harness it to the purposes of enslavement and increase their domination on foundations rather more solid than respect for religious superstition or the birthright of the aristocracy?

It is the State. The ongoing growth and expansion of the functions of the State, rooted in foundations a lot sturdier than religion or rights of inheritance—the Law. And as

long as the State endures, as long as the Law remains a sacred thing in the eyes of people, as long as the revolutions yet to come strive to maintain and expand the functions of the State and of the Law—the bourgeois can rest assured that they will cling to power and lord it over the masses. Legists establishing the all-powerful State; there lie the origins of the bourgeoisie

and it is still the all-powerful State that constitutes the strength of the bourgeoisie today. Through the Law and the State have the bourgeois seized capital and established their authority. By means of Law and the State do they uphold it. And it is by means of Law and State that they promise still to remedy the woes eating away at society.

In fact, as long as all the

affairs of the country are entrusted to a few and as long as those affairs display the inextricable complexity they do today—the bourgeois can sleep easy. They are the ones who, picking up on the Roman tradition of the all-knowing State, have devised, elaborated and established that mechanism: they are the ones who were its stalwarts down through modern history. They

study it in their universities; they uphold it in their courts, they teach it in the schools; they propagate and inculcate it through their press.

Their minds are so fashioned in the State tradition that they never stray from it, even in their dreams of the future. Their utopias bear its imprint. They cannot come up with a single idea about the structures of Society that strays outside

the principles of the Roman State. If they stumble upon institutions devised outside of those notions, whether it be in the lives of French peasants or elsewhere, they tear them down rather than recognise their rationale. In this way the Jacobins carried on with the task of destroying popular institutions in France, a task begun by Turgot.[[296](#)] They did away with the primary

assemblies in the village,[[297](#)] the *mir* that was still extant, finding it too unruly and insufficiently orderly. The Jacobins carried on with their work: they did away with family communities that had dodged the axe of Roman law: they delivered the coup de grace to communal ownership of the land; they passed draconian laws against the Vendéens by the thousands

rather than take the trouble to understand their popular institutions. And, stumbling upon the commune and the tribal federation among the Kabyles,[[298](#)] the modern day Jacobins preferred to massacre these institutions by means of their courts rather than amend their own Roman notions of property and hierarchy. The English bourgeois did likewise in the

Indies.

So, since the day when the Great [French] Revolution of the last century in its turn embraced the Roman doctrines of the all-powerful State, as sentimentalised by Rousseau and tagged by him with the label of Roman Catholic Equality and Fraternity, since the day when it made property and elective government the basis of social

organisation—it has fallen to the grandsons of the XVII century “legists,” to the bourgeois, to organise and govern France in accordance with those principles. The people now had nothing further to do with it, as their creative powers ran in a quite different direction.

II

If, by some mischance, come

the next revolution, the people yet again fails to understand that its historical mission is to smash the State conjured up by the Justinian Code and papal edicts, if it should let itself be dazzled yet again by the Roman “legal” notions of the State and property (towards which the authoritarian socialists are duly beavering away), then it will be forced yet again to

surrender the business of establishing such an organisation to those who are its real historical representatives—the bourgeois.

If it fails to grasp that the real *raison d'être* of a popular revolution is the demolition of the State, which is necessarily hierarchical, looking instead to free agreement between individuals and groups, to free,

temporary federation (with a specific purpose in mind each time); if it fails to understand that it must abolish property and the right to acquire property and do away with government by elected officials who are a substitute for the free consent of all; if the people abjures the traditions of freedom of the individual, voluntary association and consent freely given becoming

the basic rules of conduct—
traditions that have made up
the very essence of all
preceding popular upheavals
and all of the institutions of
popular creativity; if it walks
away from these traditions and
reverts to those of Roman
Catholic Rome—then it will
have nothing to do in the
revolution: it will have to leave
everything up to the
bourgeoisie and content itself

with suing for a few concessions.

The statist conception is utterly alien to the people. Fortunately, they have no grasp of it and have no use for it. They are still the people: still imbued with notions of what is known as Common law; notions founded upon the ideas of mutual fairness between individuals, whilst the law of States is founded upon

metaphysical conceptions, fictions, or interpretations of words devised in Rome and Byzantium, during a time of decomposition, as justification for the exploitation of the people and the suppression of their rights.

Time and again the people has tried to get back into the State, to seize and harness it. It has never succeeded.

And it has always ended up

abandoning this machinery of hierarchy and laws to someone else: to the sovereign, after the sixteenth-century revolutions; to the bourgeois, after the seventeenth-century revolution in England and the eighteenth-century revolution in France.

The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, has identified itself entirely with the law of States. Therein lies its strength. The

place from which it draws that single-mindedness that always strikes us.

Indeed, a Ferry may well despise a Clemenceau, a Floquet a Freycinet; a Ferry may ponder the strokes they mean to pull in order to wrest the presidency from a Grévy or a Carnot:[[299](#)] the Pope and his clergy may hate all three and cut the ground from under them; the Boulangist

may well have some hatred to spare for the clergy and the Pope, for Ferry and for Clemenceau. All of this can be and is done. But there is something higher than such enmities that binds them all together, from the flirt on the boulevards to the unctuous Carnot, from the minister down to the lowliest teacher in a secular or religious school. The cult of authority.

They are unable to conceive of society without a strong, commanding government. Without centralisation, without a hierarchy radiating from Paris or from Berlin and reaching to lowliest game-keeper and making the lowliest hamlet dance to the tune of the capital, they see naught but atomisation. Without a code—the shared creation of the Convention's

Montagnards[[300](#)] and the Empire's princes—they see naught but murder, arson and cut-throats on the streets. Without property underpinned by the code, they see naught but deserted fields and towns in ruins. Without an army brutish to the extent of blindly obeying its leaders, they see the country left wide open to the invader: and without judges swathed in as much

respect as the *Corpus Dei* was in the Middle Ages, they foresee naught but a war of each against all. The minister and the game-keeper, the Pope and the teacher are absolutely of one mind on this. And that is where their shared strength comes from.

Not that they are unaware that thievery is rampant in the ministries, civilian and military. But they say “No matter!”:

this is nothing but a question of staffing: as long as the ministries are in place, the stock exchange and the homeland are in no danger.

They know that elections are bought with money, tankards of ale and displays of munificence and that in the Chamber votes are bought in return for posts, concessions and graft. No matter!—the law passed by the people's elected

representatives will be deemed sacred by them. It can be evaded and breached if irksome, but make way for inflammatory speeches about its divine character.

The prime minister and the leader of the opposition may trade insults inside the Chamber, but once the verbal jousting is done, they wrap each other in respect: they are both leaders, two necessary

functions of the State. And should the prosecutor and the defence counsel trade insults over the head of the accused and berate each other (in flowery language) as liars and rogues, well, once the speechifying is over, they shake hands and congratulate each other on their “pulsating” rhetoric. This is not hypocrisy, not social grace. From the bottom of his heart the

advocate admires the
prosecutor and the prosecutor
the advocate: each of them
sees in the other something
loftier in their personalities,
two functions, two
representatives of the courts,
the government, the State.
Their entire education has
schooled them in an outlook
that allows human feelings to
be smothered beneath the
formulations of law. The

people will never achieve that measure of perfection and would be well advised never even to try.

A common adoration, a shared cult unites all bourgeois, all exploiters. The leader of the government and the leader of the lawful opposition, the Pope and the bourgeois atheist are equally worshippers of the same god and that god of authority lives

even in the deepest recesses of their brains. Which is why they stay united, for all their divisions. The head of State would only part company from the leader of the opposition and the prosecutor from the advocate the day the latter might query the very institution of parliament, or should the advocate treat the court itself in the manner of a real nihilist, which is to say,

denying its right to exist. Then, but only then, they might part company. Meanwhile, they are as one in directing their hate at those undermining the supremacy of the State and destroying respect for authority. No mercy will be shown to those. And if the bourgeois of the whole of Europe vented such hatred upon the toilers of the Paris Commune—it was because

they reckoned they were looking at real revolutionaries, ready to toss State, property and representative government overboard.

One can appreciate the strength this shared cult of hierarchical authority bestows upon the bourgeoisie.

No matter how rotten three-fourths of its representatives may be, it still has within its ranks a good fourth who cling

firmly to the State banner. Warming to their task, committed to their task as much by their legalistic religion as by their craving for power, they strive untiringly to affirm and spread this cult. A whole vast literature, all schools without exception, and the whole of the press are in their service, and in their youth especially, they strive relentlessly to combat all

attempts to sully the legalistic, statist outlook. And when the moment of battle arrives—they all, the dodderers as well as the strapping, close ranks around those colours. They know that as long as those colours remain unfurled, their reign will carry on.

We can appreciate too how nonsensical it is to want to have the revolution form up under those colours and to try

to induce the people, contrary to all its traditions, to embrace that same principle, the principle of domination and exploitation. Authority is their flag and until such time as the people looks to another one that speaks to its communist, anti-legalitarian and anti-statist (in short, anti-Roman) leanings, it must perforce allow itself to be led and dominated by others.

Here above all the revolutionary must show audacity of mind. He must have the audacity to break entirely with the Roman-Catholic tradition: he must have the courage to tell himself that the people has to look to its own devices in building social organisation upon foundations of real justice, as popular common right conceives of it.

III

There you have it. Abolition of the State is, we say, the task facing the revolutionary—or at any rate the man who has the mental audacity without which revolutions cannot be made. He has all of the traditions of the bourgeoisie ranged against him in this. But on his side he has the entire evolution of humanity requiring us at this point in history to shrug off a

form of association which may, perhaps, have been a necessity on account of the ignorance of a bygone age, but which has now become inimical to all further progress.

However, the abolition of the State would be an empty phrase if the forces presently tending to produce poverty were to continue to act. Like the wealth of the mighty, like capital and exploitation, the

State grew out of the impoverishment of one segment of society. It has always taken some to sink into poverty in the wake of migration, invasion, pestilence or famine, for others to grow wealthy and acquire an authority that could thereafter grow by rendering the wherewithal of life increasingly uncertain for the masses.

Political domination cannot, therefore, be abolished without abolishing the very causes of impoverishment and of the wretchedness of the masses.

And—as we have stated lots of times—we can see only one means of achieving this.

First, guarantee everyone's survival and, indeed, ease and organising in such a way as to produce, as a society,

everything that may be needed to guarantee that ease. This is more than feasible using current means of production: it is easy.

It means embracing the implication of every modern economic advance; that is, thinking about the whole of society as a single whole that produces wealth, albeit that there is no way of determining the individual contribution to

production. It means organising as a communist society—not out of consideration for absolute fairness, but because it has become impossible to discern the individual's portion in what is no longer an individual undertaking.

As can be seen, the problem confronting the revolutionary in our century is immense. It is no longer simply a matter of

abolition, say, of serfdom or of the renunciation of Papal supremacy.

It is a question of a constructive undertaking; opening up a fresh page in the history of the world, devising a completely new order of things based, no longer on solidarity within the tribe or village community, but upon the solidarity and equality of all. Ventures in limited

solidarity, based on bonds of kinship, territorial boundaries, guild or class links, having failed, it falls to us to try to come up with a society founded upon a more all-embracing conception than that which underpinned the societies of the Middle Ages or Antiquity.

The problem in need of resolution is certainly not as straightforward as it has often

been depicted as being. Changing the men in power and everyone returning to his workshop to resume his former line of work, putting labour bonds into circulation and trading them for goods—such simplistic solutions will not do: that would not last, for current output is as wrongheaded in the goals it pursues as in the means it employs.

Designed to maintain poverty, it would be ill-quipped to guarantee abundance—and it is for abundance that the masses have been clamouring ever since they woke up to their productive strength, magnified by the advances of modern science and technology. Devised with an eye to keeping the masses in a condition bordering on poverty, with the spectre of

hunger ever ready to force man to hawk his strength to those who hold the land, the capital and the power—how could the current mode of organisation of production deliver well-being?

Devised with an eye to upholding a hierarchy of toilers, designed to exploit the peasant for the benefit of the industrial worker, the miner for the benefit of mechanic,

the artisan for the benefit of the artist, and so on, for as long as civilised countries carry on exploiting countries more backward in terms of civilisation—how could agriculture and industry, such as they are today, guarantee equality?

The entire character of farming, industry and work needs to undergo a complete change, once society comes

around again to the idea that the land, the machine and the factory should be the dominion of labour, with a view to ensuring well-being to all. Before heading back to the workshop “after the revolution” like the creators of the authoritarian socialist utopias tell us, we will still have to find out if such-and-such a workshop, such-and-such a factory churning out

the polished instruments of enlightenment or brutalisation serves any purpose: whether the field should be parcelled out or not, whether cultivation should proceed as it did among the barbarians fifteen hundred years back or be conducted in such a way as to turn out the largest possible number of items of necessity to man?

There is a whole period of

transformations to be got through. Revolution needs to be brought to factory and field, to cottage and to city housing, to work tools as much as to the mighty machinery of the larger works, the farmers' association, the associations of manufacturing workers as well as to the economic relations between all who labour, to exchange and trade which are also in need of

socialisation, and to consumption and production.

Besides, everybody has to live through this period of transformation and everyone must feel themselves better off than in the past.

When the denizens of the twelfth century communes set about laying the foundations of a new society in breakaway cities freed from seigneurial rule, they began by concluding

a solidarity pact between all the inhabitants. The mutinous communes pledged to support one another: they entered into what was termed inter-communal “pledges.” The social revolution is going to have to start from just such a pact. An agreement to live together—not a suicide pact: a pledge of unity and not of mutual extermination. A pact of solidarity whereby the

entire inheritance from the past is to be regarded as a shared asset, a pact to share in accordance with the principle of equity anything that might be a help through the crisis: food and munitions, accommodation and pent-up strength, tools and machinery, knowledge and ability—a solidarity pact governing the consumption of goods as well as the use of the means of

production.

Fortified by their pledges, the twelfth century bourgeois—as the fight against the lord began, to survive during this struggle and to finish it—set about organising their guilds and trades societies. Thereby successfully affording the citizenry a measure of well-being. Likewise, fortified by a solidarity pact that will bind the whole of society so that it

can survive moments of joy or difficulty and share gain and defeat alike, the revolution will then be able to embark with full confidence upon the immense task it will be facing, of reorganising production. But it will have to conclude just such a pact, if it wishes to live.

And in its new work, which is going to have to be constructive work, the popular

masses are going to have to rely primarily upon their own forces, their own initiative and organising genius, their ability to blaze new trails, because all the education of the bourgeoisie has been in the exact opposite direction.

The problem is immense. But the people is not about to unearth the strength needed to resolve it by trying to minimise it in advance. It is, rather, by

considering it in all its grandeur and drawing inspiration from the very difficulty of the situation that it will come up with the necessary inspiration to win.

Is it not necessary therefore that the revolutionary be fully aware of the task facing him? and not shut his eyes to the difficulties? and know how to look them right in the face?

It was with their pledge

against all masters—a pledge to ensure that everybody enjoyed freedom and that all would be afforded a degree of well-being—that the rebel citizenry of the twelfth century began. And the social revolution is also going to have to start from the pledge to ensure that everybody gets bread and freedom. Let everyone know, without exception, that although

revolution may be upon him, its first thought is always going to be for the provision of bread, lodgings and clothing for the inhabitants of the city or territory and the revolution will draw the strength that earlier revolutions lacked from the simple phenomenon of general solidarity.

But for that to happen, it will have to forswear the aberrations of the old

bourgeois political economy. It must dispense once and for all with waged labour under any possible guise and look upon society as one whole, organised for the purpose of producing the greatest possible well-being at the least cost in terms of human effort. It must get used to thinking of personal remuneration for services rendered as an impossibility, as a failed past

experiment and as an encumbrance upon the future, if it were to survive.

And not just in principle but in even the least application, it must dispense with the authority principle, with the concentration of functions that is the very essence to society today.

Such being the problem, it would be very sad if revolutionary toilers were to

delude themselves as to its simplicity or for them not to be on the look-out even now for the means by which they intend of resolve it.

IV

The bourgeoisie is a force to be reckoned with, not just because it possesses wealth, but *primarily because it has availed of the leisure afforded to it by wealth in order to*

train in the arts of government and devise a science that provides a justification for domination. It knows what it wants, it knows that is required if its ideal society is to survive, and until such time as the worker also wakes up to what is required and how to go about things, he is fated to remain enslaved to the possessor of that knowledge.

It would certainly be a

nonsense to try to dream up in one's imagination the sort of society that must emerge at the far side of the revolution. It would be really Byzantine practice to squabble beforehand about the means of providing for such-and-such a requirement of the society of the future, or about how such-and-such a detail of public life is to be organised. Novels that we write set in the future are

designed merely to refine our aspirations and demonstrate the feasibility of a masterless society, which is to say, the practicability of the ideal, without foundering on insurmountable problems. A novel is just a novel. But there are still certain broad outlines upon which we need to have agreement if we are build anything at all.

The bourgeois of 1789 were

perfectly well aware that it would be pointless debating the minutiae of the parliamentary government of their dreams, but they saw eye to eye on two essential points: they wanted a strong government, and that government needed to be representative. More than that: it had to be centralised, its agencies in the provinces being a hierarchy of functionaries as

well as a whole series of mini-governments in elected town councils. But it also had to be made up of two separate branches: the legislature and the executive. What they called “justice” had to be independent of the executive power and, to some extent, of the legislature.

On these two core points of the economic question they were of one mind. In their

ideal society private property was not to be open to discussion and so-called “contractual freedom!” was to be proclaimed as the underlying organisational principle. What is more, the best of them believed, in fact, that that principle actually was going to regenerate society and become a source of wealth for everybody.

Being as flexible about the

details as they were unshakable on these essential matters, they were able, within a year or two, to completely reorganise France in accordance with their ideal and endow her with a civil code (which was later usurped by Napoleon)—a code later copied by the bourgeoisies of Europe as soon as they ascended to power.

They worked at this with a

wondrous unanimity. And whilst ferocious contests erupted later in the Convention, that was because the people, seeing its hopes deceived, came along with fresh demands that its leaders could not even fathom or which a few among them strove in vain to reconcile with the bourgeois revolution.

The bourgeois knew what they wanted: they had given it

a lot of thought. Over many long years they had cherished an ideal of government: and when the people rose up, they harnessed it to the attainment of their ideal, granting it a few minor concessions on certain matters, such as the abolition of feudal rights or equality before the law.[[301](#)]

Without getting bogged down in the minutiae, the bourgeois had, well in advance

of the revolution, mapped out the broad lines of the future. Can we say as much of the workers?

Regrettably not. Throughout modern socialism, and above all in its moderate faction, we detect a pronounced tendency not to delve too deeply into the principles of the society they would like to see triumph by means of the revolution. This is understandable. For

moderates, the very mention of revolution would tarnish their reputation, and they have an inkling that if they were to outline a mere schedule of reforms to the workers, they would lose their most fervent backers. So they choose instead to sneer at those who talk of the society of the future or try to be specific about the handiwork of revolution. “We can sort that out later; we’ll

just pick the best people, and they will arrange everything for the best!” This is their response. As for the anarchists, the fear of appearing to be split over matters relating to the society of the future and of hampering the revolutionary spirit serves the same function: when among workers, they prefer to postpone these discussions, which are (incorrectly, of

course) labelled theoretical, forgetting that within perhaps a few years they will be called upon to offer an opinion on all matters relating to the organisation of society, from the operation of bread ovens to that of schools or territorial defence—and that we will not even have the models of the English Revolution from which the Girondins of the last [i.e., the eighteenth] century could

draw.

In revolutionary circles there is too much of a tendency to look upon the revolution as one great festival in the course of which everything will sort itself out for the best. But in actual fact on the day that the old institutions come tumbling down, on the day when that immense machine—which more or less caters for the everyday needs of the greater

number—grinds to a stop, the people itself is going to have to take charge of reorganising the derailed machine.

The likes of Lamartine and Ledru-Rollin spent twenty-four hours scribbling away, just drafting decrees modelled on old republican clichés long since committed to memory. [302] But what did those decrees say?—They merely rehearsed the resounding

phrases that had been trotted out at republican meetings and clubs for years past and those decrees had not the slightest impact on the essential day to day existence of the country. Since the 1848 provisional government did not lay a finger on property, wages or exploitation, it was able to restrict itself to more or less bombastic pronouncements, issuing orders and, in short, to

getting on with the day to day business of the offices of the State. Nothing was to change except the verbiage.

Yet that task alone absorbed all the energies of the newcomers. We

revolutionaries, who recognise that the people has to eat and to feed its children above all else, will be faced with a rather more difficult task.—Is there enough flour? Will the

bakers stand by their ovens? And how are we to ensure that deliveries of beef and vegetables do not peter out? Is there housing enough to go round? Is there a clothing shortage? And so on. That will be our preoccupation.

But all of that is going to require tremendous, ferocious (yes, that's the word) effort on the part of those who have the revolution's success at heart.

“Some suffer from a fever that lasts eight days or six weeks,”—one former member of the Convention notes in his diary, “but we have had it for four uninterrupted years.” And it is while suffering from that fever, surrounded by all sorts of hostility and all manner of setbacks—for such there will be—that the revolutionary will have to work.

He will have to act. But how

is he to act if he does not have a long familiarity with some guiding idea and the broad outlines of the organisation that he claims provide an answer to the needs of the people, to its vague yearnings and its undetermined wishes?

And yet still they dare argue that there will be no need for all that, that everything is going to sort itself out! The bourgeois, being more

intelligent than that, are even now exploring ways of countering the revolution, throwing it off track and steering it down a path where its failure will be inevitable. They investigate not merely ways of crushing the risen people by force of arms in the countryside (using small armoured trains and machine-guns) and in the cities (here the general staff have studied

the details to perfection); they are also looking into ways of countering the revolution by offering it imaginary concessions in order to lure it down paths where it is sure to become mired in the filth of self-seeking and petty-minded personal bickering.

Yes, the revolution will be a festival, if it strives for the liberation of all. For that liberation to take place,

however, the revolutionary is going to have to deploy a mental audacity, an active energy, a sure-footed judgement and a commitment to effort that the people have rarely displayed in previous revolutions, but inklings of which were already showing through during the dying days of the Paris Commune and in the early days of certain strikes over the past twenty

years.

V

“But where is such mental audacity and such vigour invested in the task of organisation to come from when the people possesses none of it?”—we will be asked.—“Do you not yourselves accept that whilst the people might not be found wanting in terms of powers of

attack, it has all too often been short of mental audacity and commitment to reconstruction?”

We readily admit that. But let us not overlook either the part that falls to men of initiative in popular upheavals. And, to round off our essay, we shall now say something about such initiative.

Initiative, the unfettered initiative of the individual and

the universal opportunity to bring this force to bear during popular upheavals is what has always accounted for revolutions' irresistible might. Historians have little or nothing to say about it. But it is upon this force that we are relying for the undertaking and accomplishment of the immense task facing the social revolution.

If the revolutions of the past

achieved something, it was solely thanks to men and women with initiative, to the unknowns who emerged from the crowd and who did not shrink from taking on the responsibility before their brothers and before posterity, for actions that the faint hearts deemed insanelly daring.

The broad masses have difficulty deciding to embark on anything in the absence of

past precedent. The proof of that surrounds us daily. If routine holds us in its clutches at every step, it is because of a dearth of men of initiative ready to break with past tradition and take a leap in the dark. But if an idea takes root in the minds of people, an idea as yet vague and confused and incapable of translating itself into actions and then some men of initiative arrive on the

scene and set to work, they immediately have a following—as long as their endeavours resonate with vague aspirations. And then even when they step back, broken down by fatigue, the work begun will be carried on by thousands of torch-bearers whose very existence defied imagining. There lies the history of the whole of humanity—a story there for

anyone to confirm with his own eyes and his own experience. Only those who have sought to swim against the wishes and needs of humanity have found themselves damned and deserted by their contemporaries.

Unfortunately, men of initiative are rare in everyday life. But they spring up in times of revolution and, strictly

speaking, it is they that are responsible for the more enduring handiwork of revolutions.

They represent our hope and confidence in the upcoming revolution. Only let them have the true and, thus, generous conception of the future; let them have audacity of thought, not a stubborn fixation on reviving a past that is fated to perish; let them be inspired by

a sublime ideal—and they will be followed. Never, at any point in its existence, has humanity more sorely felt the need for a great inspiration than these times in which we are living, having come through a century of bourgeois rottenness.

But if they are to emerge, the groundwork has to be laid. New ideas are needed—ideas that will signal a fresh

departure in the history of civilisation need to be sketched out prior to the revolution; they need to be widely spread among the masses so that there they may be subjected to the critique of practical minds and, to some extent, to trial and error. The ideas that germinate in advance of the revolution need to be sufficiently widespread for a given number of minds to feel

accustomed to them. These terms: “anarchy,” “abolition of the State,” “agreements freely entered into between workers’ groups and communes,” “the communist commune” need to become common parlance—familiar enough for intelligent minorities to try to explore them.

So the Chaliers, the Jacques Roux, the Doliviers of the coming revolution will be

understood by the masses who, once over their initial surprise, will see these words as articulating their own aspirations.[[303](#)]

But what of the envy among the oppressed themselves? Has it not often been remarked, and rightly so, that envy is the reef on which democracies run aground? Whilst the labourer may be unduly patient in putting up with the

arrogance of his waist-coated master, he turns an envious eye even on the personal influence of his colleague in the workshop.—Let us not deny the fact of the matter; let us not even hide behind the argument, however true it may be, that envy always arises from the realisation that once our comrade has gained influence, he will betray his former comrades, and that

with envy, as with treachery, the only means of neutralising it would be to deprive our comrade, like the bourgeois, of the opportunity to increase his authority, to become a master.

All of this is true: but there is more. With our authoritarian schooling, all of us, when we see influence on the rise, can think of no better way to neutralise it than to annihilate it, and we forget that there is

another and infinitely more effective way to neutralise such influences, whether they are already harmful or becoming so. It is to do better oneself.

In a slavish society, this method is not feasible, and as the children of a slavish society, we do not even think of it. What means have we of getting rid of a king who has become unbearable, other

than killing him? There may be a minister who irks us but what can we do other than find some candidate to step into his shoes? And when we are revolted by some “people’s choice,” we look around for another one to run against him. That is how it goes. But is that actually rational? Indeed, what could the men of the Convention have done when faced with a king

competing with them for power, other than send him to the guillotine? And what choice did the representatives of the Mountain have in the face of other representatives possessed of the very same powers—namely, the Girondins—other than consign them in turn to the executioner? [[304](#)] Well, now, those past circumstances are with us to this very day,

whereas the only truly effective means of stopping a harmful initiative in its tracks is *for us to act ourselves by taking the initiative to act in a better direction.*

So whenever we hear revolutionaries swoon with delight at the idea of knifing or shooting whichever rulers might gain the upper hand during the revolution, we fear that the energies of genuine

revolutionaries might be squandered on struggles that are, at bottom, merely contests on behalf of or against individuals seeking promotions.

Waging war on them is tantamount to recognising the need to promote other men. Back in 1871, Paris saw a vague anticipation of a better manner of acting. The revolutionaries among the

people seemed to understand that that the “Council of the Commune” had to be regarded as a mere backdrop, as a nod to past traditions; that the people should not only not disarm but should retain, together with the Council, *its own organisation, its federated groups*, and that the requisite measures to ensure the success of the revolution ought to come from these

groups rather than from the City Hall. Unfortunately, a certain modesty among the popular revolutionaries, underpinned also by authoritarian prejudices whose roots still ran deep at that time, prevented these federated groups from completely ignoring the Council as if it were non-existent, and acting so as to usher in a new age of social *construction*.

Come the next revolution, we are not going to be able to avert the return of such attempts at revolutionary government. But we should at least know that the most effective way of nullifying its authority is not going to be the plotting of coup d'états that would merely bring back authority in some other guise, resulting in dictatorship. The only effective means will be to

conjure up from within the people itself a force that is mighty in its actions and in the constructive revolutionary tasks that it is to carry out, ignoring the authorities, no matter what name they may go under, and growing exponentially by virtue of its revolutionary enterprise, its revolutionary vigour and its achievements in terms of tearing down and reorganising.

During the Great [French] Revolution of 1789–1794, it was the sections in Paris and the other big cities and revolutionary municipalities in the smaller towns, overtaking the Convention and the provincial organs of revolutionary government, that launched attempts to rebuild the *economy* and to make Society a compact *freely entered* into. The documentary

records thus far released regarding the activities of these, alas, little-known organs of revolution demonstrate this.

A people that will itself have organised the consumption of wealth and the reproduction of such assets in the interest of society as whole will no longer be governable. A people that will itself be the armed strength of the country and which will have afforded

armed citizens the requisite cohesion and concerted action, will no longer be susceptible to being ordered around. A people that will itself have organised its railways, its navy, its schools is not going to be susceptible to being administered any more. And finally, a people that will have shown itself capable of organising arbitration to settle minor disputes will be one

where every single individual will deem it his duty to stop the bully misusing the weakling, without waiting for providential intervention by the town sergeant, and will have no use for warders, judges or jailers.

In past revolutions, the people shouldered the task of demolition: as for the business of reorganising, that they left to the bourgeois. “Come,

lords, you being better versed than us in the arts of government: organise us, order us to work so that we shall not starve to death; stop us from tearing one another apart, punish and pardon in accordance with the laws that you will have made for us, the poor in spirit!” And we know just what they made of that invitation.

Well, the task facing the

people, come the next revolution, will actually be to take over this function which it has hitherto left to the bourgeois. It will be to *create*—to organise at the same time as it destroys.

To achieve this task, the people's revolution is going to need every bit of the powers of initiative of all men of heart, all the audacity of their thought freed from the

nightmares of the past, and all of their energies. It will also have to take care not to paralyse the initiative of the most determined; it will simply have to redouble its initiative should the initiative coming from others be found wanting, should it peter out, or should it take a wrong turn. Audacity of thought, a conception as clear and as comprehensive as might be wished for, the

constructive force emanating from the people as the negation of authority proceeds on its way, and, lastly, the initiative of every single person in the work of reconstruction—that is what will invest the revolution with the power it needs if it is to win through.

It is these very forces that the active propagation of Anarchy, as well as the very philosophy of Anarchy, strive

to develop. Discipline—the last resort of the authoritarians—they counter with the comprehensive, grand concept of revolution which is the sole source of the inspiration required. And to those who would like to see the people restrict themselves to the role of a mob dispatched against the government of the day, but always restrained in time by the whip, we say: “The role of

the people in the revolution must be *positive* as well as *destructive*. For it alone has the capacity to *re-organise society* on the foundations of *equality* and *freedom* for all. Entrusting that role to others would be a betrayal of the very cause of revolution.”

[294](#)[] Antoine Quentin Fouquier de Tinville (1746–1795) was a French lawyer during the Revolution and Reign of Terror periods. When the Revolutionary Tribunal of Paris was created by the National Convention

on 10th March 1793, he was appointed its public prosecutor. His activity during this time earned him the reputation of one of the most sinister figures of the Revolution, presenting an appearance of legality to what were essentially political trials which aimed to eliminate enemies of the revolutionary authorities (whether from the right or left). (Editor)

[295](#)[] Jean-Lambert Tallien (1767–1820) was a political figure during the French Revolution. Initially, he was one of the most active popular leaders and was secretary to the Commune of Paris. He was elected to the National Convention, took an

active part in the overthrow of the Girondists and was one of the most notorious envoys sent to establish the Reign of Terror in the provinces. He then turned against the Jacobins, taking a part in the plot against Robespierre (Thermidor). As the leading Thermidorian, he was elected to the Committee of Public Safety and was instrumental in suppressing the Jacobin Club and the insurgents of Prairial (20th May 1795). Tallien appealed to the new rising class of the “Jeunesse Doree” (“gilded youth”), who viewed him as their leader. (Editor)

[296](#)[] Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, Baron de l'Aulne (1727–1781), was

a French economist who was an administrator under Louis XV and served as the comptroller general of finance (1774–76) under Louis XVI. He was an early advocate for free market capitalism although his financial reforms were blocked by the vested interests of the privileged classes (including the aristocracy, royal household, clergy and financiers). (Editor)

[297](#)[] The primary assemblies were the bodies by which the National Assembly had been elected during the French Revolution. Initially, they were composed of nearly all people in the locality and had nominated the *electors* who made in each area an

electoral assembly and this, in turn, chose its representatives in the National Assembly. However, the primary assemblies refused to limit themselves to this role, and continued to meet and kept watch over their deputies. They were undermined by two changes to secure the power of the middle classes. First, the permanence of the assemblies was ended. Second, the citizens were split into two groups—*active* and *passive*—based on how much property they owned, with only the active (wealthy) citizens allowed to vote. In this way the mass of the people were excluded from power. See chapter XXI of Kropotkin's *The Great French*

Revolution. (Editor)

[298](#)[] The Kabyle people are a Berber ethnic group native to Kabylie in the north of Algeria. They were colonised by the French State beginning in 1857, despite vigorous resistance (which continued as late as 1871 with Mokrani's rebellion). (Editor)

[299](#)[] Kropotkin lists various French politicians well known at the time. (Editor)

[300](#)[] A reference to members of "the Mountain" during the French Revolution. These were the extreme Republicans who sat in the highest rows of seats in the assembly room in which the revolutionary Parliament

(The Convention) held its meetings.
(Editor)

[301](#)[] Here Kropotkin pointed his readers to his own classic history, *The Great French Revolution* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1989).
(Editor)

[302](#)[] Alphonse Marie Louis de Prat de Lamartine (1790–1869) and Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin (1807–1874) were both French Republican politicians who took part in the 1848 Revolution and held positions in the Provisional Government it created. (Editor)

[303](#)[] A reference to three extreme left-wing agitators during the French Revolution. Joseph Chalier (1747–

1793) became acquainted with the Jacobin Club while living in Paris in 1789. Returning to Lyon to become a member of the municipal bureau, he organised the national guard and engineered the finances of the city so that the rich were heavily taxed and the poor relatively spared. Jacques Roux (1752–1794) was a radical priest who expounded the ideals of popular democracy and classless society to crowds of Parisian *sans-culottes* and workers. He fought for an economically equal society, becoming a leader of the *Enragés*, and in 1791, he was elected to the Paris Commune. Pierre Dolivier (1746–unknown) was an ideologist of

the village poor and a priest until the fall of 1793. Like the *Enragés*, Dolivier expressed the masses' dissatisfaction at having attained merely political equality. He demanded the eradication of private ownership of land and the abolition of the right of inheritance. (Editor)

[304](#)[] References to the experiences of the French Revolution. See the entries for “National Convention,” “Mountain,” and “Girondins” in the Glossary. (Editor)

Postscript to *Words of a Rebel* (1919)

Translation by
Nicolas Walter

*Kropotkin's first book, Words
of a Rebel, was originally
published in 1885. In
December 1919, he wrote this
postscript, in which he
expands on the themes of that
book, focusing on the*

importance of social reconstruction by the people themselves, through their own popular self-managed bodies, to ensure the success of a social revolution.

Revolution was only lightly touched on in general terms in the last chapter of this book [*Words of a Rebel*]. This chapter [entitled “Expropriation”] must serve, so to speak, as an introduction

to the second part of the work in hand—the constructive part—which I was only able to occupy myself with three years later, when I came out of prison. But since this chapter contains within itself traces of a long discussion on the question of the extent of expropriation which had taken place within the Jurassian, Italian, and Spanish federations of the

International, it is worth saying a little about it here.

We were in complete agreement that private ownership of land was finished and that the future belonged to communist possession of land. But we considered it unjust and unprofitable to drive from their plots the peasants who worked their land themselves without the help of hired workers, to demolish their

houses and their fences, to cut down their gardens, and to rework their land with a steam-plough, as the centralist and statist revolutionaries imagined.

Such an idea was preached in France, after the fall of Robespierre and the Jacobins, by the communist Babeuf, who made it the basis of his Conspiracy of Equals, and this same idea was also developed

later by Cabet in his *Voyage to Icaria*, and among his followers it is necessary to note during the period from 1830 to 1840 the members of the French secret societies founded by Barbès[[305](#)] and Blanqui, as well as the League of the Just, a German society founded by Weitling, from which it passed into the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels.

In this manifesto, the end of social revolution was, as in the previous programmes of the Blanquists and Babeuf, the total abolition of private property and its transfer into the hands of the State. As for production, it would be necessary to introduce, as in Babeuf, labour which was obligatory, universal and equal for all and, to this end, “the organisation of industrial

armies, especially as regards agriculture.” The State socialists of France preached in favour of these same industrial armies in the 1880s. [[306](#)]

We naturally could not accept such a programme of expropriation. Knowing the various forms of agriculture, on both large and small scales, forms which it necessarily takes in places of varying

kinds (this is marked above all in France), we could not consider the destruction of small agricultural economies as progress. The formula of Babeuf is not only unjust with regard to small rural economies, but it would lead inevitably to the revolt of the villages against the towns, and would reduce the whole country to famine. For the rest, to destroy private

initiative in agriculture now would be senseless, if only because it is precisely to private initiative and individual attachment to the land that we owe the successes in agriculture so far and the development of the intensive cultivation of the land in certain parts of Europe and America.

It is for this reason that, without wishing to prejudge

the forms which agriculture would take in the future, we decided that at that moment the efforts of the revolution should be directed not towards the abolition of the small rural economy but towards *the union of the small economies in everything which requires the union of their efforts.*

Such an attitude with regard to the small rural economy brought us attacks from the

State socialists. But they themselves, as they made contact with the real life of the countryside, soon saw—in France above all—that it was precisely this small rural economy and this possession of the land in plots which gave France its relative prosperity—without having to plunder its neighbours; the German socialists came to the same conclusion when they saw

what the small rural economy yielded in Alsace and in various parts of West Germany.

After I came out of prison, at the beginning of 1886, I began in our paper a more detailed development of the question of the reconstruction of life by the social revolution. Knowing, moreover, how powerful the aspiration towards the establishment of

independent communes was in the Latin countries, I had in view above all a large urban commune getting rid of the capitalist yoke, especially Paris, with its working population full of intelligence and independence and possessing, thanks to the lessons of the past, great organising capability.

These articles appeared later (in 1892) in a volume for

which Élisée Reclus suggested the title, *The Conquest of Bread*: this name was well chosen, for it expressed the basic idea of the whole work, notably that the principal object in a period of social revolution would be not the *political* organisation of the social order but the question of *bread for all*; the question of satisfying the most urgent needs of the population

—*feeding, housing, clothing, etc.* I tried at the same time to prove that the workers of a large town would be able to organise *themselves* for a free life within the free commune, without waiting for this life to be organised for them by officials, however well endowed with all virtues.

Unfortunately it is necessary to say that socialists and workers in general, having lost

hope in the imminent possibility of revolution, were no longer interested in the question: what character would it be desirable to give the revolution? It was only many years later, when the syndicalist movement began to take root in France, that another work appeared on the same subject. Our comrade Pouget described in his book, *How We Shall Bring About the*

Revolution, how a revolution could be carried out in France *under the control of the workers' unions*; how, not waiting at all for those who would not hesitate to take power, the workers' unions and congresses would be able to expropriate the capitalists and to organise production on a new basis without allowing the least interruption in production. It is clear that only

the workers, through their organisations, will ever be able to reach this goal, and though I differ with Pouget over certain details, I recommend this book with confidence to all those who understand the inevitability and imminence of the social reconstruction which humanity will have to envisage.

A short time after I came out of prison, I was obliged to

leave France. I settled in England, where I had the opportunity of studying the economic life of a great industrial country in practice, and not only from the books in which economists have repeated the same errors as their predecessors for more than a hundred years. Each time that I gave speeches in the various towns of England and Scotland, I took the

opportunity to talk for a long time with the workers and to visit all kinds of factories and mills—large and small—of coal-mines and big naval docks, without overlooking the small workshops as well in important centres of small-scale production, such as Sheffield and Birmingham. I also visited the great co-operative distribution centres, such as the Wholesale Co-

operative Society in Manchester, as well as the attempts at co-operative production which were already beginning to spread everywhere. Getting information in this way about what *real life* was like, I always kept in mind the following question: what form could a social revolution take so that one could pass without too many shocks from

production by individuals or by limited companies with the goal of profit to production and exchange of goods organised by the producers and consumers themselves in such a manner as to satisfy all the needs of production in the best way?

The examination of these questions led to two conclusions.

The *first* of these was that

the production of foodstuffs and of all goods, and then the exchange of these goods, represents such a complicated undertaking that the plans of the State socialists, which lead inevitably to the dictatorship of a party, will prove to be completely defective as soon as they begin to apply them to life.

No government, we assert, can be in a position to organise

production if the workers themselves are not associated with it through the mediation of their unions, in every branch of industry, in every trade; for throughout production there arise and will arise every day thousands of problems which no government can resolve or foresee.

It is of course impossible to foresee everything; it is

necessary that life itself, and the efforts of thousands of minds on the spot, should be able to co-operate in the development of the new social system and to find the best conditions capable of satisfying the thousand manifestations of local needs.

Theoretical plans for construction are not of course useless in the preparatory period. They keep thinking on

the alert and force serious reflection on the complex organisations represented by civilised societies. But, on the other hand, these plans simplify rather too much the problems which mankind is called to resolve, and if it is thought necessary to begin by putting *these programmes* into practice, one will never get round to planning *life*. Such a collapse would follow that it

could lead to the most ferocious reaction.

Many English workers—perhaps because they have been occupied for such a long time (that is to say, since the period of the Chartist Movement of 1836–1848) with social reorganisation—considered the problem in this way: first of all, they said, it is necessary to organise strong and powerful trade unions *in*

all branches of work,
including the unskilled labour
in the docks and the peasants.

[[307](#)] Afterwards, it is
necessary to form links
between them through national
and international unions, and
then, when they have become
an effective force, to take all
production under their
complete control, to get rid of
the domination of the
capitalists, and to maintain

order throughout production and consumption in the interests of the whole population of the country.

In other words, the English workers made their own the ideas which had already emerged in 1830 in Robert Owen when he tried to form the Labourers' Union; afterwards, the English trade unions together with the representatives of the French

workers tried to put these ideas into practice when, after meeting in London in 1862, they formed the *First International*.

This organisation represented, as is known, an International Association of Workers' Unions which was entirely non-political and which pursued a double end: a daily struggle against capital, and *the elaboration of the*

basis of a new socialist system. But, since “mixed sections” were also admitted, it followed that some people joined who belonged to no trade unions but who simply aspired for the emancipation of labour from the yoke of capital. This International existed until the end of the 1870s, when it was destroyed by incessant government persecution and by the

intrigues of the political parties. The *Second* International was no longer an association of workers' unions; it became an association of *the social-democratic political parties* of the various countries.

With the disappearance of the First International, there disappeared in England the force which, in the thought of its founders, would have

maintained among the trade unions the idea of the imminence of the social revolution and the necessity of its preparation among the workers themselves. The daily struggle of the local unions against the exploiters took the place of more distant ends; it is necessary to say that the majority of the active members of the workers' unions, occupied day after day with

the organisation of these unions and their strikes, lost sight of the final end of the workers' organisation—social revolution. It is only during the last five or six years before the [First World] War that one felt again a renewal of interest in favour of this basic problem—under the influence of a similar reawakening throughout the whole world.

Those influenced in this way

were above all the syndicalist movement in France and Italy, and the awakening observed in the United States where, under the name of the Industrial Workers of the World, a movement developed which devotes itself directly to the end of the struggle against capital with a view to *the transfer of all industry from the hands of the capitalists into the hands of the*

producers, organised in strong unions. Also influenced in this way were the first revolution in Russia, in 1905, and the general situation and upheaval of social life in Europe during the last years before the war. The horrors which the war has just made us pass through, and its consequences of poverty for the whole world, as well as the Russian revolution, will place without any doubt and in

the forefront before the whole world the question of the necessity of a social revolution.

But it would be necessary to say much more of this movement than I can say here. I return therefore to the conclusions I had come to in finding out about economic life in England.

The *second* conclusion I came to is the following:

present economic life in the civilised countries is *constructed on a false basis*. The theory which economic scholars put forward depends on the assumption that the peoples of the earth are divided into two categories. Some, thanks to their superior education, are called to occupy themselves above all with the production of all kinds of goods (textiles,

machines of every type, motors, etc.). The others, because of their limited ability, are condemned to produce the food for the peoples of the first category and the raw materials for their factories.[[308](#)] Every course of political economy states this theory; it is in this way that the English bourgeoisie enriches itself; it is in this way that other countries will enrich themselves by

developing their industry at the expense of backward peoples.

But a more thorough study of the economic life and of the industrial crises of England and the other countries of Europe leads to a different conclusion. *It is no longer possible* to enrich oneself as England has done until now; no civilised country wants to remain or will remain in the position of the provider of raw

materials. *All* the other countries aspire to develop their own manufacturing industry, and all are gradually reaching this goal. Technical education can never become the privilege of a single country, *except by the armed subjugation of the neighbouring countries* which aspire to develop their own education and industry. As for the tendency towards

subjugation with this end, a tendency which has emerged during the last forty years, especially in Germany, it has led the whole world into a terrible war which has cost Europe and the United States *more than six million dead and more than ten million dead, injured and mutilated,* without mentioning the ravaging of Belgium and Northern France, or the

unbelievable destruction of provisions, coal and metal which are lacked by all the peoples of the civilised world today.

In the meantime, a people has risen during the last fifty years, and has taken its place in the family of civilised peoples: the United States of North America. This people has shown that eighty million inhabitants can reach a state of

enormous wealth and power without exploiting other peoples, but solely *by developing industry and agriculture at home on parallel lines*, with the help of machines, railways, free unions, and the spread of education.[[309](#)]

France has also developed to some extent in the same direction, and this striking lesson given to the world has

transformed current theories of political economy from top to bottom. *The way towards the development of the prosperity of the peoples is to be found in the union of agriculture and industry and not in the subdivision of peoples into industrial and agricultural categories.* Such a division would inevitably lead mankind into incessant wars for the seizure of

markets and slaves for industry.

I had studied this vital and enormous question in a series of articles published between 1890 and 1893 and later in a book, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. It was necessary to study many connected questions to do this work, and to learn many things. But the most important conclusion was this: *we are very far from*

being as rich as we used to think, when, passing through the streets of our large towns, we saw the luxurious houses of the rich and their gleaming carriages, the crazy luxury of the big shop windows, and the expensively dressed crowds of passers-by. England is the richest country in the world. But if one added up all that it gets from its fields, its coal-mines, and its numerous

factories and mills, and if one divided this total among all the inhabitants in equal shares, one would get only three shillings a head a day, and in no circumstances more than four shillings. As for Russia, one would scarcely reach fifty kopeks (one shilling) a head a day.

It therefore follows that the social revolution, wherever it breaks out, will have to

consider as its first priority and from the earliest days a considerable *increase* in production. The first months of emancipation will inevitably increase the consumption of provisions and of all goods and, at the same time, production will decrease; on the other hand, every country in social revolution will be surrounded by a circle of unfriendly or even hostile

neighbours. “How shall we be able to live then, if two-thirds of the bread England needs is imported from abroad?” English comrades asked me more than once. “How will our factories be able to work to buy bread, when we do not have our own raw materials?” *And they were right.* When I drew up an account of the reserves which existed in England—of what could be

called the reserve capital of a country in case of revolution—the conclusion I came to was rather disconcerting. Immediately after the harvest, there was a reserve of grain sufficient for three months, but from January, this reserve fell to six weeks. Of cotton there was never enough for more than three months, often enough for only six weeks, This was even more the case

with all secondary products (like, for example, manganese for steel). In a word, industrial England, with its insignificant reserves, lived almost from day to day.

But England is not the only country to live like this; all peoples, in the present conditions of the capitalist economy, live in the same way. Not long ago Russia suffered a series of cruel

famines during which tens of millions of the inhabitants were hit. And now still more than one-third of the population of Russia and Siberia is *always* in poverty and even lacks bread for three or four months a year—without mentioning the insufficiency of all other goods, the primitive rustic equipment, the half-starved livestock, the absence of

fertiliser, and the lack of knowledge.

In a word, given that until now a good third of the population of all the countries of Europe has lived in poverty and has suffered from the lack of clothing and so on, revolution will lead inevitably to *increased consumption*. The demand for all goods will rise while production will fall, and in the end there will be

famine—famine in everything, as is the case today [1919] in Russia. There is only one way of avoiding such a famine. We must all understand that as soon as a revolutionary movement begins in a country, the outcome will be successful only if the workers in the factories and mills, the peasants, and all the citizens themselves at the start of the movement, take the whole

economy of the nation into their own hands, if they organise themselves and direct their efforts towards a rapid increase in all production. But *they will not be convinced of this necessity* unless all general problems concerning the national economy, today reserved by long tradition to a whole multitude of ministries and committees, *are put in a simple form before each*

village and each town, before each factory and mill, as being its own business when they are at last allowed to manage themselves.

It is in this way that the study of the real life of the peoples leads inevitably to the conclusion that *all* the peoples must endeavour in their own countries to produce a powerful expansion, to bring about an improvement in

agriculture—by means of the intensified cultivation of the soil—and at the same time in manufacturing industry. It is in this way that a guarantee of progress and of success in the emancipation of labour from the yoke of capital will be found. There is no place for some peoples destined to serve others. It is in this, and also in the understanding of the fact that it is impossible to bring

about a social revolution by dictatorship, that we may find the cornerstone of the whole structure. To build without it is to build on sand.

The reformers gave too little attention to this side of life thirty or forty years ago. Today, however, after the cruel lesson of the last war, it should be clear to every serious person and above all to every worker that such wars,

and even crueller ones still,
*are inevitable so long as
certain countries consider
themselves destined to enrich
themselves by the production
of finished goods and divide
the backward countries up
among themselves, so that
these countries provide the
raw materials while they
accumulate wealth themselves
on the basis of the labour of
others.*

More than that. We have the right to assert that the reconstruction of society on a socialist basis will be impossible so long as manufacturing industry and, in consequence, the prosperity of the workers in the factories, depend as they do today on the exploitation of the peasants of their own or of other countries.

We should not forget that at

the moment it is not only the capitalists who exploit the labour of others and who are “imperialists.” They are not the only ones who aspire to conquer cheap manpower to obtain raw materials in Europe, Asia, Africa and elsewhere. As the workers are beginning to take part in political power, the contagion of colonial imperialism is infecting them too. In the last

war the German workers, as much as their masters, aspired to conquer cheaper manpower for themselves—even in Europe, that is in Russia and in the Balkan peninsula, as well as in Asia Minor and Egypt, and they, too, considered it necessary to crush England and France, which prevented them from making these conquests; and on their side, the French and

English workers showed themselves to be full of indulgence for similar conquests on the part of their governments in Africa and Asia.

It is clear that in these conditions one may still predict a series of wars for the civilised countries—wars even more bloody and even more savage—if these countries do not bring about among

themselves a social revolution, and do not reconstruct their lives on a new and more social basis. All Europe and the United States, with the exception of the exploiting minority, feels this necessity.

But it is impossible to achieve such a revolution by means of dictatorship and State power. Without a widespread reconstruction coming from below—put into

practice by the workers and peasants themselves—the social revolution is condemned to bankruptcy. The Russian revolution has confirmed this again, and we must hope that this lesson will be understood: that everywhere in Europe and America serious efforts will be made to create within the working class—peasants, workers and intellectuals—the personnel of a future

revolution which will not obey orders from above but will be capable of elaborating for itself the free forms of the whole new economic life.

[305](#)[] Armand Sigismond Auguste Barbès (1809–1870) was a French revolutionary who formed a republican secret society, the *Société des Saisons*, with Louis-Auguste Blanqui in 1838. The failure of a *coup d'état* in 1839 led to an estrangement with Blanqui which had a deeply divisive effect on the extreme left during the revolution of

1848. (Editor)

[306](#)[] The success of the huge “giant” farms in the prairies of Canada and the United States drew the admiration of partisans of State socialism; precisely at that period, a disastrous economy formed with exactly the help of such industrial armies recruited twice a year—for the ploughing and sowing of the wheat, and for the reaping. But it was of short duration. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when I crossed the Canadian province of Manitoba, no trace of these farms was visible; as for the prairies of Ohio, I saw them in 1901 covered with little farms, and one saw in the fields a whole forest of

windmills which drew the water for the market-gardeners. After two or three bad crops of wheat, the large farms were abandoned and the land was sold to small farmers who now raise on their little farms considerably more foodstuffs of all kinds than the “giant” farms could do.

[307](#)[] Before and up to the early 1880s, the trade unions existed only in a few branches; women, for example, had no union, though there were more than 700,000 of them in the textile industry alone; the woodworkers only admitted into their unions those who earned at least tenpence an hour; and so on.

[308](#)[] That is, the theory of comparative

advantage (in its more nakedly colonialist aspect). See the excerpt from *The Conquest of Bread*, “The Division of Labour,” above. (Editor)

[309](#)[] Here, uncharacteristically, Kropotkin overlooks the rapid growth of U.S. colonialism abroad since the end of the nineteenth century as well as the importation of slaves from Africa and the bloody conquest of the mainland itself. (Editor)

Anarchy

“Communist organisation cannot be left to be constructed by legislative bodies called parliaments, municipal or communal council. It must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass.

Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months

if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free.

“It cannot exist without creating a continual contact between all for the thousands and thousands of common transactions; it cannot exist without creating local life, independent in the smallest unities—the block of houses, the street, the district, the commune. It would not answer

its purpose if it did not cover society with a network of thousands of associations to satisfy its thousand needs: the necessities of life, articles of luxury, of study, enjoyment, amusements. And such associations cannot remain narrow and local; they must necessarily tend [...] to become international.

“[...] And these remarks contain our answer to those

*who affirm that Communism
and Anarchy cannot go
together. They are, you see, a
necessary complement to one
another. The most powerful
development of individuality,
or individual originality—as
one of our comrades has so
well said,—can only be
produced when the first needs
of food and shelter are
satisfied; when the struggle
for existence against the*

*forces of nature has been
simplified; when man's time is
no longer taken up entirely by
the meaner side of daily
subsistence,—then only, his
intelligence, his artistic taste,
his inventive spirit, his
genius, can develop freely
and ever strive to greater
achievements.*

*“Communism is the best basis
for individual development
and freedom; not that*

*individualism which drives
man to the war of each
against all—this is the only
one known up till now,—but
that which represents the full
expansion of man's faculties,
the superior development of
what is original in him, the
greatest fruitfulness of
intelligence, feeling and
will.”*

*—Anarchism: Its Philosophy
and its Ideal*

The Commune

Translation by Paul
Sharkey[[310](#)]

This important discussion of the anarchist commune and its differences from the Medieval one comes from Words of a Rebel. It shows clearly both Kropotkin's basic vision of a free society and that he had no desire to recreate the Commune of the Middle Ages.

I

When we say that the social revolution ought to proceed through liberation of the Communes, and that it will be the Communes, utterly independent and released from the oversight of the State, which will, alone, be able to provide the requisite context for revolution and the wherewithal for its accomplishment, we are taken

to task for trying to resuscitate a form of society long since overtaken and which has had its day. “But the Commune”—we are told—“is a relic from another age! By trying to tear down the State and replace it with free Communes, you have turned your gaze upon the past and would transport us back to the high middle ages, re-igniting the ancient quarrels between them and

destroying the national unity so dearly won over the course of history!”

Well, now, let us examine this criticism.

First, let us note that any comparison with the past has only a relative value. If, indeed, the Commune we seek was really only a reversion to the medieval Commune, would we not have to concede that today's Commune could

scarcely assume the same shape it took seven centuries ago? Now, is it not obvious that, being established in our day, in our age of railways, telegraphs, cosmopolitan science and the quest for pure truth, the Commune would be organised along lines so very different from those which characterised it in the twelfth century that we should be confronted with a quite novel

phenomenon, situated in new conditions and necessarily entailing absolutely differing consequences?

Furthermore, our adversaries, the champions of the State, in its various guises, ought to keep it in mind that we might make the very same objection to them.

We too could say to them, and with considerably more reason, that it is they who

have their gazes fixed upon the past, since the State is a formation every bit as old as the Commune. With this single difference: while the State in history stands for the negation of all liberty, for absolutism and arbitrariness, for the ruination of its subjects, for the scaffold and for torture, it is precisely in the liberation of the Communes and in the revolts of peoples and

Communes against States that we discover the finest pages that History has to offer. To be sure, if we were to be transported into the past, it would not be back to a Louis XI or a Louis XV, or to a Catherine II, that we should look: it would, rather, be to the communes or republics of Amalfi and Florence, to those of Toulouse and Laon, Liege and Courtray, Augsburg and

Nuremburg, Pskov and Novgorod.

So it is not a matter of bandying words and sophisms: what counts is that we should study, closely analyse and not imitate [those] who are content to tell us: “But the Commune, that is the Middle Ages! And damned as a result!”—“The State represents a past record of misdeeds”—we would reply

—“So it is all the more damnable!”

Between the medieval Commune and any that might be established today, and probably will be established soon, there will be lots of essential differences: a whole abyss opened up by six or seven centuries of human development and hard experience. Let us take a look at the main ones.

What was the essential object of this “conspiracy” or “confederacy” into which the bourgeois of a given city entered in the twelfth century? The object was to break free of the *seigneur* [the feudal lord]. The inhabitants, merchants and artisans, came together and pledged not to allow “anyone at all to do wrong to one of them and treat him thereafter as a serf”:

it was against its former masters that the Commune rose up in arms. “Commune”—says one twelfth century writer quoted by Augustin Thierry[[311](#)—“is a new and despicable word, and this is what is meant by the term: persons liable to tallage now deliver only once a year to their *seigneur* the rent which they owe him. If they commit any crime, they can

be quit of it through payment of a legally prescribed fine: and, as for the levies in money customarily inflicted upon serfs, they are wholly exempt from those.”

So it was very much against the *seigneur* that the medieval Commune revolted. It is from the State that today's Commune will seek liberation. This is a crucial difference, since, remember, it was the

State, represented by the king, which, later, noticing how the Communes sought to register their independence from their Lord, sent in his armies to “chastise,” as the chronicle has it, “the presumption of these idlers who, by reason of the Commune, made a show of rebellion and defiance of the Crown.”

Tomorrow’s Commune will appreciate that it cannot any

longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes. It knows that there can be no half-way house: either the Commune is to be absolutely free to endow itself with whatever institutions it wishes and introduce all reforms and revolutions it may deem

necessary, or else it will remain what it has been to date, a mere subsidiary of the State, chained in its every movement, forever on the brink of conflict with the State and certain of succumbing in any ensuing struggle. It knows that it must smash the State and replace it with the Federation, and it will act accordingly. More than that, it will have the wherewithal so to

do. Today, it is no longer just small towns which are hoisting the flag of communal insurrection. It is Paris, Lyon, Marseilles, Cartagena, and soon every great city will unfurl the same flag. And that, if ever there was one, is an essential difference.

In liberating itself from its *seigneur*, was the medieval Commune also breaking free of the wealthy bourgeois who,

through sale of merchandise and capital, had amassed personal fortunes inside the city? Not at all! Once it had torn down the towers of its *seigneur*, the town dweller soon watched the rise within the Commune itself of the citadels of rich merchants determined to bring him to heel, and the domestic history of the medieval Communes is the history of a bitter struggle

between rich and poor, a struggle which, inevitably, ended with intervention by the king. With aristocracy expanding more and more within the very bosom of the Commune, the populace, now fallen, with regard to the wealthy *seigneur* from the upper city, into a servitude which had previously been his status with regard to the lord outside, realised that the

Commune was no longer worth defending: it deserted the ramparts which he had erected in order to win his freedom and which, as a result of individualist rule, had become the boulevards of a new serfdom. With nothing to lose, it left the rich merchants to look to their own defences, and the latter were defeated; unsexed by luxury and vice, enjoying no support from the

people, they were soon compelled to yield to the injunctions of the king's heralds and handed over the keys to their cities. In other communes, it was the rich themselves who opened the gates of their towns to the imperial, royal or ducal armies, in order to forestall the popular vengeance hanging over their heads.

But will the primary concern

of the nineteenth century Commune not be to put paid to such social inequalities? To seize all the social capital amassed within its borders and make it available to those who wish to deploy it for production and to add to the general well-being? Will its first thought not be to smash the power of capital and banish forever any chance that aristocracy, which brought

about the downfall of the medieval Communes, might raise its head? Will it mistake bishop and monk for allies? Finally, is it going to imitate ancestors who looked to the Commune for nothing more than the creation of a State within the State? Who, abolishing the power of the *seigneur* or king, could think of nothing better to do than reconstitute the very same

power, down to the finest detail, forgetting that that power, though confined within the town walls, nevertheless retained all of the vices of its paragon? Are the proletarians of our century about to imitate those Florentines who, while abolishing titles of nobility or forcing them to be worn as a badge of disgrace, simultaneously allowed a new aristocracy, an aristocracy of

the fat purse, to be created? Finally, will they do as those artisans did who, upon arriving at the town hall, piously imitated their predecessors and re-established that whole hierarchy of powers which they had so recently overthrown? Will they change only the personnel, and leave the institutions untouched?

Certainly not. The nineteenth century Commune,

learning from experience, will do better. It will be a *commune* in more than just name. It will be, not just *communalist*, but *communist*: revolutionary in its policy, it will be revolutionary in matters of production and exchange too. It will not do away with the State only to restore it, and lots of communes will know how to teach by example, abolishing government by proxy, and

fighting shy of commending their sovereignty to the happenstance of the polling booth.

II

Once it had shaken off the yoke of its *seigneur*, did the medieval commune seek to hit him in the source of his power? Did it try to rally to the assistance of the agricultural population which

surrounded it and, equipped with weaponry which rural serfs did not have, place these weapons in the service of the wretches upon whom it looked proudly down from atop its walls? Far from it! Guided by a purely selfish sentiment, the medieval Commune retreated within its walls. On how many occasions did it not jealously close its gates and raise its drawbridges against the slaves

who flocked in search of refuge, and let them be butchered by the *seigneur*, as it looked on, within harquebus range? Proud of its liberties, it did not think to extend them to those groaning outside. It was at this price, at the price of preserving its neighbours' serfdom, that many a commune earned its independence. Then again, was it not also in the interests

of the great bourgeois of the commune to see the serfs from the plains stay bound to the land, ignorant of industry and commerce, and still obliged to look to the town for their supplies of iron, metals and industrial products? And whenever the artisan thought to stretch his hand beyond the walls separating him from the serfs, what could he avail against the wishes of the

bourgeois who had the upper hand, a monopoly upon the arts of war and hardened mercenaries in his hire?

Now, what a difference: would the victorious Paris Commune have made do with endowing itself with more or less free municipal institutions? The Parisian proletariat smashing its chains would have signalled social revolution, first in Paris and

then in the rural communes. The Paris Commune, even as it was fighting desperately for its survival, nevertheless told the peasant: *Seize the land, all of it!* It would not have confined itself to words, and, if need be, its valiant sons would have carried their weapons to far-flung villages to assist the peasant with his revolution: to drive out the land-thieves, and seize it in

order to place it at the disposal of all who wish and have the expertise to harvest its bounty. The medieval Commune sought to retreat inside its walls: the nineteenth century one seeks to range far and wide, to become universal. It has replaced communal privilege with human solidarity.

The medieval commune could ensconce itself within its

walls and, to some extent, cut itself off from its neighbours. Whenever it entered into dealings with other communes, those dealings were most often confined to a treaty in defence of city rights against the *seigneur*, or a solidarity agreement for the mutual protection of commune citizens on long journeys. And when authentic leagues were formed between towns, as in

Lombardy, Spain and Belgium, these leagues being far from homogeneous, and too fragile because of the diversity of privileges, promptly fragmented into isolated groups or succumbed under the onslaught of neighbouring States.

What a difference with the groups that would be formed today! A tiny Commune could not survive a week without

being compelled by circumstance to establish consistent relations with industrial, commercial, and artistic centres, etc., and these centres in turn, would be sensible of the need to throw their gates wide open to inhabitants of neighbouring villages, adjacent communes and distant cities.

Were a given large town to proclaim the Commune

tomorrow, abolish individual ownership within its borders and introduce fully-fledged communism, which is to say, collective enjoyment of social capital, the instruments of labour and the products of the labour performed, and, provided that the town was not surrounded by enemy armies, within days convoys of carts would be pouring into the market place and suppliers

despatching cargoes of raw materials from far-off ports: the products of the city's industry, once the needs of the urban population had been met, would go off to the four corners of the globe in search of buyers: outsiders would flood in, and everyone, peasants, citizens of neighbouring towns, foreigners would carry home tales of the marvellous life of the free city

where everyone was working,
where there were neither poor
nor oppressed any more,
where everybody enjoyed the
fruits of their labour, without
anyone claiming the lion's
share. Isolation need not be
feared: if communists in the
United States have a grievance
in their community, it does not
relate to isolation, but rather to
the intrusion of the
surrounding bourgeois world

into their communal affairs.

The fact that today commerce and trade, overruling the limitations of borders, have also torn down the walls of the ancient cities. They have already established the cohesiveness which was missing in the middle ages. All the inhabited areas of western Europe are so intimately bound up one with another that isolation has become an

impossibility for any of them: there is no village perched so high upon a mountain crest that it does not have its industrial and commercial centre, towards which it gravitates, and with which it can no longer sever its connections.

The development of the big industrial hubs has done more.

Even in our own day, the parochial mentality could

arouse a lot of frictions between two adjacent communes, prevent their allying with one another and even ignite fratricidal strife. But whereas such frictions may indeed preclude direct federation of these two communes, that federation will proceed through the good offices of the larger centres. Today, two tiny adjoining municipalities often have

nothing to bring them really close: what few dealings they have would be more likely to generate friction than establish ties of solidarity. But both already have a shared hub with which they are frequently in contact and without which they cannot survive, and whatever their parish rivalries, they will be compelled to unite through the good offices of the larger town whence they

obtain their provisions or
whither they bring their
produce: each of them will be
part of the same federation, in
order to sustain their dealings
with that higher instance and
in order to cluster about it.

And yet this hub could not
itself acquire an irksome
ascendancy over the
surrounding communes.
Thanks to the infinite variety
of the needs of industry and

commerce, all population centres already have several centres to which they are bound, and as their needs develop, they will form attachments to other centres capable of meeting these new needs. So various are our needs and so rapidly do they sprout that soon one federation will no longer suffice to meet them all. So the Commune will sense a need to

contract other alliances and enter into another federation. Member of one group for the purposes of securing its food requirements, the Commune will have to belong to a second one in order to obtain other items it needs, say, metals, and then a third and fourth group for its cloth and craft goods. Pick up an economic atlas of any country at all, and you will see that economic

frontiers do not exist: the areas where various products are produced and exchanged mutually overlap, interlinking and criss-crossing. Similarly, the federations of communes, if they continue to expand freely, would soon interweave, criss-cross and overlap, thereby forming a compact “one and indivisible” network quite different from these statist combinations which are

merely juxtaposed, just as the rods of the fasces are grouped around the lictor's axe.

Thus, let us repeat, those who come along and tell us that the Communes, once rid of State oversight, are going to clash and destroy one another in internecine warfare, overlook one thing: the intimate bonds already existing between various localities, thanks to the industrial and

commercial hubs, thanks to
the numbers of such hubs,
thanks to unbroken dealings.
They fail to appreciate what
the middle ages were, with
their closed cities and caravans
lumbering slowly along
difficult roads overlooked by
robber-barons;[\[312\]](#) they
overlook the flows of men,
goods, mail, telegrams, ideas
and affections hurtling
between our cities like the

waters of rivers which never run dry; they have no clear picture of the difference between the two eras they seek to compare one with the other.

Also, do we not have the example of history to prove to us that the instinct to federate has already grown into one of mankind's most urgent needs? The State need only fall into disarray some day, for some

reason or another, and the machinery of oppression falter in its operations, and free alliances will sprout all unprompted. Let us remember the spontaneous federations of the armed bourgeoisie during the Great Revolution. Remember the federations that sprang up spontaneously in Spain and salvaged that country's independence when the State was rattled to its very

foundations by Napoleon's conquering armies. As soon as the State is no longer in a position to impose enforced union, union sprouts by itself, in accordance with natural needs. Overthrow the State and the federated society will sprout from its ruins, truly one, truly indivisible, but free and expanding in solidarity by virtue of that very freedom.

But there is something else.

For the medieval bourgeois, the Commune was an isolated State plainly separated from the rest by its borders. For us, the “Commune” is no longer a territorial agglomeration, but is instead a generic term, synonymous with a combination of equals acknowledging neither borders nor walls. The social Commune will very quickly cease to be a clearly defined

whole. Each group from the Commune will of necessity be drawn towards other similar groups from other Communes; they will band together and federate with them through ties at least as solid as those binding them to their fellow townsmen and will constitute a Commune of interests whose members will be scattered across a thousand towns and villages. Such an individual will

only find his needs met when he bands together with other individuals of similar tastes and resident in a hundred other communes.

Even today, free societies are starting to cover the whole vast expanse of human activity. No longer is it just to satisfy his scientific, literary or artistic interests that the man of leisure sets up societies. And it is not just to prosecute

the class struggle that one combines.

One would be hard put to discover a single one of the many and varied manifestations of human activity not already represented by freely constituted societies, and their numbers are forever expanding as they daily intrude into new spheres of activity, even those hitherto

regarded as the State's special preserve. Literature, the arts, the sciences, education, commerce, industry, trade, entertainments, health, museums, long-distance undertakings, polar expeditions, even territorial defences, help for the wounded, defence against aggression and the courts themselves—on every side we see private initiative at work in

the shape of free societies. This is the characteristic *tendency* and feature of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Left unhindered and to itself, and with vast new scope for development, this tendency will serve as the basis for the society of the future. It is through free combinations that the social Commune will be organised and these very same

combinations will tear down walls and frontiers. There will be millions of communes, no longer territorial, but reaching out a hand across rivers, mountain ranges and oceans, to unite individuals scattered around the four corners of the globe and the people into one single family of equals.

[310](#)[] Original translation in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), Daniel Guérin (ed.). (Editor)

[311](#)[] Augustin Thierry (1795–1856) was a French historian of the Middle Ages. (Editor)

[312](#)[] That is, in the medieval context, lords who charged excessive tolls for transport through their lands. (Editor)

From *In Russian and French Prisons*

This extract comes from the last chapter (“Are Prisons Necessary?”) of his 1887 book In Russian and French Prisons. As well as recounting his time as a political prisoner, Kropotkin discusses the counter-productive nature of prison. Here he discusses the way anti-social acts would

be handled in a free society.

If we take into consideration all the influences briefly indicated in the above rapid sketch, we are bound to recognise that all of them, separately and combined together, act in the direction of rendering men who have been detained for several years in prisons less and less adapted for life in society, and that none of them, not a single one,

acts in the direction of raising the intellectual and moral faculties, of lifting man to a higher conception of life and its duties, of rendering him a better, a more human creature than he was.

Prisons do *not* moralise their inmates; they do *not* deter them from crime. And the question arises: What shall we do with those who break, not only the written law—that sad

growth of a sad past—but also those very principles of morality which every man feels in his own heart? That is the question which now preoccupies the best minds of our century.

There was a time when Medicine consisted in administering some empirically discovered drugs. The patients who fell into the hands of the doctor might be killed by his

drugs, or they might rise up notwithstanding them, the doctor had the excuse of doing what all his fellows did; he could not outgrow his contemporaries.

But our century which has boldly taken up so many questions, but faintly forecast by its predecessors, has taken up this question too, and approached it from the other end. Instead of merely curing

diseases, medicine tries now to prevent them, and we all know the immense progress achieved, thanks to the modern view of disease. Hygiene is the best of medicines.

The same has to be done with the great social phenomenon which has been called Crime until now, but will be called Social Disease by our children. Prevention of

the disease is the best of cures
[...]

[...]

There was a custom of old
by which each commune
(clan, *Mark*, *Gemeinde*) was
considered responsible as a
whole for any antisocial act
committed by any of its
members. This old custom has
disappeared like so many good
remnants of the communal
organisation of old. But we are

returning to it, and again, after having passed through a period of the most unbridled individualism, the feeling is growing amongst us that society is responsible for the anti-social deeds committed in its midst. If we have our share of glory in the achievements of the geniuses of our century, we have our part of shame in the deeds of our assassins.

From year to year thousands

of children grow up in the filth—material and moral—of our great cities, completely abandoned amidst a population demoralised by a life from hand to mouth, the incertitude of to-morrow, and a misery of which no former epoch has had even an apprehension. Left to themselves and to the worst influences of the street, receiving but little care from

their parents ground down by a terrible struggle for existence, they hardly know what a happy home is, but they learn from earliest childhood what the vices of our great cities are. They enter life without even knowing a handicraft which might help them to earn their living. The son of a savage learns hunting from his father; his sister learns how to manage the

simple household. The children whose father and mother leave the den they inhabit, early in the morning, in search of any job which may help them to get through the next week, enter life not even with that knowledge. They know no handicraft; their home has been the muddy street, and the teachings they received in the street were of the kind known

by those who have visited the whereabouts of the gin-palaces of the poor, and of the places of amusement of the richer classes.

It is all very well to thunder denunciations about the drunken habits of this class of the population, but if those who denounce them had grown up in the same conditions as the children of the labourer who every

morning conquers by means of his own fists the right of being admitted at the gate of a London dockyard, how many of them would not have become the continual guests of the gin-palaces?—the only palaces with which the rich have endowed the real producers of all riches.

When we see this population growing up in all our big manufacturing centres, we

cannot wonder that our big cities chiefly supply prisons with inmates. I never cease to wonder, on the contrary, that relatively so small a proportion of these children become thieves or highway robbers. I never cease to wonder at the deep-rootedness of social feelings in the humanity of the nineteenth century, at the goodness of heart which still prevails in the dirty streets,

which are the causes that relatively so few of those who grow up in absolute neglect declare open war against our social institutions. These good feelings, this aversion to violence, this resignation which makes them accept their fate without hatred growing in their hearts, are the only real barrier which prevents them from openly breaking all social bonds,—not

the deterring influence of prisons. Stone would not remain upon stone in our modern palaces, were it not for these feelings.

And at the other end of the social scale, money, that is, representative signs of human work, is squandered in unheard-of luxury, very often with no other purpose than to satisfy a stupid vanity. While old and young have no bread,

and are really starving at the very doors of our luxurious shops, these know no limits to their lavish expenditure.

When everything round about us, the shops and the people we see in the streets, the literature we read, the money-worship we meet with every day tends to develop an insatiable thirst for unlimited wealth, a love for sparkish luxury, a tendency towards

spending money foolishly for every avowable and unavowable purpose; when there are whole quarters in our cities each house of which reminds us that man has too often remained a beast, whatever the decorum under which he conceals his bestiality; when the watchword of our civilised world is: “Enrich yourselves! [313] Crush down everything

you meet in your way, by all means short of those which might bring you before a court!" When apart from a few exceptions, all from the landlord down to the artisan are taught every day in a thousand ways that the *beau-ideal* of life is to manage affairs so as to make others work for you; when manual work is so despised that those who perish from want of

bodily exercise prefer to resort to gymnastics, imitating the movements of sawing and digging, instead of sawing wood and hoeing the soil; when hard and blackened hands are considered as a sign of inferiority, and a silk-dress and the knowledge of how to keep servants under strict discipline is a token of superiority; when literature expends its art in maintaining

the worship of richness and treats the “impractical idealist” with contempt, what need is there to talk about inherited criminality when so many factors of our life work in one direction, that of manufacturing beings unsuited for a honest existence, permeated with anti-social feelings!

Let us organise our society so as to assure to everybody

the possibility of regular work for the benefit of the commonwealth, and that means of course a thorough transformation of the present relations between work and capital; let us assure to every child a sound education and instruction, both in manual labour and science, so as to permit him to acquire, during the first twenty years of his life, the knowledge and habits

of earnest work, and we shall be in no more need of dungeons and jails, of judges and hangmen. Man is a result of those conditions in which he has grown up. Let him grow in habits of useful work; let him be brought by his earlier life to consider humanity as one great family, no member of which can be injured without the injury being felt by a wide circle of

his fellows, and ultimately by the whole of society; let him acquire a taste for the highest enjoyments of science and art much more lofty and durable than those given by the satisfaction of lower passions, and we may be sure that we shall not have many breaches of those laws of morality which are an unconscious affirmation of the best conditions for life in society.

Two-thirds of all breaches of law being so called “crimes against property,” these cases will disappear, or be limited to a quite trifling amount, when property, which is now the privilege of the few, shall return to its real source: the community. As to “crimes against persons,” already their numbers are rapidly decreasing, owing to the growth of moral and social

habits which necessarily develop in each society, and can only grow when common interests contribute more and more to tighten the bonds which induce men to live a common life.

Of course, whatever be the economical bases of organisation of society, there will always be in its midst a certain number of beings with passions more strongly

developed and less easily controlled than the rest, and there always will be men whose passions may occasionally lead them to commit acts of an anti-social character. But these passions can receive another direction, and most of them can be rendered almost or quite harmless by the combined efforts of those who surround us. We live now in too much

isolation. Everybody cares only for himself, or his nearest relatives. Egotistic that is, unintelligent individualism in material life has necessarily brought about an individualism as egotistic and as harmful in tile mutual relations of human beings. But we have known in history, and we see still, communities where men are more closely connected together than in our Western

European cities. China is an instance in point. The great “compound family” is there still the basis of the social organisation: the members of the compound family know one another perfectly; they support one another, they help one another, not merely in material life, but also in moral troubles, and the number of “crimes” both against property and persons stands at an

astonishingly low level (in the central provinces, of course, not on the seashore). The Slavonian and Swiss agrarian communes are another instance. Men know one another in these smaller aggregations: they mutually support one another; while in our cities all bonds between the inhabitants have disappeared. The old family, based on a common origin, is

disintegrating. But men cannot live in this isolation, and the elements of new social groups those ties arising between the inhabitants of the same spot having many interests in common, and those of people united by the prosecution of common aims is growing. Their growth can only be accelerated by such changes as would bring about a closer mutual dependency and a

greater equality between the members of our communities.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, there surely will remain a limited number of persons whose anti-social passions, the result of bodily diseases, may still be a danger for the community. Shall humanity send these to the gallows, or lock them up in prisons? Surely it will not resort to this wicked solution of the

difficulty.

There was a time when lunatics, considered as possessed by the devil, were treated in the most abominable manner. Chained in stalls like animals, they were dreaded even by their keepers. To break their chains, to set them free, would have been considered then as a folly. But a man came, Pinel, who dared to take off their chains, and to

offer them brotherly words, brotherly treatment. And those who were looked upon as ready to devour the human being who dared to approach them, gathered round their liberator, and proved that he was right in his belief in the best features of human nature, even in those whose intelligence was darkened by disease. From that time the cause of humanity was won.

The lunatic was no longer treated like a wild beast. Men recognised in him a brother.

The chains disappeared, but asylums, another name for prisons, remained, and within their walls a system as bad as that of the chains grew up by-and-by. But then the peasants of a Belgian village, moved by their simple good sense and kindness of heart, showed the way towards a new departure

which learned students of mental disease did not perceive. They set the lunatics quite free. They took them into their families, offered them a bed in their poor houses, a chair at their plain tables, a place in their ranks to cultivate the soil, a place in their dancing-parties. And the fame spread wide of “miraculous cures” effected by the saint to whose name

the church of Gheel was consecrated. The remedy applied by the peasants was so plain, so old—it was liberty—that the learned people preferred to trace the result to Divine influences instead of taking things as they were. But there was no lack of honest and good-hearted men who understood the force of the treatment invented by the Gheel peasants, advocated it,

and gave all their energies to overcome the inertia of mind, the cowardice, and the indifference of their surroundings.[[314](#)]

Liberty and fraternal care have proved the best cure on our side of the above-mentioned wide borderland “between insanity and crime.” They will prove also the best cure on the other boundary of the same borderland. Progress

is in that direction. All that tends that way will bring us nearer to the solution of the great question which has not ceased to preoccupy human societies since the remotest antiquity, and which cannot be solved by prisons.

[313](#)[] The famous slogan of the French conservative politician François Guizot (1787–1874): “Enrichissez-vous!” (Editor)

[314](#)[] One of them, Dr. Arthur Mitchell, is well known in Scotland. Compare his “Insane in Private Dwellings,”

Edinburgh, 1864; as also “Care and treatment of Insane Poor,” in *Edinb. Med. Journal* for 1868.

Are We Good Enough?

This article from Freedom (June 1888) refutes the notion that people are simply unable to live in freedom. It shows the fallacy of assuming that people cannot be trusted to co-operate while thinking that giving the same flawed individuals power is a good idea.

One of the commonest objections to Communism is, that men are not good enough to live under a Communist state of things. They would not submit to a compulsory Communism, but they are not yet ripe for free, Anarchistic Communism. Centuries of individualistic education have rendered them too egotistic. Slavery, submission to the strong, and work under the

whip of necessity, have rendered them unfit for a society where everybody would be free and know no compulsion except what results from a freely taken engagement towards the others, and their disapproval if he would not fulfil the engagement. Therefore, we are told, some intermediate transition state of society is necessary as a step towards

Communism.

Old words in a new shape; words said and repeated since the first attempt at any reform, political or social, in any human society. Words which we heard before the abolition of slavery; words said twenty and forty centuries ago by those who like too much their own quietness for liking rapid changes, whom boldness of thought frightens, and who

themselves have not suffered enough from the iniquities of the present society to feel the deep necessity of new issues!

Men are not good enough for Communism, but are they good enough for Capitalism? If all men were good-hearted, kind, and just, they would never exploit one another, although possessing the means of doing so. With such men the private ownership of

capital would be no danger. The capitalist would hasten to share his profits with the workers, and the best-remunerated workers with those suffering from occasional causes. If men were provident they would not produce velvet and articles of luxury while food is wanted in cottages: they would not build palaces as long as there are slums.

If men had a deeply developed feeling of equity they would not oppress other men. Politicians would not cheat their electors; Parliament would not be a chattering and cheating box, and Charles Warren's policemen[[315](#)] would refuse to bludgeon the Trafalgar Square talkers and listeners. And if men were gallant, self-respecting, and less egotistic,

even a bad capitalist would not be a danger; the workers would have soon reduced him to the role of a simple comrade-manager. Even a King would not be dangerous, because the people would merely consider him as a fellow unable to do better work, and therefore entrusted with signing some stupid papers sent out to other cranks calling themselves Kings.

But men are not those free-minded, independent, provident, loving, and compassionate fellows which we should like to see them. And precisely, therefore, they must not continue living under the present system which permits them to oppress and exploit one another. Take, for instance, those misery-stricken tailors who paraded last Sunday in the streets, and

suppose that one of them has inherited a hundred pounds from an American uncle. With these hundred pounds he surely will not start a productive association for a dozen of like misery-stricken tailors, and try to improve their condition. He will become a sweater. And, therefore, we say that in a society where men are so bad as this American heir, it is very hard

for him to have misery-stricken tailors around him. As soon as he can he will sweat them; while if these same tailors had a secured living from the Communist stores, none of them would sweat to enrich their ex-comrade, and the young sweater would himself not become the very bad beast he surely will become if he continues to be a sweater.

We are told we are too slavish, too snobbish, to be placed under free institutions, but we say that because we are indeed so slavish we ought not to remain any longer under the present institutions, which favour the development of slavishness. We see that Britons, French, and Americans display the most disgusting slavishness towards Gladstone, Boulanger, or

Gould.[[316](#)] And we conclude that in a humanity already endowed with such slavish instincts it is very bad to have the masses forcibly deprived of higher education, and compelled to live under the present inequality of wealth, education, and knowledge. Higher instruction and equality of conditions would be the only means for destroying the inherited slavish instincts, and

we cannot understand how slavish instincts can be made an argument for maintaining, even for one day longer, inequality of conditions; for refusing equality of instruction to all members of the community.

Our space is limited, but submit to the same analysis any of the aspects of our social life, and you will see that the present capitalist,

authoritarian system is absolutely inappropriate to a society of men so improvident, so rapacious, so egotistic, and so slavish as they are now. Therefore, when we hear men saying that the Anarchists imagine men much better than they really are, we merely wonder how intelligent people can repeat that nonsense. Do we not say continually that the only means of rendering men

less rapacious and egotistic, less ambitious and less slavish at the same time, is to eliminate those conditions which favour the growth of egotism and rapacity, of slavishness and ambition? The only difference between us and those who make the above objection is this: We do not, like them, exaggerate the inferior instincts of the masses, and do not complacently shut

our eyes to the same bad instincts in the upper classes. We maintain that *both* rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority; *both* exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation; while our opponents seem to admit that there is a kind of salt of the earth—the rulers, the employers, the leaders—who, happily enough, prevent those bad men—the ruled, the

exploited, the led—from becoming still worse than they are.

There is the difference, and a very important one. *We* admit the imperfections of human nature, but we make no exception for the rulers. *They* make it, although sometimes unconsciously, and because we make no such exception, they say that we are dreamers, “unpractical

men.”

An old quarrel, that quarrel between the “practical men” and the “unpractical,” the so-called Utopists: a quarrel renewed at each proposed change, and always terminating by the total defeat of those who name themselves practical people.

Many of us must remember the quarrel when it raged in America before the abolition

of slavery. When the full emancipation of the Negroes was advocated, the practical people used to say that if the Negroes were no more compelled to labour by the whips of their owners, they would not work at all, and soon would become a charge upon the community. Thick whips could be prohibited, they said, and the thickness of the whips might be

progressively reduced by law to half-an-inch first and then to a mere trifle of a few tenths of an inch, but some kind of whip must be maintained. And when the abolitionists said—just as we say now—that the enjoyment of the produce of one's labour would be a much more powerful inducement to work than the thickest whip, “Nonsense, my friend,” they were told—just as we are told

now. “You don’t know human nature! Years of slavery have rendered them improvident, lazy and slavish, and human nature cannot be changed in one day. You are imbued, of course, with the best intentions, but you are quite “unpractical.”

Well, for some time the practical men had their own way in elaborating schemes for the gradual emancipation

of Negroes. But, alas!, the schemes proved quite unpractical, and the civil war—the bloodiest on record—broke out. But the war resulted in the abolition of slavery, without any transition period;—and see, none of the terrible consequences foreseen by the practical people followed. The Negroes work, they are industrious and laborious, they are provident

—nay, too provident, indeed—
and the only regret that can be
expressed is, that the scheme
advocated by the left wing of
the unpractical camp—full
equality and land allotments—
was not realised: it would have
saved much trouble now.

About the same time a like
quarrel raged in Russia, and its
cause was this. There were in
Russia 20 million serfs. For
generations past they had been

under the rule, or rather the birch-rod, of their owners. They were flogged for tilling their soil badly, flogged for want of cleanliness in their households, flogged for imperfect weaving of their cloth, flogged for not sooner marrying their boys and girls—flogged for everything. Slavishness, improvidence, were their reputed characteristics.

Now came the Utopians and asked nothing short of the following: Complete liberation of the serfs; immediate abolition of any obligation of the serf towards the lord. More than that: immediate abolition of the lord's jurisdiction and his abandonment of all the affairs upon which he formerly judged, to peasants' tribunals elected by the peasants and

judging, not in accordance with law which they do not know, but with their unwritten customs. Such was the unpractical scheme of the unpractical camp. It was treated as a mere folly by practical people.

But happily enough there was by that time in Russia a good deal of unpracticalness in the air, and it was maintained by the unpracticalness of the

peasants, who revolted with sticks against guns, and refused to submit, notwithstanding the massacres, and thus enforced the unpractical state of mind to such a degree as to permit the unpractical camp to force the Tsar to sign their scheme—still mutilated to some extent. The most practical people hastened to flee away from Russia, that they might not have their

throats cut a few days after the promulgation of that unpractical scheme.

But everything went on quite smoothly, notwithstanding the many blunders still committed by practical people. These slaves who were reputed improvident, selfish brutes, and so on, displayed such good sense, such an organising capacity as to surpass the expectations of even the most

unpractical Utopians, and in three years after the Emancipation, the general physiognomy of the villages had completely changed. The slaves were becoming Men!

The Utopians won the battle. They proved that *they* were the really practical people, and that those who pretended to be practical were imbeciles. And the only regret expressed now by all who know the Russian

peasantry is, that too many concessions were made to those practical imbeciles and narrow-minded egotists: that the advice of the left wing of the unpractical camp was not followed in full.

We cannot give more examples. But we earnestly invite those who like to reason for themselves to study the history of any of the great social changes which have

occurred in humanity from the rise of the Communes to the Reform[[317](#)] and to our modern times. They will see that history is nothing but a struggle between the rulers and the ruled, the oppressors and the oppressed, in which struggle the practical camp always sides with the rulers and the oppressors, while the unpractical camp sides with the oppressed, and they will

see that the struggle always ends in a final defeat of the practical camp after much bloodshed and suffering, due to what they call their “practical good sense.”

If by saying that we are unpractical our opponents mean that we foresee the march of events better than the practical short-sighted cowards, then they are right. But if they mean that they, the

practical people, have a better foresight of events, then we send them to history and ask them to put themselves in accordance with its teachings before making that presumptuous assertion.

[315](#)[] Charles Warren (1840–1927) was a professional soldier who became a Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in London from 1886 to 1888. (Editor)

[316](#)[] William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898) was a British Liberal politician who was Prime Minister four times; General Georges Boulanger (1837–

1891) was a reactionary politician whose militarism and advocacy of revenge on Germany attracted popular support in the 1880s; Jason “Jay” Gould (1836–1892) was a leading American railroad owner and speculator, long vilified as an archetypal robber baron. The ninth richest American in history, during the Great Southwest Railroad Strike of 1886, he hired strikebreakers and proclaimed “I can hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half.” (Editor)

[317](#)[] A reference to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. (Editor)

The Permanence of Society after the Revolution

This article from Freedom (October 1890) discusses the perennial question of how a free society would defend itself from those seeking power or wealth. It effectively shows how anti-social acts would be dealt with in a free society by means of direct

action.

The question frequently arises in discussions: “But if you got an anarchist state of society tomorrow, how would you maintain it? And even if it did continue for a certain time, would not, afterwards, when the first force of revolutionary sentiment and vigilance had spent itself, the old abuses gradually and insidiously come to re-establish themselves, as

they came to be established in the first instance?" The question is worth answering, especially the latter portion of it.

The only way in which a state of Anarchy can be obtained is for each man who is oppressed to act as if he were at liberty, in defiance of all authority to the contrary, and evading or overcoming by force all force by which he is

opposed or pursued. The liberty of each is created by his taking it. We are commanded to be bound to a certain course; we are forbidden to do certain things; but we can each take the liberty of pleasing ourselves, and of helping others to please themselves in accordance with our ideas of what is proper. We shall thereupon be met by force, and our opponents will

seek to deprive us of our physical liberty by which we have rebelled, but we can take the liberty of pitting our own force against theirs. The Revolution is a question of ideas to be acted upon, and of force to enable us to act upon them. Given the will—the ideas—and given also the physical supremacy, and the Revolution is an accomplished fact, whether in a single

household or workshop, or all over the world. In practical fact, the Revolution will enable every person within the revolutionised territory to act in perfect freedom, if he chooses, without having to constantly dread the prevention or the vengeance of an opposing power upholding the former system. Our Revolution differs from any precognised by the political

parties in that it is not a result officially declared after the quelling of the troops officially opposing, but a fact consisting of the aggregate of individual victories over the resistance of every individual who has stood in the way of Liberty. Under these circumstances it is obvious that any visible reprisal could and would be met by a resumption of the same revolutionary action on

the part of the individuals or groups affected, and the maintenance of a state of Anarchy in this manner would be far easier than the gaining of a state of Anarchy by the same methods and in the face of hitherto unshaken organised opposition.

We are therefore only called upon to discuss in detail that part of the subject which deals with the gradual and

temporarily imperceptible
regeneration of the old evils.

As a preliminary reply, let us say that these evils must eventually become perceptible to those affected by them, who cannot fail to become aware that in such or such a quarter they are excluded from the liberty they enjoy elsewhere, that such or such a person is drawing from society all that he can, and monopolising from

others as much as possible. They have it in their power to apply a prompt check by boycotting such a person and refusing to help him with their labour or to willingly supply him with any articles in their possession. They have it in their power to exert pressure upon him to obtain his services. They have it in their power to use force against him. They have these powers

individually as well as collectively. Being either past rebels who have been inspired with the spirit of liberty, or else habituated to enjoy freedom from their infancy, they are hardly likely to rest passive in view of what they feel to be a wrong. The case would resolve itself into one similar to that already considered concerning the immediate maintaining of

Anarchy. And at the worst, it can hardly be supposed that the abuse would grow to be a general system like that which exists at present, without having already provoked a severe struggle. In view of the education of the people, the facilities for communication, it would be wonderful if matters went half so far. The establishment of the existing system was due to causes

which would be no longer operative.

The primitive communism was veiled in dense ignorance, and whilst the direct sources of supply were more numerous in proportion to the population than now, they were also not only less productive, in the absence of the means which later science has brought forth, but less easily taken advantage of than

those of the present time. The natural condition was communistic, but it occurred to the minds of some, eventually, to refuse the reciprocal use of their resources to others (except in the presence of force, when hospitality was surrounded with ceremony), whilst by no means relinquishing their claim to entertainment at the hands of the rest, and even enforcing

the surrender to them of all that they demanded without reference to the needs of those upon whom they claimed.

As a measure of protection against this aggression, tribal property was instituted, being the natural reaction, and through that came militancy. The military system developed that of chieftainship, and from chieftainship sprang on the one hand the State, and on the

other *private* property. From these was developed on the one hand feudalism, and on the other profit-making; then in turn were generated, on the side of feudalism landlordism, and on the side of profit-making mercantilism, followed by industrialism, and all these became merged and unified in modern downright capitalism. The State in the meanwhile modified its character, and

was successively an engine for stealing wealth by commanding the military, by land-owning (feudal supremacy), by commercial speculation, by industrial exploitation, and more recently by humbugging the masses of the people. It has never been anything else but a machine for robbery, except a machine for, in addition, arbitrary suppression of free

thought, speech and action.

The old instinct of Communism had not been sufficiently eradicated by the tradition of property for people to conceive that they were doing any wrong by forcibly appropriating the possessions of another tribe, but it was weakened enough to prevent them from having a due and natural regard for other people in the aggregate, although

individual strangers were still treated with hospitality. The occasion of this was that the few aggressive tribes, secluded from the rest, could plot and send out their predatory bands at leisure to attack the others without being expected, and, depriving the non-aggressive tribes very often of all the accumulated means of subsistence, would force them to regard with suspicion and

jealousy those who were not of themselves; and those would have the best opportunity to survive who were selfish and hoarded away what they could save from the ruin, or what they acquired afterwards from their companions in misfortune, or guarded their hoards by strongholds; and of the rest, those who attached themselves to the neighbourhood of the

strongholds and thus drank in some of the nature and traditions of the fortifiers (for those who were the most selfish, jealous, and suspicious were naturally the first to erect these fortifications), had a better chance to survive in the aggregate than those who did not.

It was easy, therefore, to persuade the people to join with the primitive robbers for

the sake of booty; today, how small a percentage could be tempted by the hope of direct violent plunder, even where there is no dread of punishment and little fear of being successfully opposed—for instance, in Africa, which is even more accessible from the other continents now than a spot a few score miles away was in the days of our progenitors! For one thing, the

idea of plunder is now repugnant to the public mind; again, the difficulties in the way, though far less than what our forefathers had to encounter in their thieving expeditions, are repellent, both because of the greater ease with which all but the most oppressed can obtain a bare sufficiency for the ordinary needs of life, and by reason of a change in the physical

culture and constitution of the people generally.

The conditions are, therefore, so different now that it is practically impossible to rationally conceive of a repetition of the developments which have led to the existing condition of society. If any evils do spring up, to become in time a tyrannical system, their nature must be wholly distinct from anything that we

can at present conceive of. The comparatively dense population of the earth, almost world-wide communication as a matter of habitual occurrence everywhere, are in themselves apparently insuperable obstacles to the process by which property and rule came previously into existence.

Furthermore, we have it for an acquired fact that the

inspiration of Liberty causes not only, like every other common cause, a development of fraternity and solidarity amongst its adherents, but a modification of the mental inclinations, so that every true Anarchist feels it against his own nature to knowingly oppress any other person or interfere with anyone's freedom of action; and it is, generally speaking, quite as

impossible for him to do so as for a young man to avoid being attracted by the opposite sex, or for a mother to delight in torturing her child. We have every reason to believe that this impulse, awakened with a greater intensity than the crudely selfish ones mentioned as having arisen in the course of evolution, will be transmitted, like them, by heredity—quite as readily and

to a greater extent—and, being beneficial, will be more persistent than they have been.

We see no reason, therefore, to suspect that either the old state of things or any other that is similarly injurious will arise when once the institutions that now oppress humanity are made a clean sweep of, but, on the contrary we see reason to believe that the accomplishment of the

Revolution will mark the dawn of a new epoch in human progress. Even if it were not so, the benefit of those who succeed in gaining the victory for freedom, and of some generations after them, would be worth striving for. We cannot by ordinance regulate the condition of posterity; our descendants must see to that for themselves. But if we each determine to ourselves be free

and win our own freedom,
history and science hint to us
that we need in no wise lack
the additional incentive that we
are thereby building up
freedom and welfare for those
who shall follow us.

The Wage System

This pamphlet presents Kropotkin's powerful critique of payment according to labour, or the wages system. It is still the best argument for (libertarian) communism against those schemes, whether anarchist (collectivism, mutualism) or authoritarian socialist, which link consumption to work done. This pamphlet was also

*included as a chapter of The
Conquest of Bread.*

I

Representative Government and Wages

In their plan for the reconstruction of society, the Collectivists commit, in our opinion, a double error. Whilst speaking of the abolition of the rule of capital, they wish, nevertheless, to maintain two

institutions which form the very basis of that rule, namely, representative government and the wage system.

As for representative government, it remains absolutely incomprehensible to us how intelligent men (and they are not wanting amongst the Collectivists) can continue to be the partisans of national and municipal parliaments, after all the lessons on this

subject bestowed on us by history, whether in England or in France, in Germany, Switzerland or the United States. Whilst parliamentary rule is seen to be everywhere falling to pieces; whilst its principles in themselves—and no longer merely their applications—are being criticised in every direction, how can intelligent men calling themselves Revolutionary

Socialists, seek to maintain a system already condemned to death?

Representative government is a system which was elaborated by the middle class to make head against royalty and, at the same time, to maintain and augment their domination of the workers. It is the characteristic form of middle-class rule. But even its most ardent admirers have

never seriously contended that a parliament or municipal body does actually represent a nation or a city; the more intelligent are aware that this is impossible. By upholding parliamentary rule the middle class have been simply seeking to oppose a dam between themselves and royalty, or between themselves and the territorial aristocracy, without giving liberty to the people. It

is moreover plain that, as the people become conscious of their interests, and as the variety of those interests increases, the system becomes unworkable. And this is why the democrats of all countries are seeking for different palliatives or correctives and cannot find them. They are trying the *Referendum*, and discovering that it is worthless; they prate of proportional

representation, of the
representation of minorities,
and other parliamentary
utopias. In a word, they are
striving to discover the
undiscoverable, that is to say,
a method of delegation which
shall represent the myriad
varied interests of the nation,
but they are being forced to
recognise that they are upon a
false track, and confidence in
government by delegation is

passing away.

It is only the Social Democrats and Collectivists who are not losing this confidence, who are attempting to maintain so-called national representation, and this is what we cannot understand.

If our Anarchist principles do not suit them, if they think them inapplicable, they ought, at least, as it seems to us, to

try to discover what other system of organisation could well correspond to a society without capitalists or landlords. But to take the middle class system—a system already in its decadence, a vicious system if ever there was one—and to proclaim this system (with a few innocent corrections, such as the imperative mandate, or the *Referendum*, the uselessness

of which has been demonstrated already) good for a society that has passed through the Social Revolution, is what seems to us absolutely incomprehensible, unless under the name of Social Revolution they understand something very different from Revolution, some petty botching of existing, middle-class rule.

The same with regard to the

wage system. After having proclaimed the abolition of private property and the possession in common of the instruments of production, how can they sanction the maintenance of the wage system under any form? And yet this is what the Collectivists are doing when they praise the efficiency of labour notes.

That the English Socialists of

the early part of this century should invent labour notes is comprehensible. They were simply trying to reconcile Capital and Labour. They repudiated all ideas of laying violent hands upon the property of the capitalists. They were so little of revolutionaries that they declared themselves ready to submit even to imperial rule, if that rule would favour their

co-operative societies. They remained middle class men at bottom, if charitable ones, and this is why (Engels has said so in his preface to the Communist Manifesto of 1848) the Socialists of that period were to be found amongst the middle class, whilst the advanced workmen were Communists.

If later Proudhon took up this same idea, that again is

easy to understand. What was he seeking in his Mutualist system, if not to render capital less offensive, despite the maintenance of private property, which he detested to the bottom of his heart, but which he believed necessary to guarantee the individual against the State? Further, if economists, belonging more or less to the middle class, also admit labour notes, it is not

surprising. It matters little to them whether the worker be paid in labour notes or in coin stamped with the effigy of king or republic. They want to save, in the coming overthrow, private property in inhabited houses, the soil, the mills; or, at least, in inhabited houses and the capital necessary for the production of manufactures. And to maintain this property, labour notes will

answer very well.

If the labour note can be exchanged for jewels and carriages, the owner of house property will willingly accept it as rent. And as long as the inhabited house, the field and the mill belong to individual owners, so long will it be requisite to pay them in some way before they will allow you to work in their fields or their mills, or to lodge in their

houses. And it will also be requisite to pay wages to the worker, either in gold or in paper money or in labour notes exchangeable for all sorts of commodities.

But how can this new form of wages, the labour note, be sanctioned by those who admit that houses, fields, mills are no longer private property, that they belong to the commune or the nation?

II

The Collectivist Wage System

Let us examine more closely this system for the remuneration of labour, as set forth by the English, French, German and Italian Collectivists.[\[318\]](#)

It comes very much to this: Every one works, be it in fields, in factories, in schools, in hospitals or what not. The working day is regulated by

the State, to which belongs the soil, factories, means of communication and all the rest. Each worker, having done a day's work, receives a labour note, stamped, let us say, with these words: *eight hours of labour*. With this note he can procure any sort of goods in the shops of the State or the various corporations. The note is divisible in such a way that one hour's worth of

meat, ten minutes' worth of matches, or half-an-hour's worth of tobacco can be purchased. Instead of saying: "two pennyworth of soap," after the Collectivist Revolution they will say: "five minutes' worth of soap."

Most Collectivists, faithful to the distinction established by the middle-class economists (and Marx also) between *qualified* (skilled) and *simple*

(unskilled) labour, tell us that qualified or professional toil should be paid a certain number of times more than simple toil.[[319](#)] Thus, one hour of the doctor's work should be considered as equivalent to two or three hours of the work of the nurse, or three hours of that of the navy. "Professional or qualified labour will be a multiple of simple labour,"

says the Collectivist Grönlund, because this sort of labour demands a longer or shorter apprenticeship.[[320](#)]

Other Collectivists, the French Marxists for example, do not make this distinction. They proclaim “equality of wages.” The doctor, the schoolmaster and the professor will be paid (in labour notes) at the same rate as the navy. Eight hours spent

in walking the hospitals will be worth the same as eight hours spent in navvies' work or in the mine or the factory.

Some make a further concession; they admit that disagreeable, or unhealthy labour, such as that in the sewers, should be paid at a higher rate than work which is agreeable. One hour of service in the sewers may count, they say, for two hours of the

labour of the professor. Let us add that certain Collectivists advocate the wholesale remuneration of trade societies. Thus, one society may say: "Here are a hundred tons of steel. To produce them one hundred workers of our society have taken ten days; as our day consisted of eight hours, that makes eight thousand hours of labour for one hundred tons of steel;

eighty hours a ton.” Upon which the State will pay them eight thousand labour notes of one hour each, and these eight thousand notes will be distributed amongst the fellow-workers in the foundry as seems best to themselves.

Or again, if one hundred miners have spent twenty days in hewing eight thousand tons of coal, the coal will be worth two hours a ton, and the

sixteen thousand labour notes for one hour each received by the miners' union will be divided amongst them as they think fair.

If there be disputes—if the miners protest and say that a ton of steel ought to cost six hours of labour instead of eight, or if the professor rate his day twice as high as the nurse—then the State must step in and regulate their

differences.

Such, in a few words, is the organisation which the Collectivists desire to see arising from the Social Revolution. As we have seen, their principles are: collective property in the instruments of labour and remuneration of each worker according to the time spent in productive toil, taking into account the productiveness of his work. As

for their political system, it would be parliamentary rule, ameliorated by the change of men in power, the imperative mandate, and the *referendum*—i.e., the general vote of Yes or No upon questions submitted to the popular decision.

Now, we must at once say that this system seems to us absolutely incapable of realisation.

The Collectivists begin by proclaiming a revolutionary principle—the abolition of private property—and, as soon as proclaimed, they deny it by maintaining an organisation of production and consumption springing from private property.

They proclaim a revolutionary principle and ignore the consequences it must necessarily bring about.

They forget that the very fact of abolishing individual property in the instruments of production (land, factories, means of communication, capital) must cause society to set out in a new direction; that it must change production from top to bottom, change not only its methods but its ends; that all the everyday relations between individuals must be modified as soon as

land, machinery and the rest are considered as common possessions.

They say: “No private property,” and immediately they hasten to maintain private property in its everyday forms. “For productive purposes you are a commune,” they say; “the fields, the tools, the machinery, all that has been made up to this day—manufactures, railways,

wharves, mines to all of you in common. Not the slightest distinction will be made concerning the share of each one in this collective property.

“But from tomorrow you are minutely to discuss the part that each one of you is to take in making the new machines, digging the new mines. From tomorrow you are to endeavour to weigh exactly the portion which will accrue

to each one from the new produce. You are to count your minutes of work, you are to be on the watch lest one moment of your neighbour's toil may purchase more than yours.

“You are to calculate your hours and your minutes of labour, and since the hour measures nothing,—since in one factory a workman can watch four looms at once,

whilst in another he only watches two, you are to weigh the muscular force, the energy of brain, the energy of nerve expended. You are scrupulously to count up the years of apprenticeship, that you may value precisely the share of each one amongst you in the production of the future. And all this, after you have declared that you leave entirely out of your reckoning

the share he has taken in the past.”

Well, it is evident to us that a society cannot organise itself upon two absolutely opposing principles, two principles which contradict one another at every step. And the nation or the commune which should give to itself such an organisation would be forced either to return to private property or else to transform

itself immediately into a communist society.

III

Unequal Remuneration

We have said that most Collectivist writers demand that in Socialist society remuneration should be based upon a distinction between qualified or professional labour and simple labour. They assert that an hour of the engineer's,

the architect's or the doctor's work should be counted as two or three hours' work from the blacksmith, the mason or the nurse. And the same distinction, say they, ought to be established between workers whose trades require a longer or shorter apprenticeship and those who are mere day labourers.

Yes, but to establish this distinction is to maintain all the

inequalities of our existing society. It is to trace out beforehand a demarcation between the worker and those who claim to rule him. It is still to divide society into two clearly defined classes: an aristocracy of knowledge above, a horny-handed democracy below; one class devoted to the service of the other; one class toiling with its hands to nourish and clothe

the other, whilst that other profits by its leisure to learn how to dominate those who toil for it.

This is to take the distinctive features of middle-class society and sanction them by a social revolution. It is to erect into a principle an abuse which today is condemned in the society that is breaking up.

We know very well what will be said in answer. We shall be

told about “Scientific Socialism.” The middle-class economists, and Marx, too, will be cited to prove that there a good reason for a scale of wages, for the “labour force” of the engineer costs society more than the “labour force” of the navy. And, indeed, have not the economists striven to prove that, if the engineer is paid twenty times more than the

navvy, it is because the cost necessary to produce an engineer is more considerable than that necessary to produce a navvy? And has not Marx maintained that the like distinction between various sorts of manual labour is of equal logical necessity? He could come to no other conclusion, since he took up Ricardo's theory of value and insisted that products

exchange in proportion to the quantity of the work socially necessary to produce them.

But we know also how much of all this to believe. We know that if the engineer, the scientist and the doctor are paid today ten or a hundred times more than the labourer, and the weaver earns three times as much as the toiler in the fields and ten times as much as a match girl, it is not

because what they receive is in proportion to their various costs of production. Rather it is in proportion to the extent of monopoly in education and in industry. The engineer, the scientist and the doctor simply draw their profits from their own sort of capital—their degree, their certificates—just as the manufacturer draws a profit from a mill, or as a nobleman used to do from his

birth and title.

When the employer pays the engineer twenty times more than the workman, he makes this very simple calculation: if an engineer can save him £4,000 a year in cost of production, he will pay him £800 a year to do it. And if he sees a foreman is a clever sweater and can save him £400 in handicraft, he at once offers him £80 or £90 a year.

He expends £100 where he counts upon gaining £1,000; that is the essence of the capitalist system. And the like holds good of the differences in various trades.

Where then is the sense of talking of the cost of production of labour force, and saying that a student, who passes a merry youth at the University, has a *right* to ten times higher wages than the

son of a miner who has pined in a pit since he was eleven? Or that a weaver has a *right* to wages three or four times higher than those of an agricultural labourer? The expenditure needed to produce a weaver is not four times as great as the necessary cost of producing a field worker. The weaver simply benefits by the advantageous position which industry enjoys

in Europe as compared with parts of the world where at present there is no industrial development.

No one has ever estimated the real cost of production of labour force. And if an idler costs society much more than an honest workman, it still remains to be known if, when all is told (infant mortality amongst the workers, the ravages of anaemia, the

premature deaths) a sturdy day labourer does not cost society more than an artisan.

Are we to be told that, for example, the 1s. [one shilling—i.e., one twentieth of a pound] a day of a London workwoman and the 3d. [three pennies—i.e., one quarter of one shilling] a day of the Auvergne peasant who blinds herself over lace-making represent the cost of

production of these women?
We are perfectly aware that
they often work for even less,
but we know also that they do
it entirely because, thanks to
our splendid social
organisation, they would die of
hunger without these
ridiculous wages.

The existing scale of wages
seems to us a highly complex
product of taxation,
government interference,

monopoly and capitalistic greed—in a word, of the State and the capitalist system. In our opinion, all the theories made by economists about the scale of wages have been invented after the event to justify existing injustices. It is needless to regard them.

We are, however, certain to be informed that the Collectivist wage scale will, at all events, be an improvement.

“You must admit,” we shall be told, “that it will, at least, be better to have a class of workers paid at twice or three times the ordinary rate than to have Rothschilds, who put into their pockets in one day more than a workman can in a year. It will be a step towards equality.”

To us it seems a step away from it. To introduce into a Socialist society the distinction

between ordinary and professional labour would be to sanction by the Revolution and erect into a principle a brutal fact, to which we merely submit today, considering it all the while as unjust. It would be acting after the manner of those gentlemen of the Fourth of August, 1789, who proclaimed, in high sounding phraseology, the abolition of feudal rights, and

on the Eighth of August sanctioned those very rights by imposing upon the peasants the dues by which they were to be redeemed from the nobles. Or again, like the Russian government at the time of the emancipation of the serfs when it proclaimed that the land henceforth belonged to the nobility, whereas previously it was considered an abuse that the

land which belonged to the peasants should be bought and sold by private persons.

Or, to take a better known example, when the Commune of 1871 decided to pay the members of the Communal Council 12s. 6d. a day, whilst the National Guards on the rampart had only 1s. 3d., certain persons applauded this decision as an act of grand democratic equality. But, in

reality, the Commune did nothing thereby but sanction the ancient inequality between officials and soldiers, governors and governed. For an Opportunist parliament such a decision might have seemed splendid, but for the Commune it was a negation of its own principles. The Commune was false to its own revolutionary principle, and by that very fact condemned it.

In the present state of society, when we see Cabinet Ministers paying themselves thousands a year, whilst the workman has to content himself with less than a hundred; when we see the foreman paid twice or three times as much as the ordinary hand, and when amongst workers themselves there are all sorts of gradations from 7s. or 8s. a day down to the 3d. of

the seamstress, we disapprove the large salary of the minister, and also the difference between the artisan's eight-shillings and the seamstress's three-pence. And we say, "Let us have done with privileges of education as well as of birth." We are Anarchists just because such privileges disgust us.

How can we then raise these privileges into a principle?

How can we proclaim that privileges of education are to be the basis of an equal society, without striking a blow at that very society? What is submitted today, will be submitted to no longer in society based on equality. The general above the soldier, the rich engineer above the workman, the doctor above the nurse, already disgust us. Can we suffer them in a

society which starts by proclaiming equality?

Evidently not. The popular conscience, inspired by the idea of equality, will revolt against such an injustice, it will not tolerate it. It is not worth while to make the attempt.

That is why certain Collectivists, understanding the impossibility of maintaining a scale of wages in a society inspired by the influences the

Revolution, zealously advocate equality in wages. But they only stumble against fresh difficulties, and their equality of wages becomes a Utopia as incapable of realisation as the wage scale of the others. A society that has seized upon all social wealth, and has plainly announced that all have a right to this wealth, whatever may be the part they have taken in creating it in the past, will be

obliged to give up all idea of wages, either in money or in labour notes.

IV

Equal Wages *versus* Communism

“To each according to his deeds,” say the Collectivists, or rather according to his share of service rendered to society. And this is the principle they recommend as

the basis of economic organisation, after the Revolution shall have made all the instruments of labour and all that is necessary for production common property!

Well, if the Social Revolution should be so unfortunate as to proclaim this principle, it would be stemming the tide of human progress, it would be leaving unsolved the huge social problem cast by past

centuries upon our shoulders.

It is true that in such a society as ours, where the more a man works the less he is paid, this principle may seem, at first sight, all aspiration towards justice. But at bottom, it is but the consecration of past injustice. It is with this principle that the wage system started, to end where it is today, in crying inequalities and all the

abominations of the present state of things. And it has ended thus because, from the day on which society began to value services in money or any other sort of wages, from the day on which it was said that each should have only what he could succeed in getting paid for his work, the whole history of Capitalism (the State aiding therein) was written beforehand; its germ was

enclosed in this principle.

Must we then return to our point of departure and pass once more through the same process of capitalist evolution? These theorists seem to desire it, but happily it is impossible; the Revolution will be Communistic, or it will be drowned in blood, and must be begun all over again.

Service rendered to society, be it labour in factory or field,

or moral service, *cannot* be valued in monetary units. There cannot be an exact measure of its value, either of what has been improperly called its “value in exchange” or of its value in use. If we see two individuals, both working for years, for five hours daily, for the community, at two different occupations equally pleasing to them, we can say that, taken all in all, their

labours are roughly equivalent. But their work could not be broken up into fractions, so that the product of each day, each hour or each minute of the labour of one should be worth the produce of each minute and each hour of that of the other.

Broadly speaking, we can say that a man who during his whole life deprives himself of leisure for ten hours daily has

given much more to society than he who has deprived himself of but five hours a day, or has not deprived himself of any leisure at all. But we cannot take what one man has done during any two hours and say that this produce is worth exactly twice as much as the produce of one hour's work from another individual, and reward each proportionately. To do this

would be to ignore all that is complex in the industry, the agriculture, the entire life of society as it is; it would be to ignore the extent to which all individual work is the outcome of the former and present labours of society as a whole. It would be to fancy oneself in the Stone Age, when we are living in the Age of Steel.

Go into a coal mine and see that man stationed at the huge

machine that hoists and lowers the cage. In his hand, he holds a lever whereby to check or reverse the action of the machinery. He lowers the handle, and in a second, the cage changes the direction of its giddy rush up or down the shaft. His eyes are attentively fixed upon an indicator in front of him, which shows exactly the point the cage has reached; no sooner does it

touch the given level than, at his gentlest pressure, it stops dead short, not a foot above or below the required place. And scarcely are the full trucks discharged or the empties loaded before, at a touch to the handle, the cage is again swinging up or down the shaft.

For eight or ten hours at a time he thus concentrates his attention. Let his brain relax but for an instant, and the cage

would fly up and shatter the wheels, break the rope, crush the men, bring all the work of the mine to a stand-still. Let him lose three seconds upon each reverse of the lever and, in a mine with all the modern improvements, the output will be reduced by from twenty to fifty tons a day.

Well, is it he who renders the greatest service in the mine? Or is it, perhaps, that

boy who rings from below the signal for the mounting of the cage? Or is it the miner who risks his life every moment in the depths of the mine and will end one day by being killed by fire-damp? Or, again, the engineer who would lose the coal seam and set men hewing bare rock, if he merely made a mistake in the addition of his calculations? Or, finally, is it the owner, who has put all his

patrimony into the concern, and who perhaps has said, in opposition to all previous anticipations: “Dig there, you will find excellent coal”?

All the workers engaged in the mine contribute to the raising of coal in proportion to their strength, their energy, their knowledge their intelligence and their skill. And we can say that all have the right to *live*, to satisfy their

needs, and even gratify their whims, after the more imperious needs of every one are satisfied. But how can we exactly value what they have each done?

Further, is the coal that they have extracted entirely the result of *their* work? Is it not also the outcome of the work of the men who constructed the railway leading to the mine, and the roads branching

off on all sides from the stations? And what of the work of those who have tilled and sown the fields which supply the miners with food, smelted the iron, cut the wood in the forest, made the machines which will consume the coal, and so on?

No hard and fast line can be drawn between the work of one and the work of another. To measure them by results

leads to absurdity. To divide them into fractions and measure them by hours of labour leads to absurdity also. One course remains: not to measure them at all, but to recognise the right of all who take part in productive labour first of all to live, and then to enjoy the comforts of life.

Take any other branch of human activity, take our existence as a whole, and say

which of us can claim the highest reward for his deeds?

The doctor who has divined the disease or the nurse who has assured its cure by her sanitary cares? The inventor of the first steam engine or the boy who one day, tired of pulling the cord which formerly served to open the valve admitting the steam beneath the piston, tied his cord to the lever of the

machine, and went to play with his companions, without imagining that he had invented the mechanism essential to all modern machinery—the automatic valve? The inventor of the locomotive or that Newcastle workman who suggested that wooden sleepers should take the place of the stones which were formerly put under the rails and threw trains off the line by

their want of elasticity? The driver of the locomotive or the signalman who stops the train or opens the way for it? To whom do we owe the trans-Atlantic cable? To the engineer who persisted in declaring that the cable would transmit telegrams, whilst the learned electricians declared that it was impossible? To Maury, the scientist, who advised the disuse of thick cables and the

substitution of one no bigger than a walking stick?[[321](#)] Or, after all, is it to those volunteers, from no one knows where, who spent day and night on the deck of the *Great Eastern*, minutely examining every yard of cable and taking out the nails that the shareholders of the maritime companies had stupidly caused to be driven through the isolating coat of the cable to

render it useless?

And, in a still wider field, the vast tract of human life, with its joys, its sorrows, and its varied incidents, cannot each of us mention some one who, during his life, has rendered him some service so great, so important, that if it were proposed to value it in money, he would be filled with indignation? This service may have been a word, nothing but

a word in season, or it may have been months or years of devotion. Are you going to estimate these, the most important of all services, in labour notes?

“The deeds of each”! But human societies could not live for two successive generations, they would disappear in fifty years, if each one did not give infinitely more than will be returned to him in

money, in “notes” or in civic rewards. It would be the extinction of the race if the mother did not expend her life to preserve her children, if every man did not give some things without counting the cost, if human beings did not give most where they look for no reward.

If middle-class society is going to ruin; if we are today in a blind alley from which

there is no escape without applying axe and torch to the institutions of the past, that is just because we have calculated too much. It is just because we have allowed ourselves to be drawn into giving that we may receive; because we have desired to make society into a commercial company based upon debit and credit.

Moreover, the Collectivists

know it. They vaguely comprehend that a society cannot exist if it logically carries out the principle, “To each according to his deeds.” They suspect that the needs (we are not speaking of the whims) of the individual do not always correspond to his deeds. Accordingly, [César] De Paepe tells us:

“This eminently individualistic principle will be

tempered by social intervention for the purpose of the education of children and young people (including their maintenance and nurture) and by social organisations for the assistance of the sick and infirm, asylums for aged workers, etc.”

Even Collectivists suspect that a man of forty, the father of three children, has greater needs than a youth of twenty.

They suspect that a woman who is suckling her child and spends sleepless nights by its cot, cannot get through so much work as a man who has enjoyed tranquil slumber.

They seem to understand that a man or woman worn out by having, perhaps, worked over-hard for society in general may find themselves incapable of performing so many “deeds” as those who

take their hours of labour quietly and pocket their “notes” in the privileged offices of State statisticians.

And they hasten to *temper* their principle. Oh, certainly, they say, society will feed and bring up its children. Oh, certainly it will assist the old and infirm. Oh, certainly *needs* not *deeds* will be the measure of the cost which society will impose on itself to

temper the principle of deeds.

What, Charity? Yes, our old friend, “Christian Charity,” organised by the State.

Improve the foundling hospital, organise insurance against age and sickness, and the principle of deeds will be “tempered.” “Wound that they may heal,” they can get no further.

Thus, then, after having forsworn Communism, after

having sneered at their ease at the formula, “To each according to his needs,” is it not obvious that they, the great economists, also perceive that they have forgotten something, i.e., the needs of the producers? And thereupon they hasten to recognise these needs. Only it is to be the State by which they are to be estimated, it is to be the State which will undertake to find

out if needs are disproportionate to deeds.

It is to be the State that will give alms to him who is willing to recognise his inferiority. From thence to the Poor Law and the Workhouse is but a stone's throw.

There is but a stone's throw, for even this stepmother of a society against which we are in revolt has found it necessary to temper its individualistic

principle. It, too, has had to make concessions in a Communistic sense, and in this same form of charity.

It also distributes halfpenny dinners to prevent the pillage of its shops. It also builds hospitals, often bad enough, but sometimes splendid, to prevent the ravages of contagious disease. It also, after having paid for nothing but the hours of labour,

receives the children of those whom it has itself reduced to the extremity of distress. It also takes account of needs—as a charity.

Poverty, the existence of the poor, was the first cause of riches. This it was which created the earliest capitalist. For, before the surplus value, about which people are so fond of talking, could begin to be accumulated, it was

necessary that there should be poverty-stricken wretches who would consent to sell their labour force rather than die of hunger. It is poverty that has made the rich. And if poverty had advanced by such rapid strides by the end of the Middle Ages, it was chiefly because the invasions and wars, the creation of States and the development of their authority, the wealth gained by

exploitation in the East and many other causes of a like nature, broke the bonds which once united agrarian and urban communities, and led them, in place of the solidarity which they once practised, to adopt the principle of the wage-system. Is this principle to be the outcome of the Revolution? Dare we dignify by the name of a Social Revolution that name so dear

to the hungry, the suffering
and the oppressed—the
triumph of such a principle as
this?

It cannot be so. For, on the
day when ancient institutions
splinter into fragments before
the axe of the proletariat,
voices will be heard shouting:
Bread for all! Lodging for all!
Right for all to the comforts of
life!

And these voices will be

heeded. The people will say to themselves: Let us begin by satisfying our thirst for the life, the joy, the liberty we have never known. And when all have tasted happiness, we will set to work; the work of demolishing the last vestiges of middle-class rule, with its account-book morality, its philosophy of debit and credit, its institutions of mine and thine. “While we throw down

we shall be building,” as Proudhon said; we shall build in the name of Communism and of Anarchy.[[322](#)]

[318](#)[] The Spanish Anarchists, who continue to call themselves Collectivists, understand by this term common possession of the instruments of labour and “liberty for each group to share the produce of labour as they think fit”; on Communist principles or in any other way.

[319](#)[] Kropotkin added the following note to this chapter of the Russian edition of *The Conquest of Bread* published in 1922: “A number of German Social Democrats have

objected to this sentence, citing a long note of Marx at the end of Chapter 6 of *Das Kapital*. In this note, however, Marx merely says that, in practice, the difference between complex and simple labour is often not fundamental. This in no way refutes the theory developed earlier in Chapter 6 or the remarks about Collectivism in Chapter 1, but merely indicates that in practice the distinction is often arbitrary. Marx has been understood this way not only by me but by many of his followers.”
(Editor)

[320](#)[] Laurence Grönlund (1846–1899) was born in Denmark before moving to the United States in 1867.

Originally a lawyer, he gave up the practice of law to write and lecture on socialism and was closely connected with the Socialist Labor Party. (Editor)

[321](#)[] Matthew Fontaine Maury (1806–1873) was an American oceanographer and cartographer whose wind charts, published in 1848, established the first “sea lanes.” He took soundings of the Atlantic Ocean in preparation for the laying of the first transAtlantic cable. His *Physical Geography of the Sea* (1855) was the first comprehensive book on oceanography to be published. (Editor)

[322](#)[] Kropotkin is referencing the motto

(*Destruam et ædificabo*) placed by Proudhon on title page of his 1846 work *System of Economic Contradictions*. He added the following note to this chapter of the Russian edition of *The Conquest of Bread* published in 1922: “The slogan ‘in demolishing we shall build’ Proudhon took from the *Pentateuch* of Moses. Now, when we see from experience how difficult it is to ‘build’ without extremely careful consideration beforehand, based on the study of social life, of *what* and *how* we want to build—we must reject this slogan of the alleged creator and master of nature and declare: ‘in building we shall

demolish’.” (Editor)

Communism And Anarchy

This article gives some indication of how a communist-anarchist system would function. Originally a report presented to an Anarchist Congress held in Paris in 1900, it was published in Les Temps Nouveaux later that year, before appearing in Freedom

(July and August 1901).

I

The importance of this question need hardly be insisted upon. Many Anarchists and thinkers in general, whilst recognising the immense advantages which Communism may offer to society, yet consider this form of social organisation a danger to the liberty and free

development of the individual. This danger is also recognised by many Communists, and, taken as a whole, the question is merged in that other vast problem which our century has laid bare to its fullest extent: the relation of the individual to society.

The problem became obscured in various ways. When speaking of Communism, most people

think of the more or less
Christian and monastic and
always authoritarian
Communism advocated in the
first half of this [the 19th]
century and practised in
certain communities. These
communities took the family
as a model and tried to
constitute “the great
Communist family,” to
“reform man,” for which
purpose, in addition to

working in common, they impose the living closely together like a family, separation from present civilisation, isolation, the interference of “brothers” and “sisters” with the entire private life of each member.

In addition to this, the difference was not sufficiently noted as between isolated communities, founded on various occasions during the

last three or four centuries, and the numerous federated communes which are likely to spring up in a society about to inaugurate the social revolution.

Certain phases of the subject thus require to be considered separately:

- Production and consumption in common;
- Domestic life in common (cohabitation)—is it

necessary to arrange it after the model of the present family?

- The isolated communities of our times;
- The federated communes of the future.
- And, in conclusion, does Communism necessarily lessen individuality? In other words: the Individual in a Communist society.

An immense movement of ideas took place during this century under the name of Socialism in general, beginning with Babeuf, St. Simon, Fourier, Robert Owen and Proudhon who formulated the predominating currents of Socialism, and continued by their numerous successors (French) Considérant, Pierre Leroux, Louis Blanc; (German) Marx, Engels;

(Russian) Chernyshevsky, Bakunin; etc. who worked either at popularising the ideas of the founders of modern Socialism or at establishing them on a scientific basis.

These ideas, on taking precise shape, gave birth to two principal currents: Authoritarian Communism and Anarchist Communism; also to a number of intermediary schools bent on finding a way

between, such as State Capitalism, Collectivism, Co-operation; among the working masses they created a formidable workers' movement which strives to organise the whole mass of the workers by trades for the struggle against Capital, and which becomes more international with the frequent intercourse between workers of different nationalities.

Three essential points were gained by this immense movement of ideas and of action, and these have already widely penetrated the public conscience; they are:

- The abolition of the wage system, the modern form of ancient serfdom.
- The abolition of individual property in the means of production.
- The emancipation of the

individual and of society from the political machinery, the State, which helps to maintain economic slavery.

On these three points all are agreed, and even those who advocate “labour notes” or who, like [Paul] Brousse, wish all “to be functionaries,” that is, employees of the State or the commune, admit that if they advocate either of these

proposals it is only because they do not see an immediate possibility for Communism. They accept this compromise as an expedient, but their aim always remains Communism. And, as to the State, even the bitterest partisans of the State, of authority, even of dictatorship, recognise that with the disappearance of the *classes* of today the State will also cease to exist.

Hence we may say without exaggerating the importance of *our* section of the Socialist movement—the Anarchist section—that in spite of all differences between the various sections of Socialism (which differences are, before all, based upon the more or less revolutionary character of the means of action of each section), we may affirm that all sections, by the voice of

their thinkers, recognise the evolution towards Free Communism as the aim of Socialist evolution. All the rest, as they themselves confess, are only stepping-stones towards this end.

It would be idle to discuss these stepping-stones without an examination of the *tendencies* of development of modern society.

Of these different tendencies

two, before all, merit our attention. One is the increasing difficulty of determining the share of each individual in modern production. Industry and agriculture have become so complicated, so riveted together, all industries are so dependent one upon the other that payment to the producer by results becomes impossible. The more industry is developed, the more we see

payment by piece replaced by wages. Wages, on the other hand, become more equal. The division of modern bourgeois society in classes certainly remains and there is a whole class of bourgeois who earn the more, the less work they do. The working class itself is divided into four great divisions: women; agricultural labourers; unskilled and skilled workers.

These divisions represent four degrees of exploitation and are but the result of bourgeois organisation.

In a society of equals, where all can learn a trade and where the exploitation of woman by man, of the peasant by the manufacturer, will cease, these classes will disappear. But, even today, wages within each of these classes tend to become more equal. This led

to the statement that a navy's day's work is worth that of a jeweller, and made Robert Owen conceive his "labour notes," paid to all who worked so many hours in the production of necessary commodities.

But if we look back on all attempts made in this direction, we find that with the exception of a few thousand farmers in the United States,

labour notes have not spread since the end of the first quarter of the century when Owen tried to issue them. Elsewhere (see *La Conquête du Pain; The Wage System*[[323](#)]) the reasons for this have been discussed.

On the other hand, we see a great number of attempts at partial socialisation, tending in the direction of Communism. Hundreds of Communist

communities have been founded during this century almost everywhere and at this very moment we are aware of more than a hundred of them, all being more or less Communistic. It is in the same direction of Communism—*partial* Communism, we mean to say—that nearly all the numerous attempts at socialisation we see in bourgeois society tend to be

made, either between individuals or with regard to the socialisation of municipal matters.

Hotels, steamers, boarding houses, are all experiments in this direction undertaken by the bourgeois. For so much per day, you have the choice between ten or fifty dishes placed at your disposal at the hotel or on the steamer, with nobody controlling the amount

you have eaten of them. This organisation is even international, and before leaving Paris or London you may buy *bons* [coupons] (for 10 francs per day) which enable you to stay at will in hundreds of hotels in France, Germany, Switzerland, etc., all belonging to an international society of hotels.

The bourgeois thoroughly understood the advantages of

partial Communism combined with the almost unlimited freedom of the individual in respect to consumption, and in all these institutions for a fixed price per month you will be lodged and fed, with the single exception of costly extras (wine, special apartments) which are charged separately.

Fire insurance (especially in villages where equality of conditions permits the charge

of an equal premium for all inhabitants), insurance against accidents, against burglars, the arrangement by which great English stores will supply for 1s. per week all the fish which a small family may consume; clubs; the innumerable societies of insurance against sickness, etc., etc.—all this mass of institutions, created during this century, belong to the same category as being an

approach towards Communism with regard to partial consumption in certain forms.

Finally, there exists a vast series of municipal institutions—water, gas, electricity, workmen's dwellings, trains with uniform fares, baths, washing houses, etc.—where similar attempts at socialising consumption are being made on an ever increasing scale.

All this is certainly not yet Communism. Far from it. But the principle of these institutions contains a part of the principle of Communism: *for so much per day* (in money today, in labour tomorrow) *you are entitled to satisfy—luxury excepted—this or the other of your wants.*

These essays into Communism differ from real Communism in many ways,

and essentially in the two following: 1) payment in money instead of payment by labour; 2) the consumers have no voice in the administration of the business. If, however, the idea, the tendency of these institutions were well understood, it would not be difficult *even today* to start by private or public initiative a community carrying out the first principle mentioned. Let

us suppose a territory of 500 *hectares* [1,200 acres] on which are built 200 cottages, each surrounded by a garden or an orchard of a quarter *hectare* [3 parts of an acre]. The management allows each family occupying a cottage, to choose out of fifty dishes per day what is desired, or it supplies bread, vegetables, meat, coffee as demanded for preparation at home. In return,

they demand either so much per annum in money or a certain number of hours of work given, at the consumers' choice, to one of the departments of the establishment: agriculture, cattle raising, cooking, cleaning. This may be put in practice tomorrow if required, and we must wonder that such a farm-hotel-garden has not yet been founded by an

enterprising hotel proprietor.

It will be objected, no doubt, that it is just here, the introduction of labour in common, that Communists have generally experienced failure. Yet this objection cannot stand. The causes of failure have always to be sought elsewhere.

Firstly, nearly all communities were founded by

an almost religious wave of enthusiasm. People were asked to become “pioneers of humanity,” to submit to the dictates of a punctilious morality, to become quite regenerated by Communist life, to give all their time, hours of work and of leisure, to the community, to live entirely for the community.

This meant acting simply like monks and to demand—

without any necessity—of men to be what they are not. It is only in quite recent days that communities have been founded by Anarchist working men without any such pretensions, for purely economic purposes—to free themselves from capitalist exploitation.

The second mistake lay in the desire to manage the community after the model of

a family, to make it “the great family.” They lived all in the same house and were thus forced to continuously meet the same “brethren and sisters.” It is already difficult often for two real brothers to live together in the same house, and family life is not always harmonious; so it was a fundamental error to impose on all the “great family” instead of trying, on the

contrary, to guarantee, as much as possible, to each individual, freedom and home life.

Besides, a small community cannot live long; “brethren and sisters” forced to meet continuously, amid a scarcity of new impressions, end by detesting each other. And if two persons through becoming rivals or simply not liking each other are able by their

disagreement to bring about the dissolution of a community, the prolonged life of such communities would be a strange thing, especially since all communities founded up to now have isolated themselves. It is a foregone conclusion that a close association of 10, 20, or 100 persons cannot last longer than three or four years. It would be even regrettable if it lasted

longer; because this would only prove either that all were brought under the influence of a single individual or that all lost their individuality. Well, since it is *certain* that in three, four or five years part of the members of a community would wish to leave, there ought to exist at least a dozen or more federated communities in order that those who, for one reason or

other, wish to leave a community may enter another community, being replaced by new comers from other places. Otherwise, the Communist beehive must necessarily perish or (which nearly always happens) fall into the hands of one individual—generally the most cunning of the “brethren.”

Finally, all communities founded up till now isolated

themselves from society, but struggle, a life of struggle, is far more urgently needed by an active man than a well supplied table. This desire to see the world, to mix with its currents, to fight its battles is the imperative call to the young generation. Hence it comes (as Chaikovsky remarked from his experience[[324](#)]) that young people, at the age of 18 or 20,

necessarily leave a community which does not comprehend the whole of society.

We need not add that governments of all descriptions have always been the most serious stumbling blocks for all communities. Those which have seen least of this or none at all (like Young Icaria[[325](#)]) succeed best. This is easily understood. Political hatred is one of the most violent in

character. We can live in the same town with our political adversaries if we are not forced to see them every moment. But how is life possible in a small community where we meet each other at every turn? Political dissent enters the study, the workshop, the place of rest, and life becomes impossible.

II

On the other hand, it has been proved to conviction that work in common, Communist production, succeeds marvellously. In no commercial enterprise has so much value been added to land by labour as in *each* of the communities founded in America and in Europe. Faults of calculation may occur everywhere as they occur in all capitalist undertakings, but

since it is known that during the first five years after their institution four out of every five *commercial* undertakings become bankrupt, it must be admitted that nothing similar or even coming near to this has occurred in Communist communities. So, when the bourgeois press, wanting to be ingenious, speaks of offering an island to Anarchists on which to establish their

community,—relying on our experience, we are ready to accept this proposal, provided only that this island be, for instance, the Isle de France[[326](#)] and that upon the valuation of the social wealth, we receive our share of it. Only, since we know that neither the Isle de France nor our share of social wealth will be given to us, we shall some day take one and the other

ourselves by means of the Social Revolution. Paris and Barcelona in 1871 were not very far from doing so—and ideas have made headway since that time.

Progress permits us to see above all, that an isolated *town*, proclaiming the Commune, would have great difficulty to subsist. The experiment ought, therefore, to be made on a *territory*—

e.g., one of the Western States, Idaho or Ohio—as American Socialists suggest, and they are right. On a sufficiently large territory, not within the bounds of a single town, we must someday begin to put in practice the Communism of the future.

We have so often demonstrated that State Communism is impossible,

that it is useless to dwell on this subject. A proof of this, furthermore, lies in the fact that the believers in the State, the upholders of a Socialist State do not themselves believe in State Communism. A portion of them occupy themselves with the conquest of a share of the power *in the State of today*—the bourgeois State—and do not trouble themselves at all to explain

that their idea of a Socialist State is different from a system of *State capitalism under which everybody would be a functionary of the State*. If we tell them that it is this they aim at, they are annoyed; yet they do not explain what other system of society they wish to establish. As they do not believe in the possibility of a social revolution *in the near future*, their aim is to become

part of the government in the bourgeois State of today and they leave it to the future to decide where this will end.

As to those who have tried to sketch the outlines of a future Socialist State, they met our criticism by asserting that all they want are bureaus of statistics. But this is mere juggling with words. Besides, it is averred today that the only statistics of value are those

recorded by each individual himself, giving age, sex, occupation, social position, or the lists of what he sold or bought, produced and consumed.

The questions to be put are usually of voluntary elaboration (by scientists, statistical societies), and the work of statistical bureaus consists today in distributing the questions, in arranging and

mechanically summing up the replies. To reduce the State, the governments, to this function and to say that, *by “government,” only this will be understood*, means nothing else (if said sincerely) but an honourable retreat. And we must indeed admit that the Jacobins of thirty years ago have immensely gone back from their ideals of dictatorship and Socialist

centralisation. No one would dare to say today that the production or consumption of potatoes or rice must be regulated by the parliament of the German People's State (*Volksstaat*) at Berlin. These insipid things are no longer said.

The Communist State is an Utopia given up already by its own adherents, and it is time to proceed further. A far more

important question to be examined, indeed, is this: whether Anarchist or Free Communism does not also imply a diminution of individual freedom?

As a matter of fact, in all discussions on freedom our ideas are obscured by the surviving influence of past centuries of serfdom and religious oppression.

Economists represented the

enforced contract (under the threat of hunger) between master and workingman as a state of freedom. Politicians, again, so called the present state of the citizen who has become a serf and a taxpayer of the State. The most advanced moralists, like Mill and his numerous disciples, defined liberty as the *right* to do everything with the exception of encroachments

on the equal liberty of all others.[[327](#)] Apart from the fact that the word “right” is a very confused term handed over from past ages, meaning nothing at all or too much, the definition of Mill enabled the philosopher [Herbert] Spencer, numerous authors and even some Individualist Anarchists to reconstruct tribunals and legal punishments, even to the

penalty of death—that is, to reintroduce, necessarily, in the end, the State itself, which they had admirably criticised themselves. The idea of free will is also hidden behind all these reasonings.

If we put aside all unconscious actions and consider only premeditated actions (being those which the law, religious and penal systems alone try to influence)

we find that each action of this kind is preceded by some discussion in the human brain; for instance, “I shall go out and take a walk,” somebody thinks, “— No, I have an appointment with a friend,” or “I promised to finish some work,” or “My wife and children will be sorry to remain at home,” or “I shall lose my employment if I do not go to work.”

The last reflection implies the fear of punishment. In the first three instances, this man has to face only himself, his habit of loyalty, his sympathies. And there lies all the difference. We say that a man forced to reason that he must give up such and such an engagement from fear of punishment, is not a free man. And we affirm that humanity *can* and *must* free itself from

the fear of punishment, and that it *can* constitute an Anarchist society in which the fear of punishment and even the unwillingness to be blamed shall disappear. Towards this ideal we march. But we know that we can free ourselves neither from our habit of loyalty (keeping our word) nor from our sympathies (fear of giving pain to those whom we love and whom we do not

wish to afflict or even to disappoint). In this last respect, man is *never free*. [Robinson] Crusoe, on his island, was not free. The moment he began to construct his ship, to cultivate his garden or to lay in provisions for the winter, he was already captured, absorbed by his work. If he felt lazy and would have preferred to remain lying at ease in his cave, he

hesitated for a moment and nevertheless went forth to his work. The moment he had the company of a dog, of two or three goats and, above all, after he had met with Friday, he was no longer *absolutely free* in the sense in which these words are sometimes used in discussions. He had *obligations*, he had to think of the *interests of others*, he was no longer the *perfect*

individualist whom we are sometimes expected to see in him. The moment he has a wife or children, educated by himself or confided to others (society), the moment he has a domestic animal, or even only an orchard which requires to be watered at certain hours—from that moment he is no longer the “care for nothing,” the “egoist,” the “individualist” who is sometimes represented

as the type of a free man. Neither on Crusoe's island, far less in society of whatever kind it be, does this type exist. Man takes, and *will always* take into consideration the interests of other men in proportion to the establishment of relations of mutual interest between them, and the more so the more these others affirm their own sentiments and desires.

Thus we find no other definition of liberty than the following one: *the possibility of action without being influenced in those actions by the fear of punishment by society* (bodily constraint, the threat of hunger or even censure, except when it comes from a friend).

Understanding liberty in this sense—and we doubt whether a larger and at the same time a

more real definition of it can be found—we may say that Communism *can* diminish, even annihilate, all individual liberty, and in many Communist communities this was attempted, but it *can also* enhance this liberty to its utmost limits.

All depends on the *fundamental ideas* on which the association is based. *It is not the form of an association*

which involves slavery; it is the ideas of individual liberty which we bring with us to an association which determine the more or less libertarian character of that association.

This applies to all forms of association. Cohabitation of two individuals under the same roof may lead to the enslavement of one by the will of the other, as it may also lead to liberty for both. The

same applies to the family or to the co-operation of two persons in gardening or in bringing out a paper. The same with regard to large or small associations, to each social institution. Thus, in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, we find communes of equals, men equally free—and four centuries later we see the same commune calling for the dictatorship of a priest. Judges

and laws had remained; the idea of the Roman law, of the State had become dominant, whilst those of freedom, of settling disputes by arbitration and of applying federalism to its fullest extent had disappeared; hence arose slavery. Well, of all institutions or forms of social organisation that have been tried until this day, Communism is the one which guarantees the greatest

amount of individual liberty—
provided that the idea that
begets the community be
Liberty, Anarchy.

Communism is capable of
assuming all forms of freedom
or of oppression—which other
institutions are unable to do. It
may produce a monastery
where all implicitly obey the
orders of their superior, and it
may produce an absolutely
free organisation, leaving his

full freedom to the individual, existing only as long as the associates wish to remain together, imposing nothing on anybody, being anxious rather to defend, enlarge, extend in all directions the liberty of the individual. Communism may be authoritarian (in which case the community will soon decay) or it may be Anarchist. The State, on the contrary, cannot be this. It is

authoritarian or it ceases to be the State.

Communism guarantees economic freedom better than any other form of association, because it can guarantee well-being, even luxury, in return for a few hours of work instead of a day's work. Now, to give ten or eleven hours of leisure per day out of the sixteen during which we lead a conscious life (sleeping eight

hours), means to enlarge individual liberty to a point which for thousands of years has been one of the ideals of humanity.

This *can* be done today. In a Communist society, man can dispose of at least ten hours of leisure. This means emancipation from one of the heaviest burdens of slavery on man. It is an increase of liberty.

To recognise all men as equal and to renounce government of man by man is another increase of individual liberty in a degree which no other form of association has ever admitted even as a dream. It becomes possible only after the first step has been taken: when man has his means of existence guaranteed and is not forced to sell his muscle and his brain to those

who condescend to exploit him.

Lastly, to recognise a variety of occupations as the basis of all progress and to organise in such a way that man may be absolutely free during his leisure time, whilst he may also vary his work, a change for which his early education and instruction will have prepared him—this can easily be put in practice in a

Communist society—this, again, means the emancipation of the individual, who will find doors open in every direction for his complete development.

As for the rest, all depends upon the ideas on which the community is founded. We know a religious community in which members who felt unhappy, and showed signs of this on their faces, used to be addressed by a “brother”:

“You are sad. Nevertheless, put on a happy look, otherwise you will afflict our brethren and sisters.” And we know of communities of seven members, one of whom moved the nomination of four committees: gardening, ways and means, housekeeping, and exportation, with absolute rights for the chairman of each committee. There certainly existed communities founded

or invaded by “criminals of authority” (a special type recommended to the attention of Mr. Lombroso[[328](#)]) and quite a number of communities were founded by mad upholders of the absorption of the individual by society. But these men were not the product of Communism, but of Christianity (eminently authoritarian in its essence)

and of Roman law, the State.

The fundamental idea of these men who hold that society cannot exist without police and judges, the idea of the State, is a permanent danger to all liberty, and not the fundamental idea of Communism—which consists in consuming and producing without calculating the exact share of each individual. This idea, on the contrary, is an

idea of freedom, of emancipation.

Thus we have arrived at the following conclusions:

Attempts at Communism have hitherto failed because—

- They were based on an impetus of a religious character instead of considering a community simply as a means of economic consumption

and production;

- They isolated themselves from society;
- They were imbued with an authoritarian spirit;
- They were isolated instead of federated;
- They required of their members so much labour as to leave them no leisure time;
- They were modelled on the form of the patriarchal

family instead of having
for an aim the fullest
possible emancipation of
the individual.

Communism, being an
eminently economic
institution, does not in any
way prejudice the amount of
liberty guaranteed to the
individual, the initiator, the
rebel against crystallising
customs. It *may* be
authoritarian, which

necessarily leads to the death of the community, and it may be libertarian, which in the twelfth century even under the partial communism of the young cities of that age, led to the creation of a young civilisation full of vigour, a new springtide of Europe.

The only durable form of Communism, however, is one under which, seeing the close contact between fellow men it

brings about, every effort would be made to extend the liberty of the individual in all directions.

Under such conditions, under the influence of this idea, the liberty of the individual, increased already by the amount of leisure secured to him, will be curtailed in no other way than occurs today by municipal gas, the house to house delivery of

food by great stores, modern hotels, or by the fact that during working hours we work side by side with thousands of fellow labourers.

With Anarchy as an aim and as a means, Communism becomes possible. Without it, it necessarily becomes slavery and cannot exist.

[323](#)[] When this report was published Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* had not yet been translated into English. However, its chapter "The Wage System" had been translated

and published as a pamphlet by Freedom Press in 1889. (Editor)

[324](#)[] Nikolai Vasilyevich Chaikovsky (1851–1926) was a Russian revolutionary socialist and a leading member of the populist “To the People” movement (*narodniki*). While studying in St. Petersburg, he joined a radical student group which became known as the Chaikovsky Circle (Kropotkin was also a member). Chaikovsky left Russia in 1874 and helped found a communist settlement in the USA. The experiment failed after two years. During the Russian Revolution he opposed the Bolsheviks. (Editor)

[325](#)[] A reference to a utopian

community founded by the Icarians, a French utopian socialist movement led by Étienne Cabet who brought his followers to America where they established a group of egalitarian communes during the period from 1848 through 1898. (Editor)

[326](#)[] That is, Île-de-France (literally, “Island of France”), the province of France centred on Paris and the surrounding districts. (Editor)

[327](#)[] John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a British philosopher, political economist and politician. He was an influential contributor to social, political and economic theory. His conception of liberty, as expressed in *On Liberty*, justified the freedom of

the individual in opposition to unlimited State control. Initially an advocate of capitalism, he turned towards socialist positions and eventually advocated a market economy based on workers co-operatives (similar to Proudhon's mutualism). (Editor)

[328](#)[] Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) was an Italian criminologist who argued that criminality was inherited and someone “born criminal” could be identified by physical defects such as a sloping forehead, ears of unusual size, asymmetry of the face or cranium, excessively long arms, etc. In one article, he asserted “that the anarchist movement is composed for

the most part (except for a very few exceptions, like Reclus and Kropotkin) of criminals and madmen.” While popular for a time, his ideas were soon completely discredited. (Editor)

The Reformed School

This letter to Spanish libertarian educationist Francisco Ferrer, founder of the new review, L'École Rénovée, appeared in Freedom in June 1908. It summarises Kropotkin's views on libertarian education and reflects his ideas of how education would work in a

free society.

Dear comrade and friend,
I am very glad to note that you are about to issue *L'École Rénovée* [the Reformed School], regretting but one thing: that I am unable to give it all the assistance I would.

Everything has to be begun over again in the schools of the present day. Above all, *education* in the true sense of the word: that is to say, the

formation of the moral being, the active individual, full of initiative, enterprise, courage, freed from that timidity of thought which is the distinctive feature of the educated man of our period—and at the same time sociable, communistic by instinct, equal with and capable of feeling his equality with every man throughout the universe; starting emancipated from the religious, narrowly

individualistic, authoritarian, etc., principles which the school inculcates.

As regards all this, we must evidently, step by step, create a new exposition of all the sciences: concrete, in place of the present metaphysical expositions; social —“associated,” if I may employ the term—in place of individualistic; and “popular” expositions, from the point of

view of the *people*, instead of that of the leisured classes, which at present dominates all science, and especially our books of instruction.

For history, social economy evidently, no one doubts it. But the same holds good for every science: biology, the physiology of living creatures in general psychology, and even for the exposition of physics and mathematics.

Take, for example, astronomy. What a difference when it was taught from the geocentric point of view to what it became when conceived and taught from the heliocentric standpoint, or to what it will be when taught from the point of view of the infinitely small, travelling through space and producing, through incessant collision, celestial harmonies. Or take mathematics when

taught as simple logical deductions of signs which have lost their original meanings, and remaining signs only, are treated as entities, to when they will be taught as simplified expressions of facts which *are* life, infinite and infinitely varied even in Nature. I shall never forget the way in which our great mathematician, Tchebycheff, taught us the integral calculus

in the St. Petersburg University. When he would say, writing the given signs of his integrals: “If, gentlemen, within certain limits, we take the total of all the infinitesimal variations that can occur in the three dimensions of such a physical body, under the influence of such forces...”—when he spoke thus his integrals became the *living emblems of living things in*

Nature; whereas with other professors, these identical signs were but dead matter, metaphysics without any real meaning.

Now, the teaching of all the sciences, from the most abstract to those of sociology, the economic, and the physiological psychology of the individual and the crowds, requires reconstruction in order to reach the level of the

science of the day. Science has progressed immensely during the past half-century, but the teaching of science has not followed a similar development. It must be brought up to date. First, in order that instruction, as already mentioned, should no longer be an obstacle in the development of the individual, and next, because the cycle of instruction now necessary has

become so much enlarged that the effort of all must be to elaborate methods which will combine an *economy* of energy and time whereby to reach the desired end. Formerly, it was he who was destined for the career of priest, scholar, or administrator, who studied. He thought little of devoting ten or fifteen years to study. Today the whole world wishes to

study, to know, and the producer of wealth, the worker, is the first to demand it for himself.

There should not be a single human being to whom knowledge—not superficial semi-knowledge, but true knowledge—should be refused on account of time.

Today, thanks to the extraordinary progress of the nineteenth century, we can

produce everything that is necessary to assure well-being *to all*. And we can at the same time give to all the joy of true knowledge. But in order to do it we must reform the methods of instruction.

In our present schools, formed to make an aristocracy of knowledge, and up to now directed by this aristocracy under the supervision of priests, the waste of time is

colossal, absurd. In English secondary schools, two years of the time reserved for the instruction of mathematics are given up to exercises on the transformation of yards, perches, poles, miles, bushels, and other English measures!

Everywhere history in schools is time absolutely wasted on the memorising of names, of laws incomprehensible to children,

wars, admitted falsehoods, etc. And in each branch the waste of time reaches outrageous proportions.

Well, it is easy to foresee that we shall be compelled to adopt *integral instruction*—i.e., teaching which, by the practice of the hand on wood, stone, metal, will speak to the brain and help to develop it. We shall arrive at teaching every one the *basis of every*

trade as well as of every machine, by labouring (according to certain already elaborated systems) at the work-bench, with the vice, in shaping raw material, in oneself making the fundamental parts of everything, as well of simple machines as of apparatus for the transmission of power, to which all machines are reduced.

We must come to the merging of manual with mental labour, as preached by Fourier and the International, and which is already to be found in a few schools, notably in the United States, and we shall then see the immense economy of time that will be realised by the young brain developed at once by the work of hand and mind. Then, as soon as the matter is seriously

studied, we shall find means to economise time in every branch of teaching. The field for cultivation as regards instruction is so immense, so vast, that the union of every spirit freed from the mists of the past and turned towards the future is necessary; all will find therein an immense work to accomplish.

My best wishes for the success of *L'École Rénovée*.

With fraternal greetings,
P. Kropotkin

From *Fields,*
Factories *and*
Workshops
or, Industry
combined with
agriculture and brain
work with manual
work

Fields, Factories and
Workshops *shows Kropotkin*

applying his scientific training to economics. Basing his argument on a wealth of evidence, he showed how advances in technology were producing a decentralisation in industry and agriculture under capitalism. These extracts also refute the notion that he stood for “small-scale” production As becomes clear, Kropotkin argues for appropriate levels of

production and technology.

Preface to the Second Edition (1913)

Fourteen years have passed since the first edition of this book was published, and in revising it for this new edition, I found at my disposal an immense mass of new materials, statistical and descriptive, and a great number of new works dealing

with the different subjects that are treated in this book. I have thus had an excellent opportunity to verify how far the previsions that I had formulated when I first wrote this book have been confirmed by the subsequent economical evolution of the different nations.

This verification permits me to affirm that the economical tendencies that I had ventured

to foreshadow then have only become more and more definite since. Everywhere, we see the same decentralisation of industries going on, new nations continually entering the ranks of those which manufacture for the world market. Each of these newcomers endeavours to develop, and succeeds in developing, in its own territory the principal industries, and thus frees itself

from being exploited by other nations, more advanced in their technical evolution. All nations have made a remarkable progress in this direction, as will be seen from the new data that are given in this book.

On the other hand, one sees, with all the great industrial nations, the growing tendency and need of developing at home a more intensive

agricultural productivity, either by improving the now-existing methods of extensive agriculture, by means of small holdings, “inner colonisation,” agricultural education, and co-operative work, or by introducing different new branches of intensive agriculture. [...]

[...]

It is especially in revising the chapters dealing with the small

industries that I had to incorporate the results of a great number of new researches. In so doing, I was enabled to show that the growth of an infinite variety of small enterprises by the side of the very great centralised concerns is not showing any signs of abatement. On the contrary, the distribution of electrical motive power has given them a new impulse. In

those places where water power was utilised for distributing electric power in the villages, and in those cities where the machinery used for producing electric light during the night hours was utilised for supplying motive power during the day, the small industries are taking a new development.

[...]

As to the need, generally felt at this moment, of an

education which would combine a wide scientific instruction with a sound knowledge of manual work, a question which I treat in the last chapter—it can be said that this cause has already been won in this country during the last twenty years. The *principle* is generally recognised by this time, although most nations, impoverished as they are by

their armaments, are much too slow in applying the principle in life.

P. Kropotkin

Brighton, October 1912

Preface to the First Edition (1898)

Under the name of profits, rent, interest upon capital, surplus value, and the like, economists have eagerly discussed the benefits which

the owners of land or capital, or some privileged nations, can derive, either from the underpaid work of the wage-labourer, or from the inferior position of one class of the community towards another class or from the inferior economical development of one nation towards another nation. These profits being shared in a very unequal proportion between the

different individuals, classes and nations engaged in production, considerable pains were taken to study the present apportionment of the benefits, and its economical and moral consequences, as well as the changes in the present economical organisation of society which might bring about a more equitable distribution of a rapidly accumulating wealth. It

is upon questions relating to the right to that increment of wealth that the hottest battles are now fought between economists of different schools.

In the meantime, the great question “What have we to produce, and how?” necessarily remained in the background. Political economy, as it gradually emerges from its semi-

scientific stage, tends more and more to become a science devoted to the study of the needs of men and of the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of energy,—that is, a sort of physiology of society. But few economists, as yet, have recognised that this is the proper domain of economics, and have attempted to treat their science from this point of

view. The main subject of social economy—that is, the *economy of energy required for the satisfaction of human needs* is consequently the last subject which one expects to find treated in a concrete form in economical treatises.

The following pages are a contribution to a portion of this vast subject. They contain a discussion of the advantages which civilised societies could

derive from a combination of industrial pursuits with intensive agriculture, and of brain work with manual work.

The importance of such a combination has not escaped the attention of a number of students of social science. It was eagerly discussed some fifty years ago under the names of “harmonised labour,” “integral education,” and so on. It was pointed out

at that time that the greatest sum total of well-being can be obtained when a variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community, and that man shows his best when he is in a position to apply his usually varied capacities to several pursuits in the farm, the workshop, the factory, the study or the studio, instead of being riveted

for life to one of these pursuits only.

[...]

Half a century ago, a harmonious union between agricultural and industrial pursuits, as also between brain work and manual work, could only be a remote desideratum. The conditions under which the factory system asserted itself, as well as the obsolete forms of agriculture which

prevailed at that time, prevented such a union from being feasible. Synthetic production was impossible. However, the wonderful simplification of the technical processes in both industry and agriculture, partly due to an ever-increasing division of labour in analogy with what we see in biology has rendered the synthesis possible, and a distinct tendency towards a

synthesis of human activities now becomes apparent in modern economical evolution. This tendency is analysed in the subsequent chapters—a special weight being laid upon the present possibilities of agriculture, which are illustrated by a number of examples borrowed from different countries, and upon the small industries, to which a new impetus is being given by

the new methods of
transmission of motive power.

[...]

P. Kropotkin
Bromley, Kent, 1898

The Decentralisation of Industries

Who does not remember the
remarkable chapter by which
Adam Smith opens his inquiry
into the nature and causes of
the wealth of nations? Even

those of our contemporary economists who seldom revert to the works of the father of political economy, and often forget the ideas which inspired them, know that chapter almost by heart, so often has it been copied and recopied since. It has become an article of faith, and the economical history of the century which has elapsed since Adam Smith wrote has been, so to speak,

an actual commentary upon it.

“Division of labour” was its watchword. And the division and subdivision—the permanent subdivision—of functions has been pushed so far as to divide humanity into castes which are almost as firmly established as those of old India. We have, first, the broad division into producers and consumers: little-consuming producers on the

one hand, little-producing consumers on the other hand. Then, amidst the former, a series of further subdivisions: the manual worker and the intellectual worker, sharply separated from one another to the detriment of both; the agricultural labourers and the workers in the manufacture; and, amidst the mass of the latter, numberless subdivisions again—so minute, indeed, that

the modern ideal of a workman seems to be a man or a woman, or even a girl or a boy, without the knowledge of any handicraft, without any conception whatever of the industry he or she is employed in, who is only capable of making all day long and for a whole life the same infinitesimal part of something: who from the age of thirteen to that of sixty pushes the coal

cart at a given spot of the mine or makes the spring of a penknife, or “the eighteenth part of a pin.” Mere servants to some machine of a given description; mere flesh-and-bone parts of some immense machinery; having no idea how and why the machinery performs its rhythmical movements.

Skilled artisanship is being swept away as a survival of a

past condemned to disappear. The artist who formerly found aesthetic enjoyment in the work of his hands is substituted by the human slave of an iron slave. Nay, even the agricultural labourer, who formerly used to find a relief from the hardships of his life in the home of his ancestors—the future home of his children—in his love of the field and in a keen intercourse with

nature, even he has been doomed to disappear for the sake of division of labour. He is an anachronism, we are told; he must be substituted, in a Bonanza farm, by an occasional servant hired for the summer, and discharged as the autumn comes: a tramp who will never again see the field he has harvested once in his life. “An affair of a few years,” the economists say, “to

reform agriculture in accordance with the true principles of division of labour and modern industrial organisation.”

Dazzled with the results obtained by a century of marvellous inventions, especially in England, our economists and political men went still farther in their dreams of division of labour. They proclaimed the necessity

of dividing the whole of humanity into national workshops having each of them its own speciality. We were taught, for instance, that Hungary and Russia are predestined by nature to grow corn in order to feed the manufacturing countries; that Britain had to provide the world market with cottons, iron goods, and coal; Belgium with woollen cloth; and so on.

Nay, within each nation, each region had to have its own speciality. So it has been for some time since; so it ought to remain. Fortunes have been made in this way, and will continue to be made in the same way. It being proclaimed that the wealth of nations is measured by the amount of profits made by the few, and that the largest profits are made by means of a

specialisation of labour, the question was not conceived to exist as to whether human beings *would* always submit to such a specialisation; whether nations could be specialised like isolated workmen. The theory was good for today—why should we care for tomorrow. Tomorrow might bring its own theory!

And so it did. The narrow conception of life which

consisted in thinking that *profits* are the only leading motive of human society, and the stubborn view which supposes that what has existed yesterday would last for ever, proved in discordance with the tendencies of human life, and life took another direction. Nobody will deny the high pitch of production which may be attained by specialisation. But, precisely in proportion as

the work required from the individual in modern production becomes simpler and easier to be learned, and, therefore, also more monotonous and wearisome—the requirements of the individual for varying his work, for exercising all his capacities, become more and more prominent. Humanity perceives that there is no advantage for the community

in riveting a human being for all his life to a given spot, in a workshop or a mine; no gain in depriving him of such work as would bring him into free intercourse with nature, make of him a conscious part of the grand whole, a partner in the highest enjoyments of science and art, of free work and creation.

Nations, too, refuse to be specialised. Each nation is a

compound aggregate of tastes and inclinations, of wants and resources, of capacities and inventive powers. The territory occupied by each nation is in its turn a most varied texture of soils and climates, of hills and valleys, of slopes leading to a still greater variety of territories and races. Variety is the distinctive feature, both of the territory and its inhabitants, and that variety

implies a variety of occupations. Agriculture calls manufactures into existence, and manufactures support agriculture. Both are inseparable: and the combination, the integration of both brings about the grandest results. In proportion as technical knowledge becomes everybody's virtual domain, in proportion as it becomes international, and can be

concealed no longer, each nation acquires the possibility of applying the whole variety of her energies to the whole variety of industrial and agricultural pursuits. Knowledge ignores artificial political boundaries. So also do the industries, and the present tendency of humanity is to have the greatest possible variety of industries gathered in each country, in each

separate region, side by side with agriculture. The needs of human agglomerations correspond thus to the needs of the individual, and while a *temporary* division of functions remains the surest guarantee of success in each separate undertaking, the *permanent* division is doomed to disappear, and to be substituted by a variety of pursuits—intellectual,

industrial, and agricultural—corresponding to the different capacities of the individual, as well as to the variety of capacities within every human aggregate.

When we thus revert from the scholastics of our textbooks, and examine human life as a whole, we soon discover that, while all the benefits of a temporary division of labour must be

maintained, it is high time to claim those of the *integration of labour*. Political economy has hitherto insisted chiefly upon *division*. We proclaim *integration*, and we maintain that the ideal of society—that is, the state towards which society is already marching—is a society of integrated, combined labour. A society where each individual is a producer of both manual and

intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works both in the field and the industrial workshop; where every aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources—it may be a nation, or rather a region—produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce.

Of course, as long as society remains organised so as to permit the owners of the land and capital to appropriate for themselves, under the protection of the State and historical rights, the yearly surplus of human production, no such change can be thoroughly accomplished. But the present industrial system, based upon a permanent specialisation of functions,

already bears in itself the germs of its proper ruin. The industrial crises, which grow more acute and protracted, and are rendered still worse and still more acute by the armaments and wars implied by the present system, are rendering its maintenance more and more difficult. Moreover, the workers plainly manifest their intention to support no longer patiently the

misery occasioned by each crisis. And each crisis accelerates the day when the present institutions of individual property and production will be shaken to their foundations with such internal struggles as will depend upon the more or less good sense of the now privileged classes.

But we maintain also that any socialist attempt at

remodelling the present relations between Capital and Labour will be a failure, if it does not take into account the above tendencies towards integration. These tendencies have not yet received, in our opinion, due attention from the different socialist schools—but they must. A reorganised society will have to abandon the fallacy of nations specialised for the production

of either agricultural or manufactured produce. It will have to rely on itself for the production of food and many, if not most, of the raw materials; it must find the best means of combining agriculture with manufacture—the work in the field with a decentralised industry; and it will have to provide for “integrated education,” which education alone, by teaching

both science and handicraft from earliest childhood, can give to society the men and women it really needs.

Each nation—her own agriculturist and manufacturer; each individual working in the field and in some industrial art; each individual combining scientific knowledge with the knowledge of a handicraft—such is, we affirm, the present tendency of civilised nations.

[...]

The Possibilities of Agriculture

[...]

If we take all into consideration, if we realise the progress made of late in the gardening culture and the tendency towards spreading its methods to the open field, if we watch the cultural experiments which are being

made now—experiments today and realities tomorrow—and ponder over the resources kept in store by science, we are bound to say that it is utterly impossible to foresee at the present moment the limits as to the maximum number of human beings who would draw their means of subsistence from a given area of land, or as to what a variety of produce they could

advantageously grow in any latitude. Each day widens former limits, and opens new and wide horizons. All we can say now is that, even now, 600 persons could easily live on a square mile, and that, with cultural methods already used on a large scale, 1,000 human beings—not idlers—living on 1,000 acres could easily, without any kind of overwork, obtain from that area a

luxurious vegetable and animal food, as well as the flax, wool, silk, and hides necessary for their clothing. As to what may be obtained under still more perfect methods—also known but not yet tested on a large scale—it is better to abstain from any forecast, so unexpected are the recent achievements of intensive culture.

We thus see that the over-

population fallacy does not stand the very first attempt at submitting it to a closer examination. Those only can be horror-stricken at seeing the population of this country increase by one individual every 1,000 seconds who think of a human being as a mere claimant upon the stock of material wealth of mankind, without being at the same time a contributor to that stock. But

we, who see in each new-born babe a future worker capable of producing much more than his own share of the common stock—we greet his appearance.

We know that a crowded population is a necessary condition for permitting man to increase the productive powers of his labour. We know that highly productive labour is impossible so long as

men are scattered, few in numbers, over wide territories, and are thus unable to combine together for the higher achievements of civilisation. We know what an amount of labour must be spent to scratch the soil with a primitive plough, to spin and weave by hand, and we know also how much less labour it costs to grow the same amount of food and weave the

same cloth with the help of modern machinery.

We also see that it is infinitely easier to grow 200,000 lb. of food on one acre than to grow them on ten acres. It is all very well to imagine that wheat grows by itself on the Russian steppes, but those who have seen how the peasant toils in the “fertile” black earth region will have one desire: that the increase of

population may permit the use of the steam-digger and gardening culture in the steppes; that it may permit those who are now the beasts of burden of humanity to raise their backs and to become at last men.

[...]

Few books have exercised so pernicious an influence upon the general development of economic thought as

Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* exercised for three consecutive generations.[[329](#)]
It appeared at the right time, like all books which have had any influence at all, and it summed up ideas already current in the minds of the wealth-possessing minority. It was precisely when the ideas of equality and liberty, awakened by the French and

American revolutions, were still permeating the minds of the poor, while the richer classes had become tired of their amateur excursions into the same domains, that Malthus came to assert, in reply to Godwin, that no equality is possible; that the poverty of the many is not due to institutions, but is a natural law. Population, he wrote, grows too rapidly and the

new-comers find no room at the feast of nature, and that law cannot be altered by any change of institutions. He thus gave to the rich a kind of scientific argument against the ideas of equality, and we know that though all dominion is based upon force, force itself begins to totter as soon as it is no longer supported by a firm belief in its own rightfulness. As to the poorer classes—who

always feel the influence of ideas circulating at a given time amid the wealthier classes—it deprived them of the very hope of improvement; it made them sceptical as to the promises of the social reformers; and to this day, the most advanced reformers entertain doubts as to the possibility of satisfying the needs of all, in case there should be a claim for their

satisfaction, and a temporary welfare of the labourers resulted in a sudden increase of population.

Science, down to the present day, remains permeated with Malthus's teachings. Political economy continues to base its reasoning upon a tacit admission of the impossibility of rapidly increasing the productive powers of a nation, and of thus giving satisfaction

to all wants. This postulate stands, undiscussed, in the background of whatever political economy, classical or socialist, has to say about exchange-value, wages, sale of labour force, rent, exchange, and consumption. Political economy never rises above the hypothesis of a *limited and insufficient supply of the necessaries of life*; it takes it for granted. And all theories

connected with political economy retain the same erroneous principle. Nearly all socialists, too, admit the postulate. Nay, even in biology (so deeply interwoven now with sociology) we have recently seen the theory of variability of species borrowing a quite unexpected support from its having been connected by Darwin and Wallace with Malthus's

fundamental idea, that the natural resources must inevitably fail to supply the means of existence for the rapidly multiplying animals and plants. In short, we may say that the theory of Malthus, by shaping into a pseudo-scientific form the secret desires of the wealth-possessing classes, became the foundation of a whole system of practical philosophy, which

permeates the minds of both the educated and uneducated, and reacts (as practical philosophy always does) upon the theoretical philosophy of our century.

True, the formidable growth of the productive powers of man in the industrial field, since he tamed steam and electricity, has somewhat shaken Malthus's doctrine. Industrial wealth *has* grown at

a rate which no possible increase of population could attain, and it *can* grow with still greater speed. But agriculture is still considered a stronghold of the Malthusian pseudo-philosophy. The recent achievements of agriculture and horticulture are not sufficiently well known, and while our gardeners defy climate and latitude, acclimatise sub-tropical plants,

raise several crops a year instead of one, and themselves make the soil they want for each special culture, the economists nevertheless continue saying that the surface of the soil is limited, and still more its productive powers; they still maintain that a population which should double each thirty years would soon be confronted by a lack of the necessaries of life!

[...]

The present tendency of economical development in the world is—we have seen—to induce more and more every nation, or rather every region, taken in its geographical sense, to rely chiefly upon a home production of all the chief necessities of life. Not to reduce, I mean, the world-exchange—it may still grow in bulk—but to limit it to the

exchange of what really must be exchanged, and, at the same time, immensely to increase the exchange of novelties, produce of local or national art, new discoveries and inventions, knowledge and ideas. Such being the tendency of present development, there is not the slightest ground to be alarmed by it, There is not one nation in the world which, being armed with the present

powers of agriculture, could not grow on its cultivable area all the food and most of the raw materials derived from agriculture which are required for its population, even if the requirements of that population were rapidly increased, as they certainly ought to be. Taking the powers of man over the land and over the forces of nature—*such as they are at the present day*—

we can maintain that two to three inhabitants to each cultivable acre of land would not yet be too much. But neither in this densely populated country nor in Belgium are we yet in such numbers. In this country, we have, roughly speaking, one acre of the cultivable area per inhabitant.

Supposing, then, that each inhabitant of Great Britain

were compelled to live on the produce of his own land, all he would have to do would be, first, to consider the land of this country as a common inheritance, which must be disposed of to the best advantage of each and all—this is, evidently, an absolutely necessary condition. And next, he would have to cultivate his soil, not in some extravagant way, but no better than land is

already cultivated upon thousands and thousands of acres in Europe and America. He would not be bound to invent some new methods, but could simply generalise and widely apply those which have stood the test of experience. He can do it, and in so doing he would save an immense quantity of the work which is now given for buying his food abroad, and for paying all the

intermediaries who live upon this trade. Under a rational culture, those necessities and those luxuries which must be obtained from the soil, undoubtedly can be obtained with much less work than is required now for buying these commodities. I have made elsewhere (in *The Conquest of Bread*) approximate calculations to that effect, but with the data given in this

book everyone can himself easily test the truth of this assertion. If we take, indeed, the masses of produce which are obtained under rational culture, and compare them with the amount of labour which must be spent for obtaining them under an irrational culture, for collecting them abroad, for transporting them, and for keeping armies of middlemen, we see at once

how few days and hours need be given, under proper culture, for growing man's food.

For improving our methods of culture to that extent, we surely need not divide the land into one-acre plots, and attempt to grow what we are in need of by everyone's separate individual exertions, on everyone's separate plot with no better tools than the spade; under such conditions

we inevitably should fail. Those who have been so much struck with the wonderful results obtained in the *petite culture*, that they go about representing the small culture of the French peasant, or *maraîcher*, as an ideal for mankind, are evidently mistaken. They are as much mistaken as those other extremists who would like to turn every country into a small

number of huge Bonanza farms, worked by militarily organised "labour battalions." In Bonanza farms, human labour is certainly reduced, but the crops taken from the soil are far too small, and the whole system is robbery-culture, taking no heed of the exhaustion of the soil. This is why the Bonanza farms have disappeared from their former home, Ohio, and when I

crossed part of this state in 1901, I saw its plains thickly dotted with medium-sized farms, from 100 to 200 acres, and with windmills pumping water for the orchards and the vegetable gardens. On the other side, in the spade culture, on isolated small plots, by isolated men or families, too much human labour is wasted, even though the crops are heavy; so that real

economy—of both space and labour—requires different methods, representing a combination of machinery work with hand work.

In agriculture, as in everything else, associated labour is the only reasonable solution. Two hundred families of five persons each, owning five acres per family, having no common ties between the families, and compelled to find

their living, each family on its five acres, almost certainly would be an economical failure. Even leaving aside all *personal* difficulties resulting from different education and tastes and from the want of knowledge as to what has to be done with the land, and admitting for the sake of argument that these causes do not interfere, the experiment would end in a failure, merely

for *economical*, for
agricultural reasons.

Whatever improvement upon the present conditions such an organisation might be, that improvement would not last; it would have to undergo a further transformation or disappear.

But the same two hundred families, if they consider themselves, say, as tenants of the nation, and treat the

thousand acres as a common tenancy—again leaving aside the personal conditions—would have, economically speaking, from the point of view of the agriculturist, every chance of succeeding, *if they know what is the best use to make of that land.*

In such [a] case, they probably would first of all associate for permanently improving the land which is in

need of immediate improvement, and would consider it necessary to improve more of it every year, until they had brought it all into a perfect condition. On an area of 340 acres they could most easily grow all the cereals—wheat, oats, etc.—required for both the thousand inhabitants and their live stock, without resorting for that purpose to replanted or

planted cereals. They could grow on 400 acres, properly cultivated, and irrigated if necessary and possible, all the green crops and fodder required to keep the thirty to forty milch cows which would supply them with milk and butter, and, let us say, the 300 head of cattle required to supply them with meat. On twenty acres, two of which would be under glass, they

would grow more vegetables, fruit and luxuries than they could consume. And supposing that half an acre of land is attached to each house for hobbies and amusement (poultry keeping, or any fancy culture, flowers, and the like)—they would still have some 140 acres for all sorts of purposes: public gardens, squares, manufactures and so on. The labour that would be

required for such an intensive culture would not be the hard labour of the serf or slave. It would be accessible to everyone, strong or weak, town-bred or country-born; it would also have many charms besides. And its total amount would be far smaller than the amount of labour which every thousand persons, taken from this or from any other nation, have now to spend in getting

their present food, much smaller in quantity and of worse quality. I mean, of course, the technically necessary labour, without even considering the labour which we now have to give in order to maintain all our middlemen, armies, and the like. The amount of labour required to grow food under a rational culture is so small, indeed, that our hypothetical inhabitants

would be led necessarily to employ their leisure in manufacturing, artistic, scientific, and other pursuits.

From the technical point of view there is no obstacle whatever for such an organisation being started to-morrow with full success. The obstacles against it are not in the imperfection of the agricultural art, or in the infertility of the soil, or in

climate. They are entirely in our institutions, in our inheritances and survivals from the past—in the “Ghosts” which oppress us. But to some extent they lie also—taking society as a whole—in our phenomenal ignorance. We, civilised men and women, know everything, we have settled opinions upon everything, we take an interest in everything. We only know

nothing about whence the bread comes which we eat—even though we pretend to know something about that subject as well—we do not know how it is grown, what pains it costs to those who grow it, what is being done to reduce their pains, what sort of men those feeders of our grand selves are... we are more ignorant than savages in this respect, and we prevent

our children from obtaining this sort of knowledge—even those of our children who would prefer it to the heaps of useless stuff with which they are crammed at school.

Small Industries and Industrial Villages

The two sister arts of agriculture and industry were not always so estranged from one another as they are now.

There was a time, and that time is not so far back, when both were thoroughly combined; the villages were then the seats of a variety of industries, and the artisans in the cities did not abandon agriculture; many towns were nothing else but industrial villages. If the medieval city was the cradle of those industries which bordered upon art and were intended to

supply the wants of the richer classes, still it was the rural manufacture which supplied the wants of the millions, as it does until the present day in Russia, and to a very great extent in Germany and France. But then came the water-motors, steam, the development of machinery, and they broke the link which formerly connected the farm with the workshop. Factories

grew up, and they abandoned the fields. They gathered where the sale of their produce was easiest, or the raw materials and fuel could be obtained with the greatest advantage. New cities rose, and the old ones rapidly enlarged; the fields were deserted. Millions of labourers, driven away by sheer force from the land, gathered in the cities in search

of labour, and soon forgot the bonds which formerly attached them to the soil. And we, in our admiration of the prodigies achieved under the new factory system, overlooked the advantages of the old system under which the tiller of the soil was an industrial worker at the same time. We doomed to disappearance all those branches of industry which

formerly used to prosper in the villages; we condemned in industry all that was not a big factory.

True, the results were grand as regards the increase of the productive powers of man. But they proved terrible as regards the millions of human beings who were plunged into misery and had to rely upon precarious means of living in our cities. Moreover, the

system, as a whole, brought about those abnormal conditions which I have endeavoured to sketch in the two first chapters. We were thus driven into a corner, and while a thorough change in the present relations between labour and capital is becoming an imperious necessity, a thorough remodelling of the whole of our industrial organisation has also become

unavoidable. The industrial nations are bound to revert to agriculture, they are compelled to find out the best means of combining it with industry, and they must do so without loss of time.

To examine the special question as to the possibility of such a combination is the aim of the following pages. Is it possible, from a technical point of view? Is it desirable?

Are there, in our present industrial life, such features as might lead us to presume that a change in the above direction would find the necessary elements for its accomplishment? Such are the questions which rise before the mind. And to answer them, there is, I suppose, no better means than to study that immense but overlooked and underrated branch of

industries which are described under the names of rural industries, domestic trades, and petty trades: to study them, not in the works of the economists who are too much inclined to consider them as obsolete types of industry, but in their life itself, in their struggles, their failures and achievements.

[...]

In reality, the extension of

the petty trades, side by side with the great factories, is nothing to be wondered at. It is an economic necessity.

The absorption of the small workshops by bigger concerns is a fact which had struck the economists in the 'forties of the last century, especially in the textile trades. It is continued still in many other trades, and is especially striking in a number of very

big concerns dealing with metals and war supplies for the different States. But there is another process which is going on parallel with the former, and which consists in the continuous creation of new industries, usually making their start on a small scale. Each new factory calls into existence a number of small workshops, partly to supply its own needs and partly to

submit its produce to a further transformation. Thus, to quote but one instance, the cotton mills have created an immense demand for wooden bobbins and reels, and thousands of men in the Lake District set to manufacture them—by hand first, and later on with the aid of some plain machinery. Only quite recently, after years had been spent in inventing and improving the machinery, the

bobbins began to be made on a larger scale in factories. And even yet, as the machines are very costly, a great quantity of bobbins are made in small workshops, with but little aid from machines, while the factories themselves are relatively small, and seldom employ more than fifty operatives, chiefly children. As to the reels of irregular shape, they are still made by hand, or

partly with the aid of small machines, continually invented by the workers. New industries thus grow up to supplant the old ones; each of them passes through a preliminary stage on a small scale before reaching the great factory stage, and the more active the inventive genius of a nation is, the more it has of these budding industries. The countless small bicycle works

which have lately grown up in this country, and are supplied with ready-made parts of the bicycle by the larger factories, are an instance in point. The domestic and small workshops, fabrication of boxes for matches, boots, hats, confectionery, grocery and so on is another familiar instance.

Besides, the large factory stimulates the birth of now

petty trades by creating new wants. The cheapness of cottons and woollens, of paper and brass, has created hundreds of new small industries. Our households are full of their produce—mostly things of quite modern invention. And while some of them already are turned out by the million in the great factory, all have passed through the small workshop stage, before

the demand was great enough to require the great factory organisation. The more we may have of new inventions, the more shall we have of such small industries, and again, the more we have of them, the more shall we have of the inventive genius, the want of which is so justly complained of in this country (by W. Armstrong, amongst many others). We must not wonder,

therefore, if we see so many small trades in this country, but we must regret that the great number have abandoned the villages in consequence of the bad conditions of land tenure, and that they have migrated in such numbers to the cities, to the detriment of agriculture.

In England, as everywhere, the small industries are an important factor in the

industrial life of the country, and it is chiefly in the infinite variety of the small trades, which utilise the half-fabricated produce of the great industries, that inventive genius is developed, and the rudiments of the future great industries are elaborated. The small bicycle workshops, with the hundreds of small improvements which they introduced, have been under

our very eyes the primary cells out of which the great industry of the motor cars, and later on of the aeroplanes, has grown up. The small village jam-makers were the precursors and the rudiments of the great factories of preserves which now employ hundreds of workers. And so on.

Consequently, to affirm that the small industries are doomed to disappear, while

we see new ones appear every day, is merely to repeat a hasty generalisation that was made in the earlier part of the nineteenth century by those who witnessed the absorption of hand-work by machinery work in the cotton industry—a generalisation which, as we saw already, and are going still better to see on the following pages, finds no confirmation from the study of industries,

great and small, and is upset by the censuses of the factories and workshops. Far from showing a tendency to disappear, the small industries show, on the contrary, a tendency towards making a further development, since the municipal supply of electrical power—such as we have, for instance, in Manchester—permits the owner of a small factory to have a cheap supply

of motive power, exactly in the proportion required at a given time, and to pay only for what is really consumed.

[...]

One fact dominates all the investigations which have been made into the conditions of the small industries. We find it in Germany, as well as in France or in Russia. In an immense number of trades, it is not the superiority of the *technical*

organisation of the trade in a factory, nor the economies realised on the prime-motor, which militate against the small industry in favour of the factories, but the more advantageous conditions for *selling* the produce and for *buying* the raw produce which are at the disposal of big concerns. Wherever this difficulty has been overcome, either by means of association,

or in consequence of a market being secured for the sale of the produce, it has always been found—first, that the conditions of the workers or artisans immediately improved, and next, that a rapid progress was realised in the technical aspects of the respective industries. New processes were introduced to improve the produce or to increase the rapidity of its

fabrication; new machine-tools were invented; or new motors were resorted to; or the trade was reorganised so as to diminish the costs of production.

On the contrary, wherever the helpless, isolated artisans and workers continue to remain at the mercy of the wholesale buyers, who always—since Adam Smith's time—“openly or tacitly” agree to

act as one man to bring down the prices almost to a starvation level—and such is the case for the immense number of the small and village industries; their condition is so bad that only the longing of the workers after a certain relative independence, and their knowledge of what awaits them in the factory, prevent them from joining the ranks of

the factory hands. Knowing that in most cases the advent of the factory would mean no work at all for most men, and the taking of the children and girls to the factory, they do the utmost to prevent it from appearing at all in the village.

As to combinations in the villages, co-operation and the like, one must never forget how jealously the German, the French, the Russian and the

Austrian Governments have hitherto prevented the workers, *and especially the village workers*, from entering into any sort of combination for economical purposes. In France, the peasant syndicates were permitted only by the law of 1884. To keep the peasant at the lowest possible level, by means of taxation, serfdom, and the like, has been, and is still, the policy of

most continental States. It was only in 1876 that some extension of the association rights was granted in Germany, and even now a mere co-operative association for the sale of the artisans' work is soon reported as a "political association" and submitted as such to the usual limitations, such as the exclusion of women and the like.[[330](#)] A striking example

of that policy as regards a village association was given by Prof. Issaieff, who also mentioned the severe measures taken by the wholesale buyers in the toy trade to prevent the workers from entering into direct intercourse with foreign buyers.

When one examines with more than a superficial attention the life of the small

industries and their struggles for life, one sees that when they perish, they perish—not because “an economy can be realised by using a hundred horsepower motor, instead of a hundred small motors”—this inconveniency never fails to be mentioned, although it is easily obviated in Sheffield, in Paris, and many other places by hiring workshops with wheel-power, supplied by a central

machine, and, still more, as was so truly observed by Prof. W. Unwin, by the electric transmission of power. They do not perish because a substantial economy can be realised in the factory production—in many more cases than is usually supposed, the fact is even the reverse—but because the capitalist who establishes a factory emancipates himself from the

wholesale and retail dealers in raw materials, and especially because he emancipates himself from the buyers of his produce and can deal directly with the wholesale buyer and exporter, or else he concentrates in one concern the different stages of fabrication of a given product. The pages which Schulze-Gäwernitz gave to the organisation of the cotton

industry in England, and to the difficulties which the German cotton-mill owners had to contend with, so long as they were dependent upon Liverpool for raw cotton, are most instructive in this direction. And what characterises the cotton trade prevails in all other industries as well.

If the Sheffield cutlers who now work in their tiny

workshops, in one of the above-mentioned buildings supplied with wheel-power, were incorporated in one big factory, the chief advantage which would be realised in the factory would *not* be an economy in the costs of production, in comparison to the quality of the produce; with a shareholders' company the costs might even increase. And yet the profits (including

wages) probably would be greater than the aggregate earnings of the workers, in consequence of the reduced costs of purchase of iron and coal, and the facilities for the sale of the produce. The great concern would thus find its advantages not in such factors as are imposed by the *technical* necessities of the trade at the time being, but in such factors as could be

eliminated by co-operative organisation. All these are elementary notions among practical men.

[...]

Altogether, it may be taken as one of the fundamental facts of the economical life of Europe that the defeat of a number of small trades, artisan work and domestic industries, came through their being incapable of organising the

sale of their produce—not from the *production* itself. The same thing recurs at every page of economical history. The incapacity of organising the sale without being enslaved by the merchant was the leading feature of the medieval cities, which gradually fell under the economical and political yoke of the Guild-Merchant, *simply because they were not able to maintain*

the sale of their manufactures by the community as a whole, or to organise the sale of a new produce in the interest of the community. When the markets for such commodities came to be Asia on the one side, and the New World on the other side, such was fatally the case; since commerce had ceased to be *communal*, and had become *individual*, the cities became a prey for the

rivalries of the chief merchant families.

Even nowadays, when we see the co-operative societies beginning to succeed in their productive workshops, while fifty years ago they invariably failed in their capacity as producers, we may conclude that the cause of their previous failures was not in their incapacity of properly and economically organising

production, but in their inability of acting as *sellers* and exporters of the produce they had fabricated. Their present successes, on the contrary, are fully accounted for by the network of distributive societies which they have at their command. The sale has been simplified, and production has been rendered possible *by first organising the market.*

[...]

The facts which we have briefly passed in review show, to some extent, the benefits which could be derived from a combination of agriculture with industry, if the latter could come to the village, not in its present shape of a capitalist factory, but in the shape of a socially organised industrial production, with the full aid of machinery and

technical knowledge. In fact, the most prominent feature of the petty trades is that a relative well-being is found only where they are combined with agriculture: where the workers have remained in possession of the soil and continue to cultivate it. Even amidst the weavers of France or Moscow, who have to reckon with the competition of the factory, relative well-being

prevails so long as they are not compelled to part with the soil. On the contrary, as soon as high taxation or the impoverishment during a crisis has compelled the domestic worker to abandon his last plot of land to the usurer, misery creeps into his house. The sweater becomes all-powerful, frightful overwork is resorted to, and the whole trade often falls into decay.

Such facts, as well as the pronounced tendency of the factories towards migrating to the villages, which becomes more and more apparent nowadays, and found of late its expression in the “Garden Cities” movement,[[331](#)] are very suggestive. Of course, it would be a great mistake to imagine that industry ought to return to its hand-work stage in order to be combined with

agriculture. Whenever a saving of human labour can be obtained by means of a machine, the machine is welcome and will be resorted to, and there is hardly one single branch of industry into which machinery work could not be introduced with great advantage, at least at some of the stages of the manufacture. In the present chaotic state of industry, nails and cheap pen-

knives can be made by hand, and plain cottons be woven in the hand-loom, but such an anomaly will not last. The machine will supersede handwork in the manufacture of plain goods. But at the same time, handwork very probably will extend its domain in the artistic finishing of many things which are now made entirely in the factory, and it will always remain an

important factor in the growth of thousands of young and new trades.

But the question arises, Why should not the cottons, the woollen cloth, and the silks, now woven by hand in the villages, be woven by machinery in the same villages, without ceasing to remain connected with work in the fields? Why should not hundreds of domestic

industries, now carried on, entirely by hand, resort to labour-saving machines, as they already do in the knitting trade and many others? There is no reason why the small motor should not be of a much more general use than it is now, wherever there is no need to have a factory, and there is no reason why the village should not have its small factory, wherever

factory work is preferable, as we already see it occasionally in certain villages in France.

More than that. There is no reason why the factory, with its motive force and machinery, should not belong to the community, as is already the case for motive power in the above-mentioned workshops and small factories in the French portion of the Jura hills. It is evident that

now, under the capitalist system, the factory is the curse of the village, as it comes to overwork children and to make paupers out of its male inhabitants, and it is quite natural that it should be opposed by all means by the workers, if they have succeeded in maintaining their olden trades' organisations (as at Sheffield, or Solingen), or if they have not yet been

reduced to sheer misery (as in the Jura). But under a more rational social organisation the factory would find no such obstacles: it would be a boon to the village. And there is already unmistakable evidence to show that a move in this direction is being made in a few village communities.

The moral and physical advantages which man would derive from dividing his work

between the field and the workshop are self evident. But the difficulty is, we are told, in the necessary centralisation of the modern industries. In industry, as well as in politics, centralisation has so many admirers! But in both spheres the ideal of the centralisers badly needs revision. In fact, if we analyse the modern industries, we soon discover that for some of them the co-

operation of hundreds, or even thousands, of workers gathered at the same spot is really necessary. The great iron works and mining enterprises decidedly belong to that category; oceanic steamers cannot be built in village factories. But very many of our big factories are nothing else but agglomerations under a common management, of

several distinct industries; while others are mere agglomerations of hundreds of copies of the very same machine; such are most of our gigantic spinning and weaving establishments.

The manufacture being a strictly private enterprise, its owners find it advantageous to have all the branches of a given industry under their own management; they thus

cumulate the profits of the successive transformations of the raw material. And when several thousand power-looms are combined in one factory, the owner finds his advantage in being able to hold the command of the market. But from a technical point of view the advantages of such an accumulation are trifling and often doubtful. Even so centralised an industry as that

of the cottons does not suffer at all from the division of production of one given sort of goods at its different stages between several separate factories: we see it at Manchester and its neighbouring towns. As to the petty trades, no inconvenience is experienced, from a still greater subdivision between the workshops in the watch trade and very many others.

We often hear that one horse-power costs so much in a small engine, and so much less in an engine ten times more powerful; that the pound of cotton yarn costs much less when the factory doubles the number of its spindles. But, in the opinion of the best engineering authorities, such as Prof. W. Unwin, the hydraulic, and especially the electric, distribution of power

from a central station sets aside the first part of the argument.[[332](#)] As to its second part, calculations of this sort are only good for those industries which prepare the half-manufactured produce for further transformations. As to those countless descriptions of goods which derive their value chiefly from the intervention of skilled labour, they can be best fabricated in

smaller factories which employ a few hundred, or even a few score of operatives. This is why the “concentration” so much spoken of is often nothing but an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of dominating the market, not for cheapening the technical process.

Even under the present conditions the leviathan factories offer great

inconveniences, as they cannot rapidly reform their machinery according to the constantly varying demands of the consumers. How many failures of great concerns, too well known in this country to need to be named, were due to this cause during the crisis of 1886–1890? As for the new branches of industry which I have mentioned at the beginning of the previous

chapter, they always must make a start on a small scale, and they can prosper in small towns as well as in big cities, if the smaller agglomerations are provided with institutions stimulating artistic taste and the genius of invention. The progress achieved of late in toy-making, as also the high perfection attained in the fabrication of mathematical and optical instruments, of

furniture, of small luxury articles, of pottery and so on, are instances in point. Art and science are no longer the monopoly of the great cities, and further progress will be in scattering them over the country.

The geographical distribution of industries in a given country depends, of course, to a great extent upon a complexus of natural conditions; it is obvious

that there are spots which are best suited for the development of certain industries. The banks of the Clyde and the Tyne are certainly most appropriate for ship-building yards, and ship-building yards must be surrounded by a variety of workshops and factories. The industries will always find some advantages in being grouped, to some extent,

according to the natural features of separate regions. But we must recognise that now they are not at all grouped according to those features. Historical causes—chiefly religious wars and national rivalries—have had a good deal to do with their growth and their present distribution; still more so the employers were guided by considerations as to the

facilities for sale and export—that is, by considerations which are already losing their importance with the increased facilities for transport, and will lose it still more when the producers produce for themselves, and not for customers far away.

Why, in a rationally organised society, ought London to remain a great centre for the jam and

preserving trade, and
manufacture umbrellas for
nearly the whole of the United
Kingdom? Why should the
countless Whitechapel petty
trades remain where they are,
instead of being spread all over
the country? There is no
reason whatever why the
mantles which are worn by
English ladies should be sewn
at Berlin and in Whitechapel,
instead of in Devonshire or

Derbyshire. Why should Paris refine sugar for almost the whole of France? Why should one-half of the boots and shoes used in the United States be manufactured in the 1,500 workshops of Massachusetts? There is absolutely no reason why these and like anomalies should persist. The industries must be scattered all over the world, and the scattering of industries amidst all civilised

nations will be necessarily followed by a further scattering of factories over the territories of each nation.

In the course of this evolution, the natural produce of each region and its geographical conditions certainly will be one of the factors which will determine the character of the industries that are going to develop in this region. But when we see

that Switzerland has become a great exporter of steam-engines, railway engines, and steam-boats—although she has no iron ore and no coal for obtaining steel, and even has no seaport to import them; when we see that Belgium has succeeded in being a great exporter of grapes, and that Manchester has managed to become a seaport—we understand that in the

geographical distribution of industries, the two factors of local produces and of an advantageous position by the sea are not yet the dominant factors. We begin to understand that, all taken, it is the intellectual factor—the spirit of invention, the capacity of adaptation, political liberty, and so on—which counts for more than all others.

That all the industries find an

advantage in being carried on in close contact with a great variety of other industries the reader has seen already from numerous examples. Every industry requires *technical surroundings*. But the same is also true of agriculture.

Agriculture cannot develop without the aid of machinery, and the use of a perfect machinery cannot be generalised without industrial

surroundings: without mechanical workshops, easily accessible to the cultivator of the soil, the use of agricultural machinery is not possible. The village smith would not do. If the work of a threshing-machine has to be stopped for a week or more, because one of the cogs in a wheel has been broken, and if to obtain a new wheel one must send a special messenger to the next

province—then the use of a threshing machine is not possible. But this is precisely what I saw in my childhood in Central Russia, and quite lately, I have found the very same fact mentioned in an English autobiography in the first half of the nineteenth century. Besides, in all the northern part of the temperate zone, the cultivators of the soil must have some sort of

industrial employment during the long winter months. This is what has brought about the great development of rural industries, of which we have just seen such interesting examples. But this need is also felt in the soft climate of the Channel Islands, notwithstanding the extension taken by horticulture under glass. “We need such industries. Could you suggest

us any?" wrote to me one of my correspondents in Guernsey.

But this is not yet all. Agriculture is so much in need of aid from those who inhabit the cities, that every summer thousands of men leave their slums in the towns and go to the country for the season of crops. The London destitutes go in thousands to Kent and Sussex as bay-makers and

hop-pickers, it being estimated that Kent alone requires 80,000 additional men and women for hop-picking; whole villages in France and their cottage industries are abandoned in the summer, and the peasants wander to the more fertile parts of the country; hundreds of thousands of human beings are transported every summer to the prairies of Manitoba and

Dakota. Every summer many thousands of Poles spread at harvest time over the plains of Mecklenburg, Westphalia, and even France, and in Russia there is every year an exodus of several millions of men who journey from the north to the southern prairies for harvesting the crops; while many St. Petersburg manufacturers reduce their production in the summer, because the

operatives return to their native villages for the culture of their allotments.

Agriculture cannot be carried on without additional hands in the summer, but it still more needs temporary aids for *improving* the soil, for ten-folding its productive powers.

Steam-digging, drainage, and manuring would render the heavy clays in the north-west of London a much

richer soil than that of the American prairies. To become fertile, those clays want only plain, unskilled human labour, such as is necessary for digging the soil, laying in drainage tubes, pulverising phosphorites, and the like, and that labour would be gladly done by the factory workers if it were properly organised in a free community for the benefit of the whole society. The soil

claims that sort of aid, and it would have it under a proper organisation, even if it were necessary to stop many mills in the summer for that purpose. No doubt the present factory owners would consider it ruinous if they had to stop their mills for several months every year, because the capital engaged in a factory is expected to pump money every day and every hour, if

possible. But that is the capitalist's view of the matter, not the community's view.

As to the workers, who ought to be the real managers of industries, they will find it healthy not to perform the same monotonous work all the year round, and they will abandon it for the summer, if indeed they do not find the means of keeping the factory running by relieving each other

in groups.

The scattering of industries over the country—so as to bring the factory amidst the fields, to make agriculture derive all those profits which it always finds in being combined with industry (see the Eastern States of America) and to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work—is surely the next step to be made, as soon as a

reorganisation of our present conditions is possible. It is being made already, here and there, as we saw on the preceding pages. This, step is imposed by the very necessity of *producing for the producers themselves*; it is imposed by the necessity for each healthy man and woman to spend a part of their lives in manual work in the free air, and it will be rendered the more

necessary when the great social movements, which have now become unavoidable, come to disturb the present international trade, and compel each nation to revert to her own resources for her own maintenance. Humanity as a whole, as well as each separate individual, will be gainers by the change, and the change will take place.

However, such a change

also implies a thorough modification of our present system of education. It implies a society composed of men and women, each of whom is able to work with his or her hands, as well as with his or her brain, and to do so in more directions than one. This “integration of capacities” and “integral education” I am now going to analyse.

Brain Work and Manual Work

[...]

What is the meaning, in fact, of the outcry for technical education which has been raised at one and the same time in England, in France, in Germany, in the States, and in Russia, if it does not express a general dissatisfaction with the present division into scientists, scientific engineers, and

workers? Listen to those who know industry, and you will see that the substance of their complaints is this: “The worker whose task has been specialised by the permanent division of labour has lost the intellectual interest in his labour, and it is especially so in the great industries: he has lost his inventive powers. Formerly, he invented very much. Manual workers—not

men of science nor trained engineers—have invented, or brought to perfection, the prime motors amid all that mass of machinery which has revolutionised industry for the last hundred years. But since the great factory has been enthroned, the worker, depressed by the monotony of his work, invents no more. What can a weaver invent who merely supervises four looms,

without knowing anything either about their complicated movements or how the machines grew to be what they are? What can a man invent who is condemned for life to bind together the ends of two threads with the greatest celerity, and knows nothing beyond making a knot?

“At the outset of modern industry, three generations of

workers *have* invented; now they cease to do so. As to the inventions of the engineers, specially trained for devising machines, they are either devoid of genius or not practical enough. Those ‘nearly to nothings,’ of which Sir Frederick Bramwell spoke once at Bath, are missing in their inventions—those nothings which can be learned in the workshop only, and

which permitted a Murdoch and the Soho workers to make a practical engine of Watt's schemes. None but he who knows the machine—not in its drawings and models only, but in its breathing and throbbings—who unconsciously thinks of it while standing by it, can really improve it. Smeaton and Newcomen surely were excellent engineers, but in their engines a boy had to

open the steam valve at each stroke of the piston, and it was one of those boys who once managed to connect the valve with the remainder of the machine, so as to make it open automatically, while he ran away to play with other boys. But in the modern machinery there is no room left for naïve improvements of that kind. Scientific education on a wide scale has become necessary

for further inventions, and that education is refused to the workers. So that there is no issue out of the difficulty, unless scientific education and handicraft are combined together—unless integration of knowledge takes the place of the present divisions.”

Such is the real substance of the present movement in favour of technical education. But, instead of bringing to

public consciousness the, perhaps, unconscious motives of the present discontent, instead of widening the views of the discontented and discussing the problem to its full extent, the mouthpieces of the movement do not mostly rise above the shopkeeper's view of the question. Some of them indulge in jingo talk about crushing all foreign industries out of competition,

while the others see in technical education nothing but a means of somewhat improving the flesh-machine of the factory and of transferring a few workers into the upper class of trained engineers.

Such an ideal may satisfy them, but it cannot satisfy those who keep in view the combined interests of science and industry, and consider both as a means for raising

humanity to a higher level. We maintain that in the interests of both science and industry, as well as of society as a whole, every human being, without distinction of birth, ought to receive such an education as would enable him, or her, to combine a thorough knowledge of science with a thorough knowledge of handicraft. We fully recognise the necessity of specialisation

of knowledge, but we maintain that specialisation must follow general education, and that general education must be given in science and handicraft alike. To the division of society into brain workers and manual workers we oppose the combination of both kinds of activities, and instead of “technical education,” which means the maintenance of the present division between brain

work and manual work, we advocate the *éducation integrale*, or complete education, which means the disappearance of that pernicious distinction.

Plainly stated, the aims of the school under this system ought to be the following: To give such an education that, on leaving school at the age of eighteen or twenty, each boy and each girl should be

endowed with a thorough knowledge of science—such a knowledge as might enable them to be useful workers in science—and, at the same time, to give them a general knowledge of what constitutes the bases of technical training, and such a skill in some special trade as would enable each of them to take his or her place in the grand world of the manual production of wealth.

[[333](#)] I know that many will find that aim too large, or even impossible to attain, but I hope that if they have the patience to read the following pages, they will see that we require nothing beyond what can be easily attained. In fact, *it has been attained*, and what has been done on a small scale could be done on a wider scale, were it not for the economical and social causes

which prevent any serious reform from being accomplished in our miserably organised society.

[...]

So let us suppose that a community—a city, or a territory which has, at least, a few millions of inhabitants—gives the above-sketched education to all its children, without distinction of birth (and we *are* rich enough to

permit us the luxury of such an education), without asking anything in return from the children but what they will give when they have become producers of wealth. Suppose such an education is given, and analyse its probable consequences.

I will not insist upon the increase of wealth which would result from having a young army of educated and

well-trained producers; nor shall I insist upon the social benefits which would be derived from erasing the present distinction between the brain workers and the manual workers, and from thus reaching the concordance of interest and harmony so much wanted in our times of social struggles. I shall not dwell upon the fullness of life which would result for each separate

individual, if he were enabled to enjoy the use of both his mental and bodily powers; nor upon the advantages of raising manual labour to the place of honour it ought to occupy in society, instead of being a stamp of inferiority, as it is now. Nor shall I insist upon the disappearance of the present misery and degradation, with all their consequences—vice, crime,

prisons, price of blood, denunciation, and the like—which necessarily would follow. In short, I will not touch now the great social question, upon which so much has been written and so much remains to be written yet. I merely intend to point out in these pages the benefits which science itself would derive from the change.

Some will say, of course,

that to reduce men of science to the *rôle* of manual workers would mean the decay of science and genius. But those who will take into account the following considerations probably will agree that the result ought to be the reverse—namely, such a revival of science and art, and such a progress in industry, as we only can only faintly foresee from what we know about the

times of the Renaissance. It has become a commonplace to speak with emphasis about the progress of science during the nineteenth century, and it is evident that our century, if compared with centuries past, has much to be proud of. But, if we take into account that most of the problems which our century has solved already had been indicated, and their solutions foreseen, a hundred

years ago, we must admit that the progress was not so rapid as might have been expected, and that something hampered it.

[...]

It is evident, however, that all men and women cannot equally enjoy the pursuit of scientific work. The variety of inclinations is such that some will find more pleasure in science, some others in art,

and others again in some of the numberless branches of the production of wealth. But, whatever the occupations preferred by everyone, everyone will be the more useful in his own branch if he is in possession of a serious scientific knowledge. And, whosoever he might be—scientist or artist physicist or surgeon, chemist or sociologist, historian or poet—

he would be the gainer if he spent a part of his life in the workshop or the farm (the workshop *and* the farm), if he were in contact with humanity in its daily work, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he himself discharges his duties as an unprivileged producer of wealth.

How much better the historian and the sociologist would understand humanity if

they knew it, not in books only, not in a few of its representatives, but as a whole, in its daily life, daily work, and daily affairs! How much more medicine would trust to hygiene, and how much less to prescriptions, if the young doctors were the nurses of the sick and the nurses received the education of the doctors of our time! And how much the poet would

gain in his feeling of the beauties of nature, how much better would he know the human heart, if he met the rising sun amidst the tillers of the soil, himself a tiller; if he fought against the storm with the sailors on board ship; if he knew the poetry of labour and rest, sorrow and joy, struggle and conquest! *Greift nur hinein in's volle Menschenleben!* Goethe said;

Ein jeder lebt's—nicht vielen ist's bekannt.[[334](#)] But how few poets follow his advice!

The so-called “division of labour” has grown under a system which condemned the masses to toil all the day long, and all the life long, at the same wearisome kind of labour. But if we take into account how few are the real producers of wealth in our present society, and how

squandered is their labour we must recognise that [Benjamin] Franklin[[335](#)] was right in saying that to work five hours a day would generally do for supplying each member of a civilised nation with the comfort now accessible for the few only.

But we have made some progress since Franklin's time, and some of that progress in the hitherto most backward

branch of production—
agriculture—has been
indicated in the preceding
pages. Even in that branch the
productivity of labour can be
immensely increased, and
work itself rendered easy and
pleasant. If everyone took his
share of production, and if
production were socialised—
as political economy, if it
aimed at the satisfaction of the
ever-growing needs of all,

would advise us to do—then more than one half of the working day would remain to everyone for the pursuit of art, science, or any hobby he or she might prefer, and his work in those fields would be the more profitable if he spent the other half of the day in productive work—if art and science were followed from mere inclination, not for mercantile purposes.

Moreover, a community organised on the principles of all being workers would be rich enough to conclude that every man and woman, after having reached a certain age—say of forty or more—ought to be relieved from the moral obligation of taking a direct part in the performance of the necessary manual work, so as to be able entirely to devote himself or herself to whatever

he or she chooses in the domain of art, or science, or any kind of work. Free pursuit in new branches of art and knowledge, free creation, and free development thus might be fully guaranteed. And such a community would not know misery amidst wealth. It would not know the duality of conscience which permeates our life and stifles every noble effort. It would freely take its

flight towards the highest regions of progress compatible with human nature.

Conclusion

Readers who have had the patience to follow the facts accumulated in this book, especially those who have given them thoughtful attention, will probably feel convinced of the immense powers over the productive

forces of Nature that man has acquired within the last half a century. Comparing the achievements indicated in this book with the present state of production, some will, I hope, also ask themselves the question which will be ere long, let us hope, the main object of a scientific political economy: Are the means now in use for satisfying human needs, under the present

system of permanent division of functions and production for profits, really *economical*? Do they really lead to economy in the expenditure of human forces? Or, are they not mere wasteful survivals from a past that was plunged into darkness, ignorance and oppression, and never took into consideration the economical and social value of the human being?

In the domain of agriculture, it may be taken as proved that if a small part only of the time that is now given in each nation or region to field culture was given to well thought out and socially carried out permanent improvements of the soil, the duration of work which would be required afterwards to grow the yearly bread-food for an average family of five would be less

than a fortnight every year, and that the work required for that purpose would not be the hard toil of the ancient slave, but work which would be agreeable to the physical forces of every healthy man and woman in the country.

It has been proved that by following the methods of intensive market-gardening—partly under glass—vegetables and fruit can be grown in such

quantities that men could be provided with a rich vegetable food and a profusion of fruit, if they simply devoted to the task of growing them the hours which everyone willingly devotes to work in the open air, after having spent most of his day in the factory, the mine, or the study. Provided, of course, that the production of food-stuffs should not be the work of the isolated

individual, but the planned-out and combined action of human groups.

It has also been proved—and those who care to verify it by themselves may easily do so by calculating the real expenditure for labour which was lately made in the building of workmen's houses by both private persons and municipalities[[336](#)]
—that under a proper combination of

labour, twenty to twenty-four months of one man's work would be sufficient to secure for ever, for a family of five, an apartment or a house provided with all the comforts which modern hygiene and taste could require.

And it has been demonstrated by actual experiment that, by adopting methods of education, advocated long since and

partially applied here and there, it is most easy to convey to children of an average intelligence, before they have reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, a broad general comprehension of Nature, as well as of human societies; to familiarise their minds with sound methods of both scientific research and technical work, and inspire their hearts with a deep feeling

of human solidarity and justice, and that it is extremely easy to convey during the next four or five years a reasoned, scientific knowledge of Nature's laws, as well as a knowledge, at once reasoned and practical, of the technical methods of satisfying man's material needs. Far from being inferior to the "specialised" young persons manufactured by our universities, the

complete human being, trained to use his brain and his hands, excels them, on the contrary, in all respects, especially as an initiator and an inventor in both science and technics.

[...]

Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals

have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men. Not those factories in which children lose all the appearance of children in the atmosphere of an industrial hell, but those airy and

hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits, of which we already find a few samples here and there; factories and workshops into which men, women and children will not be driven by hunger, but will be attracted by the desire of finding an activity suited to their tastes,

and where, aided by the motor and the machine, they will choose the branch of activity which best suits their inclinations.

Let those factories and workshops be erected, not for making profits by selling shoddy or useless and noxious things to enslaved Africans, but to satisfy the unsatisfied needs of millions of Europeans. And again, you

will be struck to see with what facility and in how short a time your needs of dress and of thousands of articles of luxury can be satisfied, when production is carried on for satisfying real needs rather than for satisfying shareholders by high profits or for pouring gold into the pockets of promoters and bogus directors. Very soon you will yourselves feel

interested in that work, and you will have occasion to admire in your children their eager desire to become acquainted with Nature and its forces, their inquisitive inquiries as to the powers of machinery, and their rapidly developing inventive genius.

Such is the future—already possible, already realisable; such is the present—already condemned and about to

disappear. And what prevents us from turning our backs to this present and from marching towards that future, or, at least, making the first steps towards it, is not the “failure of science,” but first of all our crass cupidity—the cupidity of the man who killed the hen that was laying golden eggs—and then our laziness of mind—that mental cowardice so carefully nurtured in the

past.

For centuries science and so-called practical wisdom have said to man: “It is good to be rich, to be able to satisfy, at least, your material needs, but the only means to be rich is to so train your mind and capacities as to be able to compel other men—slaves, serfs, or wage-earners—to make these riches for you. You have no choice. Either

you must stand in the ranks of the peasants and the artisans who, whatsoever economists and moralists may promise them in the future, are now periodically doomed to starve after each bad crop or during their strikes and to be shot down by their own sons the moment they lose patience. Or you must train your faculties so as to be a military commander of the masses, or

to be accepted as one of the wheels of the governing machinery of the State or to become a manager of men in commerce or industry.” For many centuries there was no other choice, and men followed that advice, without finding in it happiness, either for themselves and their own children, or for those whom they pretended to preserve from worse misfortunes.

But modern knowledge has another issue to offer to thinking men. It tells them that in order to be rich they need not take the bread from the mouths of others, but that the more rational outcome would be a society in which men, with the work of their own hands and intelligence, and by the aid of the machinery already invented and to be invented, should themselves

create all imaginable riches. Technics and science will not be lagging behind if production takes such a direction. Guided by observation, analysis and experiment, they will answer all possible demands. They will reduce the time which is necessary for producing wealth to any desired amount, so as to leave to everyone as much leisure as he or she may ask for. They surely cannot

guarantee happiness, because happiness depends as much, or even more, upon the individual himself as upon his surroundings. But they guarantee, at least, the happiness that can be found in the full and varied exercise of the different capacities of the human being, in work that need not be overwork, and in the consciousness that one is not endeavouring to base his

own happiness upon the misery of others.

These are the horizons which the above inquiry opens to the unprejudiced mind.

Appendix

[329](#)[] Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) was a reverend who wrote on political economy. He is best known for *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, which blamed poverty on overpopulation rather than an unjust social system. Much hated in working class circles, his arguments were invoked against social change and even moderate welfare reforms.

(Editor)

[330](#)[] See the discussions in the Reichstag in January, 1909, on the Polish Syndicates, and the application that is made to them of the paragraph of the law of the associations relative to language (*Sprachenparagraph*).

[331](#)[] The Garden City movement, inspired by the work of urbanist Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928), author of *To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), advocated changing patterns of settlement so to combine the best aspects of rural and urban life while eliminating the worst. While Howard was no political radical, his proposals attracted the interest of a

number of socialists and anarchists.
(Editor)

[332](#)[] I may add from my own experience that such is also the opinion of several Manchester employers: “I am saving a great deal by using municipal electric power in my factory, instead of the steam-engine,” I was told by one of the most respected members of the Manchester community: “I pay for motive power according to the number of persons I employ—and two hundred at certain times, and fifty in other parts of the year. I need not buy coal and stock it in advance for all the year; I have saved the room that was occupied by the steam engine, and the room above

it is not heated and shaken by the engine as it used to be.”

[333](#)[] In their examination of the causes of unemployment in York, based not on economists’ hypotheses, but on a close study of the real facts in each individual case (*Unemployment: a Social Study*, London, 1911), Seebohm Rowntree and Mr. Bruno Lasker have come to the conclusion that the chief cause of unemployment is that young people, after having left the school (where they learn no trade), find employment in such professions as greengrocer boy, newspaper boy, and the like, which represent “a blind alley.” When they reach the age of eighteen or twenty,

they must leave, because the wages are a boy's wages,—and they know no trade whatever!

[334](#)[] A quote from Goethe's *Faust*:
“Grasp the life of man complete!
Each lives it—though it's known to few” (Editor)

[335](#)[] Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. A noted polymath, he was a leading author, political theorist, politician, and, as a scientist, a major figure in the American Enlightenment and the history of physics for his discoveries and theories regarding electricity. In a letter to Benjamin Vaughn, dated July 1784, he argued that it had “been

computed by some political arithmetician that if every man and woman would work for four hours each day on something useful, that labour would produce sufficient to procure all the necessaries and comforts of life, Want and Misery would be banished out of the World, and the rest of the 24 hours might be leisure and happiness” (“On Luxury, Idleness, and Industry,” *The Works of Dr. Benjamin Franklin* [T. Bedlington, Boston: 1825], 213). (Editor)

[336](#)[] These figures may be computed, for instance, from the data contained in “The Ninth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labour of the

United States, for the year 1893: Building and Loan Associations.” In this country, the cost of a workman’s cottage is reckoned at about £200, which would represent 700 to 800 days of labour. But we must not forget how much of this sum is a toll raised by the capitalists and the landlords upon everything that is used in building the cottage: the bricks and tiles, the mortar, the wood, the iron, etc.

Mutual Aid: An Important Factor in Evolution

This essay appeared in Emma Goldman's Mother Earth (Vol. IX, No. 4) in June 1914. It summarises Kropotkin's arguments on mutual aid and how they fit in with his other, explicitly revolutionary, works and ideas.

At first received with distrust, the idea that mutual aid and mutual support represent an important factor in the progressive evolution of animal species seems to be accepted now by many biologists. In most of the chief works of Evolution, which have appeared lately in Germany, it is already recognised that two different aspects of the struggle for life must be

distinguished: the struggle of the whole, of large divisions, of a species against adverse natural conditions and rival species, and the struggle between individuals within the species; in other words: *exterior* warfare and *inner war*. At the same time it begins also to be recognised that the struggle for life *within* the species has been exaggerated and that *mutual aid* is, to say

the least, *as much a fundamental principle in Nature as mutual struggle*; while for *progressive evolution* it is without doubt the most important of the two.

The value of this recognition cannot be overlooked. Darwin already foresaw it. Once it is recognised that the social instinct is a permanent and powerful instinct in every animal species, and still more

so in man, we are enabled to establish the foundations of Ethics (the Morality of Society) upon the sound basis of the observation of Nature and need not look for it in supernatural revelation. The idea which Bacon, Grotius, Goethe, and Darwin himself (in his second work, *The Descent of Man*) were advocating is thus finding a full confirmation, once we direct

our attention to the extent to which mutual aid is carried on in Nature. *We* see at once what a powerful weapon it represents even for the feeblest species in their struggle against adverse natural conditions, the longevity it secures to the individuals, the accumulation of experience, and the development of higher instincts and intelligence that it renders

possible within the species.

To show this importance of the social instinct as a basis of Ethics is the work which I am now engaged in.

Another important consideration to which the study of mutual aid in Nature brings us is that it enables us better to realise how much the evolution of every animal species, and still more so of human societies and separate

individuals, depends upon *the conditions of life under which they are developing*. This idea, so energetically advocated by the French Encyclopaedists at the end of the eighteenth century, and by their Socialist and Anarchist followers in the succeeding century, beginning with Godwin, Fourier, and Robert Owen, is bitterly combated by the defenders of Capitalism

and the State, as well as by the religious preachers, and we all know what advantage they took of the struggle-for-life idea for the defence of their position—much to the despair of Darwin himself. Now that we see that the idea of an inner struggle within the species had been grossly exaggerated by Darwin's followers, we understand that if in his works, subsequent to

his *Origin of Species* (*The Descent of Man* and especially *Variation in Animals and Plants*), he gave more and more importance to the action of exterior conditions in determining the lines of evolution of all living beings—he did not make “a concession” to his opponents, as we are told by some of his English followers. He merely summed up the result of the

immense researches he had made into the causes of variation after he had published in 1859 his first epoch-making work, *The Origin of Species*.

A careful, dispassionate study of the effects of environment upon the development of both societies and individuals can thus be made now, and it is sure to open new, important vistas

upon Evolution as a whole, while at the same time it frees the social reformer from the doubts he might have had concerning his efforts of changing first the present conditions of life of mankind and saying that better conditions of social life, based on mutual support and equality, would already raise man's moral conceptions to a level they never could attain

under the present system of slavery and exploitation of man by man.

A third point upon which the researches made can throw a new light is *the origin of the State*. Some ideas upon this subject, derived from the studies of the development of Society, and contained in *Mutual Aid*, I have embodied in a pamphlet, "The State and Its Historical Role." But much

more could be said upon this important subject, and, as every careful reader will see himself, the chapters I give in the book to “Mutual Aid in the Medieval City” and, the preceding chapter, to the Village Community, open new lines of research which would be rich in important *practical* results. Unfortunately, the worship of the centralised Roman State and Roman Law,

which reigns supreme in our universities, stands in the way of such researches. The more so, as such studies, if they were made, would give support to the ideas growing now in the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon communities as regards the necessity of independence, or “home rule,” not only for separate nationalities but also for every geographically separate

territory, every commune and parish. Such an independence—it begins now to be understood—would be the only proper way for establishing a real union between the different parts of a territory, in lieu of the artificial cohesion enforced now by a common submission to some outside authority. It has been said in some reviews of this book that I have to

some extent exaggerated the good features of the medieval free republics. But if this book were not written for the general reader, and if I had incorporated into it the immense mass of material I have collected in the reliable contemporary sources, and serious modern works on the subject, one would have seen that, far from having exaggerated, I was compelled

to limit my illustrations to quite a small number of those I might have given. Those illustrations which I have in my manuscript notes alone would do to make a second volume.

Now that we see such a great movement among the workingmen of Europe and America towards themselves working out the forms which production and exchange

ought to take in a society freed from the yoke of Capital and State, I earnestly advise those workers who are already thinking in that direction to meditate about what we know of the first two centuries of independent life in the medieval cities, after they had thrown off the yoke of feudal barons, bishops, and kings, and started a new development on the lines of

freedom and federation. Of course, we must not try to imitate the past—history does not repeat itself, and I have indicated in *Mutual Aid* the mistakes the medieval cities committed when they worked out their freedom charts. What we have to do is to see whether the *principles of independence and free federation* were not infinitely better, leading to prosperity

and a higher intellectual development, than the submission to outside authorities and the enslavement to Church and State, which characterised the epoch that followed the fall of the free cities and inaugurated the growth of military States.

At the present time the idea of centralisation and centralised States is so much in vogue, even among

Socialists, that we often hear people saying that the smaller nationalities have no reason to exist; the sooner they will be swallowed by the more numerous ones, the sooner they forget their mother tongue, the better.

All my life, experience has taught me quite the reverse. All that I have learned in my life has persuaded me, on the contrary, that the surest way

to bring about a harmony of aspirations among the different nations is for every fraction of mankind to further develop and to enrich the language that is spoken by the masses of that fraction of humanity. This will also be the surest way for all those fractions to agree among themselves as to the one or two languages that will be accepted later on as the chief means of international

intercourse. The more so as learning a language would be a knowledge quite easy to acquire under the perfected methods of teaching languages which are already worked out now.

Besides, this is also the surest way to stimulate every nationality to develop the best that it has worked out in the course of centuries in its own surroundings: the surest way

to enrich our common inheritance with those national features which give a special value to philosophical conceptions, to poetry, and to art.

Glossary

Certain terms, people and events continually appear in Kropotkin's work. If a name, event or organisation is referred to once then it is footnoted in the text, if it is mentioned multiple times rather than footnote each occurrence, information on it is summarised here. In addition, anything that is

mentioned once and cannot be referenced easily in the main text is also listed.

People

Alexander Alexandrovich (1845–1894), known as **ALEXANDER III**, reigned as Emperor of Russia from 13th March 1881, after the assassination of his father, Alexander II, by Russian Populists, until his death. He

reversed some of the liberal measures of his predecessor.

François-Noël **BABEUF**
(1760–1797) known as
Gracchus Babeuf, was a
French political agitator and
journalist during the Great
French Revolution. He was
executed for his role in the
Conspiracy of the Equals.
This aimed an armed uprising
of the masses against the
bourgeois regime of the

Directory to establish a revolutionary dictatorship as a transitional stage to “pure democracy” and “egalitarian communism.”

Jean-Sylvain BAILLY (1736–1793) was a French astronomer, mathematician, and political leader in the early part of the French Revolution. He presided over the Tennis Court Oath and served as the mayor of Paris from 1789 to

1791. He was guillotined during the Reign of Terror.

Yevgeny BAZAROV is a fictional character, a young physician whose actions and philosophy are the focus of the novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862) by Russian writer Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883). Bazarov is rude, sarcastic, and strident in his profession of faith in nothing but science. Calling himself a nihilist, he

“throws overboard all the conventionalities and the petty lies of ordinary society life” (Kropotkin, *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*), challenging the liberal ideas of other characters as well as the traditional Russian Orthodox feelings of his parents.

Edward BELLAMY (1850–1898) was an American socialist, most famous for his

utopian novel *Looking Backward* (1888). This was a Rip Van Winkle-like tale set in the then-distant future of the year 2000. Bellamy's state socialist vision inspired the formation of over 160 "Nationalist Clubs" dedicated to make it a reality. He died shortly after he finished its sequel, *Equality* (1898).

Alexander **BERKMAN**
(1870–1936) was a leading

member of the American anarchist movement. In 1892, he made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate businessman Henry Clay Frick in revenge for the death of nine strikers by his Pinkerton guards. He recounted his 14 year prison term in *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912). In 1917, Berkman and Emma Goldman were sentenced to two years in jail

for conspiracy against the draft. After their release, they were deported to Russia. Initially supportive of the Bolsheviks, they turned against them. Leaving Russia, he wrote *The Bolshevik Myth* (1925) on his experiences as well as the classic introductory text *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism* (1929).

Otto Eduard Leopold,

Prince of Bismarck, Duke of Lauenburg (1815–1898), known as **Otto von BISMARCK**, was a conservative German statesman who dominated European affairs from the 1860s to 1890. After a series of short victorious wars, he unified numerous German states into the German Empire in 1871 and was its Chancellor until 1890. He implemented

the world's first welfare state in the 1880s, working closely with big industry to make it acceptable to conservatives (partly to undermine support for the Socialists).

Louis Jean Joseph Charles BLANC (1811–1882) was a French politician, historian and reformist state socialist. Most famous for his work *L'Organisation du travail* ("The Organisation of

Labour”) which advocated state-funded and (initially) state-run producer co-operatives which would compete capitalism away and then abolish competition. In the Revolution of 1848 Louis Blanc became a member of the provisional government and convinced it to set up the National Workshops. He was appointed to preside over the government labour

commission established at the Palais de Luxembourg to report on the labour question.

Louis Auguste BLANQUI (1805–1881) was a noted French socialist revolutionary. He organised numerous conspiracies to overthrow the regime and thought that the revolution had to be carried out by a small group. This would establish a temporary dictatorship which would

create the new social order after which power would be handed to the people. Blanqui's uncompromising politics and regular insurrections ensured that he spent half his life in prison.

Napoléon BONAPARTE (1769–1821) was a French military and political leader who rose to prominence during the latter stages of the French Revolution and its

associated wars in Europe. He overthrew the French Directory, replacing it with the French Consulate on 9th November 1799 (18th *Brumaire*, Year VIII under the French Republican Calendar). Initially installing himself as First Consul, five years later the French Senate proclaimed him Emperor Napoleon I (1804–1815).

Louis-Napoléon

BONAPARTE (1808–1873) was the first President of the French Republic and the last monarch of France. Nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, he was elected President of the Second Republic in December 1848. He organised a coup on 2nd December 1851 and disbanded the National Assembly. This was overwhelmingly approved in a plebiscite and one year later

another plebiscite confirmed the creation of the Second Empire and his ascension to the throne as Napoleon III.

John Francis BRAY (1809–1897) was a writer on socialist economics and labour activist in both Britain and America. One of the Ricardian socialists, he argued that the profits of the employers were caused by unequal exchange which ensured that workers

were not paid the full value of their labour. The remedy was creating a society of equal exchange between producers.

Jacques Pierre BRISSOT (1754–1793), who assumed the name of de Warville, was a leading member of the Girondist movement during the French Revolution. His call for the reinstatement of the constitutional monarchy of the Constitution of 1791 to restrict

the rising popular revolution was ignored. Under pressure from the *sans-culottes* in May 1793, the Montagnards in the Convention expelled and arrested Brissot and the entire Girondin party. He tried to escape, but was captured and guillotined.

Paul BROUSSE (1844–1912): A French socialist, originally an anarchist active in the Jura Federation from 1873

to 1880, publishing an article in *L'Avant-Garde* which defined propaganda of the deed. Returning to France in 1880, he became progressively more reformist, joined the socialist party and become the leader of its “possibilists.”

Étienne CABET (1788–1856) was a French philosopher and utopian socialist, founder of the Icarian movement. In 1840 he wrote

the *Voyage and Adventures of Lord William Carisdall in Icaria* (better known as *Voyage to Icaria*) which depicted a utopia in which an elected government controlled all economic activity and supervised social affairs. He led a group of emigrants to found such a society in the United States in 1848. The last Icarian colony, at Corning, disbanded in 1898.

**Nikolay Gavrilovich
CHERNYSHEVSKY** (1828–
1889) was a Russian
revolutionary democrat,
materialist philosopher, critic,
and socialist. Founder of
Russian populism, he agitated
for the revolutionary
overthrow of the autocracy
and the creation of a socialist
society based on the peasant
commune. In 1862 he was
arrested, and wrote *What Is to*

Be Done? in prison. This was an inspiration to many later Russian revolutionaries, who sought to emulate its hero, Rakhmetov, who was wholly dedicated to the revolution, ascetic in his habits and ruthlessly disciplined.

Georges	Benjamin
CLEMENCEAU	(1841–
1929) was a French statesman	
and leader of the centre-right	
Radical Party. He played a	

central role in politics after 1870 and served as the Prime Minister of France from 1906 to 1909, and again from 1917 to 1920.

Victor	Prosper
CONSIDÉRANT	(1808–
1893) was a French utopian Socialist and disciple of Fourier. He edited the journals <i>Le Phalanstère</i> , <i>La Phalange</i> , and <i>La Démocratie Pacifique</i> . He defined the notion of the	

“right to work” which was so important to French socialists in the 1848 Revolutions.

Georges Jacques DANTON (1759–1794) was a leading figure in the early stages of the French Revolution and the first President of the Committee of Public Safety. Danton played an important role in the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the First French Republic. A

moderating influence on the Jacobins, he was guillotined by the advocates of revolutionary terror after accusations of venality and leniency to the enemies of the Revolution.

Michael DAVITT (1846–1906) was an Irish republican and nationalist agrarian agitator, a social campaigner, labour leader, journalist, and Member of Parliament. He helped create the *Irish*

National Land League.

César DE PAEPE (1841–1890) was a medical doctor and a prominent member of the IWMA. Influenced by Proudhon, he extended his ideas into the labour movement by arguing that unions were required both for the current struggle within capitalism and the structure of a socialist society. He played a key part in the Collectivist

victory over the right-wing mutualists at the 1868 Brussels conference. Initially siding with the libertarian wing in the 1872 split, he moved towards a social democratic position.

Louis **Charles**
DELESCLUZE (1809–1871)
was a French republican journalist. Took part in the July Revolution of 1830 and joined various republican societies. Elected to the Paris

Commune, he met his death on the barricades during Adolphe Thiers' assault on Paris.

Benjamin DISRAELI, first Earl of Beaconsfield (1804–1881), was a parliamentarian, Conservative statesman and twice British Prime Minister. He served in government for four decades and played a central role in the creation of the modern Conservative Party

after the Corn Laws schism of 1846.

Giuseppe FANELLI (1827–1877) was an Italian revolutionary anarchist. An associate of Bakunin, he visited Spain in 1868 and met with many workers groups across the country. He was instrumental in introducing revolutionary anarchism into Spain.

Francesc FERRER i

Guàrdia (1859–1909) (known as **Francisco Ferrer**) was a Catalan free-thinker and anarchist. He was active in libertarian education, opening the *Escuela Moderna* (The Modern School) in 1901. After the general strike and uprising of 1909 in Catalonia (the Tragic Week) against Spanish military intervention in its (then) colony of Morocco, he was arrested as a ringleader.

Wrongly found guilty, he was executed by firing squad in spite of international protest.

Jules François Camille FERRY (1832–1893) was a Republican French statesman. He was a promoter of colonial expansion. He was also instrumental in passing the “Ferry Laws” between 1879 and 1885, the first major attempt at reform of the Education system by placing it

under state control and reducing Church influence.

Charles FOURIER (1772–1837) was one of the leading Utopian socialists of the early nineteenth century. He advocated highly regulated co-operative communities called *Phalanstères*. Unusually for his time, he was an advocate of women's equality.

Léon GAMBETTA (1838–1882) was a French statesman

prominent during and after the Franco-Prussian War. Originally a radical republican, he voiced his opposition to the Paris Commune and turned to moderate republicanism in late 1871. He urged a moderate course, based on small reforms, which he called “opportunism.”

Henry GEORGE (1839–1897) was an American writer, social reformer,

politician and political economist. The most influential proponent of the land value tax, which he called the “single tax.” He argued that people should own what they create, but that everything found in nature, most importantly the land, belongs equally to all humanity. As the value of land was created by the community, its rent belonged

to the community. His most famous work is *Progress and Poverty* (1879), a treatise on inequality, the cyclic nature of industrial economies, and the use of the land value tax as a remedy.

Johann Wolfgang von GOETHE (1749–1832) was a German writer, artist, and politician. His body of work includes epic and lyric poetry; prose and verse dramas; an

autobiography; literary and aesthetic criticism; treatises on botany, evolution, anatomy, linguistics, and colour; four novels; and 3,000 drawings. He was fascinated by mineralogy and the mineral goethite (an iron oxide) is named after him.

Jean GRAVE (1854–1939) was an important activist in the French anarchist movement, involved with *La Révolté* and

Les Temps Nouveaux. Initially a Social Democrat, he became a populariser of communist-anarchist ideas after 1880.

John GRAY (1799–1883) was a British socialist economist who was associated with the co-operative movement of Robert Owen for a time. He is best known as being one of the so-called Ricardian socialists, proposing a central bank which would

issue labour notes to ensure that workers received the full product of their labour.

Jules Basile GUESDE (1845–1922) was a leader of French Marxism and its defender against the reformism of the “possibilists” associated with Paul Brousse. With Marx, he drew up the minimum programme accepted by *Workers' Party* in 1880 which stressed the use of

elections and was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1893. He supported the Allies during the First World War. Marx accused him of “revolutionary phrase-mongering” and of denying the value of reformist struggles, proclaiming that, if Guesde’s politics were Marxism, then “what is certain is that I am not a Marxist.”

James GUILLAUME (1844—

1916), a Swiss anarchist, was a leading member of the Jura Federation. An associate of Bakunin, he popularised collectivist anarchist ideas and played an active role in the International and the anarchist and labour movements in the 1870s and 1880s.

Jean-Marie GUYAU (1854–1888), a French philosopher, author of *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni*

sanction (*Morality without Obligation or Sanction*, 1885), an ethical treatise which Kropotkin cited approvingly in “Anarchist Morality” and *Ethics: Origin and Development*. At the close of Kropotkin’s *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry on “Anarchism,” Guyau is also listed as an example of “how closely anarchism is connected with all the

intellectual movement of our own times.”

Alexander Ivanovich HERZEN (1812–1870) was a Russian writer and thinker, known as the “father of Russian socialism.” Influenced by Proudhon and Bakunin (and a friend and associate of both), he is one of the main founders of agrarian populism and created the political climate leading to the

emancipation of the serfs in 1861.

Thomas HODGSKIN (1787–1869) was an English writer on political economy and critic of capitalism. During the debates on banning worker's "combinations" (unions), he supported the right to organise. He used Ricardo's labour theory of value to denounce the exploitation of workers by capitalists in a series of

lectures later published as *Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital* (1825).

Victor Marie HUGO (1802–1885) was a French poet, novelist, and dramatist. He is considered the most well-known French Romantic writer and was a passionate supporter of republicanism. His works touch upon most of the political and social issues and artistic trends of his time.

Henrik IBSEN (1828–1906) was a Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. He is often referred to as “the father of realism” and is one of the founders of Modernism in the theatre. Several of his plays were considered scandalous to many of his era as he utilised a critical eye and free inquiry into the conditions of life and issues of morality.

Pierre LEROUX (1797–

1871), was a French philosopher and follower of Saint-Simon who, in an 1834 essay entitled “Individualism and Socialism,” introduced the term “socialism” into French political discourse. After the outbreak of the revolution of 1848 he was elected to the Constituent Assembly.

**Wilhelm Martin Philipp
Christian Ludwig
LIEBKNECHT (1826–1900)**

was a German social democrat and one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Under his leadership, it grew from a tiny sect to become Germany's largest political party. He combined Marxist revolutionary theory with legal political activity. Elected into the Reichstag, he was also editor-in-chief of *Vorwärts* (the party's main newspaper) and

helped create the party's Erfurt Program.

LOUIS-PHILIPPE I (1773–1850) became King of the French after the July Revolution of 1830. The elected Chamber of Deputies proclaimed him the French king, ruling what was known as the July Monarchy. Called the Citizen King, he was overthrown by the February Revolution in 1848.

John William MACKAY (1831–1902) was an Irish-born American gold and silver magnate and financier.

Errico MALATESTA (1853–1932) was an Italian communist-anarchist and friend of Kropotkin. After joining the First International, he became an anarchist after meeting Bakunin and spent the rest of his life agitating and organising for anarchism.

Jean-Paul MARAT (1743–1793) was a radical journalist and politician during the French Revolution. His journalism was renowned for its fiery character and urging of basic reforms for the poor. He was a vigorous defender of the *sans-culottes* and was assassinated in his bathtub by Charlotte Corday, a Girondist sympathiser.

Giuseppe MAZZINI (1805–

1872) was an Italian revolutionary republican. He organised the secret society *Young Italy* to create a unified centralised Italian Republic by means of a popular uprising. Its motto was “God and the People.” His influence over the Italian workers’ movement was destroyed by Bakunin’s polemics against him, written after Mazzini attacked the Paris Commune.

Jules MICHELET (1798–1874) was a French historian whose monumental works, *Historie de la France* and *Historie de la Révolution française*, more than any others created many of the great French national myths of the revolution.

Alexandre MILLERAND (1859–1943) was a French socialist politician, elected to the Chamber of Deputies in

1885 as a Socialist. He joined Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau's cabinet of "republican defence" as Minister of Commerce and Industry in 1899. This sparked a debate in the Second International about the participation of socialists in "bourgeois governments." Expelled from the socialist party in 1904, Millerand was responsible for the introduction of a wide range of

reforms but called out the army to suppress the 1909 railway strike.

Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de MIRABEAU (1749–1791) was a prominent moderate politician involved in the French Revolution.

Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de MONTESQUIEU (1689–1755), referred to as simply Montesquieu, was a French

social commentator and political thinker who lived during the Enlightenment. He developed the theory of separation of powers and advocated federalism.

NICHOLAS II, Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov (1868–1918), was the last Emperor of Russia, nicknamed Bloody Nicholas because of his regime's repression of working-class and peasant

movements (for example, Bloody Sunday), anti-Semitic pogroms, his execution of political opponents, and his pursuit of wars on a previously unprecedented scale. He ruled from 1894 until his abdication after the February Revolution in 1917. He was shot along with his family by the Bolsheviks in July 1918.

Robert OWEN (1771–1858) was a Welsh social reformer

and one of the founders of socialism and the co-operative movement. When the manager of the New Lanark mills, he introduced reforms to improve the life of his employees. He turned from philanthropy to socialism and advocated the creation of communities of about twelve hundred persons, all living in one large building. He appealed for investment into his ideal communities

from the wealth and rich. This was not forthcoming and he went to America to set one up. It failed after two years and, upon his return, Owen took part in the labour movement, gaining the support of the most influential labour organisation of the time, the Builders' Union. In 1834 he helped found the *Grand National Consolidated Trades Union* but this broke up the same

year.

Constantin PECQUEUR
(1801–1887) was a French socialist economist and politician. First a follower of Saint-Simon and then Fourier, he developed his own theories based on the ownership of the means of production by the state. He participated in the 1848 Revolution as an ally of Louis Blanc. He is called the father of French collectivist

socialism.

Philippe PINEL (1745–1826) was a French physician who was instrumental in the development of a more humane psychological approach to the custody and care of psychiatric patients. He is seen as the physician who more than any other transformed the concept of “the mad” into that of patients needing care and

understanding, establishing a field that would eventually be called psychiatry. His legacy included improvement of asylum conditions and broadly psychosocial therapeutic approaches.

Georgi Valentinovich PLEKHANOV (1856–1918) is considered “the father of Russian Marxism.” Originally a Populist, he turned to Marxism after being forced to

emigrate to Western Europe because of his political activities. He rallied to the cause of the Allied powers during the First World War and was hostile to Bolshevik regime.

Émile POUGET (1860–1931) was a French anarcho-communist who, like Kropotkin, advocated anarchist involvement in the labour movement. He was a

leading figure in French syndicalism, becoming vice-secretary of the *General Confederation of Labour* (CGT) from 1901 to 1908 and helped draft the 1906 *Charte d'Amiens*, which set the basis of French syndicalism. He published a famous workers' journal, *Le Père Peinard*, between 1889 and 1902, and became the chief editor of *La Voix du Peuple* (The Voice of

the People), the weekly paper of the CGT, in 1907.

**Terence Vincent
POWDERLY** (1849–1924)

was the head of the Knights of Labor (see entry below) from 1879 until 1893. He joined in the bourgeois red scare after the Haymarket police riot, calling for the anarchists to be hanged (even though two of them were Knights of long standing). While he sought to

distance the union from “the red flag of anarchy” (to use his words), many branches passed resolutions in support of the Chicago Anarchists.

Élisée-Jean-Jacques

RECLUS (1830–1905) was a renowned French geographer, writer and anarchist. An associate of Bakunin, he took an active role in the Paris Commune (and as a result was sentenced to banishment from

France). He played an important role in the development of communist-anarchism.

Maximilien François Marie Isidore de ROBESPIERRE (1758–1794) was a French lawyer, politician, and one of the best-known and most influential figures of the French Revolution. A left-wing bourgeois republican influenced by Rousseau and

Montesquieu, he was a member of the Estates-General, the Constituent Assembly and the Jacobin Club. He was a member of the Committee of Public Safety during the Reign of Terror, for which he was arrested and executed.

Baron ROTHSCCHILD (1840–1915) was the patriarch of a famously wealthy British banking family and often used

in Socialist propaganda as a personification of the ruling class or bourgeoisie.

Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU (1712–1778) was an extremely influential social theorist whose ideas on democracy dominated radical circles before, during and after the French Revolution. Key works are *The Social Contract* and *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality*

Among Men.

Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de SAINT-SIMON (1760–1825), usually referred to as Henri de Saint-Simon, was a Utopian socialist. He advocated a form of state capitalism, wherein industrial chiefs would control society. He argued that the men who organised society for productive labour were entitled to rule it.

Unsurprisingly, class conflict is not present in his work.

Adhémar

SCHWITZGUÉBEL (1844–1895) was a Swiss Anarchist and theorist of collectivist anarchism. He was a founder of the Jura Federation and member of Bakunin's *Alliance of Social Democracy*.

Jean Charles Léonard de SISMONDI (1773–1842) was a Geneva-born writer, best

known for his works on political economy as well as French and Italian history. As an economist, Sismondi represented a humanitarian protest against capitalism and its economic orthodoxy, chronicling its negative impact on the working classes. As a historian, he wrote extensively on the Italian (*Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen Âge*) and French

(Histoire des Français)
Communes during the Middle
Ages.

Adam SMITH (1723–1790)
was a Scottish moral
philosopher and a pioneer of
political economy. He is best
known for *The Theory of
Moral Sentiments* (1759) and
*An Inquiry into the Nature
and Causes of the Wealth of
Nations* (1776). The latter,
better known as *The Wealth of*

Nations, was the first modern work of economics and influenced both defenders and opponents of capitalism. Kropotkin praised the former work in his *Ethics*.

Herbert SPENCER (1820–1903) was a prominent English classical liberal political theorist of the Victorian era, best known for coining the concept “survival of the fittest.” He developed

an all-embracing conception of evolution as progressive development in biology and society (Synthetic Philosophy), writing on ethics, religion, anthropology, economics, political theory, philosophy, biology, sociology, and psychology.

Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) was a leading Conservative historian of the French Revolution whose

book *Origins* of
Contemporary France was
extremely influential.

Warlaam TCHERKESOFF
(1846–1925) was a Georgian
Prince best known for his
activities in favour of the
emancipation of Georgia.
Initially a populist, he had to
flee his country and in exile
became a communist-
anarchist. He supported the
Allies in World War I. After

the 1917 Russian revolution, he returned to Georgia but again had to go into exile after the Bolshevik invasion of 1921.

Louis-Adolphe THIERS (1797–1877) was a French politician. In his early days, he was well known in Liberal society and was one of the animators of the 1830 revolution, becoming Prime Minister under Louis-Philippe.

Elected in 1848 to the Constituent Assembly, Thiers was a leader of the right-wing liberals and bitterly opposed the socialists. He suppressed the Paris Commune of 1871.

William THOMPSON
(1775–1833) was an Irish socialist and feminist writer whose ideas influenced the Co-operative, Trade Union and Chartist movements. Initially an advocate of the worker

receiving the full product of their labour, he moved to defending distribution according to need (communism). He opposed Robert Owen's argument to wait for investment from wealthy benefactors or the Government for large scale communities, arguing for independent small scale communities established by the workers' own resources.

Cornelius VANDERBILT (1794–1877) was the head of a famous wealthy family with major holdings in shipping and railroads.

Eugène VARLIN (1839–1871) was a French mutualist, communard and a founder of the IWMA. A bookbinder by trade, he was one of the pioneers of French syndicalism and a member of Bakunin's *Alliance of Social*

Democracy. He believed that trade unions should also be the means of organising production in a free society. Elected to the Paris Commune, he became its commissioner of finance and fought in its defence. Captured, he was tortured by a mob and shot.

François VIDAL (1814–1872) was a French socialist. In his youth, he was fascinated

by the ideas of Saint-Simon and Fourier and in 1846, Vidal published *On the Distribution of Wealth, or the Distributive Justice of Social Economy* in which he argued that colonies for the unemployed and labour associations should be set up with the help of the state and these would be a means for the gradual peaceful transition to socialism. During the Revolution of 1848, Vidal was

Louis Blanc's secretary in the Luxembourg Commission and was elected to the National Assembly in 1850.

François-Marie Arouet (1694–1778), known by his *nom de plume* **VOLTAIRE**, was a French Enlightenment writer, historian and philosopher. He was famous for his wit and for his advocacy of civil liberties, including freedom of religion,

freedom of expression and separation of church and state. A prolific writer, Voltaire produced works in almost every literary form, including plays, poems, novels, essays, and historical and scientific works.

Wilhelm WEITLING (1808–1871) was a journeyman tailor and an influential German (authoritarian) communist, both praised and attacked by

Marx and Engels. Called by the latter the “founder of German communism,” Weitling joined the *League of the Just* in 1837 and joined Parisian workers in protests and street battles in 1839. When the League merged with Marx’s *Communist Correspondence Committee* to form the *Communist League*, Weitling played an active part and clashed with him over

policies during the revolutionary upheavals in Germany.

WILHELM II or William II (1859–1941) of the House of Hohenzollern, was the last German Emperor (Kaiser), and ruled from 1888 until the revolution of November 1918 created a republic.

Count Sergei Yulyevich WITTE (1849–1915) was a highly influential Russian

policy maker under two Tsars. As Finance Minister, he used extensive state intervention to promote capitalism and industrialization:

protectionism, subsidies and direct investment to expand heavy industry, an ambitious program of railway construction and state orders for industrial products. As well as presiding over the extensive industrialisation of the Russian

Empire, he was also the author of the October Manifesto of 1905, a precursor to its first constitution.

Organisations, Movements and Others

Blanquists were followers of socialist Louis Auguste Blanqui who favoured

conspiratorial politics to prepare armed uprisings that aimed to install their (transitional) rule, for which Blanqui coined the phrase “the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

The Bonanza farms (from the Spanish word *bonanza*—in mining terminology, “a rich lode”) were created by a massive sale of land owned by the Northern Pacific Railway, resulting in farms of enormous

acreage, taking advantage of mechanized agriculture to reap huge monocrop harvests.

Boulangism was a reactionary French political movement associated with General Georges Boulanger (1837–1891), whose militarism and advocacy of revenge on Germany attracted popular support in the 1880s. At the height of his influence, many feared he would lead a coup

d'état and declare himself dictator.

Caesarism is a form of political rule that emulates the rule of Roman dictator Julius Caesar over the Roman Republic. That is, military or imperial dictatorship led by a charismatic strongman whose rule is based upon a cult of personality. Both Napoleon Bonaparte and Benito Mussolini espoused

Caesarism.

Chartism was a working class movement for political reform in Britain between 1838 and 1848. It takes its name from the *People's Charter* of 1838 which called for six basic democratic reforms of the state. Starting as a petition movement which tried to mobilise “moral force,” it soon attracted men who advocated “physical force” in the form of

insurrection.

The *National Convention*, or *Convention*, comprised the constitutional and legislative assembly which sat from 20th September 1792 to 26th October 1795 during the French Revolution. From 1793 to 1794, executive power was exercised de facto by the Committee of Public Safety. It was dominated by the middle-class Jacobins and was hostile

to the aspirations and actions of the working classes of the time.

Duma is the Russian word for Parliament.

The ***Encyclopaedists*** were a group of more than a hundred 18th-century writers in France who compiled and wrote the *Encyclopédie*, edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. They promoted the advancement of science

and secular thought and supported tolerance, rationality, and the open-mindedness of the Enlightenment.

The *Enragés* (“Madmen”) were a group of extreme left-wing revolutionaries in France in 1793 who advocated social and economic measures in favour of the working classes. Their name reflects the horror that they aroused in the

bourgeoisie. Their leaders were arrested in September 1793 by the Committee of Public Safety.

The *Fabians* were a British radical group that advocated the gradual transformation of private capitalism into state capitalism (called “socialism”) by an advanced elite acting for the masses within the current political regime. *Fabianism* refers to this gradualist

perspective.

The *Girondists* were a moderate republican political faction during the French Revolution, so called because the most prominent exponents of their point of view in the Legislative Assembly and the National Convention were deputies from the Gironde. Accused of federalism by the Jacobins, they were repressed during the Terror.

The *Grand National Consolidated Trades Union* was an early attempt to form a national union confederation in Britain. In 1833, Robert Owen returned from the United States and declared the need for a guild-based system of co-operative production, gaining the support of the *Builders' Union* which had already called for a Grand National Guild. Founded in February

1834 at a conference in London, it broke up by November of that year.

The *Haymarket Martyrs* refers to 8 anarchists in Chicago who were framed for murder and executed by the US state: George Engel (1836–1887), Samuel Fielden (1847–1922), Adolph Fischer (1858–1887), Louis Lingg (1864–1887), Oscar Neebe (1850–1916), Albert Parsons (1848–

1887), Michael Schwab (1853–1898) and August Spies (1855–1887). Most were active trade unionists, playing a prominent role in the agitation for strikes on the 1st May 1886 for the Eight Hour Day. On 3rd of May, police fired on strikers and the anarchists called a protest meeting for 4th May in Haymarket Square. When the police tried to disperse the

peaceful rally, an unknown person threw a bomb which caused the police to open fire, killing many. The eight were tried for conspiracy and in spite of no evidence seven were sentenced to death and one to 15 years in prison. The death sentences of two of the defendants were commuted to life, while Lingg committed suicide in jail. The other four were hanged on 11th

November 1887. In 1893, the new governor pardoned the remaining defendants and criticised the trial.

The *International Working Men's Association* (known simply as “the **International**,” retrospectively termed “the **First International**”), founded in 1864 and dissolved in 1872, was an attempt to create a global organisation of

the working classes. Comprised of many political factions, the IWA became increasingly polarised around the conflict between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin, with Marx ultimately gaining the upper hand and ejecting Bakunin at the Hague Congress in 1872, only to effectively scuttle the organisation shortly thereafter. Several attempts were made

subsequently to revive or recreate the International on another basis.

Internationalist refers to members of the International Working Men's Association. The term was usually used by its libertarian wing and referred to all members of the organisation, regardless of political opinions.

The *Irish National Land League* was an organisation of

poor tenant farmers active in the late 19th century. Its primary aim was to abolish landlordism in Ireland and enable tenant farmers to own the land they worked. The period from 1880 to 1892 is known as the Land War, during which it fought for the “Three Fs” (Fair Rent, Fixity of Tenure and Free Sale). The League organised rent strikes, resistance to evictions and

boycotts (its campaign of ostracism against Captain Boycott coined the word).

The ***Jacobin Club*** was the most famous and influential political club in the French Revolution, so-named because of the Dominican convent where it met in the Rue St. Jacques (Latin: *Jacobus*), Paris. Initially moderate, the club later became notorious for the Reign of Terror.

Robespierre was a central figure in the Jacobin Club and his faction in the National Convention became known as Jacobins. It had thousands of chapters throughout France but after the fall of Robespierre, the club was closed.

The *Jacobins* were members of the revolutionary Jacobin Club (1789–1794) during the Great French Revolution and

stood for a centralised national republic. Since then it has been used to refer to supporters of a centralised Republic, with power concentrated in the national government, at the expense of local or regional governments.

Jacqueries are peasant uprisings. Named after the *Jacquerie* of 1358, which was a popular revolt by peasants against the nobility in northern

France. It was known as the *Jacquerie* because the nobles derided peasants as “Jacques” or “Jacques Bonhomme.”

The *Jura Federation* (*Fédération Jurassienne*) was an anarchist-led section of the International Working Men’s Association based in the Jura region of Switzerland.

The *Knights of Labor* was one of the largest U.S. labour organisations of the 1880s.

Established in 1869, it reached 28,000 members in 1880 before jumping to nearly 800,000 members in 1886. After the red scare associated with the Haymarket police riot of 1886, its frail structure could not cope, and by 1890, it was a fraction of that size. See the entry for Terence Vincent Powderly.

The *Luxembourg Commission* was established

by a decree of the provisional government of the Second Republic in February 1848. It was an official commission of inquiry into the conditions of French workers in response to the radical upheavals of that year, convened at the Palais de Luxembourg and headed by Louis Blanc.

1st May is International Workers' Day. The first congress of the Second

International in Paris in 1889 passed a resolution calling for international demonstrations on the 1890 anniversary of the Haymarket events. May Day became formally recognised as an annual event at the International's second congress in 1891.

Metz is a city in the northeast of France. After France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, it was

annexed into the newly created German Empire. Its location ensured its strategic military role, becoming a key German garrison town.

The *Mountain* refers to the radical Republicans of the Great French and 1848 Revolutions. The most radical part of the National Convention during the French Revolution were nicknamed “the Mountain” (*la Montagne*)

because its members (often called “Montagnards”) occupied the highest rows of seats in the building.

The *National Workshops* were a French government programme created by the February Revolution of 1848, which were based on Louis Blanc’s scheme for state-funded and state-run producer co-operatives. They failed as a means of changing society,

being little more than work-schemes for the unemployed and discredited socialist ideas as a result.

Orléanism refers to the Orléanists, a French right-wing party which arose out of the French Revolution. It governed France from 1830–1848 under Louis Philippe, but eventually collapsed with the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870. It was

named after the Orléans branch of the House of Bourbon (descended from the youngest son of Louis XIII) and aimed for a constitutional monarchy.

The *Osborne* judgment refers to a 1910 UK labour law case (Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants versus Osborne) which ruled that members of trade unions would have to “contract in” if

they wanted a portion of their salary to go to a trade union, unlike the previous system of “contracting out” in which the portion of salary was taken unless the individual explicitly stated otherwise. It was overturned by the Trade Union Act 1913.

Le Père Peinard (1889–1900) was a very successful anarchist weekly written in Parisian slang, edited by Emile

Pouget.

The *Peterhof Palace* (German: “Peter’s Court”) is a series of palaces and gardens located in Saint Petersburg, Russia. It was created by Tsar Peter the Great and is sometimes referred as the “Russian Versailles.” It was the official Imperial Residence from the reign of Nicholas I onwards.

The *Reichstag* was, from

1871 to 1918, the Parliament of the German Empire. Although elected by universal male suffrage, it had limited control over the Kaiser. It had no power to draft legislation, nor did was the government drawn from it (as is ordinarily the case in parliamentary democracies) nor were the government's actions subject to its approval.

The *sans-culottes* (“without

breeches”) were the radical, left-wing working-class revolutionaries of the French Revolution, dominating France by their willingness to use direct action to influence political events. Their ideals included popular direct democracy as well as social and economic equality. Their name was derived from their rejection of aristocratic and bourgeois apparel.

Seigneur (“lord”) refers to the possessor of a *seigneurie* (fiefdom) in medieval feudal or manorial systems.

The ***States-General*** (or ***Estates-General***) of 1789 was the first meeting since 1614 of the general assembly representing the three estates of the realm: the clergy (First Estate), the nobles (Second Estate), and the common people (Third Estate).

Summoned by Louis XVI to propose solutions to his government's financial problems, it sat for several weeks but came to an impasse as the three estates clashed over their respective powers. It ended when members of the Third Estate formed themselves into a National Assembly, signalling the start of the French Revolution.

In 1901 the *Taff Vale* Railway

Company successfully sued the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants for losses during a strike. This court ruling exposed unions to being sued every time they were involved in an industrial dispute, with obvious negative effects on industrial action. The 1906 Trades Disputes Act removed trade union liability for damage by strike action and provided the foundation

for the law on the right to strike in the UK.

Events

14th July 1789 (or Bastille Day) was when the Bastille, a medieval fortress and prison in Paris, was stormed. It represented royal authority in the centre of Paris and its fall was the turning point of the French Revolution. It subsequently became an icon

of the French Republic and is a public holiday in France.

4th August 1789 was when the National Constituent Assembly abolished feudalism (although at that point there had been sufficient peasant revolts to almost end feudalism already). This swept away both the seigneurial rights of the Second Estate (the nobility) and the tithes gathered by the First Estate

(the clergy). This act was purely formal and not put into practice until much later, under pressure from the people (see Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution*).

10th August 1792 was when tens of thousands besieged the Tuileries palace in Paris. This insurrection, which had the backing of the insurrectionary Paris Commune and its sections, forced the royal

family to shelter with the Legislative Assembly. It was the effective end of the French Monarchy. Its formal end came six weeks later, as one of the first acts of business of the new Convention.

The **War in the Vendée** was a Royalist rebellion between 1793 and 1796 in the Vendée region during the French Revolution. The peasants revolted against the

Revolutionary government after the imposition of military conscription. It cost more than 240,000 lives, with both sides committing atrocities, although the Government was particularly brutal in its repression. Kropotkin in *The Great French Revolution* blamed the revolt, in part, on the urban bourgeoisie and their exploitative treatment of the peasantry as well as the lack

of constructive governmental policies which could address the problems facing the revolution and the peasantry.

Thermidor was the eleventh month in the French Republican Calendar and in which the Thermidorian reaction—9 Thermidor Year II (27th July 1794)—occurred. This was the overthrow of the Jacobins (Robespierre and his followers) and so the word

“Thermidor” has come to mean a retreat from more radical goals and strategies during a revolution, especially when caused by a replacement of leading personalities.

The **1848 Revolution** in France was one of a wave of revolutions across Europe. The February revolution ended the Orléans monarchy (1830–1848) and led to the creation of the French Second

Republic. Initially including socialists like Louis Blanc, the new Republican government became more conservative. This led radicals to protest, and on 15th May, Parisian workers invaded the Assembly *en masse* to proclaim a new Provisional Government. This was quickly suppressed. On 23rd June 1848, the people of Paris rose in insurrection in response to the closing of the

National Workshops and were crushed by force after two days (the June Days). In December 1848, Louis Napoleon was elected President of the Second Republic and on 2nd December 1851 organised a coup, with troops repressing resistance across France (with 200 deaths in Paris alone). Exactly one year later, he declared himself Emperor

Napoleon III, replacing the Second Republic by the Second Empire.

The **Paris Commune** refers to a popular revolt in Paris from 18th March to 28th May 1871. It was created when the French Government, fearful of the radicalised Parisian National Guard, ordered regular troops to seize its cannon. The soldiers fraternised with National

Guards and local residents. Other army units joined the rebellion, which spread so fast that the head of the government, Thiers, ordered an immediate evacuation of Paris by as many of the regular forces as would obey, by the police, and by administrators and specialists of every kind, to Versailles. The Central Committee of the National Guard arranged

elections for the city council and predominantly socialists and radicals were elected. Most were republicans (reformists through to neo-Jacobins and Blanquists), but a minority were members of the IWMA (and all, bar one Marxist, influenced by Proudhon) and these were responsible for most of the socialistic aspects. This minority also opposed the

majority's attempts to introduce a "Committee of Public Safety" (and its association with the Jacobins' Reign of Terror). The National Government in Versailles attacked the Commune, shooting prisoners out of hand. The toughest resistance was in the working-class districts, where fighting became known as *La Semaine Sanglante* (The Bloody Week). With defeat,

Communards were shot against the *Mur des Fédérés* (Wall of the Federals) in Père Lachaise Cemetery. At least 20,000 were killed, 7,000 exiled to New Caledonia and thousands fled to other countries. Paris remained under martial law for five years.

The Hague Congress was the fifth congress of the IWMA, held from the 2nd to 7th of

September 1872 in The Hague, Holland. It expelled Michael Bakunin and James Guillaume as well as passing a resolution on organising political parties to achieve the socialism. The Congress was not organised in the usual manner, with Marx and Engels ensuring both outcomes by arranging for attendees from non-existent sections. The majority of the International

declared it null and void, holding its own Congress in Saint-Imier, which rejected political action in favour of class struggle by unions.

The Great Railroad Strike of 1877 (also called the Great Upheaval) began on 14th July in Martinsburg, West Virginia, in response to the cutting of wages by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. The strike quickly spread along with

railways, with battles between strikers and troops a commonplace occurrence. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 21st July, militiamen bayoneted and fired on rock-throwing strikers, killing twenty people and wounding twenty-nine others. Rather than quell the uprising, this merely infuriated the strikers, who then forced the militiamen to take refuge in a

railroad roundhouse and then set fires that destroyed 39 buildings, 104 locomotives and 1,245 freight and passenger cars. On 22nd July, the militiamen shot their way out and killed 20 more. The strike was defeated after 45 days when President Hayes sent in federal troops to each city to suppress the strikes.

The **Walloon** *jacquerie* refers to an insurrectionary general

strike in March 1886 which swept across the revolutionary hotbed of industrial Wallonia (the predominantly French-speaking southern region of Belgium, whose workers unionised in the First International). This strike wave started on 18th March when anarchists in Liège urged workers to mark the 15th anniversary of the Paris Commune. From Liège's metal

sector, it quickly expanded across the Hainaut industrial belt. Marked by looting and the destruction of a glass factory, it took the state repression so usual in Belgium at the time to end the revolt, with dozens killed by troops (ten in the town of Roux alone), hundreds of workers were condemned in court and those identified by the state as leaders were persecuted.

The Great Dockers' Strike of 1889 was a product of the dangerous and precarious nature of port work, combined with low pay, poor working conditions and widespread social deprivation. In the summer, the dockers' union became involved in a dispute over pay and conditions on the London docks, striking for four hours continuous work at a time and a minimum rate of

sixpence an hour. After the initial walkout, the strike spread to the neighbouring docks and soon half of East London was out. The strike ended in complete victory for the workers. This strike was a turning-point in the history of trade unionism, being a key part of the New Unionism which organised all workers rather than just, as previously, skilled workers.

The Southampton Dockers' Strike of 1890 was inspired by the London Dock Strike of 1889. At the end of August 1890, the Southampton dockers struck over a pay rise and the refusal of the employers to recognise the union. It quickly spread to the seamen, firemen, and porters and the port was paralysed. The Mayor called for military assistance, and troops with

fixed bayonets cleared the streets. The strikers were not intimidated, leading to the sending of more troops and two gunboats. The strike was ended on 15th September after the London-based national executive of the union refused to make the strike official or to pay strike money.

The **Boer War** (1899–1902) was fought by the British Empire against the Dutch

settlers of two independent Boer republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic. It involved large numbers of troops and ended with the conversion of the Boer republics into British colonies. The British fought directly against Boer troops, defeating them first in open warfare and then in a long and bitter guerrilla campaign. The British policies of “scorched

earth” and civilian internment in concentration camps ravaged the civilian population.

The **Montjuich tortures** followed the wholesale arrest of anarchists after a bomb was thrown into a procession on Corpus Christi Day in Barcelona in 1897, killing seven working class people and a soldier. Those arrested were subjected to terrible treatment in the prison of

Montjuich, from which several died, while others were officially executed. The actual bomb thrower was never found.

9th January 1905 (or *Bloody Sunday*) was one of the key events which led to the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. In December 1904, a strike broke out at the Putilov plant in St. Petersburg. Strikes quickly spread and

soon over 800,000 were on strike. Father Gapon, a Russian priest who was concerned about the condition of the working classes, organised a “workers’ procession” to the Winter Palace to deliver a petition to the Tsar asking for reforms. His troops opened fire on the peaceful marchers, killing thousands.

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“Passim” (literally “scattered”)
indicates intermittent discussion of a
topic over a cluster of pages.

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Direct Struggle Against Capital
A Peter Kropotkin Anthology

Edited by Iain McKay

© 2014 AK Press (Edinburgh, Oakland,
Baltimore)

ISBN: 978-1-84935-170-6

e-ISBN: 978-1-84935-171-3

Library of Congress Control Number:
2013945486

AK Press
674-A 23rd Street
Oakland, CA 94612
USA

www.akpress.org
akpress@akpress.org

AK Press UK
PO Box 12766
Edinburgh EH8 9YE
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Printed in the United States on recycled,
acid-free paper.

Cover design by John Yates |
stealworks.com

Interior design by Margaret Killjoy |
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*This project is supported in part by a
generous contribution
by the Anarchist Archives Project.*

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The Workers' Movement in Spain

Workers' Organisation

The Use of the Strike

Strikes

1st May 1891

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