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## **The revolutionary strategy of anarchism in Europe and the United States 1868-1939**

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Addis, Oscar. 2021. "The Revolutionary Strategy of Anarchism in Europe and the United States 1868-1939".  
Loughborough University. <https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.16961263.v1>.

# **The Revolutionary Strategy of Anarchism in Europe and the United States 1868-1939**

by

Oscar Addis

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

July 2021

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation provides a rational reconstruction of the revolutionary strategy of anarchism in Europe and the United States between 1868 and 1939. The central argument is that anarchist revolutionary strategy was underpinned by a theoretical framework – the theory of practice – which maintained that as people engage in activities, they simultaneously change both the world and themselves. This theoretical framework was the foundation for the anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends: the means that revolutionaries proposed to achieve social change had to be constituted by forms of activity that would develop people into the kinds of individuals who were capable of, and were driven to, (a) overthrow capitalism and the state and (b) construct and reproduce the end goal of an anarchist society. Although anarchism’s commitment to the unity of means and ends has been identified by previous historians of anarchism, this is the first detailed study to ground it, alongside anarchist revolutionary strategy in general, in the theory of practice. Doing so enables me to establish the intellectual depth of historical anarchist revolutionary strategy in a manner which has hitherto not been achieved.

Rather than discussing anarchist ideas abstractly, as if they existed outside of history, my thesis combines a detailed textual interpretation of primary sources in English with the secondary literature on the history of different anarchist movements. I first explain the political theory of anarchism in general: the theory of practice, value system, critique of existing society and vision of a future society. With this in place, I reconstruct the core ideas on strategy which were generally shared by the anarchist movement, with a particular emphasis on the anarchist critique of state socialism. I then provide an overview of the two main schools of anarchist strategy: insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism. Having done so I expand the discussion of mass-anarchism by explaining the history, theory and practice of syndicalist anarchism and organisational dualism.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to my supervisors Ian Fraser and Alexandre Christoyannopoulos for their encouragement and helpful comments. This work greatly benefited from feedback provided by Paul Raekstad, Jesse Cohn, Shawn P. Wilbur, Mark Leier, David Berry, Kenyon Zimmer, Danny Evans, James Yeoman, Ruth Kinna and Constance Bantman. Thanks to my friends and family for their support throughout the past five years.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction</b>	1
1.1 – Literature Review	1
1.2 – Defining Anarchism	8
1.3 – Rational Reconstruction	17
1.4 – The Argument of the Thesis	25
<b>Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework</b>	30
2.1 – Materialism and Human Nature	32
2.2 – The Theory of Practice	37
2.3 – Conclusion	49
<b>Chapter 3 – Values, Critique and Vision</b>	51
3.1 – The Value System	51
3.2 – Critique of Existing Society	61
3.3 – Vision of an Alternative Society	71
3.4 – Conclusion	83
<b>Chapter 4 – Anarchist Strategy</b>	87
4.1 – Social Revolution	89
4.2 – Evolution and Revolution	100
4.3 – Unity of Means and Ends	105
4.4 – Prefiguration	111
4.5 – Direct Action	121
4.6 – The Spirit of Revolt	126
4.7 – Conclusion	129
<b>Chapter 5 – The Anarchist Critique of State Socialism</b>	131
5.1 – The Anarchist Critique of Seizing State Power	131
5.1.1 – Parliamentarism	134
5.1.2 – Workers’ State	139
5.2 – State Capitalism	143
5.3 – Anarchism and Political Struggle	151
5.4 – Conclusion	155
<b>Chapter 6 – Insurrectionist Anarchism</b>	158
6.1 – Opposition to Formal Organisations	159

6.2 – Rejection of Struggling for Reforms	165
6.3 – Propaganda of the Deed	168
6.3.1 – Propaganda of the Deed: First Phase	169
6.3.2 – Propaganda of the Deed: Second Phase	181
6.4 – Conclusion	193
<b>Chapter 7 – Mass Anarchism</b>	195
7.1 – Support of Formal Organisations	195
7.2 – Reform not Reformism	211
7.3 – Militant Minority: The Anarchist Relationship with the Masses	233
7.4 – Conclusion	243
<b>Chapter 8 – Syndicalist Anarchism</b>	245
8.1 – From the 1 <sup>st</sup> International to Anarcho-Syndicalism	248
8.2 – The Double Aim of Syndicalist Anarchist Unions	264
8.3 – The Dual Function of Syndicalist Anarchist Unions	275
8.4 – The General Strike	284
8.5 – Conclusion	296
<b>Chapter 9 – Organisational Dualism: From Bakunin to the Platform</b>	298
9.1 – Bakunin and the Alliance	300
9.2 – Syndicalism and Specific Anarchist Organisations	315
9.3 – Platformism and Synthesism	326
9.4 – Conclusion	340
<b>Chapter 10 – Conclusion</b>	343
<b>Bibliography</b>	350
Primary Sources	350
Secondary Sources	359

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 1845 Karl Marx wrote that, “philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”<sup>1</sup> Few philosophers have followed Marx’s advice. One historic social movement which did produce philosophy in order to change the world was anarchism. This thesis will contribute to the history of political theory by providing a rational reconstruction of what anarchists who lived in Europe and the United States thought about revolutionary strategy between 1868 and 1939. In this chapter I shall first situate this thesis within the existing literature on anarchism. I shall then define anarchism in-depth, explain my methodology of rational reconstruction, and outline the main arguments of this thesis.

### 1.1 – Literature Review

Anarchism is one of the largest social movements in the history of socialism. According to the historian Benedict Anderson, “international anarchism . . . was the main vehicle of global opposition to industrial capitalism, autocracy, latifundism and imperialism” during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Even the hostile Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm is forced to concede that, between 1905 and 1914, “the main body of Marxists” belonged to increasingly reformist social democratic political parties whilst “the bulk of the revolutionary left was anarcho-syndicalist, or at least much closer to the ideas and the mood of anarcho-syndicalism than to that of classical marxism”.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the importance of anarchism very few studies of historical anarchist political theory have been written. Numerous historians of socialism and communism have tended to ignore

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Age of Globalisation: Anarchists and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso 2013), 54.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, (London: Phoenix, 1994), 61.

anarchist political theory entirely or only mention it briefly as part of the history of Marxism or state socialism in general. This usually accompanies the view that anarchism is distinct from socialism and communism, despite the fact that anarchism is a form of anti-state socialism and the majority of anarchists historically were anarcho-communists.<sup>4</sup> In so doing these historians are merely reenforcing the narratives constructed about the history of socialism by Marxist revolutionaries, such as Vladimir Lenin, who dismissed “anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism” as “bourgeois trends” which are “irreconcilably opposed” to “socialism” and “communism”.<sup>5</sup>

Even historians who have written about anarchism often dismiss anarchist theory as being of poor quality, inconsistent and incoherent. James Joll, for example, asserts without evidence or argumentation that anarchist theory is “full of logical flaws” and “contradictions and inconsistencies”.<sup>6</sup> Hobsbawm dismisses anarchist theory as “primitive” and asserts that “anarchism has no significant contribution to socialist theory to make”. As a result, “the main appeal of anarchism was emotional and not intellectual”.<sup>7</sup> Many academics have been particularly dismissive when discussing the anarchist theorist Michael Bakunin. One example is Isaiah Berlin who held that Bakunin’s “positive doctrines” were “mere strings of ringing commonplaces, linked together by vague emotional relevance or rhetorical afflatus rather than a coherent structure of genuine ideas”. Since there are “no coherent ideas to be extracted from his writings of any period” it followed that “what is to be looked for in him is not social theory or political doctrine”. His ideas were, in short, “almost always simple” and “shallow”.<sup>8</sup> Another

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<sup>4</sup> For example: Ronald Kowalski, *European Communism 1848-1991* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Robert Service, *Comrades! A History of World Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 409-10.

<sup>6</sup> James Joll, *The Anarchists* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1969), 12, 275.

<sup>7</sup> Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, 86, 83, 88.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 106, 110-11, 108.



author, George Lichtheim, simply asserts that Bakunin “remained . . . all his life a man of action rather than a thinker”.<sup>9</sup>

This negative attitude towards anarchist theory can also be found in the writings of historic Marxist revolutionaries. Marx himself wrote in 1871 that Bakunin was “a man devoid of all theoretical knowledge”.<sup>10</sup> In 1901 Lenin boldly asserted that anarchism “has produced nothing but general platitudes against exploitation” and has contributed “[n]o doctrine, revolutionary teaching, or theory” to “recent European history”.<sup>11</sup> Nikolai Bukharin, who was Lenin’s associate in the Bolshevik party, similarly wrote in 1918 that anarchist theory included “childish confusion[s]” and that workers who adopted it had been “poisoned”.<sup>12</sup>

Several broad histories of anarchism have been written, such as Joll’s *The Anarchists*, George Woodcock’s *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* and Peter Marshall’s *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. These books, however, focus much more on tracing the idea of anti-statism across history, the biographies of famous individual anarchists, and a largely Eurocentric history of the anarchist movement, rather than the political theory of anarchism. Joll and Woodcock’s books are especially marred by the fact that even when they do discuss anarchist theory, they contain too many inaccuracies, do not go into sufficient depth and in general lack philosophical rigour.<sup>13</sup>

Both David Miller’s *Anarchism* and April Carter’s *The Political Theory of Anarchism* provide in-depth discussions of political theory but define anarchism so broadly that they depict it as an incoherent collage of various thinkers with fundamentally different and incompatible

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<sup>9</sup> George Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism*, (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1970), 120.

<sup>10</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 44 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 255.

<sup>11</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 5, ed. Victor Jerome (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 327, 328.

<sup>12</sup> Nikolai Bukharin, *Anarchy and Scientific Communism* (1918), <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-02-07/introduction-to-bukharin-s-anarchy-and-scientific-communism>.

<sup>13</sup> Joll, *Anarchists*; George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986); Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008).

worldviews.<sup>14</sup> Alan Ritter's *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis* and George Crowder's *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin* are, despite also having an overly broad conception of anarchism, much more accurate. They nonetheless focus overwhelmingly on the relationship between anarchist conceptions of freedom and arguments for and descriptions of a free stateless society, rather than anarchist revolutionary strategy.<sup>15</sup> The above texts also suffer from focusing on a very small number of anarchist authors whose ideas are considered in the abstract, as if they had been written by a contemporary author answering what they viewed as the eternal questions of politics, rather than being contextualised within a specific historical moment.<sup>16</sup>

The majority of scholarship in anarchist history has consisted of in-depth studies of famous anarchists<sup>17</sup>, specific anarchist social movements<sup>18</sup>, or anarchism as a trans-national social movement.<sup>19</sup> These studies, by their very nature, focus on the history of specific individuals, groups, formal organisations, newspapers, collective struggles and so on, rather than the political theory of anarchism in general. A few good recent studies of anarchist political theory

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<sup>14</sup> David Miller, *Anarchism* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1984); April Carter, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> Alan Ritter, *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); George Crowder, *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew S. Adams, "The Possibilities of Anarchist History: Rethinking the Canon and Writing History", *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 1 (2013), 39-42, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Paul Avrich and Karen Avrich, *Sasha and Emma: The Anarchist Odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); Mark Leier, *Bakunin: The Creative Passion ó A Biography* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009); Antonio Senta, *Luigi Galleani: The Most Dangerous Anarchist in America* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Chris Ealham, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010); Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Pietro Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora 1880-1917* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt, ed., *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); David Berry and Constance Bantman, ed., *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: The Individual, the National and the Transnational* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

have appeared, but these tend to focus on a single author rather than the movement as a whole.

This includes Davide Turcato's *Occult Anarchism: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism, 1889-1900* and Ruth Kinna's *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition*.<sup>20</sup>

The main systematic overview of the political theory of the anarchist movement as a whole is Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt's *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*. The largest sub-section of the book is an account of the revolutionary strategy of anarchism, the various strategic debates between different kinds of anarchists, and the relationship between anarchism and syndicalism, which was a form of revolutionary trade unionism. This was significant since prior to its publication in 2009 both broad overviews of anarchism and studies of anarchist political theory had generally not focused on strategy to such an extent.

Their work contained a number of major arguments. Firstly, they argued that previous studies of anarchism were wrong to define it as any form of anti-statism in history or as a form of anti-state socialism which was first developed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1840. They argued that anarchism should instead be defined as a revolutionary working-class social movement which first emerged from the 1860s onwards. Secondly, they explained the political theory of anarchism so understood and argued that this social movement developed a coherent set of ideas which rival that of other political traditions, such as liberalism or Marxism, and is of ongoing importance to contemporary struggles against oppression. In contrast to some previous overviews of anarchism, they argued that anarchism was an international social movement which cannot be adequately understood through a focus on anarchism in Western Europe and

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<sup>20</sup> Davide Turcato, *Making Sense of Anarchism: Errata to Occult Anarchism, 1889-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Ruth Kinna, *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

the United States. For this reason, they gave significant attention to anarchist movements in Eastern Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa. Thirdly, they drew attention to anarchist positions on topics which were less studied at the time, such as imperialism and national liberation, and argued against common inaccurate claims about anarchism made by academics or other kinds of socialist, such as the belief that anarchism was only ever a genuine mass movement in Spain.<sup>21</sup>

Schmidt and van der Walt argued that the political theory of anarchism, in their sense of the term, was characterised by the following main commitments. Anarchism advocated the freedom of the individual and held that this could only occur within an egalitarian and co-operative society. This led anarchists to advocate the abolition of all systems of class rule and oppression, which included capitalism, landlordism, the state, patriarchy, and racism. In place of a society based on oppression and exploitation, anarchists sought to create a stateless classless socialist society in which the means of production and land were owned in common, workplaces and communities were self-managed by workers themselves, and markets were replaced by a system of decentralised planning. Anarchists rejected the strategy of seizing state power as a means to achieve a stateless classless society and instead argued that capitalism, landlordism and the state should be abolished simultaneously. They proposed that this could be achieved through the international working class and peasantry engaging in class struggle and ultimately launching a social revolution which forcibly overthrew and expropriated the ruling classes. Anarchists argued that, since the means one engages in determines the ends one arrives at, it follows that working class and peasant social movements should attempt to achieve the unity of means and ends. In order to do this social movements must select means which prefigure the ends of an anarchist society, such as forming organisations which are self-

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 8-9, 14-26. It should be noted that since its publication Schmidt was revealed to be a racist.

managed by their membership and therefore embody the self-management which would exist in a society without classes.<sup>22</sup>

Despite these important contributions, *Black Flame* contains several limitations. Firstly, key areas of anarchist political theory are not discussed in-depth. For example, Schmidt and van der Walt correctly note that anarchists advocated the freedom of the individual and held that this freedom could only be achieved through egalitarian and co-operative social relations. They do not, however, outline the different definitions of freedom which anarchist authors proposed.<sup>23</sup> The lack of detailed discussion is especially noticeable during its overview of anarchist revolutionary strategy. Key aspects of anarchist revolutionary strategy, such as their critique of state socialism or commitment to the unity of means and ends, are often summarised in a few paragraphs or pages, rather than being explored in-depth.<sup>24</sup> This partly stems from the fact that the book does not focus exclusively on revolutionary strategy and devotes a significant amount of space to other topics, such as how to define anarchism, the differences between anarchist and Marxist social theory, and the class character of the anarchist movement.

Secondly, *Discourse of Anarchism* "Discussion of anarchist strategy is limited in so far as Schmidt and van der Walt largely focus on explaining what anarchists thought but do not explain in sufficient depth why anarchists did so. Thirdly, *Black Flame* does not provide a detailed account of how different aspects of anarchist theory were connected with and underpinned one another. For example, Schmidt and van der Walt explain broad features of anarchist social theory, but do not explore the connection between how anarchists thought about society and their commitment to the unity of means and ends. The book is, in addition to this, now outdated in light of new primary and secondary literature which has appeared in English since its release.

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<sup>22</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 44-72.

<sup>23</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 25, 33, 47-9.

<sup>24</sup> For their brief remarks about the unity of means and ends see Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 25, 55-6, 65, 72. For their summary of the anarchist critique of state socialism see *ibid*, 54-6, 99-105, 109-111

Given the above, it is worthwhile to produce a new study of the political theory of anarchism which focuses specifically on revolutionary strategy, establishes in detail how different aspects of anarchist political theory connected with and underpinned one another, and uses this understanding of anarchist political theory as an interconnected system to explain why anarchists adopted the strategies that they did. In so doing I shall firmly establish anarchism's place in the intellectual history of socialism and communism, counter those academics and Marxist revolutionaries who have dismissed anarchist theory as being of poor quality, inconsistent and incoherent, and provide a new overview of the topic which draws upon the latest primary and secondary literature in English and explains in depth why anarchists advocated particular strategies. Before I do so I must first define how anarchism will be understood in this thesis.

## 1.2 – Defining Anarchism

Overviews of anarchism often begin by claiming that it is incredibly broad, incoherent, and inherently difficult to define.<sup>25</sup> Being difficult to define is not, however, a unique feature of anarchism. It is a general problem facing the intellectual historian because, as Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, “only something which has no history can be defined.”<sup>26</sup> That is to say, the reason why one can define the chemical element ‘zinc’ in terms of essential and unchanging necessary and jointly sufficient conditions is that it lies outside of history and so do not vary within and between places. What the element ‘zinc’ is does not change between 10<sup>th</sup> century France and 20<sup>th</sup> century Alaska. This remains true even though how humans have understood

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<sup>25</sup> For example: Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 3; Miller, *Anarchism*, 2-3; Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 118-9; Saul Newman, *Postanarchism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 1-2; Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 17-8.

<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 53. For discussions of Nietzsche's views on definitions see Lawrence Hatab, *Plato's Republic: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 97-99; Raymond Geuss, *History and Illusion in Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6-8, 69-72; *Morality, Culture and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9-14.

or thought about ‘zinc’ has changed over time. But the same is not true of things which are historical in the sense of being inherently connected to and concerned with human activity, such as ‘Christianity’ or ‘anarchism’.

Such historical entities have a beginning and boundaries which distinguish them from other parts of human existence, but the elements which compose them nonetheless change over time. Christianity, for example, emerged during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD and was subsequently modified numerous times during its history, such as by the invention of Catholicism and Protestantism. Historical entities are fluid and ever-changing because they are produced by and are about humans who are themselves constantly changing as they engage in activity within constantly evolving social structures. At any given moment in history people will think and act differently in response to the same wider intellectual, social, economic, and political context. The consequence of this is that, as people articulate distinct perspectives, argue with one another, and act to ensure that their understanding remains dominant or becomes so, they also produce competing and contradictory versions of the same historically produced concept. Over time this process of contestation causes what the widespread version of a historically produced concept is to change as some elements arise to prominence or fade into obscurity, whole new elements are added, and other elements are removed. There is therefore no one true version of a historically produced concept. There is only what elements do or do not compose it according to different individuals or groups of people at the various stages of its development.

Nietzsche’s views on historically produced concepts have several consequences for thinking about how to define anarchism. Although anarchism will have an origin and some conceptual boundaries that have historically demarcated it from other ideologies, there will not be a single unified body of thought called anarchism. At a given historical moment there will be a series of distinct individuals or groups of people who all happen to call themselves anarchists and are

in a process of contestation with one another over what anarchism means or should mean. Since what anarchism means is historically variable, the best we can expect from a definition is that it provides a snapshot of how specific individuals or groups of people understood anarchism at a given moment of its historical development. Such a definition may be rendered incomplete by unexpected developments within anarchism, such as whole new elements arising or previously important elements fading into obscurity. It may work very well for understanding a certain version of anarchism which is a particular configuration of elements, while also not neatly fitting a certain other historical iteration of anarchism which contains different elements or understands the same elements in a very different way. This way of thinking about historically produced concepts lends itself to an inherently pragmatic approach to defining anarchism. The point is not to establish what anarchism truly means once and for all but is instead to construct a definition of anarchism that is useful for investigating a particular historical period, topic or type of anarchism.

There are two main views on what anarchism is. Trans-historicists generally define anarchism as referring to any political theory in history which advocates the abolition of the state in favour of a free stateless society. This broad definition includes a huge number of thinkers ranging from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Daoist Bao Jingyan to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Digger Gerrard Winstanley and the 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary socialist Michael Bakunin.<sup>27</sup> In response to this way of thinking about anarchism, historicists have argued that anarchism should instead be defined as a historically specific form of anti-state socialism which first emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and

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<sup>27</sup> Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, xiii-xiv, 96-99; John A. Rapp, *Daoism and Anarchism: Critiques of State Autonomy in Ancient and Modern China* (London: Continuum Books, 2012), 3-5, 37-40; Robert Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), 2-3.



rapidly spread, during and after its birth, to North America, South America, Asia, Oceania and Africa through transnational networks and migration flows.<sup>28</sup>

Given my commitment to Nietzsche's way of thinking about definitions, I shall be taking a historicist approach and only focusing on people who have referred to themselves as 'anarchists' or belonged to a movement which called itself 'anarchist' and in so doing created a particular notion of what 'anarchism' means. Although doing so significantly limits the scope of who can be considered an anarchist, it is not sufficient to develop a useful definition of anarchism for the purposes of studying it as a coherent political theory. This is because during its history as a concept people with fundamentally different commitments have called themselves anarchists and engaged in a process of contestation with one another over what anarchism is or should be.

A brief summary of this history is as follows. The term 'anarchist' was sometimes used as an insult during the English civil war and the French revolution.<sup>29</sup> It did not refer to a distinct political ideology until it was adopted by anti-state socialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century within the context of industrialisation and the rise of capitalism and the modern nation state (henceforth referred to as the state) as a global economic and political system. The earliest known occurrence of this occurred in 1840 when Pierre-Joseph Proudhon wrote "I am an anarchist" in his book *What is Property*.<sup>30</sup> On other occasions Proudhon labelled himself an advocate of

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<sup>28</sup> Marie Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism: Elisée Reclus and Nineteenth-Century European Anarchism* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1979), 15-23; Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 33-47; Hirsch and van der Walt, ed., *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World*, xxxvi-lv.

<sup>29</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 12, 41. Some historical anarchists were themselves aware of its usage during the French Revolution. See Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 346-7, 350-60.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 205. See also Proudhon, *Property Is Theft: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, ed. Iain McKay (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011), 205, 254, 480, 711. It is claimed that Proudhon was the first person to self-identify as an anarchist in Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 13; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 5. For an overview of Proudhon's life and ideas see Steven K. Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1987).

“mutuality”, “mutualism” and “the mutualist system”.<sup>31</sup> This was a term which Proudhon borrowed from a previously existing social movement among silk workers in Lyon.<sup>32</sup>

Between the 1840s and 1860s Proudhon’s version of anti-state market socialism influenced a number of individuals in the United States and Europe who also came to refer to themselves as mutualists.<sup>33</sup> These mutualists advocated the abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of a decentralised market socialist society in which workers, either as individual producers or within voluntary collective associations, only possessed land and means of production which they were occupying or using themselves. This goal was to be achieved through a process of gradual and peaceful social change, such as workers forming co-operatives which would, with the aid of interest free loans provided by a people’s bank, out-compete capitalist businesses over time and thereby eventually establish socialism as a society wide economic system.<sup>34</sup>

During debates within the International Workingmen’s Association of 1864 (henceforth referred to as the 1<sup>st</sup> International) a tendency emerged which, despite being influenced by Proudhon, dithered from mutualism in the above sense and advocated the collective ownership of land, revolutionary trade unionism, and the abolition of capitalism and the state through an armed insurrection which would forcibly expropriate the ruling classes.<sup>35</sup> This tendency referred to itself, and was referred to by others, using a variety of labels. These included:

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<sup>31</sup> Proudhon, *Property is Theft*, 254-5, 291-2, 348, 615-6, 718, 725.

<sup>32</sup> For the history of the term see Shawn P. Wilbur, “Mutualism”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, ed. Carl Levy and Matthew S. Adams (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 213-224; Vincent, *Proudhon*, 162-4.

<sup>33</sup> In the United States mutualists were also influenced by Josiah Warren. See Josiah Warren, *The Practical Anarchist: Writings of Josiah Warren*, ed. Crispin Sartwell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); James J. Martin, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827-1908* (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Publisher, 1970), 1-102.

<sup>34</sup> David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement: 1917 to 1945* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 16-17; Julian P.W. Archer, *The First International in France 1864-1872: Its Origins, Theories and Impact* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), 41-7, 66-75; Martin, *Men Against the State*, 103-66; Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 31-52.

<sup>35</sup> Archer, *First International in France*, 79-225; Edward Castleton, “The Origins of ‘Collectivism’: Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s Contested Legacy and the Debate About Property in the International Workingmen’s Association and the League of Peace and Freedom”, *Global Intellectual History* 2, no. 2 (2017), 169–95; Moss, *Socialism of Skilled Workers*, 52-82.

federalists, collectivists, anarchists and revolutionary socialists.<sup>36</sup> Between the mid-1870s and early 1880s the label anarchism became increasingly prominent until it was the dominant term for this social movement.<sup>37</sup> Although it should be kept in mind that the popularity of the label anarchism went alongside a number of individuals and groups preferring to also use alternative language, such as autonomist, libertarian, libertarian socialism and libertarian communism.<sup>38</sup>

The anarchist tendency, which was primarily located within the Jurassian, Italian, French and Spanish sections of the 1<sup>st</sup> International, began to form a distinct social movement during a series of congresses held in Spain (Barcelona June 1870, Valencia September 1871), Switzerland (La Chaux-de-Fonds April 1870, Sonvillier November 1871) and Italy (Rimini August 1872). During these congresses delegates passed resolutions which rejected the strategy of achieving socialism via the conquest of state power and opposed Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' attempt to convert the General Council of the 1<sup>st</sup> International, which was supposed to perform only an administrative role, into a governing body which imposed decisions and policies on the organisation's previously autonomous sections.<sup>39</sup> This culminated in the establishment of the St Imier International in September 1872 after the anarchists Michael Bakunin and James Guillaume were expelled from the 1<sup>st</sup> International at its Hague Congress.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For example: Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, ed. Marshall Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 133, 135-6, 179, 186; *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 88, 191, 197-8, 238; Wolfgang Eckhart, *The First Socialist Schism: Bakunin VS. Marx in the K p v g t p c v k q p c n " Y q t* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), 129, 136-3, 375-6, 387-8; Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 102, 450, 466, 468.

<sup>37</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 19; Fleming, *Anarchist Way*, 119, 126; Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*, 11-3, 71-5, 80-3, 96-7; Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 225, 262.

<sup>38</sup> Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 44-7; Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* ed. Heiner M. Becker (London: Freedom Press, 1996), 144-5, 161-2, 184-5. The term 'libertarian' in its political sense was coined by Joseph Déjacque. It is not clear if later anarchists were aware of his ideas when they adopted 'libertarian' as a label. See Nettlau, *Short History*, 75-7; Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 233-5.

<sup>39</sup> Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*, 53-5, 104-9, 159-64, 166; Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism 1864-1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 57-9; T.R. Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 176-8.

<sup>40</sup> For a condensed overview of the actions of the general council and the formation of the St Imier International see Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 167-213; René Berthier, *Social-Democracy and Anarchism in the K p v g t p c v k q p c n " Y q t* (London: Anarchy Editions, 2015), 166-83. For an in-depth overview see Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*.

The St Imier International was not an exclusively anarchist organisation and was viewed by its participants as the direct continuation of the 1<sup>st</sup> International. The founding congress was attended by anarchist delegates representing Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland but also included the delegate for America, Gustave Lefrançais, who, despite being a survivor of the Paris Commune, was not strictly speaking an anarchist. The organisation soon grew to include a minority of state socialists from England, Germany and Belgium. It was not until the final Vervier (1877) congress of the St Imier International, which was attended by delegates representing anarchist groups in France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Spain, Greece, Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay and Alexandria, that the delegates were exclusively anarchist.<sup>41</sup> There is therefore a sense in which a distinct anarchist social movement does not fully exist as a separate entity until around 1880.<sup>42</sup>

In parallel to these developments' mutualists in the United States continued to advocate anti-state market socialism achieved through gradual peaceful means. From the early 1880s onwards, they also adopted Proudhon's label of 'anarchism' as their own and gained a small number of adherents in Europe.<sup>43</sup> This led to a situation in which two forms of anti-state socialism, which had both developed out of Proudhon's ideas and referred to themselves as 'anarchists', co-existed with one another. On the one side anarchist collectivists and anarchist communists, and on the other side individualist anarchists. The fact that they fundamentally

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<sup>41</sup> Berthier, *Social-Democracy and Anarchism*, 77-81, 104-140; Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 29-33; Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 197-227; Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 202-12. For information about the anarchist sections in Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay and Alexandria see Ángel J. Cappelletti, *Anarchism in Latin America* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017), 47-50, 115-8, 351-5; Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 114-5.

<sup>42</sup> Berthier, *Social-Democracy and Anarchism*, 153; Moss, *Socialism of Skilled Workers*, 79; A.W. Zurbrugg, *Anarchist Perspectives in Peace and War 1900-1918* (London: Anarres Editions, 2018), 6, note \*.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin Tucker, *Instead of a Book, by a Man Too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Benj. R Tucker, Publisher, 1897), ix, 14. For a summary of this history see Nettlau, *Short History of Anarchism*, 30-42; Rudolf Rocker, *Pioneers of American Freedom: Origin of Liberal and Radical Thought in America* (Los Angeles: Rocker Publications Committee, 1949), 145-154. This topic is made more complicated by the fact that some Italian anarchist communists referred to themselves as 'individualist anarchists' without being aware of American individualist anarchism. See Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 239-241, 270-2; Di Paola, *Knights Errant*, 63-78.

disagreed with one another on such topics as their visions of a future society and strategies to achieve social change led to a process of contestation over what ‘anarchism’ meant. This often took the form of both sides in the debate arguing that they alone were the true anarchists, and their opponents were fake, pseudo or inconsistent anarchists.<sup>44</sup> On other occasions there were attempts at tolerance, co-operation and even combining collectivist/communist anarchism and individualist anarchism together.<sup>45</sup>

Given this history, there is no neutral and uncontested definition of the anarchist movement. What people in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century took anarchism to mean was a product of ongoing debates and discussion between groups who all claimed to be anarchists but had conflicting and incompatible views on both what anarchism meant and who was and was not a genuine anarchist. Although it is impossible to find a neutral and entirely uncontested definition of anarchism, it is possible to pick out contingents that represented one side within the process of contestation over what anarchism meant and to view anarchism from their point of view.

For the purposes of this thesis, anarchism will be defined as a revolutionary anti-state socialist movement which first emerged in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe within the federalist wing of 1<sup>st</sup> International between 1864 and 1872 and the subsequent St Imier International, which included anarchist groups in Europe, South America and Egypt, between 1872 and 1878. I will focus exclusively on social anarchists: anarchist collectivists, anarchist communists, and anarchists without adjectives who were agnostic about the nature of the future society but advocated the

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<sup>44</sup> Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*, 214; Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, 15-6, 111-2, 383-93, 403-4; John Henry Mackay, *The Anarchists: A Picture of Civilization at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Benj. R. Tucker, Publisher, 1891), ix, 118, 125, 128-133; Peter Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, ed. Iain McKay (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2018), 139, 173; *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology*, ed. Iain McKay (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014), 203.

<sup>45</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 168-172; Errico Malatesta, *Life and Ideas: The Anarchist Writings of Errico Malatesta*, ed. Vernon Richards (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2015), 21-5; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004), 6, 9; Nettlau, “Anarchism: Communist or Individualist? Both” in *C p c t e j { < " C p " C p v j q n q i { " q h , " e d C p e t C l a s s g o l d ( N e w Y o r k : C o u n t e r P o i n t , j g t " G c t v j* 2000), 79-83; Voline, “Synthesis (Anarchist)” in *The Anarchist Encyclopedia Abridged*, ed. Mitchell Abidor (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019), 197-205.

same strategy as collectivists and communists. I will not examine the ideas of the intellectual precursors of the anarchist movement who wrote during the 1840s and 50s, such as Proudhon, or individualist anarchists who existed in parallel with social anarchism. This is motivated by the fact that both Proudhon and individualist anarchists dithered from social anarchists on their vision of a future society and their strategies to achieve the abolition of capitalism and the state. Examining the ideas proposed by every single individual or movement who called themselves anarchists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is not possible within the limited space of this thesis.

My definition of anarchism is similar to the approach which has been previously advocated by Schmidt and van der Walt in *Black Flame*. According to Schmidt and van der Walt the broad anarchist tradition first emerges in the 1860s and only includes social anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists who, despite not calling themselves anarchists, have organisational and ideological lineage with the anarchist members of the 1<sup>st</sup> International.<sup>46</sup> This definition has since been critiqued by Ruth Kinna, Robert Graham and Iain McKay for defining anarchism too narrowly, wrongly excluding Proudhon and individualist anarchists, and mistakenly including self-described Marxists who were revolutionary syndicalists within the broad anarchist tradition.<sup>47</sup>

Despite considering *Black Flame* to be the main systematic overview of the political theory of the anarchist movement, I agree with these objections to its definition of anarchism. It is therefore necessary to point out that these objections do not apply to my definition of

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<sup>46</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 14-9, 44-7, 71-2, 83-5, 160-4, 170-1; van der Walt, “(Re)Constructing a Global Anarchist and Syndicalist Canon: A Response to Robert Graham and Nathun Jun on Black Flame”, *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 1 (2013), 196. This definition built on Fleming, *Anarchist Way*, 15-23, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Kinna, “Review of Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism”, *International Review of Social History* 55, no. 2 (2010), 329-331; Graham, “Black Flame: A Commentary”, *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 1 (2013), 189-92; Iain McKay, “Review of Black Flame” (2009), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anarcho-review-of-black-flame>.

anarchism. Firstly, I am not committing myself to the strong view that Proudhon and the individualist anarchists were not anarchists. My definition of anarchism only specifies the kind of anarchism I will be examining and does not claim to establish the one true version of anarchism. I explicitly reject Schmidt and van der Walt's view that social anarchism is the only kind of anarchism since I do not think that a singular true version of any historically produced concept exists. I instead hold that there are multiple different versions of anarchism which change over time and are in a process of contestation with one another over what anarchism is or should be.

Secondly, I explicitly reject Schmidt and van der Walt's position that revolutionary syndicalists who thought of themselves as Marxists belong to the broad anarchist tradition due to them having organisational and ideological lineage with the anarchist members of the 1<sup>st</sup> International. This is because, unlike Schmidt and van der Walt, I take considering oneself to be a member of a social movement to be a necessary but insufficient condition for belonging to it. Although self-described Marxists who were revolutionary syndicalists advocated several ideas which were first advocated by anarchist members of the 1<sup>st</sup> International, they did not consciously advocate a conception of anarchism and contribute to the process of contestation over what anarchism means. These Marxist revolutionary syndicalists were connected to anarchism as a movement but did not belong to it. With this definition in place, I shall now explain my methodology of rational reconstruction.

### **1.3 – Rational Reconstruction**

This thesis will contribute to the history of political theory by providing a rational reconstruction of what anarchists who lived in Europe and the United States thought about revolutionary strategy between 1868 and 1939. The philosopher Michael Beaney defines a rational reconstruction as a “redescription and reorganisation” of a set of ideas which “exhibits

the logical (or rational) relations between its elements”.<sup>48</sup> A rational reconstruction of an author’s argument would, for example, reorganise the various claims they make into a series of clearly stated premises which logically entail a conclusion. In a similar fashion a rational reconstruction of a political theory not only explains what its exponents claim about various topics, such as what their values or ethical principles are, how they think about human beings, society, and social change, what kinds of social relations they oppose or advocate, how they think people should act to realise their goals, and so on. A rational reconstruction, in addition to this, makes the logical connections between the different elements of a political theory explicit, such as how the opposition to certain social relations is grounded in the value system, or the logical connection between their views on human beings and the kinds of action they advocate to achieve specific goals.

I shall therefore be taking elements from different anarchist authors, combining them together into a unified whole and arranging them in a manner which highlights how these ideas interconnect with and follow from one another. For example, in Chapter 3 I take the many different claims anarchist authors made about freedom, equality and solidarity across a range of texts and re-arrange them into a logical chain of argument which clearly establishes the different positions anarchists adopted on these topics and how certain ideas entailed, underpinned or were interconnected with other ideas. I then explain how anarchists used this value system to argue for the abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society and in so doing make the logical connections between different elements of anarchist political theory explicit.

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Beaney, “Analytic Philosophy and History of Philosophy: The Development of the Idea of Rational Reconstruction” in *The Historical Turn in Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Erich H. Reck (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 253.



It is necessary to rationally reconstruct anarchist ideas in this manner for two main reasons. Firstly, the vast majority of anarchist texts are short articles, speeches or pamphlets. Even texts which were published as books are often compilations of previously published articles, such as Peter Kropotkin's *Words of a Rebel* (1885), *The Conquest of Bread* (1892) and *Modern Science and Anarchy* (1913). Given this, an understanding of what an anarchist author thought can only be reached through assembling together the many different ideas they espoused in different places. Bakunin, for example, wrote several sentences and paragraphs about freedom within texts concerned with a more general topic, but did not write an extended essay or book devoted solely to the subject of freedom. In order to establish what Bakunin thought about freedom one must therefore assemble together a collection of short sentences and paragraphs made by Bakunin in several different texts. Even when an anarchist author did write about a topic in more detail it is still necessary to combine different texts together because the positions advocated in one short article can be misunderstood or misrepresented when not connected to the claims made in other short articles. The ideas of the anarchist movement can likewise only be understood by assembling together the ideas of a large number of different authors.

Secondly, a key reason why anarchist authors wrote political theory was that they aimed to spread revolutionary ideas to workers and inspire them to rise up against their oppressors. This resulted in anarchists choosing to write in a style which was accessible to a wide readership but can make it appear as if they were not making complicated arguments. For example, on numerous occasions anarchist authors do not explicitly lay out the conceptual connections between their different beliefs. Even when anarchist authors do claim that certain ideas are connected, they do not always explain why this is the case or only explain briefly. Given this, it is necessary to rationally reconstruct anarchist ideas in order to build up the interconnected conceptual system which anarchist authors often left implicit or did not explain in enough depth. Doing so is especially important given that one of the main limitations of Schmidt and

van der Walt's *Black Flame* is that it did not sufficiently establish the connections between different aspects of anarchist theory.

Rational reconstructions sometimes go beyond what an author wrote, or could have intended to mean, and add new ideas in order to produce the best possible version of a theory. G. A. Cohen, for example, frames his rational reconstruction of Marx's theory of history as being an attempt "to construct a tenable theory of history" which is in "broad accord with what Marx said on the subject" but also includes elements which Marx "would certainly have found . . . unfamiliar". For Cohen rational reconstruction requires a certain degree of transformation of the original ideas in order to express them in as clear and rigorous a manner as possible and meet the standards of contemporary analytic philosophy.<sup>49</sup> I shall, in contrast, focus on producing a rational reconstruction which is, as far as is possible, the same as what historical anarchist authors intended to mean. Doing so will sometimes require introducing new language for the sake of clarity and consistent terminology, but this shall only ever represent a change in language and not a change in ideas. I shall, in addition to this, attempt to use the same language as historical anarchists as much as possible.

The technique of rational reconstruction is usually applied to explaining the ideas of a single individual author, such as Marx or Descartes.<sup>50</sup> Such rational reconstructions must be sensitive to the fact that an individual author changed their mind or developed their ideas over time. It would therefore be a mistake to unthinkingly place ideas from one period of their life alongside ideas from another period as if they belong together simply because they were written by the same person. This issue becomes greater when rationally reconstructing the ideas of an international social movement over several decades. Assembling together the ideas of a large

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<sup>49</sup> G. A. Cohen, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xi, e.g. xxiv.

<sup>50</sup> For example: Cohen, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Language*, V. E. McCurley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

number of different authors is straightforward when explaining ideas which all anarchists advocated, such as the abolition of capitalism and the state, but is more complicated when examining areas where anarchists disagreed with one another, an idea significantly changed over time, or a whole new idea emerged during a specific historical moment and did not exist prior to this.

A rational reconstruction of the ideas of anarchism as a social movement must therefore be sensitive to the fact that anarchist theory was not a single unchanging unified whole. Given this, I shall begin by rationally reconstructing the political theory of anarchism in general and the ideas which anarchist authors consistently advocated and agreed with one another about. I shall then rationally reconstruct unified wholes which map onto the two main strategic tendencies within anarchism: insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism. The unified whole of mass anarchism will in turn be subdivided through a rational reconstruction of the various different forms of syndicalist anarchism and organisational dualism. Throughout the thesis I shall, in addition to this, include overviews of how ideas within anarchism first emerged or changed over time.

There are a number of important limitations to this approach. Firstly, the product of such a rational reconstruction will not correspond precisely to each individual author's viewpoint and will contain propositions that some of the authors I cite may have objected to due to them disagreeing with other anarchists on the topic. To minimise this issue, I shall, when it is relevant, point out when a view was distinct to a specific author and when there are important exceptions to a generalisation.

Secondly, this rational reconstruction will not exactly correspond to what the workers who composed the bulk of the anarchist movement thought. These workers were, after all, not automatons who blindly repeated word for word the ideas expressed by the major authors of

anarchism. They had thoughts of their own about what anarchism was and about what anarchists should do. They may have, in addition to this, disagreed with my interpretation of the authors I cite, not noticed features of these texts which I have, noticed features which I have failed to, and in general gained different ideas from reading these texts than the ones which I have. It is furthermore the case that I will have read texts which individual workers within the movement were unfamiliar with and they would have read, or if they were illiterate had read to them, texts which I am unfamiliar with.

It is difficult to find out what these anarchists thought because the majority of anarchists were not published authors and instead developed ideas through face-to-face conversations with their comrades. German anarchists in New York, to give one example, would discuss politics in a wide variety of locations ranging from anarchist-run beer halls to singing societies to family picnics in the park.<sup>51</sup> The contents of these conversations have unfortunately been largely lost when those who experienced and remembered them died, since only a tiny fraction of them were ever recorded in writing.

Thirdly, in reconstructing anarchism through a detailed study of texts produced by major anarchist authors, I will be focusing largely on the perspectives of men. This is because, although large numbers of women played a significant role in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century anarchist movement, most published anarchist authors appear to have been men.<sup>52</sup> Of those anarchist authors who were women, many of them cannot be included in my rational reconstruction since either they lived outside of Europe and the United States, such as the

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<sup>51</sup> Goyens, "Johann Most and the German Anarchists" in *Radical Gotham: Anarchism in New York City from 1840 to 1860* (Urbank: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 19-20.

<sup>52</sup> For discussions of women's participation in historical anarchist movements see Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 313-7; Jennifer Guglielmo, *No Turn Back: Women and the Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 139-175; Martha Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005); Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*, 155-8; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 43-7, 66-70; Federico Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography: Reclus and Kropotkin in the UK* (London: Routledge, 2019), 91-111.

Chinese anarchist He-Yin Zhen, or they have not been translated into English, such as the Yiddish-speaking anarchist and doctor Katherina Yevzerov.<sup>53</sup> Nor can my reconstruction, due to its focus on texts, include the perspectives of those women who were active within the anarchist movement but did not (as far as I am aware) have their ideas published by the anarchist press. This includes such individuals as the militant Concha Pérez, who took up arms in the Spanish revolution of 1936 and fought against fascists in Barcelona and on the Aragon Front, and Sonia Farber, who liked to knee scabs and the police at picket lines, rather than punch them, so the police would not notice who had hit them.<sup>54</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, a rational reconstruction of the ideas that can be found in the major theorists of anarchism who lived in Europe and the United States will, nonetheless, provide a useful synthesis for thinking about the ideas that were prominent within the anarchist movement. It should be kept in mind throughout, that this reconstruction reflects the ideas of a small list of people who, despite exerting great influence on the movement, should not be conflated with the ideas of the movement as a whole. Given this, when I write that ‘anarchists thought x’ or ‘anarchism holds that y’ I am not committing myself to the strong position that every person within the anarchist movement held these views since this is not something I could possibly know. I am instead using these phrases as shorthand for the more modest claim that the major anarchist authors, newspapers and programmes of organisations I cite did adhere to these views.

While this study will utilise the conceptual rigour of philosophy to summarise the arguments of anarchist authors, it will not examine these ideas in an historically anachronistic manner as if they existed outside of time and space. To truly understand the political theory of historical

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<sup>53</sup> Lydia H. Liu, Rebecca E. Karl, and Dorothy Ko (eds), *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 21, 44.

<sup>54</sup> Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 93-95; Sonia Farber interviewed in Steven Fischler and Joel Sucher, *Free Voice of Labor: The Jewish Anarchists* (New York: Pacific Street Films, 1980), 22:30.

anarchism it is necessary to understand what these authors intended to mean and communicate to their audiences. It has been argued by Quentin Skinner that in order to “reconstruct without anachronism” historians must locate texts within a specific linguistic context: inherited assumptions from previous thinkers, on-going debates and discussions, how certain words were used at the time etc. Through assembling together this linguistic context a historian can determine what an author intended to say or do in writing a particular text and how the text was, independently of these authorial intentions, understood by readers at the time.<sup>55</sup>

This approach has been critiqued by Ellen Meiksins Wood for conceiving of historical context too narrowly and, as a result, failing to situate authors within both the day-to-day activities and social relations which constituted the society they lived in and the large-scale processes of social change which were occurring at the time. Wood has correctly argued that, in order to understand the meaning of a text, historians must locate them not only within a linguistic context, but also the wider social, economic and political world which these ideas were produced within and in reaction to. This includes such things as the social relations through which the production and consumption of goods were organised, what kinds of domination the ruling classes engaged in, and how the oppressed classes resisted and struggled against their rulers.<sup>56</sup>

A comprehensive study of anarchism which fully contextualises its ideas within their historical moment goes far beyond the scope of this thesis. I shall, instead, be focusing on a single main context: the history of the anarchist movement itself. Given my commitment to Wood’s

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<sup>55</sup> Quentin Skinner, “The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives” in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 202; “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas” in *Visions of Politics Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82, 84-7; “Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts” in *Visions*, 110-4; *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume 1: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), x-xiv.

<sup>56</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London: Verso, 2011), 7-16.

approach to intellectual history, this will include not only the theoretical debates within the movement, but also its various actual attempts at overthrowing capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. This is motivated by the position that the revolutionary strategy of anarchism was articulated by members of a social movement in order to be put into action. It is furthermore the case that what ideas different anarchist authors proposed developed in response to the on-going experiences of class struggle, such as the various actions of different working-class social movements, state repression of anarchist movements, and debates within anarchist organisations about how to act in a specific moment. In order to include this context my thesis will combine a detailed textual interpretation of primary sources available in English with the secondary literature on the history of different anarchist movements in Europe and the United States.

#### **1.4 – The Argument of the Thesis**

The theory of anarchism can be broken down into five main elements. These were,

1. A theoretical framework for thinking about human beings, society, and social change.
2. A set of ethical principles which form the value system of anarchism.
3. An analysis and critique of existing social relations and structures in terms of their failure to promote these ethical principles.
4. A vision of alternative social relations and structures that are achievable and would in practice promote these ethical principles.
5. A series of strategies (which are consistent with the ethical principles) for abolishing existing social relations and structures in favour of the proposed alternative social relations and structures.

In order to rationally reconstruct the revolutionary strategy of anarchism it is necessary to explain the other four main elements of anarchist theory in depth. This is because what anarchists thought about strategy can only be understood within the context of anarchist theory as a whole. Although anarchists developed revolutionary strategies to abolish a variety of different oppressive structures, I shall primarily focus on their strategies to abolish capitalism and the state since this is what most anarchist texts discuss. I shall when it is relevant include anarchist views on how to abolish patriarchy, but it should be kept in mind that anarchist men, who were the majority of published anarchist authors, did not give this topic sufficient attention.

I shall throughout this thesis refer extensively to, and quote from, a number of major anarchist authors who lived in Europe or the United States between 1868 and 1939. This includes, but is not limited to, Michael Bakunin (1814-1876), Elisée Reclus (1830-1905), Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), James Guillaume (1844-1916), Carlo Cafiero (1846-1892), Errico Malatesta (1853-1932), Émile Pouget (1860-1931), Ricardo Mella (1861-1925), Luigi Galleani (1861-1931), Max Baginski (1864-1943), Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912),<sup>57</sup> Emma Goldman (1869-1940), Alexander Berkman (1870-1936), Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958), and Luigi Fabbri (1877-1935). When studying specific forms of anarchism, such as insurrectionist or syndicalist anarchism, I shall supplement the quotations from key theorists with quotations from sources collectively produced by the movement. These will include programmes, congress resolutions and manifestos of formal organisations or affinity groups.

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<sup>57</sup> De Cleyre was initially an individualist anarchist and mutualist but came to reject this position during the 1890s. Between 1897 and 1900 she came to identify as an anarchist without adjectives who was agnostic about the nature of the future society whilst advocating the same strategies as social anarchists. I shall only be including texts by her from this later period. See Avrich, *An American Anarchist, The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2018), 46-7, 58, 120, 144-9; Voltairine de Cleyre, *The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader* ed. A.J Brigati (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004), 60, 106-8.



A key factor determining which authors I have chosen to include within my thesis is the fact that I can only read English. This is a significant limitation given that the majority of anarchist primary sources within Europe and the United States were originally written in languages other than English – mainly French, Italian, German, Spanish, Russian and Yiddish – and have yet to be translated.<sup>58</sup> As a result of this there are authors who were historically important but whose ideas I cannot examine in any depth due to lacking access to them, such as the Yiddish-speaking anarchist Saul Yanovsky or the Dutch anarchist Domela Nieuwenhuis. Even with authors who have been translated into English, such as Reclus, I often only have access to a small amount of their total output. It should therefore be kept in mind that generalisations I make about anarchism are based on the primary sources available in English and these represent a small fragment of the total texts produced by the historical anarchist movement.

I shall be quoting anarchist authors at length, rather than only re-phrasing their ideas in my own words, because, in order to understand what anarchists thought historically, a modern reader must understand them on their own terms and so through their own language and exact ways of conceptualising or expressing their ideas. Doing so will not only help ensure that my explanation of anarchist theory corresponds to what anarchists actually thought, but will also bring many obscure and not well-known passages to the reader's attention. In so doing I will not be arguing that anarchist theory was correct or interjecting with my own personal views on which anarchist authors or ideas were best. I will instead only be concerned with establishing and explaining what anarchist authors themselves thought.

The previous main overview of the revolutionary strategy of anarchism is Schmidt and van der Walt's *Black Flame*. This study was limited in so far as it (a) did not discuss key areas of

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<sup>58</sup> Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography*, 61-2; Zimmer, "Archiving the American Anarchist Press: Reflections on Format, Accessibility and Language", *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism* 29, no. 1 (2019), 10-11.

anarchist political theory in sufficient depth, (b) described what anarchists thought about revolutionary strategy but did not include a detailed explanation of why they did so, and (c) did not systematically establish how different aspects of anarchist political theory connected with and underpinned one another. I shall utilise the method of rational reconstruction in order to provide a new detailed overview of the revolutionary strategy of anarchism which establishes in depth how different aspects of anarchist political theory interconnected with one another, and uses this understanding of anarchist political theory as an interconnected system to explain why anarchists adopted the strategies that they did.

The central argument of this thesis is that the reasons anarchists gave for supporting or opposing particular strategies were grounded in a theoretical framework – the theory of practice – which maintained that, as people engage in activity, they simultaneously change the world and themselves. This theoretical framework was the foundation for the anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends: the means that revolutionaries proposed to achieve social change had to be constituted by forms of activity which would develop people into the kinds of individuals who were capable of, and were driven to, (a) overthrow capitalism and the state and (b) construct and reproduce the end goal of an anarchist society. Although anarchism’s commitment to the unity of means and ends has been identified by previous historians of anarchism, this is the first detailed study to ground it, alongside anarchist revolutionary strategy in general, in the theory of practice.<sup>59</sup> Doing so enables me to establish the intellectual depth of historical anarchist revolutionary strategy in a manner which has hitherto not been achieved.

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<sup>59</sup> For example: Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 53-4; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 629; Schmidt and Van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 25, 55-6, 65, 72; Turcato, *Making Sense*, 21-5, 64. The anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends has been previously grounded in the theory of practice by Paul Raekstad and Sofa Saio Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020). Their discussion is much briefer than mine and drew extensively upon my unpublished work.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In Chapter two I shall explain anarchism's theoretical framework – the theory of practice. With this in place I shall rationally reconstruct anarchism's value system, critique of existing society and vision of a future society in Chapter three. The core ideas on strategy which were in general shared by the anarchist movement will be described in Chapter four. Chapter five will reconstruct the anarchist critique of state socialism. Chapters six and seven will provide an overview of the two main schools of anarchist strategy: insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism. Chapter eight will expand the discussion of mass-anarchism by explaining the history, theory and practice of one of its main forms: syndicalist anarchism, which is a kind of revolutionary trade unionism. Chapter nine will continue the discussion of mass anarchism by describing the history and theory of organisational dualism, the view that anarchists should simultaneously form mass organisations open to all workers and smaller organisations composed exclusively of anarchists. Chapter ten will conclude and re-affirm my central argument that the revolutionary strategy of anarchism was grounded in the theory of practice.

## Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

In order to understand anarchist political theory, one must first understand the theoretical framework which anarchists used for thinking about human beings, society and social change. This is the theory of praxis or practice.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that anarchists, in my sense of the term, were not the only socialists to adhere to this theory. It can also be found in the writings of Marx and Engels. I have been unable to find evidence of individualist anarchists, such as Benjamin Tucker and E. Armand, adhering to the theory of practice.<sup>2</sup> The best modern reconstruction of the theory of practice has been produced by Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen in *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism* and Raekstad and Sofa Saio Gradin in *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today*.<sup>3</sup> Cox and Nilsen's reconstruction draws extensively on Marx, whilst Raekstad and Gradin reference both Marxist and anarchist authors. My reconstruction differs from these two previous accounts in so far as it is based exclusively on anarchist writers and cites far more anarchist primary sources than Raekstad and Gradin's account.

I shall first explain how anarchists thought about and conceptualised reality in general and human nature in particular. With this in place I shall then rationally-reconstruct the theory of practice in depth. This will begin with how anarchists thought about human action in terms of people deploying capacities to satisfy drives and, in so doing, simultaneously changing the external world, both physical and social, and themselves. I shall then develop the model by

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<sup>1</sup> Some prefer to use the German word for 'practice', which is 'praxis'. I shall be using 'practice' to avoid confusion with 'praxis' in the sense of 'a unity of theory and practice'. Praxis in this distinct sense refers to the process of theory informing political action and political action informing theory which in turn informs political action and so on.

<sup>2</sup> I looked for evidence of individualist anarchists advocating the theory of practice within Tucker, *Instead of a Book*; Mitchell Abidor, ed. *Down with the Law: Anarchist Individualist Writings from Early Twentieth-Century France* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019); Martin, *Men Against the State*; Rocker, *Pioneers of American Freedom*.

<sup>3</sup> Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 21-59; Raekstad and Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics*, 40-59.

using this way of understanding human action to outline how anarchists thought about social structures and social change in an inherently historical manner. In reconstructing the theory of practice I shall not only be explaining what anarchists thought but in so doing differentiating my account of anarchist political theory from previous studies which do not use the theory of practice to understand historical anarchist authors and, as a result, fail to fully understand what they wrote. I shall, in addition to this, be demonstrating the intellectual sophistication of anarchism and thereby refute those academics and Marxist revolutionaries who have dismissed anarchist theory as bad or incoherent.

Before I do so, it is important to note that the theory of practice was often implicit in anarchist texts and not laid out in great detail. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, the vast majority of anarchist texts were short articles or pamphlets which focused on other topics, such as why anarchists think capitalism should be abolished or concrete discussions about how to achieve anarchist goals. Secondly, anarchist authors did not, in general, feel the need to write an explicit and detailed statement of their social theory's foundational premises because it was already accepted as the common ground which underpinned their theorising. The consequence of this is that a rational reconstruction of the theory of practice has to be made by piecing together the different brief statements that anarchist authors made, and then supplementing these brief statements with my own examples in order to clearly illustrate what they thought. The fact that the theory of practice underpinned their views will be demonstrated throughout this thesis due to its great explanatory power in making sense of their positions and arguments. This will include establishing why these authors kept using certain words and phrases, such as 'development' and 'powers'.

## 2.1 – Materialism and Human Nature

Anarchists were, in general, committed to materialism in the broad sense that they viewed matter as the fundamental building block of reality.<sup>4</sup> This materialism went alongside the view that the natural world must be conceptualised as a process which undergoes changes over time, rather than as a static entity.<sup>5</sup> For Bakunin the universe is the “infinite totality of the ceaseless transformation of all existing things”.<sup>6</sup> Cafiero similarly referred to the “continuous processes of transformation” that occur to the “infinity of matter” which constitutes the universe.<sup>7</sup> Decades later Kropotkin wrote in his *Ethics* that “the life of the universe” should be conceived as “a never-ending series of transformations of energy”.<sup>8</sup> The natural world so understood included human society.<sup>9</sup> Malatesta held that “the social world” is “nothing but the continuing development of natural forms”.<sup>10</sup> Kropotkin likewise claimed that the “whole of nature” included “the life of societies”.<sup>11</sup>

Given this framework, anarchists viewed history as the study of how society as a process changes over time due to the action of human beings. According to Bakunin, “history is made,

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<sup>4</sup> Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, ed. G.P. Maximoff (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 57, 60-8; Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 89-92, 100-1, 125; *Ethics: Origins and Development* (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1924), 1, 3-4; Lucy Parsons, *Freedom, Equality and Solidarity: Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937*, ed. Gale Ahrens (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004), 137; Malatesta, *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*, ed. Davide Turcato (Oakland, CA: AK Press 2014), 38, 132. In the 1910s and 1920s Malatesta critiqued types of materialism which denied human agency or engaged in economic reductionism, but this should not be conflated with a rejection of materialism in a broad sense. He instead described himself as ignorant about which metaphysical theory was true whilst denying the existence of God and praising the scientific method. See Malatesta, *The Anarchist Revolution: Polemical Articles 1924-1931*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1995), 45-57; *Method of Freedom*, 363-73, 445-8.

<sup>5</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 163; *Fugitive Writings*, ed. George Woodcock (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1993), 100-4; Ricardo Mella, *Anarchist Socialism in Early Twentieth-Century Spain: A Ricardo Mella Anthology*, ed. Stephen Luis Vilaseca (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 3-4. The language of processes is ubiquitous in anarchist literature. For examples see: Alexander Berkman, *What is Anarchism?* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), 97, 99, 101, 167, 191; Luigi Galleani, *The End of Anarchism?* (London: Elephant Editions, 2012), 47-8, 83; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 8, 29, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Carlo Cafiero, *Revolution* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> This point is made by Bakunin again and again. See Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 57, 69, 83, 85, 89, 91.

<sup>10</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 125.

not by abstract individuals, but by acting, living and passing individuals. Abstractions advance only when borne forward by real men”.<sup>12</sup> For Rocker, since “[e]very social process . . . arises from human intentions and human goal-setting and occurs within the limits of our volition” it follows that “history is . . . nothing but the great arena of human aims and ends”.<sup>13</sup> Malatesta simply wrote that “history is made by men”.<sup>14</sup>

Anarchist social theory rested on a particular understanding of what human beings are, what human activity is, and how human activity both shapes and is shaped by society. I shall discuss each component in turn. Anarchists viewed human beings as unchanging and changing at the same time. Humans are unchanging in that there are certain characteristics which all humans across all societies have in common. These include the fact that humans need food, water and sleep to survive, reproduce through sex, have brains, are social animals who communicate through language, experience emotions and so on.<sup>15</sup> Bakunin held that the key elements of “human existence” will “always remain the same: to be born, to develop and grow; to work in order to eat and drink, in order to have shelter and defend oneself, in order to maintain one’s individual existence in the social equilibrium of his own species, to love, reproduce and then to die”.<sup>16</sup> The exact same point is made by Rocker. He claimed that,

We are born, absorb nourishment, discard the waste material, move, procreate and approach dissolution without being able to change any part of the process. Necessities eventuate here which transcend our will . . . We are not compelled to consume our food in the shape nature offers it to us or to lie down to rest in the first convenient place, but

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<sup>12</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 162. The same point is made in Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 76.

<sup>13</sup> Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture* (Los Angeles: Rocker Publications Committee, 1937), 25, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 155.

<sup>15</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 92-3; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 19, 121-2, 446-7, 456; Élisée Reclus, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Élisée Reclus*, ed. John Clark and Camille Martin (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2013), 184; Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 6, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 85-6. See also *ibid*, 100.

we cannot keep from eating or sleeping, lest our physical existence should come to a sudden end.<sup>17</sup>

Anarchists held that one of the distinguishing characteristics of humans as a species was their consciousness. This consciousness, according to Bakunin, was the product “of the cerebral activity of man” such that the “material world” included “the ideal world” which exists within the inner mental life of each human being.<sup>18</sup> With this consciousness humans think about themselves, other people, the world in which they live and worlds which they have imagined. They make plans for the future and reflect on past events. They direct and alter their behaviour. In short, humans are able to mentally stand apart from their immediate experience and make their own life an object of their thought.<sup>19</sup> According to Reclus “[h]umanity is nature becoming self-conscious”.<sup>20</sup> Cafiero wrote that, “[t]he feeling of one’s self is without doubt the dominant sentiment of the human soul. The awareness of one’s being, its development and betterment, the satisfaction of its needs, these make up the essence of human life”.<sup>21</sup> Given this, any individual human always possesses a particular form of consciousness, by which I mean the specific ways in which they experience, conceptualise and understand the world in which they live. I shall from now on refer to this as ‘consciousness’ for short.

Since these common characteristics are constant across all human beings they must stem from certain basic facts about human biology. It is this human biology, alongside the natural environment, which are the starting points for human activity and so the parameters in which it occurs. Crucially, human nature was not viewed as a fixed, entirely static entity or an abstract essence which exists outside of history. Anarchists distinguished between the fundamental raw

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<sup>17</sup> Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 67.

<sup>19</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 84-5, 91, 92-4, 100-1, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in John Clark, “An Introduction to Reclus’ Social Thought” in Reclus, *Anarchy*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 3.



materials of human nature which constitute all human beings and what these fundamental raw materials are shaped into during a person's life within a historically specific society. Bakunin distinguished between innate "faculties and dispositions" which are "natural" and "the organisation of society" which "develops them, or on the other hand halts, or falsifies their development". Given this, "[a]ll individuals, with no exception, are at every moment of their lives what Nature and society have made them".<sup>22</sup>

Kropotkin, who was a geographer, similarly thought that "[m]an is a result of both his inherited instincts and his education".<sup>23</sup> The consequence of this was that Kropotkin thought that although there are "fundamental features of human character" which "can only be mediated by a very slow evolution" the extent and manner in which these characteristics are expressed is a result of a person's social environment. For Kropotkin, one of these fundamental characteristics with a strong biological basis was the tendency for human beings to co-operate with one another and engage in mutual aid in order to survive. Yet he also held that "the relative amount of individualist and mutual aid spirit" is "among the most changeable features of man".<sup>24</sup>

Similar views were expressed by other anarchist authors. Goldman declared that, "[t]hose who insist that human nature remains the same at all times have learned nothing . . . Human nature is by no means a fixed quantity. Rather, it is fluid and responsive to new conditions".<sup>25</sup> The extent to which anarchists thought that the expression of human nature was malleable or plastic can be seen in the fact that several anarchists claim that there is an infinite number of different

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<sup>22</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 228.

<sup>24</sup> Kropotkin, *Proposed Communist Settlement: A New Colony for Tyneside or Wearside* (The Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1895), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-proposed-communist-settlement-a-new-colony-for-tyneside-or-wearside>. See also Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 77-8.

<sup>25</sup> Emma Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New Jersey: Humanities Press 1996), 438. See also *ibid*, 73.

kinds of person. Malatesta, for example, wrote that in an anarchist society “the full potential of human nature could develop in its infinite variations”.<sup>26</sup>

This was not to say that humans could transform themselves into anything they wanted. The nature of the raw materials which constitute human beings places definite limits on what they can be shaped into. Humans cannot shape themselves into a totally emotionless being or morph their arms into wings. This is because, although a human can become an incredibly wide variety of different things during the course of their finite existence, the scope of what they can possibly become is pre-determined by the kind of animal they are. As Rocker wrote, “[m]an is unconditionally subject only to the laws of his physical being. He cannot change his constitution. He cannot suspend the fundamental conditions of his physical being nor alter them according to his wish”.<sup>27</sup>

Stereotypes of anarchists depict them as having a naïve conception of human nature in which it is imagined that humans are innately good and kind. In reality, anarchists held that human beings were defined by two main distinct tendencies: struggle/strife and sociability/solidarity.<sup>28</sup> Malatesta thought that humans possessed both the “harsh instinct of wanting to predominate and to profit at the expense of others” and “another feeling which draws him closer to his neighbour, the feeling of sympathy, tolerance, of love”. As a result human history contained “violence, wars, carnage (besides the ruthless exploitation of the labour of others) and innumerable tyrannies and slavery” alongside “mutual aid, unceasing and voluntary exchange of services, affection, love, friendship and all that which draws people closer together in brotherhood”.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 402. See also Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 149-50, 153-4, 330-1; Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 5-8; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 121.

<sup>29</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 65-6, 68.

This position was shared by Kropotkin, who wrote in his *Ethics* that there are “two sets of diametrically opposed feelings which exist in man”. These “are the feelings which induce man to subdue other men in order to utilise them for his individual ends” and the feelings which “induce human beings to unite for attaining common ends by common effort”. The first corresponds “to that fundamental need of human nature – struggle” and the second to the “equally fundamental tendency – the desire of unity and mutual sympathy”.<sup>30</sup>

## **2.2 – The Theory of Practice**

One of the main processes which modifies and develops the raw materials of human nature is human activity itself. This feature of human beings is important because it makes fundamental social change possible. If human beings are conscious creatures who are able to modify themselves significantly through activity, then how human beings are today is not inevitable or fixed but is something which human beings can consciously change themselves. Human activity is conceptualised by anarchist social theory in terms of practice. By practice I mean the process whereby people with particular consciousness engage in activity – deploy their capacities to satisfy a psychological drive – and through doing so change the world and themselves simultaneously.

A capacity is a person’s real possibility to do and/or to be, such as playing tennis or being physically fit. It is composed of two elements: (a) a set of external conditions which enable a person to do or be certain things, and (b) a set of internal abilities which the person requires in order to be able to take advantage of said external conditions. For example, a person’s capacity to play tennis requires external conditions in the form of such things as a tennis court, a tennis racket, someone to play against and so on. Internally it requires abilities such as being able to

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<sup>30</sup> Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 22.

hold a racket, hit a ball, and know the rules of the game. In the absence of either the external or internal conditions, a person lacks the real possibility to achieve the doing of playing tennis and therefore lacks the capacity to play. A drive, in comparison, is a person's particular desires, intentions, motivations, goals, values or concerns, such as wanting to play tennis. Given this, a person engaging in the activity of playing tennis can be conceptualised in terms of the person exercising their real possibility to play tennis, which has internal and external conditions, in order to satisfy their drive to play tennis.<sup>31</sup>

Although I have opted to speak of 'capacities' and 'drives' it should be kept in mind that, historically, anarchists used a variety of different terms including powers, capabilities, wants and needs.<sup>32</sup> Bakunin, for instance, used "drives", "urges" and "needs" interchangeably.<sup>33</sup> Malatesta, in comparison, referred to "man's . . . capacity to modify his external surroundings and adapt them to his own wants, by the exercise of his primeval powers" and goes on to refer to people who possess the "capabilities and powers of free association".<sup>34</sup>

Kropotkin consistently used the language of 'wants', 'needs', 'capacities' and 'powers'. In *The Conquest of Bread* he referred to "the rapid development of our wealth-producing powers" and "the possibility of developing intellectual capacities". He distinguished between "the needs of the individual and of society, and the means which man has resorted to in order to satisfy them during his varied phases of development".<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere he wrote that "[e]ach nation is a compound aggregate of tastes and inclinations, of wants and resources, of capacities and inventive powers" and referred to the "mental and bodily powers" of individuals.<sup>36</sup> In his *Ethics*

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<sup>31</sup> This interpretation of capacities and drives is based on Raekstad, "Revolutionary Practice and Prefigurative Politics: A Clarification and Defence," *Constellations* 25, no. 3 (2018), 2-3; "Human Development and Alienation in the Thought of Karl Marx", *European Journal of Political Theory* 17, no. 3 (2018), 3-14.

<sup>32</sup> For example: Reclus, *Anarchy*, 116, 133, 140, 145, 175, 182, 231, 232; Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 21, 26, 85, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 93, 95.

<sup>34</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 122, 134.

<sup>35</sup> Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), 64, 138, 206.

<sup>36</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 651-2, 671.

Kropotkin claimed that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century “mankind has reached a point where the means of satisfying its needs are in excess of the needs themselves”. He goes on to refer to the “social constructive capacities” and “creative powers” of humanity.<sup>37</sup> In order to avoid confusion, I shall now refer to ‘capacities’ and ‘drives’ exclusively.

As humans exercise their capacities to satisfy their drives they continually develop and shape their existing capacities and drives, whilst also developing whole new capacities and drives. A person who frequently plays the guitar will become better at playing a particular chord and finds their pre-existing motivation to play grows. During the course of their development as a musician they learn whole new guitar techniques and find themselves having drives which they did not have when they started, such as the drive to play heavy metal. Were they to stop playing then their capacity to play guitar would diminish over time and they might lose the drive they once had to play the instrument. Capacities and drives are therefore not fixed, static entities, but are rather in constant motion as human action maintains, alters, erodes, destroys, and produces them over time. Given this, when humans produce anything they engage in an act of double-production. They simultaneously produce a particular thing, such as a good or service, and the capacities and drives exercised, developed, or created during the activity of production itself. When people engage in practice they are also changing themselves. Kropotkin, for example, advocated in 1908 “teaching which, by the practice of the hand on wood, stone, metal, will speak to the brain and develop it”.<sup>38</sup>

The process of engaging in practice not only affects a person’s capacities and drives but also has a significant impact on their consciousness. Someone who engages in the practice of learning music theory will not only, for example, get better at reading sheet music or acquire

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<sup>37</sup> Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), 16.

the drive to learn more about the subject. They will, in addition to this, change how they experience, conceptualise, and understand music or life in general, such as noticing a feature of a song which they did not notice before or coming to think of themselves as a person of culture and sophistication.

This is not to say that anarchists viewed the process of development as automatic or predetermined. Different people can develop different drives in response to the exact same kinds of practice, such as one person eating dark chocolate and developing the drive to consume it daily, whilst another develops the drive to avoid it at all costs. One person can play an instrument and become better at it rapidly, whilst another person struggles to make progress. Two people can read the same book and develop distinct consciousness in response to it. But despite this, generalisations can still be made, such as the fact that people socialised to reproduce patriarchal gender roles will in general do so or that the activity of being a member of the Ku Klux Klan or the police (or both) will in general bring out the worst in someone.

This theory of practice can be clearly seen in the writings of Bakunin. He thought that humans created “all civilization”, which included “all the marvels of industry, science, and the arts” and “all the developments of humanity – religious, aesthetic, philosophic, political, economic, and social”, through “the exercise of an active power” which “tends to assimilate and transform the external world in accordance with everyone’s needs”. Such labour was “progressive” and “becomes more and more rational as time goes on” in the sense that as humans exercise their powers they develop them. This could be seen, according to Bakunin, in the fact that, whereas “[a]nts, bees, beavers, and other animals which live in societies do now precisely the same thing which they were doing 3,000 years ago”, humans have developed their powers such that

they have gone from living in “huts” and using bows or spears to building “palaces” and manufacturing guns and artillery.<sup>39</sup>

The development of capacities, drives and consciousness is of course not an entirely individual matter. Humans are, in Malatesta’s words, “a social animal whose existence depends on the continued physical and spiritual relations between human beings” which are “based either on affinity, solidarity and love, or on hostility and struggle”.<sup>40</sup> Anarchists sometimes expressed this point through analogies with other animals, such as Bakunin’s remark that, “[m]an is born into society, just as an ant is born into an ant-hill or a bee into its hive”.<sup>41</sup>

Since humans are social animals they experience life immersed in the practice, capacities, drives and consciousness of other people, which in turn conditions and develops their own individual practice, capacities, drives and consciousness. A child will be taught the capacity to read and write by adults who already possess these capacities, while a dancer will develop the drive to dance in a new style after observing other dancers deploying their dancing capacities in new ways. The manner in which these kinds of practice shape a person’s consciousness are in turn inherently social, such as a person adopting a particular perspective on the world due to reading books written by other people or thinking in terms of concepts which have been collectively produced and reproduced by the culture in which they live.<sup>42</sup>

Given this, if the capacities, drives and consciousness a person has are continually determined by practice, and the practice people engage in varies across different social and historical contexts, then what capacities, drives, and consciousness people have, in turn, varies both socially and historically. The capacity to sail a longboat and the drive to die heroically in battle

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<sup>39</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 86-8.

<sup>40</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 157.

<sup>42</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 159, 164, 167-8.

so that you will go to Valhalla developed from living as a warrior in a 9th century Norse society. These capacities, drives and consciousness are not widespread in modern Nordic societies because people are no longer engaging in appropriately Viking practice. Instead, people engage in practice which develops their capacity to assemble flat pack furniture or their drive to go to melodic death metal concerts. The social and historical situation in which one lives also determines how universal capacities and drives are experienced. For example, the universal drive of hunger may be experienced as hunger for beef burgers within a modern North American fast food restaurant, but would be experienced as hunger for seal meat within a 19th century Inuit house.

The inherently historical and social nature of capacities, drives and consciousness was emphasised by anarchist authors again and again. Bakunin, Cafiero and Malatesta all conceptualised human history in terms of a series of economic periods characterised by specific kinds of technology and ways of organising production. Their model held that human beings had gone from living in hunter-gatherer societies to living in ancient agricultural societies based on slavery, feudal agricultural societies based on serfdom and finally modern industrial societies based on wage labour.<sup>43</sup> This went alongside the awareness that there were hunter-gatherer societies which existed at the same time as industrial societies.<sup>44</sup> Although the specifics of their model is now deeply outdated in the light of modern anthropology and archaeology, it nonetheless highlights that they thought about capacities, drives and consciousness as varying over time and between different kinds of society.<sup>45</sup> This is because

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<sup>43</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 121; *From Out of the Past*, 174, 188-91; Cafiero, *Revolution*, 5-34; Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy: Malatesta in America 1899-1900*, ed. Davide Turcato (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019), 44; Kropotkin had a slightly more complicated model, but the basic point remained the same. See Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 62-247; *Ethics*, 17-18; *Modern Science*, 276-7.

<sup>44</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 229, 231; Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 64, 68-9; Reclus, *Anarchy*, 213-18.

<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the worst and most outdated part of this model was Bakunin and Cafiero's view that humans were initially cannibals who eat each other for food before they discovered animal husbandry and farming.



different economic periods were constituted by specific kinds of practice, such as hunting with a bow and arrow, collecting the harvest as a peasant or manufacturing a car in a factory, and so developed within people distinct capacities, drives and consciousness.

This way of thinking can especially be seen in anarchist discussions of drives. Berkman held that “the satisfaction of our wants creates new needs, gives birth to new desires and aspirations”.<sup>46</sup> Cafiero wrote that, “[w]ith a change in the time, place, conditions or civilization, the needs change too”.<sup>47</sup> Malatesta claimed that during the course of history the “desires” of humanity “have multiplied with the means of satisfying them, and have become needs”. This view was repeated by Malatesta when he wrote elsewhere that as “the productive power of human labour” have enormously increased so too have “our needs . . . multiplied and become enormously complex”.<sup>48</sup> Kropotkin similarly thought that an anarchist society would organise to achieve “the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs”. In addition to this, he referred to “new needs” which will “develop” and “sprout” in such a society.<sup>49</sup> For Galleani, when a human being develops themselves they acquire “a series of ever-more, growing and varied needs claiming satisfaction” which “vary, not only according to time and place, but also according to the temperament, disposition and development of each individual”.<sup>50</sup> Thus,

A farmer who lives in an Alpine valley, in the present conditions of his development, may have satisfied all his needs – eaten, drunk, and rested to his heart’s content; while a worker who lives in London, in Paris, or in Berlin, may willingly give up a quarter of his salary and several hours of his rest, in order to satisfy a whole category of needs

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<sup>46</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 175.

<sup>47</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 122, 456.

<sup>49</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 163, 598. See also Kropotkin, *Conquest of Bread*, 137-9.

<sup>50</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 43, 45.

totally unknown to the farmer stranded among the gorges of the Alps or the peaks of the Apennine mountains – to spend an hour of intense and moving life at the theatre, at the museum or at the library, to buy a recently published book or the latest issue of a newspaper, to enjoy a performance of Wagner or a lecture at the Sorbonne.<sup>51</sup>

The social environment in which capacities, drives and consciousness are developed is one which is itself produced by practice. This is because humans are social animals who collectively engage in practice and through doing so produce social relations amongst themselves. What is called society is the totality of the individual actions which continuously constitute, reproduce and transform it. This point was made by anarchist authors on numerous occasions. Bakunin wrote that “the real life of society, at every instant of its existence, is nothing but the sum total of all the lives, developments, relations, and actions of all the individuals comprising it”.<sup>52</sup> According to Reclus, [t]he movement of society ultimately reduces to the movement of the individuals who are its constitutive elements”.<sup>53</sup> Kropotkin likewise held that “[h]umanity is not a rolling ball, nor even a marching column. It is a whole that evolves simultaneously in the multitude of millions of which it is composed. . . . The fact is that each phase of development of society is a resultant of all the activities of the intellects which compose that society; it bears the imprint of all those millions of wills”.<sup>54</sup> Malatesta wrote at length that,

The real being is the man, the individual; society or the collectivity, and the State or government which professes to represent it, if not hollow abstractions, can be nothing else than aggregates of individuals. And it is within the individual organism that all thoughts and all human action necessarily have their origin. Originally individual, they

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<sup>51</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 44-5.

<sup>52</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> Reclus, *Anarchy*, 208.

<sup>54</sup> Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 119-20.

become collective thoughts and actions, when shared in common by many individuals. Social action, then, is not the negation, nor the complement of individual initiative, but it is the sum total of the initiatives, thoughts and actions of all the individuals composing society: a result which, other things equal, is more or less great according as the individual forces tend towards the same aim, or are divergent and opposed.<sup>55</sup>

The theoretical consequences of human beings engaging in practice within social relations which are themselves produced and reproduced through practice can be understood through imagining an artificially simplistic micro-social structure: a group of hunters who co-operate to find and kill animals for food. During the course of their attempts to gain food, these hunters produce a series of social relations between themselves, such as the most experienced member leading the hunt or their singing a song in victory after they kill an animal. The social relations which collective practice produces in turn determine the nature of the practice being engaged in since the practice is itself performed through these social relations. Given this, how the hunters hunt both produces the social relation of the most experienced member leading the hunt and is altered by this social relation. This modification to their practice in turn shapes the kind of social relations and practice which they perform in the future and so on and on. Importantly, collective practice is not necessarily friendly or egalitarian practice. The slave master owns and controls the slave. They nonetheless both engage in the collective practice of a cotton plantation, albeit in very different roles.

This interplay between practice producing social relations and practice being performed through social relations results in the formation of relatively stable and enduring social structures. These social structures simultaneously enable and constrain practice. They enable practice in two ways. Firstly, they cause people to develop the necessary internal abilities and

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<sup>55</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 132-3.

drives for practice, such as being taught how to hunt or learning that it is ethical to kill animals for food. Secondly, they produce many of the external conditions which the exercise of the internal abilities is preconditioned on, such as a sufficient amount of hunting equipment being produced. They constrain practice by imposing limits and exerting pressure on which capacities are deployed, how capacities are deployed, what drives are satisfied, and the direction in and extent to which new capacities and drives are developed. It is for this reason that a hunter is, due to the kind of social structure they participate in, unlikely to develop the drive to become a vegetarian. Or, to take another example, the social structure of Victorian upper-class dining culture constrains the practice of eating by requiring people to use their fork capacities in the prescribed manner, rendering certain drives unsatisfiable, such as the drive to throw food at people, and limiting the scope of what dinner-based drives and capacities one can develop to those allowed by the dinner norms in question.

Although these social structures are relatively stable, they do not exist as fixed or static entities. This is because they are processes which are reproduced over time by the practice of human beings and so human beings who are themselves continually changing as their capacities, drives and consciousness are modified through action, including the action of others. In Bakunin's words, "every man at his birth and during the whole course of his development throughout his life, is nothing else but the result of the countless actions, circumstances, and conditions, material and social, which continue shaping him as long as he lives".<sup>56</sup> These changes to the human beings which compose the social structure can in turn lead to the modification of the social structure itself. The group of hunters who engage in the practice of singing songs in celebration of their victory not only sing songs but, in so doing, develop their singing capacities and acquire new singing drives. With the passage of time, this will lead them to create new and

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<sup>56</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 95.

more elaborate songs and thereby alter the social structure which they constitute or even create a whole new social structure, such as their deciding to form a funk band after realising that music is their true passion in life. As Rucker argued, “every form of his social existence, every social institution which the past has bestowed on him as a legacy from remote ancestors, is the work of men and can be changed by human will and action or made to serve new ends”.<sup>57</sup>

The kinds of practice that people within social structures engage in is significantly determined by the social structure in question due to its enabling and constraining aspects. The consequence of this is that people engage in the kind of practice which develops them into people with the right kinds of capacities, drives and consciousness for reproducing the social structure itself. In Malatesta’s words, “[b]etween man and his social environment there is a reciprocal action. Men make society what it is and society makes men what they are”.<sup>58</sup> A consequence of this for Malatesta was that, “[m]an, like all living beings, adapts and habituates himself to the conditions in which he lives, and transmits by inheritance his acquired habits. Thus being born and having lived in bondage, being the descendent of a long line of slaves, man . . . believed that slavery was an essential condition of life, and liberty seemed to him an impossible thing”.<sup>59</sup> Social structures which consistently shape the capacities, drives and consciousness of people in this manner come to be dominant structures when they underpin the reproduction and relative stability of the society in which they are embedded.

Dominant structures do not ever include or exhaust all the human practice which constitutes a particular society. Rather they exist alongside a wide variety of less influential or smaller social structures which are constituted by and reproduced through distinct kinds of practice and their accompanying capacities, drives and consciousness. These smaller social structures include

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<sup>57</sup> Rucker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 48.

<sup>59</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 110. See also Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 272; Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 66-8.

ways of life as diverse as romanticism, punk, scientology and the micro-structure of a particular family. It is because of the existence of these less influential or smaller social structures that it is possible for alternative types of practice to emerge and modify or replace existing dominant structures. This can be seen in Kropotkin's argument that even within capitalist societies, based on hierarchical social relations, production for profit, and economic competition, there are also numerous instances of people organising horizontally to satisfy each other's needs directly and engage in mutual aid. Such voluntary associations are "the seeds" of a "new life".<sup>60</sup> From this point on, I will use the adjective 'radical' to label social structures, capacities, drives and consciousness which are fundamentally at odds with existing dominant structures and so if universalised would transform society and replace one dominant structure with another. For example, the drive to not oppress women is radical within a patriarchal society because its universalisation is incompatible with the ongoing existence of patriarchy.<sup>61</sup>

Anarchists held that a crucial factor determining the modification or replacement of dominant structures are the attempts by both dominant and oppressed groups to shape society in their distinct interests. Dominant groups use their superior power and resources to ensure that practice, and, hence the organisation and development of capacities, drives and consciousness both reproduces and extends or develops their ruling position within a society. Oppressed groups in turn act to (a) resist attempts by dominant groups to re-shape social structures, (b) modify existing dominant structures to make a space for the development of their capacities and the satisfaction of their drives or (c) abolish existing dominant structures in favour of new social structures constituted by and reproduced through fundamentally different types of practice, capacities, drives and consciousness. This perspective on history can be seen in Malatesta's claim that, "we have arrived at the present state of society" through "a most

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<sup>60</sup> Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 188-9, 219-41; *Modern Science*, 212-5. Quote from *ibid*, 367.

<sup>61</sup> This language is borrowed from Cox and Nilsen, *We Make Our Own History*, 42-4, 53.

complicated series of struggles of every description, of invasions, wars, rebellions, repressions, concessions won by struggle, associations of the oppressed united for defence and of the conquerors for attack”.<sup>62</sup> Such conflicts between oppressors and the oppressed are conflicts over how practice, and, thus the production, development, exercise, and satisfaction of capacities, drives and consciousness, are organised. In struggling with one another over what forms of practice humans engage in they are ultimately coming into conflict due to their different views on what kinds of human being a society should produce.

### **2.3 – Conclusion**

Anarchists generally adhered to a social theory that enabled them to think about human beings, society and social change. This social theory held that society was a process constituted by and reproduced through human beings with particular forms of consciousness engaging in practice: deploying their capacities to satisfy a psychological drive and, in so doing, simultaneously changing both the world and themselves. Anarchists thought that the interplay between practice producing social relations and practice being performed through social relations resulted in the formation of relatively stable and enduring social structures. These social structures simultaneously enable and constrain practice such that individuals engage in forms of practice which develop historically specific capacities, drives and consciousness. The consequence of this is that social structures cause people to engage in forms of practice which result in them developing into the kinds of people who reproduce the social structure itself. To change society, it is therefore necessary to engage in forms of practice which develop distinct capacities, drives and consciousness and thereby replace existing dominant social structures with alternative social structures that produce fundamentally different kinds of people. Before I examine the forms of revolutionary practice which anarchists proposed as the means to change society, I

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<sup>62</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 44.

must first establish why anarchists thought society should be changed and what they thought society should be changed into. I address these topics in the next chapter.



## Chapter 3 – Values, Critique and Vision

Anarchist political theory contained a set of ethical principles which form the value system of anarchism, an analysis and critique of existing social relations and structures in terms of their failure to promote these ethical principles and a vision of alternative social relations and structures that are achievable and would in practice promote these ethical principles. Within this chapter I shall first explain anarchism's value system, which held that individuals should be free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity, and then outline the anarchist analysis and critique of capitalism and the state. With this in place I shall describe the anarchist alternative to capitalism and the state which was a stateless classless society they called anarchy. In so doing I shall demonstrate that anarchism was a sophisticated and coherent political theory.

### 3.1 – The Value System

Anarchism's central ethical value is that individuals should lead free lives. Although anarchists focused on the freedom of the individual, they did not conceptualise this freedom in terms of an isolated abstract entity who stands outside of society. For anarchists an individual could, given the kind of animal that humans are, only be free if they belonged to a community of equals who are bonded together through relations of solidarity.<sup>1</sup> The anarchist value system was therefore constituted by three inter-dependent values – freedom, equality and solidarity – which cannot be understood in isolation from one another. This is because for anarchists the

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<sup>1</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 148-9; Nestor Makhno, *The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays*, ed. Alexandre Skirda (San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1996), 70. This value system is similar to the one proposed by Marx, although Marx did not think that the concept of 'equality' was useful. For an overview of Marx's value system see Raekstad, "Democracy, Socialism, and Human Development", chapter 2. For a summary of Marx's critique of equality see Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 76-80.

realisation of one of these values can only be achieved through the realisation of all three at once. I shall describe each concept one after the other.

Summaries of anarchist theory sometimes present anarchists as having a singular conception of freedom. Paul Thomas asserts that almost all anarchists were committed to a negative conception of freedom in which an individual is free if they are free from external constraints.<sup>2</sup> Crowder, in comparison, argues that anarchists were committed to a positive conception of freedom in which an individual is free if they consciously self-direct their actions in accordance with moral rules.<sup>3</sup> Anarchists in fact conceptualised freedom in three main ways: not being subject to domination, having the real possibility to do and/or to be, and developing oneself as a human.<sup>4</sup> Although anarchist authors consistently valued all three of these things, they did not all label them as freedom. Bakunin, for example, defined freedom as both non-domination and developing oneself as a human, whilst at the same time arguing that having the real possibility to do and/or to be is important to the realisation of this freedom.

Anarchists who defined freedom in terms of non-domination held that individuals are free if they are not subordinate to another person who has the power to impose their will on them. If a person is subject to the power of another then, even if this power is not currently being exercised, they are being dominated. To be free is therefore to be able to live in accordance with one's own will, rather than being subject to the will of another.<sup>5</sup> This conception of freedom can be clearly seen in Bakunin. He wrote in 1869 that "freedom" consists in "the full

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 8. This position is also asserted in Linda Martín Alcoff and José Alcoff, "Autonomism in Theory and Practice", *Science & Society* 79, no. 2 (April 2015), 231.

<sup>3</sup> Crowder, *Classical Anarchism*, 10-16. It's important to note that Crowder held that 20<sup>th</sup> century anarchists ended up rejecting this view. See *ibid*, 185-6.

<sup>4</sup> I have decided to not include Kropotkin in this discussion because I find his conception of freedom unclear. He wrote that "we find no other definition of freedom than this one: the possibility of acting without being influenced in decisions being made by the fear of punishment by society (bodily constraint, the threat of hunger or even censure, except when it comes from a friend". Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 225.

<sup>5</sup> Anarchism shares this emphasis on non-domination with republicanism. See Kinna and Alex Prichard, "Anarchism and Non-domination", *Journal of Political Ideologies* 24, no. 3 (2019), 221-240.

independence of the will of the individual with respect to the will of others”. This view is repeated later in the text where he defines “freedom” as “independence” from “all laws that other human wills – collective and isolated [from the collectivity] impose”.<sup>6</sup> During his subsequent 1871 lectures to Swiss members of the International he said that “[t]he negative condition of freedom is that no person owe obedience to another; the individual is free only if his will and his own convictions, and not those of others, determine his acts”.<sup>7</sup> In 1870 Bakunin explicitly connected this idea with non-domination when he advocated “self-determination” and “the fullest human freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination”.<sup>8</sup> The same position was advocated by other anarchist authors. Galleani, for example, defined “the broadest individual autonomy” in terms of “absolute independence from any domination by either a majority or a minority”.<sup>9</sup>

According to the real possibilities view of freedom an individual’s freedom increases as the possible doings and beings which they can actually experience increases. As was briefly explained in Chapter 2, doings are activities people perform, such as the act of exercising or reading, and beings are states of people, such as being physically fit or being educated. What possible beings and doings are available to a person, and so the extent to which they are free, are a product of (a) the external conditions within their social and natural environment which enable a person to do or be certain things and (b) their internal abilities which enable them to take advantage of said external conditions. For example, in order to have the real possibility to read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* a child must, among many other requirements, know how to read (internal ability), live in a society where *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* is produced, and themselves possess a copy of the book (external conditions). As they grow older they become

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<sup>6</sup> Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 121, 124.

<sup>7</sup> Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 46. See also Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 64, 148.

<sup>8</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 191. Bakunin labels restrictions on freedom as domination on multiple occasions. See *ibid*, 136, 150, 167, 192, 212, 254.

<sup>9</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 50. See also *ibid*, 61, 62-3, 68.

better at reading (development of internal ability) and acquire a greater number of books (expansion of external conditions). This marks an increase in their freedom since the range of possible beings and doings they can achieve has increased, such as being able to become an expert on the history of the potato or being able to read the *Poetic Edda*.

An individual's freedom is restricted when obstacles decrease the number of real possibilities open to them and thereby limit the possible doings and beings they can achieve. The closure of a public library due to government budget cuts, for example, decreases the freedom of people in the local area since doings and beings which required the existence of the library are no longer available to them. Or a slave owner who prevents their slaves from reading, limits what possibilities they have and thereby makes them less free. Crucially, obstacles can be removed or overcome. A person can become freer both when an obstacle is removed or ceases to exist, such as when slaves rise up and kill their slave master, or when they develop their capacities such that they can step over the obstacle which previously prevented them from acting, such as when a homosexual gains the confidence to be themselves and not care what homophobes think.

This emphasis on having the actual means to lead a specific kind of life can be seen in Malatesta's claim in 1884 that, "[t]rue freedom is not the right but the opportunity, the strength to do what one will". This view was repeated by Malatesta decades later in 1924 when he wrote that, "freedom is a hollow word unless it is wedded to ability, which is to say, to the means whereby one can freely carry on his own activity".<sup>10</sup> This conceptualisation of freedom can be seen in Malatesta's remark in 1926 that humans may have once "thought it possible to fly at will, but remained on the ground; when science discovered the conditions required to float and

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<sup>10</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 40, 446. See also Malatesta, *A Long and Patient Work: The Anarchist Uq e k c n k u o " q h "* - 1898, ed. Davide Turcato (Chicago, CA: AK Press, 2016), 249, 366.

to move in the atmosphere Man really acquired the freedom to fly”.<sup>11</sup> For Malatesta one of the main ways that people’s real possibility to do and/or to be could be restricted was through being subject to domination by others. He wrote that, “the freedom we want is not the abstract right, but the power, to do as one wishes” and freedom so understood “presupposes that everybody has the means to live and to act without being subjected to the wishes of others”.<sup>12</sup> As a result he advocated “the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man”.<sup>13</sup>

Malatesta was not the only anarchist to define freedom as a person’s real possibility to do and/or to be. In 1927 Berkman distinguished between negative freedom, which is freedom from something, and “positive freedom” which is “the opportunity to do, to act”.<sup>14</sup> He continued to advocate this position in 1929 when he wrote that “freedom really means opportunity to satisfy your needs and wants. If your freedom does not give you that opportunity, then it does you no good. Real freedom means opportunity and well-being. If it does not mean that, it means nothing”.<sup>15</sup> Goldman similarly wrote in 1914 that “true liberty . . . is not a negative thing of being free from something . . . Real freedom, true liberty is positive: it is freedom to something; it is the liberty to be, to do; in short, the liberty of actual and active opportunity”.<sup>16</sup> Even though Bakunin did not define freedom as having the real possibility to do and/or to be, he did think that it was indispensable for the achievement of freedom. He wrote that, “all should have not just the right but the means necessary to develop their faculties, to be free and happy, in equality and through fraternity”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Berkman, “A Decade of Bolshevism” in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution*, ed. Friends of Aron Baron (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017), 119.

<sup>15</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts 1868-1875*, ed. A. W. Zurrbrugg (London: Anarres Editions, 2016), 100.

According to the freedom as human development view an individual must, if they are to be free, engage in activities and in so doing develop their capacities and drives such that they become a better version of themselves. This can be seen in Bakunin's remark that freedom "consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual and moral powers which are found in the form of latent capabilities in every individual".<sup>18</sup> Rocker combined this view with the real possibility approach when he claimed that, "freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all the powers, capacities, and talents with which nature has endowed him".<sup>19</sup>

Those anarchists who did not define freedom in terms of human development did nonetheless value it.<sup>20</sup> Malatesta held that "happiness", rather than freedom, "consists of the full and optimum development of our faculties".<sup>21</sup> Goldman, in comparison, argued that freedom leads to, rather than consists in, human development. She insisted that "authority stultifies human development, while full freedom assures it".<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere she declared that "[o]nly in freedom can man grow to his full stature. Only in freedom will he learn to think and move, and give the very best in him. Only in freedom will he realise the true force of the social bonds which knit men together, and which are the true foundations of a normal social life."<sup>23</sup>

In summary, some overviews of anarchist theory, such as those produced by Thomas and Crowder, have been wrong to depict anarchists as having a singular conception of freedom, be it positive or negative. Anarchists in fact developed three distinct conceptions of freedom. These were (a) not being subject to domination, (b) having the real possibility to achieve a broad range of doings and beings, and (c) developing one's capacities and drives in a positive

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<sup>18</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 196. See also Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 119; *Direct Struggle*, 164.

<sup>21</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 438. A similar view is expressed in Makhno, *Struggle*, 62.

<sup>23</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 72-3.

direction. Although anarchist authors disagreed about which of these should be labelled freedom, they did all value them. This is because the three different conceptions of freedom feed off one another. For example, in order to develop one's capacities and drives in a positive direction, a person must have the real possibility to do so, and in order to have this real possibility they must, among other things, not be subject to domination that deprives them of these real possibilities.

Anarchists held that freedom, whichever way they defined it, is only possible in and through a free society. This is because human beings are by nature social or communal animals and so cannot achieve freedom outside of a social context. To quote Bakunin, “[m]an completely realises his individual freedom as well as his personality only through the individuals that surround him, and thanks to the labour and the collective power of society. . . . Society far from decreasing his freedom, on the contrary creates the individual freedom of all human beings. Society is the root, the tree, and liberty is its fruit.”<sup>24</sup> Since “[b]eing free for man means being acknowledged, considered and treated as such by another man, and by all the men around him” it follows that “[l]iberty is . . . a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection”.<sup>25</sup>

For anarchists, in order for a society to be free over an extended period of time it must be structured in such a manner that it both enables the freedom of the individuals who comprise it and prevents individuals from being able to oppress others. According to anarchists, the kinds of social structures and relations that would in fact ensure the on-going freedom of individuals were necessarily egalitarian ones. The consequence of this is that they thought that freedom and equality were so interconnected that it was in practice impossible to have one without the

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<sup>24</sup> Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchism*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2001), 236.

<sup>25</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 147.

other. Bakunin claimed that “I am a convinced supporter of economic and social equality, because I know that, outside that equality, freedom . . . will never be anything but lies”.<sup>26</sup> Kropotkin echoed this sentiment when he wrote that, “[t]o have the individual free, they must strive to constitute a society of equals”.<sup>27</sup> From these quotes it is apparent that anarchists advocated equality but it is not yet clear what exactly they meant by the term. My interpretation is that anarchists conceptualised equality as the equality of freedom, or as Malatesta phrased it, “the equal freedom of all”.<sup>28</sup> This took the form of society being structured such that there is, as far as is possible, equality of self-determination and equality of opportunity. Equality of self-determination was connected with non-domination, whilst equality of opportunity was connected to human development and having the real possibility to do/and or to be.

Equality of self-determination was conceptualised as having two components. Firstly, each individual is equally free to live in accordance with their own will, unless they subject another person to their will through coercion. This is because doing so would establish a relation of domination and thereby violate the equal freedom of all. Berkman wrote that, in an anarchist society, “[y]ou are to be entirely free, and everybody else is to enjoy equal liberty, which means that no one has a right to compel or force another, for coercion of any kind is interference with your liberty”.<sup>29</sup> Malatesta similarly argued that anarchists advocate “freedom for all and in everything, with no limit other than the equal freedom of others: which does not mean . . . that we embrace and wish to respect the ‘freedom’ to exploit, oppress, command, which is oppression and not freedom”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 197.

<sup>27</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 202-3. This exact same language was used by Mella. See Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 117-8.

<sup>28</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 156.

<sup>30</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 149. See also *ibid*, 141.



Secondly, organisations are structured in a horizontal, rather than hierarchical, manner such that there are no divisions between rulers who make decisions and subordinates who do as instructed and lack decision-making power. In horizontal organisations each member has an equal say in decisions which affect them and so co-determine the organisation with every other member.<sup>31</sup> This kind of equality emerged from the fact that individuals within a group have three choices. Either they “submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate)”.<sup>32</sup> Given their commitment to freedom and opposition to domination, anarchists choose to be associates.

These two components of equality of self-determination can be seen in Bakunin’s remark that in order to “prevent men from ever oppressing other men” it is necessary to “[a]range matters such that they never have the opportunity”. This must be achieved,

by the actual organisation of the social environment, so constituted that while leaving each man to enjoy the utmost possible liberty it gives no one the power to set himself above others or to dominate them, except through the natural influence of his own intellectual or moral qualities, which must never be allowed either to convert itself into a right or to be backed by any kind of political institution.<sup>33</sup>

Equality of opportunity, or what Bakunin termed “equality at the outset”, was understood by anarchists to refer to a situation in which each individual had equal access to the external conditions that are necessary for them to have the real possibility to do and/or to be.<sup>34</sup> According to Malatesta, anarchists “call liberty the possibility of doing something” and in order

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<sup>31</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 73, 93-4, 130, 133.

<sup>32</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 152-3.

<sup>34</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 76-7.

for this to be realised, society must “be constituted for the purpose of supplying everybody with the means for achieving the maximum well-being, the maximum possible moral and spiritual development”.<sup>35</sup> Such “equal opportunity” would, in the opinion of Berkman, lead to people being able to express and act out their “individuality” and thereby achieve “the greatest possible variety of activity and development”.<sup>36</sup> It would, in other words, result in an expansion of freedom as human development.

Anarchists held that freedom and equality are generally maintained over time by solidarity between individuals and groups.<sup>37</sup> By solidarity anarchists meant two different kinds of social relation. The first consisted in individuals co-operating with one another in pursuit of a common goal. This form of co-operation was very important for anarchists because it is the concrete means through which the external conditions that are necessary for people to exercise their capacities and satisfy their drives are established, such as the organisation of a school where children can develop and transform themselves or the co-ordination of an economy which provides the necessary materials that a school needs. This can be seen in Kropotkin’s remark that a free society “could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it”.<sup>38</sup> Malatesta linked this idea with freedom when he argued that “liberty” in the sense of one’s real possibility to do and/or to be “becomes greater as the agreement among men and the support they give each other grows”.<sup>39</sup>

The second kind of social relation consisted in individuals forming reciprocal caring relationships, in which each individual acts to ensure the on-going freedom and equality of

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<sup>35</sup> Malatesta, *At the Café: Conversations on Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 2005), 57; *Towards Anarchy*, 56.

<sup>36</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 164-5.

<sup>37</sup> The following interpretation of solidarity differs from but is indebted to the discussion of Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s understanding of solidarity in John Nightingale, “The Concept of Solidarity in Anarchist Thought” (PhD diss., Loughborough University, 2015), 34-108.

<sup>38</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 478.

<sup>39</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 57.

those around them. Malatesta praised “solidarity” in the sense of “affection, love, friendship and all that which draws people closer together in brotherhood.”<sup>40</sup> This is because, given the kind of animal humans are, it is the only environment in which “man can be true to his own nature, and attain to the highest development and happiness”. Such an environment is characterised by a “harmony of interests and sentiments, the sharing of each in the good of all, and of all in the good of each”. This “causes the liberty of each to find not its limits, but its complement, the necessary condition of its continual existence – in the liberty of all”.<sup>41</sup> In short, anarchists understood that in order to be free an individual needs positive social relationships, such as loving parents, a supportive teacher and good friends.

### **3.2 – Critique of Existing Society**

Equipped with this value system, anarchists critiqued existing society on the grounds that it is structured in such a manner that it systematically fails to promote freedom, equality and solidarity. They critiqued existing society at an institutional level because they understood that society is not the way it is merely because of the negative personality traits of some bad rulers. Rather, it is the consequence of the fundamental structure of society and the forms of practice which constitute and reproduce it over time. As Malatesta explained to a jury whilst on trial in 1921, “social wrongs do not depend on the wickedness of one master or the other, one governor or the other, but rather on masters and governments as institutions; therefore, the remedy does not lie in changing the individual rulers, instead it is necessary to demolish the principle itself by which men dominate over men”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 68.

<sup>41</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 124.

<sup>42</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 415. See also Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 400; Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 74.

It is sometimes falsely claimed that anarchists held that the state was the main oppressive social structure and the root cause of social problems.<sup>43</sup> In reality, anarchists critiqued three main dominant structures: capitalism, landlordism and the state. The structures of economic oppression (capitalism and landlordism) and political oppression (the state) were taken to constitute an interconnected global social system which I shall call ‘class society’. Although anarchists opposed landlordism in the sense of feudal or semi-feudal economic systems in which serfs or peasants worked for aristocratic landowners to whom they had to give tribute in the form of labour, produce or money, I shall be focusing only on anarchist opposition to capitalism and the state.<sup>44</sup>

Anarchists viewed capitalism as a social system constituted by (a) private ownership of land, raw materials and the means of production, (b) wage labour and (c) production of commodities for profit within a competitive market. Under capitalism society was divided into two main economic classes: a minority of capitalists and landlords who privately owned land, raw materials and the means of production and a majority of workers who were propertyless and sold their labour to capitalists and landlords. The labour of workers produced goods and services which were sold by capitalists and landlords on the market in order to earn a profit and thereby expand their wealth. Workers, in comparison, received only a wage which they then used to buy the necessities of life, such as food, shelter and clothing, and thereby reproduce themselves.<sup>45</sup> Capitalism was, to quote Kropotkin, “[a] society which is divided into two distinct classes, one which produces but possesses nothing, the other which does not produce but possess everything”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For example: Miller, *Kropotkin*, 248; Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, 2; Woodcock and Ivan Avakumović, *Peter Kropotkin: From Prince to Rebel* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1990), 446.

<sup>44</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 49-51.

<sup>45</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 7-8; Kropotkin, *Conquest of Bread*, 58-60, 100-1.

<sup>46</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 110.

The term ‘working class’ is sometimes used only to refer to industrial wage labourers such that there is a clear distinction between the working class, artisans and peasants. Anarchists, in comparison, generally preferred to use the terms ‘working class’ and ‘worker’ to refer to “anybody plying a useful trade who does not exploit another person’s labours”.<sup>47</sup> This broad notion of ‘working class’ was then usually subdivided, depending upon the context, into either (a) urban and rural workers or (b) factory workers, artisans and agrarian workers, some of whom were peasants.<sup>48</sup> In 1872 Bakunin distinguished between the “urban proletariat” and the “rural proletariat”. A year later he wrote in *Statism and Anarchy* that the Italian “proletariat . . . consists of 2 or 3 million urban factory workers and small artisans, and some 20 million landless peasants”. He went on to claim that “the Slavic proletariat . . . must enter the International en masse [and] form factory, artisan, and agrarian sections”.<sup>49</sup> Eight years later Kropotkin wrote in 1881 that “the working class” is composed of “the worker in the fields and in the towns”.<sup>50</sup> In 1884 Malatesta used the terms “peasants”, “labourers” and “workers” interchangeably and then distinguished between “workers of the land and the city”.<sup>51</sup>

As capitalism developed, and the number of artisans dramatically declined due to their inability to compete with large scale industry, anarchists updated their language and began to refer only to industrial workers and rural workers or peasants. Berkman wrote in 1929 that “the working class consists of the industrial wage earners and the agricultural toilers” and only referred to

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<sup>47</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 63. See also Goldman, *Red Emma*, 222. This was not a uniquely anarchist definition. Similar ideas can be found in other 19<sup>th</sup> century socialists. For an example see Alan B Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 96, 101-2.

<sup>48</sup> Kropotkin includes women as a specific oppressed group within the working class. He wrote that, “within the working class itself we see four great divisions: women, agricultural labourers, workers who do unskilled labour, and finally those who have a more or less specialised trade. These divisions represent four degrees of exploitation which are only the results of the bourgeois organisation of production”. It is unclear if Kropotkin views women as an economically oppressed class due to the reproductive labour they engage in or is only referring to the distinct ways in which women are exploited within capitalist workplaces. Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 212.

<sup>49</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 254; *Statism and Anarchy*, 7, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 293.

<sup>51</sup> Malatesta, *Between Peasants: A Dialogue on Anarchy* (Johannesburg: Zabalaza Books, n.d.), 5-6, 9.

artisans as a class when describing how the development of capitalism forced them to become factory workers.<sup>52</sup> In order to avoid any potential confusion with narrower usages of the term ‘working class’ I shall, from here on, use the phrase ‘the working classes’ to refer to artisans who did not exploit anybody else’s labour, industrial wage labourers, agricultural wage labourers and peasants. It should be kept in mind that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A person born into the peasantry could, for example, work as a wage labourer in a city during one season and as a small farmer in the countryside during another.<sup>53</sup>

Anarchists advocated the abolition of capitalism because it was based on the oppression and exploitation of the working classes. Workers allegedly choose to sell their labour to capitalists and landlords in exchange for a wage, but they did so only because they had no other option given their social context. Under capitalism a small minority owned the land, raw materials and the means of production. As a result of this, the majority of the population lacked the means to survive independently through their own labour. In order to gain access to the goods and services they needed to survive, such as food, clothing and shelter, workers had to purchase them with money. The only way to earn this money was, given their social position, to sell their labour to capitalists and landlords.<sup>54</sup> Workers therefore ‘choose’ to sell their labour to capitalists and landlords in exchange for a wage in just the same manner that a person might ‘choose’ to hand over their possessions to a robber armed with a gun. The victim of a robbery makes this choice because their only realistic alternative is being attacked by the robber. Workers similarly sell their labour to capitalists and landlords in exchange for a wage because the only realistic alternative is extreme poverty, homelessness, starvation and so on. Such a

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<sup>52</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 190. See also *ibid*, 4, 7.

<sup>53</sup> The historian Moss has argued that the term ‘artisan’ is misleading due to it conflating “independent artisans, master artisans and skilled wage earners” into one social group. See Moss, *Socialism of Skilled Workers*, 13. To avoid this misunderstanding I have added the qualification that the artisans anarchists referred to did not exploit the labour of others.

<sup>54</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 493.

decision is therefore an involuntary one forced upon workers by the fundamental structure of capitalist society.<sup>55</sup>

Wage labour was not only involuntary. It was, in addition to this, based on a relationship of domination and subordination in which capitalists and landlords had the power to command workers to do as instructed. Malatesta described “capitalism” as a society in which “a few individuals have hoarded the land and all the instruments of production and can impose their will on the workers, in such a fashion that instead of producing to satisfy people’s needs and with these needs in view, production is geared towards making a profit for the employers”.<sup>56</sup> Goldman similarly wrote that under capitalism workers “are subordinate to the will of a master”.<sup>57</sup>

The consequence of wage labour being involuntary and based on a relationship of domination and subordination was that workers had no choice but to engage in forms of labour that actively harmed them. This resulted not only in a great amount of suffering, but also led to workers being unable to develop themselves in a positive direction and fulfil their human potential. This point was frequently made by anarchists through the metaphor of workers being transformed into machines.<sup>58</sup> Goldman, for example, wrote that workers were turned “into a mere particle of a machine, with less will and decision than his master of steel and iron. Man is being robbed not merely of the products of his labour, but of the power of free initiative of originality and the interests in, or desire for, the things he is making”. Workers were, in other words, “living corpses without originality or power of initiative, human machines of flesh and blood who pile

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<sup>55</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 11-12. The same analogy is used in Malatesta, *Café*, 45.

<sup>56</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 25; Max Baginski, *What Does Syndicalism Want? Living, Not Dead Unions* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2015), 10.

up mountains of wealth for others and pay for it with a grey, dull, and wretched existence for themselves”.<sup>59</sup>

Under capitalism labour was but one commodity for sale. This is because it was a market economy in which “the whole economic life of society” is “regulated by the competition and profit principle”.<sup>60</sup> The negative consequences of the competitive global market were numerous. Capitalists hired a small number of workers and forced them to work long hours in order to reduce costs, maximise profit and out-compete rival companies. Improvements in technology made workers unemployed, rather than enabling them to work less. Companies produced more commodities than they could sell and were then forced by this overproduction to close down and fire their workforce. This, in turn, led to regular economic crises. Even when the capitalist market was operating more smoothly, it was based on an irrational organisation of production in which a vast number of human drives which society had the means to fulfil were not satisfied because there was no profit in doing so, such as housing the homeless or feeding the hungry. On the international scale, economic competition resulted in states engaging in colonialism, imperialism and war in order to find new markets, establish monopolies, maximise capital accumulation, and serve the interests of capitalists in their respective countries, especially those involved in the manufacturing of weapons, ammunition, warships etc.<sup>61</sup>

According to anarchists, the oppression and exploitation which occurred under capitalism was maintained over time by the violence of the modern state.<sup>62</sup> This is because “[t]he state is

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<sup>59</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 67, 50.

<sup>60</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 49-50, 149, 151-3; Berkman, *Anarchism*, 25-38; Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 79.

<sup>62</sup> Anarchists did not all use the same terminology. Malatesta argued in 1891 that anarchists should use the term ‘government’, instead of ‘the state’. To avoid confusion I shall consistently refer to ‘the state’. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 111-2.



authority, domination and force, organised by the property-owning . . . classes against the masses” and therefore performs the function of defending the interests of capitalists and landowners.<sup>63</sup> The state does this through many different means. Most obviously it enforces private property rights. In Malatesta’s words, “the landowners are able to claim that the land and its produce as theirs and the capitalists are able to claim as theirs the instruments of labour and other capital created by human activity” because “the dominant class . . . has created laws to legitimise the usurpations that it has already perpetrated, and has made them a means of new appropriations”.<sup>64</sup> The state, in addition to this, aids the economic ruling classes by establishing monopolies, subsidising private companies, repressing social movements via the police and prisons, and maintaining an army in order to keep “the people in bondage” and conquer “new markets and new territory, to exploit them in the interests of the few”.<sup>65</sup>

Bakunin claimed that “the historical formation of the modern concept of the state” occurred in “the mid sixteenth century” and consisted in an on-going process of “military, police, and bureaucratic centralisation”.<sup>66</sup> Kropotkin later expanded upon this narrative by arguing that, the modern state developed as “a mutual insurance company formed by the landlord, the military, the judge, the priest and later on the capitalist in order to assure each of them authority over the people and the exploitation of [their] poverty”. As a result, “the State, as a political and military power, along with modern governmental Justice, the Church, and Capitalism appear in our eyes as institutions which are impossible to separate from each other. In history these four institutions developed while supporting and reinforcing each other . . . They are

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<sup>63</sup> Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 140. See also Reclus, *Anarchy*, 147; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 11-5.

<sup>64</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 45.

<sup>65</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 313-17, 234, 306. For anarchist critiques of the police and prisons see: *ibid*, 499-508; Berkman, *Anarchism*, 42-59; Goldman, *Red Emma*, 332-46; De Cleyre, *Reader*, 151-72.

<sup>66</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 9, 26. In 1871, two years before the publication of *Statism and Anarchy*, Bakunin had dated the “foundation of modern States” to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Kropotkin dated the rise of the modern state to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. See Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 137; Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 183, 234, 252.

linked together by the bonds of cause and effect”.<sup>67</sup> Rather than positing a one-sided perspective in which the modern state was created by capitalism, anarchists held that the modern state and capitalism co-created one another.<sup>68</sup>

Anarchists were therefore not committed to the view that the state is merely an instrument of the economic ruling classes. They held that it served the interests of the military, judges, bishops and so on, as well as capitalists and landowners. Those who directly controlled state power, such as politicians, monarchs, heads of the police etc, were taken to constitute a distinct political ruling class with interests of their own. As Malatesta wrote, while “the State is the defender, the agent, and the servant of the propertied class” it “also constitutes a class by itself, with its own interests and passions. When the State, the Government, is not helping the propertied to oppress and rob people, it oppresses and robs them on its own behalf”.<sup>69</sup> Anarchists, in other words, understood class not merely as a person’s relationship to the means of production. Class was also about a person’s relationship to the means of institutionalised coercion. This is not to say that these two classes were mutually exclusive. An individual could, for example, be a capitalist and a politician at the same time.

Given the above, anarchists did not define the state purely in terms of its function as a coercive instrument of economic class rule such that any institution which performs this function is, by definition, a state. Through an analysis of the state as an actually-existing social structure, anarchists came to define the state in terms of both its functions and its particular organisational forms and characteristics. To be a state an institution must, in addition to performing the function of reproducing economic class rule, be hierarchically and centrally organised and

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<sup>67</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 183-4. I have altered the first quote by adding the phrase “and later on the capitalist”. This appears in the 1912 British edition and is included as an editor’s footnote in the quoted 1913 French edition. To make this addition grammatically correct I have removed the “and” which appears after “the judge” in the 1913 edition.

<sup>68</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 299, 317-9.

<sup>69</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 212-3. See also Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 29, 44.

wielded by a minority political ruling class in their interests, as well as the interests of the economic ruling class, against the masses.<sup>70</sup> In Kropotkin's view, the state "not only includes the existence of a power situated above society, but also of a territorial concentration and a concentration of many functions in the life of societies in the hands of a few. . . A whole mechanism of legislation and of policing is developed to subject some classes to the domination of other classes". The state is therefore the "perfect example of a hierarchical institution, developed over centuries to subject all individuals and all of their possible groupings to the central will. The State is necessarily hierarchical, authoritarian – or it ceases to be the State".<sup>71</sup>

Anarchists opposed the state, to quote Bakunin, because it "is placed by its very nature and position above and outside the people and must inevitably work to subordinate the people under rules and for objectives foreign to them".<sup>72</sup> The "state", in short, "means coercion, domination by means of coercion".<sup>73</sup> Through this domination the state not only prevents the working classes from living in accordance with their own wills, but also hinders their development as people and limits their real possibility to do and to be. This is because the state oppresses humanity in two main ways: either directly by physical violence or indirectly by enforcing private property rights and thereby depriving the majority of the population from access to the means of existence such that they are forced to work for the economic ruling classes.<sup>74</sup> In so doing, the state violates the equal freedom of all and promotes social relations of strife over

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<sup>70</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 210-11; *on Anarchism*, 318; Makhno, *Struggle*, 56; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 113, 115-8. It is important to note that anarchists conceded the logical possibility of a state based on majority rule in which collective decisions were imposed on everyone by violence through a legal apparatus and police force. They, however, thought that all actually existing states were based on minority rule and that if a state based on genuine majority rule was created it would end up being ruled by a minority. See Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 73-9.

<sup>71</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 234, 227. Kropotkin claims that the state is necessarily centralised and hierarchical multiple times in this text and others. See *ibid*, 199, 275, 310; *Direct Struggle*, 566.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Zurrugg, "Introduction" in Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 24.

<sup>74</sup> Kropotkin, *Words of A Rebel* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 25, 27; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 115, 118.

solidarity because “so long as political power exists, there will be persons who dominate and persons dominated, masters and slaves, exploiters and the exploited”.<sup>75</sup>

Although capitalism and the state were two of the main social structures anarchists sought to abolish, they were not the only ones. Goldman advocated “the consideration of every phase of life – individual, as well as the collective; the internal, as well as the external phases”.<sup>76</sup> Kropotkin similarly thought “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”.<sup>77</sup> As a result, anarchists understood that humans are oppressed by a myriad of other social structures which must also be abolished if the values of freedom, equality and solidarity are to be truly realised. These included racism<sup>78</sup>, patriarchy<sup>79</sup>, homophobia<sup>80</sup>, hierarchically organised religion<sup>81</sup> and authoritarian modes of education.<sup>82</sup> Some anarchists, such as Reclus, went beyond a singular focus on human emancipation and advocated vegetarianism, animal liberation and the protection of the natural environment.<sup>83</sup>

This opposition to multiple structures of oppression went alongside attempts to theorise the manner in which these different structures were interconnected with one another, such as

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<sup>75</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 63.

<sup>76</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 64.

<sup>77</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 197-8.

<sup>78</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 189-90, 203, 207; Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 298-339; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 71-2, 182, 188; Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography*, 120-143.

<sup>79</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 174; on *Anarchism*, 396-7; Goldman, *Red Emma*, 175-189; Goldman, *Anarchy and the Sex Question: Essays on Women and Emancipation, 1896-1926*, ed. Shawn P. Wilbur (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016); Parsons, *Writings and Speeches*, 79, 92-3.

<sup>80</sup> Terence Kissack, *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States, 1895-1917* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008); Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography*, 169-180.

<sup>81</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 111-135; Goldman, *Red Emma*, 150-7.

<sup>82</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 39-41; Goldman, *Red Emma*, 140-9; Avrich, *Modern School*, 6-18. In 1896 Malatesta, who lived in London at the time, responded to a teacher caning his son for playing in class and laughing loudly by forcing his way into the classroom and hitting the teacher in the face and body in front of the school children. See Di Paola, *Knights Errant*, 147, note 121.

<sup>83</sup> Reclus, *Anarchy*, 136-7, 156-62, 233; Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography*, 160-1. See also Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 136. For a discussion of vegetarianism in the Spanish anarchist movement see Jerome R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 87-8.

Goldman's argument that the triple oppression of patriarchy, capitalism and the state resulted in working-class married women having to do both paid wage labour and unpaid domestic labour.<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately, a significant number of anarchists failed to put the theoretical opposition to racism, sexism and homophobia into practice or even support it in theory. To give a few examples: Bakunin was an antisemite, most male anarchists were sexist towards women in the movement, and some anarchists opposed Goldman giving talks on homosexuality for fear it would damage the reputation of the movement to discuss "perverted sex-forms".<sup>85</sup>

### **3.3 – Vision of an Alternative Society**

Anarchists argued that capitalism and the state should be abolished in favour of a society in which humanity as a whole was free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity. They called this society anarchy.<sup>86</sup> In advocating anarchy as their ultimate end goal anarchists were not using the term in the sense of a disorganised and chaotic society in which there is, to use Thomas Hobbes' phrase, "a war of all against all".<sup>87</sup> They were instead referring to a stateless, classless and non-hierarchical society. Malatesta defined anarchy in 1891 as a "society of free men" and a "society of friends". Six years later, in 1897, he referred to anarchy as a "society organised without authority" where authority is understood to mean "the ability to impose one's own wishes" on others through "coercion". Malatesta continued to use this definition two years later when he wrote in 1899 that "Anarchy" is "a society based on free and

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<sup>84</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 209.

<sup>85</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 138, 141, 177, 180; Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 115-8; Zurbrugg, *Anarchist Perspectives*, 34-5; Goldman, *Living My Life Volume 2* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 555.

<sup>86</sup> This usage of the word 'anarchy' was borrowed from Proudhon. Members of the anarchist movement later claimed that Proudhon was the first person to use the word in this way within his 1840 book *What is Property*. See Proudhon, *What is Property?*, 209, 212, 216; Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 167; Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*, 376.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xviii.

voluntary accord – a society in which no one can force his wishes on another and in which everyone can do as he pleases and together all will voluntarily contribute to the well-being of the community”.<sup>88</sup>

Anarchist authors outlined visions of what anarchy would look like in numerous texts. In so doing they did not view themselves as utopians in the style of Charles Fourier who elaborated incredibly detailed blueprints of what a post-capitalist society would look like.<sup>89</sup> Bakunin himself explicitly critiqued “Fourierists” for wrongly assuming “that it was theoretically and a priori possible to build a social paradise in which all of future humanity could recline. They had not realised that while we may well define the great principles of its future development we must leave the practical expression of those principles to the experience of the future”.<sup>90</sup> Kropotkin argued in *Modern Science and Anarchy* that although anarchy is a vision of an “ideal society” it is not a “utopia” because it is based on “the study of tendencies already emerging in the evolution of society”, rather than being “based solely on what the writer finds desirable from a theoretical point of view”.<sup>91</sup>

This way of thinking was shared by Malatesta who wrote in 1891 that anarchists cannot “in the name of Anarchy, prescribe for the coming man what time he should go to bed, or on what days he should cut his nails!”. Such practical questions could only be answered by those who actually lived in and self-managed the future classless society. All that anarchists who lived within existing class society could do was say that they wish society were “constituted” in such

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<sup>88</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 150-1; *Method of Freedom*, 128, 299. For other definitions of anarchy see: Reclus, *Anarchy*, 120-1; Berkman, *Anarchism*, 144; Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 133-4; Cafiero, *Revolution*, 40; Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 26, 58; Parsons, *Writings and Speeches*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> This opposition to utopian blueprints was shared with several other socialists from this period. For example: Marx and Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” in Marx, *Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 26-9; Proudhon, *Property Is Theft*, 160-2; Spitzer, *Blanqui*, 105-7.

<sup>90</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 99.

<sup>91</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 134. See also Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 572-5; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 15-16.

a manner that “the exploitation and domination of man by man” was “impossible” and “indicate a method” through which this could be achieved.<sup>92</sup>

By this Malatesta meant that anarchists should,

(a) envision anarchy as a society which successfully instantiates certain states of affairs, such as people having a say in decisions which affect them, people not being oppressed, or social relations being infused with a sense of solidarity.

(b) articulate general anarchist methods of organisation and association which could successfully actualise these states of affairs, such as each person in a group having a vote, smaller groups federating together to form larger groups, or organisations electing instantly recallable mandated delegates to perform administrative tasks.

According to this view, anarchists could not say exactly how, to give one example, the education of children would be organised under anarchy but were in a position to indicate the method through which it would be organised. Parents, teachers and other adults interested in the positive development of children would come together as equals within general assemblies to “meet, discuss, agree and differ, and then divide according to their various opinions”, put their respective ideas “into practice” and in so doing establish through a process of experimentation what the best system of education was. How anarchy was organised would therefore “be modified and improved as circumstances were modified and changed, according to the teachings of experience”. It was for this reason that Malatesta labelled “Anarchist ideals” as “the experimental system brought from the field of research to that of social realisation”.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 140-1.

<sup>93</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 142, 128, 302. See also Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 304. The same point is made by Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 1-9, 27.

The theorists of anarchism were not naïve and understood that it would not be possible to establish anarchy as an ideal during or immediately after the abolition of capitalism and the state. Cafiero distinguished between “Anarchy today” which “is indignation, deadly hatred and eternal war against every oppressor and exploiter on the face of the earth” and anarchy “tomorrow, once the obstacles have been overcome” which “will be solidarity and love – complete freedom for all”. The fact that Cafiero thought it would take a significant amount of time to achieve full anarchy can be seen in his claim that one generation would fight in the revolution and the next generation would work towards full anarchy in a post-revolutionary world. He wrote that contemporary “supporters of anarchy” would die fighting in skirmishes prior to the revolution and at the beginning of the revolution. Some would perhaps “be fortunate enough to see the first dawning of humanity’s great event” but “other men will be born from the very entrails of the fertile revolution and take on the task of carrying out the positive, organic part of anarchy. For us – hatred, war and destruction; for them – love, peace and happiness”.<sup>94</sup>

Malatesta, in comparison, conceded that “some comrades” mistakenly “expect Anarchy to come with one stroke – as the immediate result of an insurrection which violently attacks all that which exists and replaces it with institutions that are really new”. Malatesta, however, went onto argue that these comrades were wrong because the full achievement of anarchy requires that “all men will not only not want to be commanded but will not want to command” and “have understood the advantages of solidarity and know how to organise a plan of social life wherein there will no longer be traces of violence and imposition”.<sup>95</sup> Such a significant

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<sup>94</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 41, 49

<sup>95</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 299-300.



transformation of individuals and the social structures they constitute would take an extended amount of time to achieve.

Given this, Malatesta thought that society immediately after the abolition of capitalism and the state “would not be Anarchy, yet, or it would be only for those few who want it, and only in those things they can accomplish without the cooperation of the non-anarchists”. The development towards anarchy would be a product of “peaceful evolution” in which anarchist “ideas . . . extend to more men and more things until it will have embraced all mankind and all life’s manifestations”. For Malatesta, “Anarchy cannot come but little by little – slowly, but surely, growing in intensity and extension. Therefore, the subject is not whether we accomplish Anarchy today, tomorrow or within ten centuries, but that we walk toward Anarchy today, tomorrow and always”.<sup>96</sup>

Anarchists, in other words, viewed the abolition of capitalism and the state as an act which created the preconditions for the achievement of anarchy and moved society closer to anarchy but would not by itself create anarchy as an ideal universal social system. The task of anarchists during and immediately after the social revolution was therefore to establish the basic forms of organisation and association which would exist under anarchy as an ideal and thereby establish the social conditions from which anarchy could emerge. In order to clearly differentiate these basic social structures from anarchy I shall refer to the totality of these social structures as an anarchist society.

Anarchists envisioned an anarchist society as having four main components. These were,

1. The working classes collectively own and directly control land, raw materials and the means of production.

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<sup>96</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 300-302.

2. Workplaces and communities are self-managed by the people who constitute them through general assemblies in which everyone has a vote and an equal say in decisions which affect them.<sup>97</sup>
3. Markets are replaced by decentralised planning.
4. The rigid capitalist division of labour is abolished such that people do a combination of mental and physical labour and unsatisfying labour is either removed, automated, or shared among workers.<sup>98</sup>

Within such a society “the relations between its members are regulated, not by laws . . . not by any authorities – whether they are elected or derive their power by right of inheritance – but by mutual agreements, freely made and always revocable, as well as [social] customs and habits, also freely accepted”.<sup>99</sup> Decisions would be made within workplace and community assemblies<sup>100</sup> in which “everything is done to reach unanimity, and when this is impossible, one would vote and do what the majority wanted, or else put the decision in the hands of a third party who would act as arbitrator”.<sup>101</sup> This is not to say that an anarchist society was based on the rule of the majority over the minority. Anarchists believed in free association and so held

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<sup>97</sup> This system of decision-making is often referred to as direct democracy by modern anarchists. This language was not generally used by historical anarchists because they viewed all forms of democracy as a system of government which was incompatible with anarchism’s advocacy of a stateless society, such as bourgeois parliamentary representative democracy or Ancient Athens. See Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 139; Berkman, *Anarchism*, 71-2; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 131, 488; *Café*, 111-3. For an exception to this generalisation see Gregori P. Maximoff, *Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Guillotine Press, 2015), 38.

<sup>98</sup> For accounts of an anarchist society see Cafiero, *Revolution*, 49-62; James Guillaume, “Ideas on Social Organisation (1876)” in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism*, ed. Daniel Guérin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 247-267; Kropotkin, *Conquest of Bread*; Diego Abad de Santillán, *After the Revolution: Economic Reconstruction in Spain* (1937), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/diego-abad-de-santillan-after-the-revolution>.

<sup>99</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 133.

<sup>100</sup> Different anarchist authors used different terminology when referring to assemblies. To take a few examples: Bakunin refers variously to “free productive associations”, “agricultural and industrial associations” and “producers’ associations”; Kropotkin refers to “the Free Federation of groups of Producers and Consumers, formed through affinities of trade or of needs”; Malatesta refers to “popular assemblies” and “associations of production and consumption”; Goldman refers to “productive and distributive associations”; Rocker refers to “a system of labour councils”. See Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 82, 174, 197; Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 559; Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 121, 140; Goldman, *Red Emma*, 68; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 47-8.

<sup>101</sup> Malatesta, *Between Peasants*, 30. See also Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 390-1.

that majorities should not violently impose their decisions on minorities. It was expected that minorities within a workplace or community would voluntarily defer to majority decisions in situations where there was the need to do something and it required everyone involved to agree on a course of action, such as when the next meeting would take place or which colour a room would be painted.<sup>102</sup> If the minority strongly disagreed with this decision then they were free, not only to persuade others of their point of view, but also to leave and voluntarily disassociate.

An anarchist society would therefore be organised in a horizontal manner with decision-making flowing “from the bottom upwards and from the circumference inwards, in accordance with the principle of liberty, and not from the top downwards and from the centre outwards, as is the way of all authority”.<sup>103</sup> Within such a society “the free association of all” would establish “a social organisation” structured “from the low to the high, from the simple to the complex, starting from the more immediate to arrive at the more distant and general interests.”<sup>104</sup> Anarchists, in other words, advocated a decentralised and bottom-up system of decision making in which workplace and community assemblies made their own decisions about how they operated at a local level. They then associated with one another via free agreement in order to form a network capable of achieving co-ordination and co-operation on a large scale.

As will be explained in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7, there were two main positions on how to achieve large scale co-ordination and co-operation during both the struggle against class society and the reproduction of an anarchist society. Anti-organisationalists, who appear to have been in the minority, advocated co-ordination via informal social networks and free agreements made between small groups. Organisationalists, in comparison, also advocated the establishment of formal federations. These federations would take two main forms: federations

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<sup>102</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 488.

<sup>103</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 170.

<sup>104</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 128.

of workplace assemblies belonging to the same branch of production, such as the federation of builders or the federation of teachers, and federations of community assemblies within a given geographical area, such as the federation of East London or the Federation of England. Community assemblies would be composed of both members of workplace assemblies and those who, for whatever reason, did not belong to one, such as the elderly or disabled. These federations would be structured in a decentralised manner such that they could be broken down into: local federations, which were usually called communes, and were composed of assemblies in the immediate area; regional federations, which were federations of local federations; national federations, which were federations of regional federations; and international federations, which were federations of national federations.<sup>105</sup> Although organisationalist anarchists advocated the creation of national federations before and during a social revolution, it is likely that in a stateless society without borders new labels would be used.<sup>106</sup>

Federations, be they at a local, regional, national or international level, would organise regular congresses attended by instantly recallable mandated delegates that were elected from among the groups which composed the federation and were rotated on a regular basis. These delegates, in contrast to representatives within capitalist parliaments, would not be granted the power to make decisions independently and impose these decisions on others. They could instead act only as a spokesperson for the group which elected them and told them what to say, or as the executor of the group's wishes through the performance of a specific task.<sup>107</sup> Malatesta explained that, "in a free society delegation of power is only for particular, temporary tasks, for certain jobs, and does not give rights to any authority". As a result, "the resolutions of

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<sup>105</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 206; Guillaume, "Ideas on Social Organisation", 253, 264-5; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 60, 62; Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 164-5.

<sup>106</sup> For examples of anarchists using the language of national federations see: Berkman, *Anarchism*, 212; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 62-3.

<sup>107</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 42; *Between Peasants*, 28-29; *Method of Freedom*, 63-4.

delegates are always subject to the approval of those they represent”.<sup>108</sup> Or, as Kropotkin wrote, “[t]he 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”.<sup>109</sup>

Workplace and community assemblies were the two main organs of self-management anarchists advocated but they did not hold that they would be the only kind of social grouping within an anarchist society. Kropotkin thought that an anarchist society would be constituted through 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” including not only “production” and “consumption” but also “the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs”.<sup>110</sup>

Although anarchists agreed that land, raw materials and the means of production should be owned in common by humanity as a whole, they disagreed with one another on how the products of labour should be distributed in an anarchist society. Anarcho-collectivists advocated a society in which the products of labour were owned by those who produced them. This was often expressed as the notion that each worker should enjoy the full product of their labour.<sup>111</sup> Bakunin, the most famous anarcho-collectivists, proposed in 1868 that society should be structured such that it “allows each to share in the enjoyment of social wealth – which in fact is produced only by labour – only to the extent that he has contributed his own to its

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<sup>108</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 76.

<sup>109</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 133.

<sup>110</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 163.

<sup>111</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 90; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 9, 46, 96; “The St. Imier Congress (1872)” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume One: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300 CE to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 99-100.

production.”<sup>112</sup> Anarcho-collectivists within the 1<sup>st</sup> International did not initially specify how the products of collective labour would be distributed to those who produced them and argued that the question would be resolved in various ways by communities themselves depending upon their circumstances.<sup>113</sup> For example, at the 1877 Verviers congress of the St Imier International Spanish anarcho-collectivists advocated a society based on the collective ownership of the means of production and land which “gives autonomy to each community of producers and each receives according to his production”.<sup>114</sup> They did not, however, specify how this system of distribution would actually be organised. A more concrete proposal was made by the anarcho-collectivist Guillaume in 1874. He re-affirmed the collectivist position that each community should decide for itself how it will distribute the products of labour, whilst suggesting a system of labour vouchers in which individuals receive a certain number of vouchers per hour of work or per type of work performed and then use them to acquire items at stores. After abundance had been achieved, he thought this should be replaced by the principle of “from each according to ability, to each according to needs”.<sup>115</sup>

From 1876 onwards a number of prominent anarchists, including Malatesta, Cafiero and Reclus, rejected anarcho-collectivism in favour of anarcho-communism. This soon came to be the dominant position within the anarchist movement, although anarcho-collectivism continued to be advocated by a significant segment of anarchists in Spain during the 1880s. By anarcho-communism was meant a society in which the products of labour are collectively owned by humanity as a whole and distributed according to need. For anarcho-communists such as Cafiero, this would initially, during and immediately after the social revolution, be organised

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<sup>112</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 108. See also *ibid*, 78.

<sup>113</sup> Guillaume quoted in Bakunin, *on Anarchism*, 158-9; Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 170-1, 186-7; The Jura Federation, “Minutes of the Jura Federation Congress (1880)” in *No Gods, No Masters*, 283.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 59.

<sup>115</sup> Guillaume, “*Ideas on Social Organisation*”, 251, 255-7. A similar proposal about labour vouchers was made by Kropotkin in 1873 before he became an anarcho-communist. See Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 29-30, 34-5.

through a system of rationing. Once the economy was sufficiently developed and stable, rationing would be abolished in favour of free access to the products of labour. In contrast to Guillaume, who had previously proposed distribution according to need as the long-term goal, anarcho-communists thought it could be achieved much more rapidly and rejected the idea of distribution via labour vouchers as an intermediary system.<sup>116</sup>

Over time the debate between anarcho-collectivists and anarcho-communists on what the goal of anarchism should be became increasingly hostile, most notably in Spain during the 1880s where it was entangled with wider strategic debates.<sup>117</sup> In response to these debates within the Spanish anarchist movement Fernando Tarrida del Marmol and Ricardo Mella formulated the idea of anarchism without adjectives in 1889. They argued that it was not possible for people living in class society to know which specific system of distribution would best realise anarchist values after the revolution. As a result, anarchists existing under capitalism should adopt a non-dogmatic stance whereby collectivism and communism would co-exist in the post-revolutionary society and the argument over which system was superior would be settled through actual experimentation in different economic arrangements. Until this had occurred anarchists would not be in a position to identify as either collectivist or communist since they did not know which economic system was in fact superior. So long as anarchists lived within class society they should simply call themselves anarchists and not add to this label any particular adjective denoting a future system of distribution.<sup>118</sup> This position would go on to influence some anarchists outside of Spain, including the American anarchist de Cleyre who

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<sup>116</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 11-2, 46-8, 95-99; Cafiero, *Revolution*, 54-62. For the history of anarcho-communism see Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 36-67; Turcato, "Anarchist Communism" in *Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, 237-247.

<sup>117</sup> George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 98-116; Temma Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868-1903* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 139-142.

<sup>118</sup> Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 9-17, 60-2; Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 134-54. Similar views were advocated by Malatesta in 1889. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 95-99.

met Tarrida del M  rmol during her 1897 visit to England.<sup>119</sup> She subsequently referred to herself in 1907 as “an Anarchist, simply, without economic label attached”.<sup>120</sup>

For Kropotkin, who played a significant role in theorising and popularising anarcho-communism, it was important to describe the nature of the future society because how one envisions the future shapes how one acts in the present. A socialist who envisions a society based on the workers owning and self-managing the means of production themselves will act differently, both under capitalism and during a revolution, from a socialist who envisions a society based on the state owning and managing the means of production through a vast bureaucracy. They each have a different vision and so will act differently to try and create very different worlds.<sup>121</sup> This perspective can be seen in Kropotkin’s remark in *Modern Science and Anarchy* that the anarchist vision of a future society “soon separated the anarchists in their means of action from all political parties, as well as, to a large extent, from the socialist parties which thought they could retain the ancient Roman and Canonical idea of the State and carry it into the future society of their dreams”.<sup>122</sup>

If the achievement of anarchy required that the working classes engage in forms of practice which actually produce an anarchist society, such as establishing workplace or community assemblies, then the working classes must first develop both the awareness of what an anarchist society would look like and the drive to create such a society. As Kropotkin wrote in 1913, “[n]o struggle can be successful . . . if it does not produce a concrete account of its actual aim. No destruction of what exists is possible without, during the struggles leading to the destruction

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<sup>119</sup> Avrich, *American Anarchist*, 107, 116, 120.

<sup>120</sup> de Cleyre, *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre - Feminist, Anarchist, Genius* (State University of New York, 2005), ed. Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell, 105. See also de Cleyre, “A Suggestion and Explanation” in *Free Society*, vol. 6 no. 29 (June 3, 1900), 1; *Reader*, 107-8.

<sup>121</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 201-4. Importantly, Kropotkin was against composing extremely detailed programmes of what was to be done on the day of revolution because these would inhibit action, rather than guide it. See *ibid*, 202.

<sup>122</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 131-2.



and during the period of destruction itself, already visualising mentally what will take the place of what you want to destroy.”<sup>123</sup>

The role of anarchist authors, such as Kropotkin or Cafiero, was to articulate and spread this vision among the working classes and thereby instil in them the appropriate drives for achieving an anarchist society. Anarchists had to decide not only on “the aim which we ourselves propose to attain” but must also “make it known, by words and deeds, in such a way as to make it notably popular, so popular that on the day of action it will be on everybody’s lips”.<sup>124</sup> In outlining these visions of what an anarchist society would look like anarchists did not think that they were establishing the permanent means through which society would be organised after the social revolution. Instead they assumed that people living in a future anarchist society would develop new and better ways of organising which they had not considered and had not even been in a position to conceive.<sup>125</sup>

### **3.4 – Conclusion**

Anarchism, far from being incoherent or chaotic as is often falsely assumed, was in reality a deeply coherent and sophisticated political theory. It was a form of revolutionary anti-state socialism which explained (a) what it is for human beings to be free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity, (b) what the nature of capitalism and the state are and how these institutions make people unfree, unequal and alienated from one another, and (c) what a society in which human beings are free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity would look like.

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<sup>123</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 130-1.

<sup>124</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 203.

<sup>125</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 15-6.

Anarchists not only advocated the abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society in which people would be free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity. In addition to this, they constructed effective strategies for how to set about achieving their goals. One of the central problems which their strategies had to overcome was that both the abolition of class society in favour of an anarchist society and the day-to-day reproduction of an anarchist society requires the bulk of the population to have developed a vast array of different capacities, drives and consciousness, such as having the capacity to make decisions through general assemblies in which everyone has a vote, the drive to not oppress others and the consciousness that capitalism and the state make people unfree. The dominant structures of class society, however, produce people fit for the reproduction of a society based on minority rule by political and economic ruling classes, rather than the abolition of class society. The consequence of this is that class society systematically fails to produce the kinds of people which both an anarchist revolution and an anarchist society need.

Such individuals would be produced by a properly functioning anarchist society. This is for the obvious reason that people who participated in an anarchist society would, just like within class society, be shaped by the dominant structures that they spend their time in and develop the right kinds of capacities, drives and consciousness for reproducing these social structures. Individuals would not only make decisions within workplace and community assemblies but would, as a result of doing so, develop their decision-making capacities, acquire the drive to make decisions in this way and the consciousness to justify this way of organising social life. Such individuals are exactly the kinds of people that anarchist social movements need in order to succeed. Anarchists, however, live under class society and not an anarchist one. They therefore have a problem: in order to transform society they need transformed people. In order to have transformed people they need a new society. How then could anarchist social movements effectively transform society from one kind of society – capitalism and the state –

into a fundamentally different kind of society – anarchy? This problem was succinctly expressed by Malatesta as follows,

Between man and his social environment there is a reciprocal action. Men make society what it is and society makes men what they are, and the result is therefore a kind of vicious circle. To transform society men must be changed, and to transform men, society must be changed. Poverty brutalises man, and to abolish poverty men must have a social conscience and determination. Slavery teaches men to be slaves, and to free oneself from slavery there is a need for men who aspire to liberty. . . Governments accustom people to submit to the Law and to believe that Law is essential to society; and to abolish government men must be convinced of the uselessness and the harmfulness of government.<sup>126</sup>

Despite the self-reproducing nature of dominant structures, social change remained a possibility. This is because existing society is not solely the product of the “will of a dominating class” but is also “the result of a thousand internecine struggles, of a thousand human and natural factors acting indifferently, without directive criteria”.<sup>127</sup> If “Anarchy . . . may or may not come about depending on human will” then anarchists who “are besieged and buffeted on every side by hostile realities” must not “accept everything, and defer to everything because this is the situation in which history has placed us.” They should instead choose to “combat these realities” and thereby change what reality is.<sup>128</sup> This same point was made by de Cleyre who argued in 1910 that, although human beings are shaped by their circumstances, they are

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<sup>126</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 48. This problem has since been articulated by a number of modern socialist theorists drawing upon Marxism. See Al Campbell and Mehmet Ufuk Tutan, “Human Development and Socialist Institutional Transformation: Continual Incremental Changes and Radical Breaks,” *Studies in Political Economy* 82, no. 1 (2008), 153-70; Sam Gindin, “Socialism ‘With Sober Senses’: Developing Workers’ Capacities,” *The Socialist Register* 34 (1998), 75-99.

<sup>127</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 48.

<sup>128</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 46; *Method of Freedom*, 450.

also at the same time “an active modifying agent, reacting on its environment and transforming circumstances, sometimes slightly, sometimes greatly, sometimes, though not often, entirely”.<sup>129</sup>

It is therefore possible for one segment of society to choose to engage in actions which, given the theory of practice, would simultaneously change social relations and themselves via the development of new capacities, drives and consciousness and the construction of new social structures. For example, workers choose to go on strike and win. In so doing they change social relations – wages increase and workers gain more power over their bosses – and change people – workers develop the capacity to organise a strike, acquire an increased sense of solidarity with one another and see the economy in a fundamentally different way. During the course of the strike, these workers not only changed social relations and themselves but also constructed a new social structure which did not exist before – a trade union.

Given this analysis, anarchists held that the working classes could engage in forms of revolutionary practice during the struggle against capitalism and the state which would transform them into the kinds of people with the necessary capacities, drives and consciousness for both abolishing class society and establishing and reproducing an anarchist society. In Malatesta’s words, “[p]rogress must advance contemporaneously and along parallel lines between men and their environment”.<sup>130</sup> In the remainder of this thesis I will rationally reconstruct the forms of revolutionary practice which anarchists proposed for fundamentally changing the world and achieving human emancipation.

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<sup>129</sup> De Cleyre, *Reader*, 37.

<sup>130</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 49. See also Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 81-2. This same idea was expressed by Marx. See Marx, *Selected Writings*, 172; Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 214.

## Chapter 4 – Anarchist Strategy

The march towards anarchy required anarchists to act in the present and in so doing work towards, and eventually achieve, the abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. A crucial aspect of anarchist theory was therefore determining what methods of anarchist action would achieve both their short term and long term goals. According to Malatesta, “to be able to act, to be able to contribute to the realisation of one’s cherished ideas, one has to choose one’s own path. In parties, as more generally in life, the questions of method are predominant. If the idea is the beacon, the method is the helm”. It is for this reason that “we are anarchists in our goal... but we are anarchist in our method too”.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere Malatesta defined “Anarchism” as “the method of reaching anarchy, through freedom, without government”.<sup>2</sup>

Anarchist authors produced political theory, but they did not produce the kind of political theory which is developed by academic philosophers abstractly contemplating arguments from the safety of the seminar room. The theorists of anarchism were instead active participants in collective struggles by the working classes against the ruling classes. Given this, anarchist authors did not produce theory for theory’s sake. They produced theory in order to help guide the action of the working classes in general and anarchist militants in particular. This central focus on formulating practical strategies to achieve social change can be seen in Bakunin’s insistence that in order for socialism to be “alive and vigorous” it had to move beyond the realm of ideas – philosophers publishing books and socialist journals – into the realm of action. This action required “enlightened revolutionary instincts”, “collective will” and “the real organisation of the working masses themselves”. If “instinct, will and organisation are lacking

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Turcato, *Making Sense*, 55.

<sup>2</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 52.

the best books in the world will be nothing more than empty theories and powerless dreams”.<sup>3</sup>

As Kropotkin succinctly put it, “theory and practice must become one if we are to succeed”.<sup>4</sup>

Anarchists understood that creating appropriate methods of action was not a matter of inventing abstract strategies fit for all times and places and following them as if there were an instruction manual for producing a revolution. Anarchism, to quote Kropotkin, contains “no ready made recipes for political-cooking”.<sup>5</sup> Building an anarchist society required action within a specific context and, since this context varies according to time and place, it followed that, in Goldman’s words, “[t]he methods of Anarchism . . . do not comprise an iron-clad program to be carried out under all circumstances” but must instead “grow out of the economic needs of each place and clime, and of the intellectual and temperamental requirements of the individual”.<sup>6</sup> As Malatesta wrote,

the problem facing us anarchists, who regard anarchy not so much as a beautiful dream to be chased by the light of the moon, but as an individual and social way of life to be brought about for the greatest good of all . . . is to so conduct our activities as to achieve the greatest useful effect in the various circumstances in which history places us. One must not ignore reality, but if reality is noxious, one must fight it, resorting to every means made available to us by reality itself.<sup>7</sup>

Anarchism was therefore an inherently action-focused political theory. It held that one must not merely aspire to a fundamentally different world but must, in addition to this, engage in real political practice which attempts to transform the existing world. In order for this real political practice to be effective, it had to be guided by strategy and ways of organising which

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<sup>3</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 77.

<sup>4</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 204. See also *ibid*, 219.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Kinna, *Kropotkin*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 449-50.

were both appropriate to the situation in which they were acting and capable of actually bringing about an anarchist society.

Despite anarchist methods of action necessarily varying depending upon the historically specific context, there were nonetheless common views on strategy and social change that pervaded the anarchist movement. These were (a) the advocacy of social revolution, the unity of means and ends, prefiguration, direct action, and the spirit of revolt and (b) the rejection of the seizure of state power via elections or armed insurrection. In this chapter I shall rationally reconstruct anarchist views on the social revolution, the unity of means and ends, prefiguration, direct action and the spirit of revolt. Having done so I shall then turn to the anarchist critique of seizing state power in Chapter 5. Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate that, anarchists advocated the strategies they did due to their beliefs about what forms of practice constituted them and how these forms of practice would simultaneously transform people and social relations. In particular, I will show that the anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends was grounded in the theory of practice.

#### **4.1 – Social Revolution**

Anarchists held that the simultaneous abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society could “only be achieved by means of a revolutionary movement” instigating a social revolution.<sup>8</sup> It is common for modern academics who study the history of revolutions to define a ‘revolution’ as necessarily involving the transformation of the state from one form into another. Charles Tilly, for example, writes that, “whatever else they involve, revolutions include forcible transfers of power over states”.<sup>9</sup> Anarchists wanted to abolish the state, rather than seize its power, and so did not define a social revolution in such a state-centric manner.

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<sup>8</sup> Guillaume, “Ideas on Social Organisation”, 247.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 5.

They advocated and attempted to create a social revolution which fundamentally transformed “the foundations of society, its political, economic and social character” and so was distinct from a statist revolution in which there is “a mere change of rulers, of government”.<sup>10</sup>

This fundamental transformation of society required, according to Kropotkin, “completely reconstructing all relationships” between people, from the relationships within a household, factory or village to those between urban and rural areas.<sup>11</sup> Given this, anarchists did not limit the scope of revolutionary transformation to the public sphere of the community or workplace. In order for the revolution to be meaningful it had to also transform the so-called private sphere of sexual relationships, parent-child relationships, housework and so on. Goldman, to take one example, argued that the compulsory social relations of marriage should be replaced by free love in which “love can go and come without fear of meeting a watch-dog” and neither partner acts and/or views themselves as the owner, controller and dictator of the other. The extent to which some anarchists viewed emancipation within the private sphere as essential can be seen in Kropotkin’s insistence that “a 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”.<sup>12</sup>

Anarchists did not think that the social revolution so understood should be imposed on society by a revolutionary elite acting in the name of the people. They were instead committed to the famous words of the 1864 preamble to the statutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> International: “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves”.<sup>13</sup> This line from

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<sup>10</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 180, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 275.

<sup>12</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 220-1; Kropotkin, *Conquest of Bread*, 156-7. For other examples see Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 197-9; *Café*, 93-6; It should be kept in mind that despite the ideas and actions of feminists within the anarchist movement many anarchist men were sexists who failed to support women’s emancipation.

<sup>13</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 14. These words are similar to Proudhon’s declaration in 1848 that “the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of government”. Quoted in Woodcock, *Proudhon*, 125.



the preamble was consistently repeated by anarchist authors or re-phrased in slightly different language, such as Malatesta's remark that, "we anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves".<sup>14</sup>

The necessity of a social revolution emerged from the fact that a ruling class had never in history given up their power voluntarily. In every instance it had required violence or at least the threat of it.<sup>15</sup> Although anarchism aimed at, to quote Malatesta, "the removal of violence from human relations"<sup>16</sup>, the vast majority of anarchist authors advocated revolutionary violence as a means to overcome the violence which defended and maintained class society.<sup>17</sup> This is because they understood that "[t]he means we employ are those that circumstances make possible or necessary". In a society where the power of the ruling classes is protected by "powerful military and police organisations which meet any serious attempt at a change with prison, hanging, and massacre" revolutionaries have no choice but to use violence to overcome "the physical force that blocks our way".<sup>18</sup>

Malatesta realised that since "the State is the protector of property" revolutionaries could "get at the property owner only by passing over the body of the policeman".<sup>19</sup> Rocker likewise insisted in 1920 that "a revolution cannot be made with rose-water" since "the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the

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<sup>14</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 83. For other examples of anarchists repeating the words of the preamble see Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 234; Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 537.

<sup>15</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 45. See also Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 241; Goldman, *Red Emma*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 171; Cafiero, *Revolution*, 24-5, 36-7, 47; Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 76-7; Makhno, *Struggle*, 86-7. There were a few anarchists who were pacifists committed to strict non-violent resistance, but they were in the minority. See Bart de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution* (Pluto Press, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 156, 157.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 153.

workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production”.<sup>20</sup>

The same position was expressed by Kropotkin. In 1877 he advocated “the expropriation and suppression of the bourgeoisie”.<sup>21</sup> A few years later in 1881 he wrote that workers must “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”.<sup>22</sup> Kropotkin continued to advocate this position decades later. In 1914 he wrote that, “two things are necessary to be successful in a revolution . . . an idea in the head, and a bullet in the rifle! The force of action – guided by the force of Anarchist thought”.<sup>23</sup> The extent to which Kropotkin was a proponent of violence against the forces of state repression can be seen in the fact that in 1877 he attended a demonstration in St Imier, Switzerland armed with a gun. He was ready, in his own words, to “blow out the brains” of the police if they attacked.<sup>24</sup> Decades later in 1905 Kropotkin responded to the Russian revolution by practising shooting with a rifle in case he returned to Russia and needed to participate in street fighting.<sup>25</sup>

This is not to say that anarchists who advocated revolutionary violence agreed with one another on the conditions under which it was acceptable. To give one example, Johann Most wrote several articles during the 1880s where he actively encouraged anarchists to engage in violent acts of vengeance against the ruling classes. Malatesta, in comparison, argued in the 1890s that

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<sup>20</sup> Rocker, “The Soviet System or the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” in *Bloodstained*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Woodcock and Avakumović, *From Prince to Rebel*, 160.

<sup>22</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 305.

<sup>23</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 207. For other examples see *ibid*, 145.

<sup>24</sup> Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 102, 104.

<sup>25</sup> Woodcock and Avakumović, *From Prince to Rebel*, 365-6.

anarchists should, when it is necessary, use violence to overthrow systems of oppression, but should not engage in violence to achieve revenge.<sup>26</sup>

It should also be noted that anarchists saw potential dangers in revolutionary violence. In 1896 Malatesta argued that “a liberating revolution cannot be born of massacre and terror, these having been – and ever so it shall remain – the midwives to tyranny”.<sup>27</sup> Kropotkin similarly wrote in 1892 that “slaughtering the bourgeois so as to ensure that the revolution succeeds is a nonsensical dream” since “organised and legalised Terror . . . serves only to forge chains for the people” and “lays the groundwork for the dictatorship of whoever will grab control of the revolutionary tribunal”.<sup>28</sup> Even Most told an audience in Baltimore that “we are revolutionists not from love of gore” but “because there is no other way to free and redeem mankind”.<sup>29</sup>

In the popular imagination, revolutions are typically equated with violent acts of destruction, such as fighting the police and army or storming parliament. Anarchists advocated these acts, but they did not reduce the social revolution to them. For many anarchists the social revolution was above all an act of creation. The old world had to be destroyed only because it was a prerequisite to the construction of a new social order. This idea can be seen in Bakunin’s oft-quoted remark, which was made in 1842 before he became an anarchist, that “[t]he passion for destruction is a creative passion, too”. Bakunin re-articulated this perspective as an anarchist in 1873 when he wrote in *Statism and Anarchy* that although “the real passion for destruction . . . is far from sufficient for achieving the ultimate aims of the revolutionary cause . . . there

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<sup>26</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 201-204; Andrew R. Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany Volume I: The Early Movement* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1972), 253-5.

<sup>27</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 203. See also Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 62-5.

<sup>28</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 563-4.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 67.

can be no revolution without widespread and passionate destruction, a destruction salutary and fruitful precisely because out of it, and by means of it alone, new worlds are born and arise”.<sup>30</sup>

For anarchists such as Berkman a revolution “begins with a violent upheaval” but this is only “the rolling up of your sleeves” before “the actual work” of revolution occurs, namely “the reorganisation of the entire life of society”.<sup>31</sup> Kropotkin similarly claimed that the “first skirmish” of a social revolution when the people rise up in insurrection “is soon ended, and it is only after the overthrow of the old constitution that the real work of revolution can be said to begin”.<sup>32</sup> By this anarchists did not mean that violence was not an important aspect of launching and defending the social revolution. Kropotkin, for example, predicted that a revolution would most likely result in a civil war due to the ruling classes launching a counterattack against the working classes.<sup>33</sup> Anarchists were instead drawing attention to the fact that the core of the social revolution was people internalising anarchist ideas and reconstructing and reorganising society according to them. The social revolution in other words rested on the simultaneous transformation of social structures and of the people who constituted, produced and reproduced them. It required a change not only in how society was organised but also a corresponding change to what drives and capacities people exercised and developed. Above all, for anarchists, it required people to develop revolutionary consciousness, such as a “sense of justice and equality, the love of liberty and of human brotherhood”.<sup>34</sup> This aspect of the social revolution would continue long after the ruling classes had been successfully overthrown.

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<sup>30</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 58; *Statism and Anarchy*, 28. This idea was repeated by later anarchists. See Berkman, *The Blast* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 10; Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 222; *Direct Struggle*, 579.

<sup>31</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 183-4. See also Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 145-6.

<sup>32</sup> Kropotkin, *Conquest of Bread*, 67-8.

<sup>33</sup> Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 270-1.

<sup>34</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 400.

It is therefore not the case that anarchists expected the social revolution to occur quickly.<sup>35</sup> Kropotkin wrote 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.” Anarchists would instead have to “traverse” a “whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years”.<sup>36</sup> During and after this insurrectionary period society as a whole would be restructured not from the top-down by means of government decree but from the bottom up by millions of workers, in both urban and rural areas, re-organising their workplaces, communities and households themselves according to anarchist ideas. Fabbri went further and noted in 1922 that “however extensive and radical a revolution may be, before it manages to be victorious completely and worldwide not one but many generations must elapse”.<sup>37</sup> In other words, anarchists viewed “the social revolution” as a “process” which stretched over an extended period of time.<sup>38</sup>

The process of social revolution was divided into moments of destruction and construction.<sup>39</sup> The working classes would destroy the old world by overthrowing and abolishing the state and expropriating land, raw materials, the means of production and the necessities of life, such as warehouses of food and clothing or apartment blocks, from the ruling classes.<sup>40</sup> The working classes would build the new society on the ruins of the old by establishing the communal ownership and control of land, raw materials, the means of production and the necessities of life, building organs of self-management – workplace and community assemblies – and through these, organise the on-going reproduction and re-structuring of society. Most anarchists thought that in order to co-ordinate production, distribution and revolutionary activity on a

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<sup>35</sup> Avrich wrongly claims that Kropotkin advocated a “speedy” revolution. See Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>36</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 72. See also Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 322, 535, 553.

<sup>37</sup> Luigi Fabbri, “Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism” in *Bloodstained*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Nabat, “Proceedings of Nabat” in *No Gods, No Masters*, 487.

<sup>39</sup> The following account of social revolution can be seen in Berkman, *Anarchism*, 195-6, 207-8, 211-3; Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 99-100; Malatesta, *Café*, 122-3.

<sup>40</sup> Anarchists typically claimed that only means of production and land which was used by a capitalist or landlord to profit off the labour of others would be expropriated. See Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 214; *Conquest of Bread*, 89. For how the expropriation of food, clothing and housing was envisioned see *ibid*, 70-1, 103-4, 121-2, 127.

large scale, these assemblies should establish formal local federations which would, in turn, federate together to form regional, national and ultimately, if the social revolution went as hoped, international federations. A minority of anarchists argued that large scale co-ordination should be achieved through informal social networks alone and opposed the establishment of formal federations.

The defence of the social revolution would be achieved through the formation of worker militias, rather than through the seizure of state power. These worker militias would act as organs of class power.<sup>41</sup> As early as 1868 Bakunin, who had previously joined the barricades during the 1848 revolution in Paris and Prague and an 1849 insurrection in Dresden, argued that revolutionaries must “organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction” which would include “the federation of the Barricades”. This view was repeated in 1870 when he wrote that, during an anarchist revolution, workers would be “armed and organised” in order to co-ordinate “common defence against the enemies of the Revolution”.<sup>42</sup> Decades later in 1922 Malatesta advocated “[t]he creation of voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to reestablish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution”.<sup>43</sup> Berkman similarly argued in 1929 that “[t]he armed workers and peasants are the only effective defence of the revolution”.<sup>44</sup>

The advocacy of workers’ militias was not limited to the writings of famous anarchist authors. It can also be seen in the resolutions of anarchist organisations. The resolutions passed at the

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<sup>41</sup> For example: Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 85; Makhno, *Struggle*, 57-8, 89. For overviews of anarchist attempts at defending a revolution with workers’ militias during the Russian and Spanish revolutions see Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918-1921* (London: Freedom Press, 2005); Makhno, *Struggle*, 6-23; Agustín Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution: The CNT Defence Committees in Barcelona 1933-1938* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 170-1, 179. For his participation in 1848 and the 1849 insurrection see E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), 149-162, 189-94.

<sup>43</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 232.

Spanish National Confederation of Labour's (CNT) 1936 Zaragoza congress acknowledged "the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution" from both "foreign capitalist invasion" and "counter-revolution at home". This would be achieved through "[t]he people armed" with an array of weapons including not only pistols and rifles but also "planes, tanks, armoured vehicles, machine-guns and anti-aircraft cannon". This workers' militia, which would include "all individuals of both sexes who are fit to fight", would co-ordinate its action via their local "commune" and the "Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes".<sup>45</sup>

The manner in which anarchists described the social revolution can give the false impression that they thought it would occur all at once and imagined that, to pick a country at random, all or most of France would simultaneously rise up, overthrow the ruling classes and build an anarchist society. Kropotkin, however, routinely pointed out that the social revolution would most likely (a) occur alongside a parallel statist revolution launched by republicans or state socialists, (b) develop out of a statist revolution or a series of smaller insurrections, and (c) begin with local uprisings in particular regions, such as Paris, or by particular groups of people, such as miners, and spread to the rest of the country (and hopefully the world) as people in other regions and industries heard of these uprisings and were inspired to join the emerging social revolution.<sup>46</sup>

As has already been mentioned, anarchists held that these uprisings, and the social revolution at large, should involve the working classes forcefully expropriating land, raw materials, the means of production and the necessities of life from the ruling classes. Anarchists advocated expropriation not only because doing so was part of abolishing capitalism in favour of an

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution Volume 1* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), ed. Chris Ealham, 109-10.

<sup>46</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 542-4, 551-5; *Modern Science*, 191-5; *Rebel*, 101-2, 186-9. Malatesta also pointed out that anarchists would be but one faction within the revolution. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 472.

anarchist society, but also because they thought that any social revolution which did not engage in expropriation would be doomed to failure. This was because if a social revolution were to succeed then the population as a whole must be fed, clothed and housed. If this did not happen then workers would either never support the social revolution because it did not improve their lives directly or, having supported it, cease to do so due to their experiences of starvation and a decline in living conditions. Without the support of the masses, the social revolution would fail and reactionaries would be able to restore class society with the promise of bringing stability. Anarchists, in other words, understood that “[i]t is not enough to cherish a noble ideal. Man does not live by high thoughts or superb discourses, for he needs bread as well”.<sup>47</sup> It was therefore essential that, once a social revolution began, people immediately expropriated and redistributed food, clothing and housing among the population. The expropriation of the means of production and land would, in turn, enable the working classes to produce the necessities of life needed to sustain the population over a longer period of time and prevent food shortages from defeating the social revolution.<sup>48</sup>

Even if a country were able to achieve this, the social revolution would fail unless it occurred internationally because, as Kropotkin predicted, “a local revolution cannot succeed though it may survive over a short period”.<sup>49</sup> This view was shared by Guillaume who argued that, “[t]he Revolution cannot be confined to a single country; on pain of death, it is obliged to subsume into its movement, if not the whole world, then at least a considerable portion of the civilized countries”. This is because no country can be entirely self-sufficient and were the states

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<sup>47</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 218. The fear that a social revolution could be crippled by food shortages was shared by Malatesta. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 428-9.

<sup>48</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 207, 218-20; *Conquest of Bread*, 95-7; *Direct Struggle*, 588.

<sup>49</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 37-8.



neighbouring a country in revolution to impose a blockade, let alone invade, then “the Revolution, being isolated, would be doomed to perish”.<sup>50</sup>

It was for this reason, among others, that anarchists placed so much emphasis on opposing patriotism and fostering internationalism among the working classes.<sup>51</sup> Bakunin understood that “a real and definite solution to the social question can be found only on the basis of an international solidarity of workers of every land”. This was because “no isolated local or national workers' association, even one based in the largest of European countries, can ever triumph in the face of a formidable coalition of every privileged class, of every wealthy capitalist, and of every state in the world”. To overcome this coalition of reaction, workers had to achieve “the unity of all local and national bodies” through the formation of “one universal association – the great International Workers' Association of every Land”.<sup>52</sup> This point was reiterated by Rocker decades later when he argued that “the effective basis . . . for the international liberation of the working class” will only be laid “when the workers in every country . . . come to understand clearly that their interests are everywhere the same, and out of this understanding learn to act together”.<sup>53</sup>

The outcome of this internationalism would, to quote Malatesta, be workers coming to view “the whole world as our homeland, all humanity as our brothers and sisters”.<sup>54</sup> Under capitalism this internationalism would be grounded in an understanding of the working classes shared interests such that any “worker, the oppressed, Chinese or Russian or from any other country is our brother, just as the property-owner, the oppressor, is our enemy, even if he is born in our

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<sup>50</sup> Guillaume, “Ideas on Social Organisation”, 266.

<sup>51</sup> For an in-depth discussion of anarchist views on internationalism see Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 60-5, 297-321.

<sup>52</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 34, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 71.

<sup>54</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 137. The chorus of a song by the anarchist musician Pietro Gori proclaimed, “The whole world is our country / liberty is our law / and a rebellious thought / is in our hearts”. Quoted in Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 111.

home town”.<sup>55</sup> This commitment to working-class internationalism led anarchists in Europe and the United States to oppose imperialism and support anti-colonial national liberation movements, such as those in Cuba and Ireland, whilst pointing out that the goals of these movements – freedom – could only be achieved through anarchism rather than the establishment of a new state.<sup>56</sup>

During WW1 the anarchist opposition to imperialism was paradoxically used by a small number of authors, including Kropotkin and Grave, to argue that anarchists should support the French republic against German militarism on the grounds that Germany had launched a war of aggression and if victorious would impose autocracy on the rest of Europe. The majority of anarchists rejected this argument and refused to side with any state in the conflict. As the *International Anarchist Manifesto Against War* declared in 1915, “there is but one war of liberation: that which in all countries is waged by the oppressed against the oppressors, by the exploited against the exploiters”.<sup>57</sup> This opposition to all states in the conflict went alongside multiple attempts to organise resistance to the war, such as launching campaigns against conscription. This, in turn, resulted in anarchist movements experiencing a significant amount of state repression.<sup>58</sup>

## 4.2 – Evolution and Revolution

Anarchists did not think that an international social revolution would appear out of nowhere. They viewed social change as a single process which could be divided into periods of evolution

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<sup>55</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 153.

<sup>56</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 138-41; Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 221-37; Maximoff, *Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 43; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 120-4; Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography*, 104-15, 120-143.

<sup>57</sup> “International Anarchist Manifesto Against War (1915)” in *A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, 290. See also Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 379-87.

<sup>58</sup> Kinna, *Kropotkin*, 177-83; Adams and Kinna, eds. *Anarchism, 1914-18: Internationalism, Anti-Militarism and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

and periods of revolution.<sup>59</sup> During periods of evolution change is slow, gradual and partial. Evolutionary change therefore includes such things as certain ideas becoming more popular, small groups of people developing radical capacities and drives, or dominant structures being modified. Over time this evolutionary change builds up and culminates in a revolutionary period during which change is rapid, large scale, and fundamentally alters society, such as one dominant structure being replaced by another.<sup>60</sup> Although periods of evolution were in general much longer than periods of revolution, it did not follow from this that revolutions were short. A revolutionary period could last several years if during this period there was on-going large-scale change which occurred rapidly and fundamentally altered society, such as the French revolutionary period which began in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille and ended ten years later in 1799 with the seizure of state power by Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>61</sup>

Evolutionary change and revolutionary change were not separate distinct entities but rather fed off and flowed into one another. An evolutionary period would, if events unfolded as anarchists hoped, develop into a revolutionary period which fundamentally altered society. According to Bakunin, revolutions “come about of themselves, produced by the force of things, the tide of events and facts. They ferment for a long time in the depths of the instinctive consciousness of the popular masses – they then explode, often triggered by apparently trivial causes”.<sup>62</sup> Such a

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<sup>59</sup> Fleming, *Anarchist Way*, 77, 157-8; Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 412; *Modern Science*, 95, 97; *Direct Struggle*, 195-6, 342; Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 55.

<sup>60</sup> Some anarchists expressed this same idea in different language. For Pouget a revolution is a single process of radical social change which includes both what other anarchists labelled evolution - engaging in direct action under capitalism - and revolution - overthrowing capitalism via the forceful expropriation of the capitalist class. He writes that revolutionary syndicalism “does not regard the Revolution as a future cataclysm for which we must wait patiently to see emerging from the inevitable working-out of events. . . The Revolution is an undertaking for all times, for today as well as tomorrow: it is continual action, a daily battling without let-up or respite, against the forces of oppression and exploitation”. Pouget, *The Party of Labour*, <https://libcom.org/library/party-labour-emile-pouget>.

<sup>61</sup> Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution: 1789-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-2. I referred to ‘the French Revolutionary period’ rather than ‘The French Revolution’ because many historians distinguish between several distinct revolutions which occurred one after the other. Jonathan Israel, for example, distinguishes between a democratic republican revolution, a constitutional monarchist revolution and an authoritarian populist revolution. See Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution: From the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 695.

<sup>62</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 172.

revolutionary period would, in turn, create or open up new pathways through which evolutionary change could move in the future, while at the same time blocking off certain avenues for evolutionary change and altering the trajectory of evolutionary change which had existed prior to the revolutionary period. This new evolutionary change would then lead to new revolutionary change in the future and so on. As Reclus argued, “evolution and revolution are two successive aspects of the same phenomenon, evolution preceding revolution, and revolution preceding a new evolution, which is in turn the mother of future revolutions”.<sup>63</sup>

Anarchists consistently expressed these ideas through water-based metaphors. Bakunin wrote in a letter to Reclus that, “[w]e are falling back into a time of evolution – that is to say revolutions that are invisible, subterranean and often imperceptible . . . drops of water, though they may be invisible may go on to form an ocean”.<sup>64</sup> Guillaume claimed that, “[i]t is not in one day that waters rise to the point where they can breach the dam holding them back: the waters rise slowly and by degrees: but once they have reached the desired level, the collapse is sudden, and the dam crumbles in the blinking of an eye”.<sup>65</sup> For Berkman evolutionary change leads into revolutionary change in the same way that water in a kettle gradually heats up until it boils.<sup>66</sup>

The anarchist usage of biological and geographical language should not be mistaken for the view that evolution and revolution are natural forces that inevitably propel human subjects towards a better society.<sup>67</sup> Reclus understood that “revolutions do not necessarily constitute

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<sup>63</sup> Reclus, *Anarchy*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 251-2. Bakunin used similar imagery in a letter to Nechaev. See Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 183.

<sup>65</sup> Guillaume, “Ideas on Social Organisation”, 247. This dam metaphor can also be found in Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolutions*, 81.

<sup>66</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 179.

<sup>67</sup> This idea has been falsely attributed to Kropotkin. Malatesta, for example, makes this claim in his 1931 article “Peter Kropotkin: Recollections and Criticisms by One of His Old Friends”. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 516-8. For a critique of fatalistic readings of Kropotkin see Matthew S. Adams, *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015) 106-111.

progress, just as evolutions are not always directed toward justice”.<sup>68</sup> Malatesta similarly held that “there is no natural law that says evolution must inevitably give priority to liberty rather than the permanent division of society into two castes . . . that of the dominators and that of the dominated”.<sup>69</sup> These evolutions and revolutions, be they progressive or reactionary, were nothing but the product of human beings acting within their historical situation and thereby transforming the world. Mella insisted that “[s]ocial evolution is constituted by men; these men constitute the means by which it develops”.<sup>70</sup> Malatesta expressed this same idea when he argued that “[h]uman evolution moves in the direction in which it is driven by the will of humanity”.<sup>71</sup>

One of the main forms of evolutionary change anarchists engaged in was spreading anarchist ideas through newspapers, pamphlets, books and talks. This anarchist literature was not exclusively non-fiction and also included poems, songs, short stories, plays and novels. For Malatesta, the “first task” of anarchists was “to persuade people” and thereby “make people aware of the misfortunes they suffer and of their chances to destroy them”, “awaken sympathy in everybody for the misfortunes of others and a warm desire for the good of all people”, arouse “the sentiment of rebellion in the minds of men”, help people understand the social causes of oppression and “how it depends on human will to rid ourselves of them”.<sup>72</sup> In other words, anarchists sought to bring about a variety of different changes to the consciousness of the working classes. They sought to improve their theoretical understanding of existing society and how it oppresses them, persuade them that an anarchist society is both possible and desirable, instil anarchist values within them and, perhaps most importantly of all, motivate them to

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<sup>68</sup> Reclus, *Anarchy*, 139.

<sup>69</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> Mella, *Evolution and Revolution* (1892), <https://es.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ricardo-mella-evolucion-y-revolucion/>. See also Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 87-92, 227.

<sup>71</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 105.

<sup>72</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 46.

actually engage in direct action and emancipate themselves. It was for this reason that Kropotkin sought to use his paper *Le Révolté* to inspire workers with hope by documenting “the growing revolt against antiquated institutions”, rather than, as many socialist papers did, drive workers to despair and inaction by focusing too strongly on suffering within existing society.<sup>73</sup>

Anarchist newspapers, pamphlets, books and talks were but one aspect of a wider revolutionary working-class counter-culture which the anarchist movement constructed. In Spain anarchist ideas were spread through a wide variety of different means including: anarchist cafés where workers could, aside from relaxing and having fun, listen to anarchist literature being read aloud and participate in political discussion groups; anarchist plays, live music and poetry recitals; and anarchist holidays celebrating key dates in the revolutionary calendar, such as the anniversary of the Paris Commune and May Day. In the United States, Yiddish-speaking anarchists not only organised anarchist literary and poetry scenes, plays, picnics, dinner parties and balls but also subverted religious traditions. They chose to spend Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, listening to radical talks, eating huge amounts of food at feasts and dancing whilst religious Jews fasted and prayed for atonement. These social activities, which constituted a significant amount of anarchist activity, were not only embodiments of fun or creativity. They were also instrumental in (a) drawing workers into a social milieu where they would develop revolutionary consciousness and come to engage in direct action, (b) raising funds for newspapers, strikes, political prisoners etc., and (c) forming close social bonds both amongst anarchist militants and between anarchists and the wider working class in the area.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 390-1.

<sup>74</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 124-31; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 24-6, 35-7. For other examples of anarchist counter-culture see: Angel Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction: Catalan Labour and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1989-1923* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 155-62, 259-62; Avrich, *Haymarket*, 131-49; Ealham, *Living Anarchism: José Peirats and the Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalist Movement* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), 50-5; *Anarchism and the City*, 45-7; Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*, 34-52, 168-82; Andrew

### 4.3 – Unity of Means and Ends

Anarchists did not think that any form of activity could lead to an anarchist society. They argued that working class social movements should only use means which were in conformity with the ends of creating a society in which all systems of domination and exploitation were abolished and everybody was free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity. Anarchists, in other words, advocated the unity of means and ends. In 1881 Kropotkin argued that social movements should establish their “final objective” and then “specify a proposed course of action in conformity with the ends”.<sup>75</sup> Anarchists often expressed this idea with transit-based metaphors in which the revolutionary must choose a road or build a bridge that will in fact lead them to the future society.<sup>76</sup> In 1899 Malatesta wrote that,

it is not enough to desire something; if one really wants it adequate means must be used to secure it. And these means are not arbitrary, but instead cannot but be conditioned by the ends we aspire to and by the circumstances in which the struggle takes place, for if we ignore the choice of means we would achieve other ends, possibly diametrically opposed to those we aspire to, and this would be the obvious and inevitable consequence of our choice of means. Whoever sets out on the highroad and takes a wrong turning does not go where he intends to go but where the road leads him.<sup>77</sup>

Goldman made this same point in 1922 when she argued, in response to the Bolshevik seizure of state power during the Russian Revolution, that “means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim” because the “means employed, become, through individual habit and social

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Douglas Hoyt, “And They Called Them ‘Galleanisti’: The Rise of the Cronca Sovversiva and the Formation of America’s Most Infamous Anarchist Faction (1895-1912)”, (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2018), 76-125; Di Paola, *Knights Errant*, 169-183; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 62-6.

<sup>75</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 303.

<sup>76</sup> Berkman used the metaphor of a seed growing into a fruit. See Berkman, *Anarchism*, 136.

<sup>77</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 46.

practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical”.<sup>78</sup> Given this,

[r]evolutionary methods must be in tune with revolutionary aims. The means used to further the revolution must harmonize with its purposes. In short, the ethical values which the revolution is to establish in the new society must be initiated with the revolutionary activities of the so-called transitional period. The latter can only serve as a real and dependable bridge to the better life if built of the same material as the life to be achieved.<sup>79</sup>

Anarchism’s commitment to the unity of means and ends has been previously discussed by a number of historians, including Schmidt and van der Walt in *Black Flame*. They correctly note that anarchists thought a non-hierarchical society could only be created by non-hierarchical social movements because authoritarian means would continuously reproduce authoritarianism, rather than lead to emancipation. They do not, however, explain in sufficient depth why anarchists thought this was the case.<sup>80</sup> On my interpretation, the answer is that anarchists thought about society and social change in terms of the theory of practice.

Anarchists held that when humans engage in activity, they simultaneously transform themselves and the world around them – both social and physical. An anarchist society would be reproduced over time by human beings engaging in non-hierarchical systems of association and decision-making and in so doing continuously creating and re-creating both anarchist social relations and themselves as people with the right kinds of capacities, drives and consciousness for an anarchist society. Given existing social conditions, this goal can only be

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<sup>78</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 401-2.

<sup>79</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 404.

<sup>80</sup> Schmidt and Van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 25, 55-6, 65, 72. See also Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 53-4; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 629; Turcato, *Making Sense*, 21-5, 64.



achieved through a social revolution that abolishes capitalism and the state and so will have to be created by the people who presently live under class society. It is therefore essential that the majority of the working classes engage in forms of practice that transform them into people who are capable of, and are driven to, both (a) abolish capitalism and the state through a social revolution and (b) establish and reproduce an anarchist society. If social movements make the mistake of using the wrong or inappropriate means then they will produce people who will create a different society to one they initially intended.

This theory entailed two main commitments. Firstly, a core part of determining what strategies and tactics a social movement should use to achieve their goals is establishing how the forms of practice which constitute them transform individuals and social relations simultaneously. If a social movement's end goals can only be achieved through a social revolution, then it must choose means during an evolutionary period which build toward this. Kropotkin, for example, argued in 1881 that workers should engage in direct struggle against capital, especially via trade unions and strikes, because of the unity of means and ends. He wrote 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.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 306-7. Kropotkin is using the term 'party' in the broad sense of a social movement or group of people who adhere to the same beliefs.

The second main position entailed by the unity of means and ends was that social movements must structure organisations and make decisions in a manner which causes participants to develop the kinds of capacities, drives and consciousness which are necessary for producing and reproducing the social relations of the future society. A social movement organised in a hierarchical and centralised manner cannot create an anarchist society because it will not produce the right kinds of people for the task. Participants will either act in an authoritarian way or be subject to the authoritarianism of others, such as a small group of leaders monopolising decision-making power and issuing orders which the membership then implements. This will result in the development of authoritarian capacities, drives, and consciousness and the establishment of authoritarian social structures which will, in turn, enable authoritarian modes of practice and constrain anti-authoritarian modes of practice. If a social movement constituted by these self-reproducing authoritarian social structures were to launch or take over a revolution, then the result would not be an anarchist society. Instead, the authoritarianism of the social movement would come to characterise society as a whole, such as the movement's leadership becoming the new ruling class who impose their will on the majority of the population.

If a social movement is to achieve an anarchist society, then it must be constituted by forms of practice that produce self-determining people who associate non-hierarchically with one another. In order to do so workers must establish social relations which are, as far as is possible, the same as those that would constitute an anarchist society. Through engaging in such forms of practice workers develop, in time, the kinds of radical capacities, drives and consciousness that are needed for overthrowing the existing hierarchical society and creating and reproducing an anarchist society.

This commitment to the unity of means and ends led anarchists to maintain that, although violence was necessary to defend the revolution from counter-attack by the ruling classes and those they command, such as the police or army, it should not be used to force the working classes into an anarchist society. In Bakunin's words, "[l]iberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward".<sup>82</sup> As a result, "[a] revolution that is imposed, either by official decrees, or by force of arms is no longer a revolution but the opposite of a revolution, because it necessarily provokes reaction".<sup>83</sup> Malatesta similarly declared that "anarchy cannot be made by force and imposition by [a] few". It "is only possible when it is understood and wanted by large popular masses that embrace all the elements necessary to creating a society superior to the present one".<sup>84</sup>

What anarchists meant by this is that if an anarchist society is based on people voluntarily self-determining their lives through participation in workplace and community assemblies then it follows that such a society cannot be created by forcing people to participate in it. Were people forced to participate in it then they would not be voluntarily self-determining their lives and so an anarchist society would not have been created. There is, in other words, an incompatibility between the means of coercing people into a particular kind of society and the ends of a self-determining society. The consequence of this view was that there could be no social revolution unless the majority of the population actively supported and participated in it. If the majority of the population during a revolutionary situation were, despite the best efforts of anarchists, in favour of creating a new capitalist government, rather than abolishing capitalism and the state, then there simply would be no social revolution for the time being.

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<sup>82</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 179.

<sup>83</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 420, 426. See also Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 46-7.

For anarchists, means and ends were not only inter-connected in so far as the means you engage in determine the ends you arrive at. They were also identical in the narrow sense that both the means and the ends of anarchism are freedom. This position was explicitly advocated by Fabbri who wrote that “the libertarian notion of revolution” holds that “freedom is also a means as well as an end”.<sup>85</sup> Anarchist actions, in other words, simultaneously create freedom and are instances of freedom at the same time. This can be seen by connecting the anarchist conceptions of freedom discussed in Chapter 3 to revolutionary practice. When the working classes collectively struggle against the ruling classes, they are not only fighting for a distant post-capitalist society in which humanity will finally be free. They are also rejecting domination in the present by choosing to act in accordance with their own wills, rather than obeying the wills of their masters and remaining subservient. When the working classes create organisations and social relations in which they non-hierarchically relate to one another, they are both struggling for a future free society and creating a freer society in the here and now by expanding their real-possibilities to experience a different kind of life and become a different kind of person. When the working classes either engage in collective struggles or participate in horizontal social structures they are, in turn, developing themselves and so becoming more free than they were before.

Such a view was not inconsistent with the fact that the majority of anarchists thought violence was necessary to overthrow the ruling classes and defend the social revolution from counterattack. This is because using violence to abolish the power of violent oppressors is not a negation of freedom but rather an affirmation or defence of it. As Malatesta wrote, “in order to fight our enemies, and fight effectively, we do not need to deny the principle of freedom” since a commitment to freedom entails “the right to resist any violation of freedom, and to use

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<sup>85</sup> Fabbri, *Revolution and Dictatorship: On One Anarchist Who Has Forgotten his Principles* (1921), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-revolution-and-dictatorship>. See also Berkman, *Anarchism*, 136; Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 3, 143.

brute force to resist, when violence is based upon brute force and there is no better way to successfully oppose it". Given this, anarchists wish to use violence to expropriate the economic ruling classes "not because freedom is a good thing for the future, but because it is always good, today as much as tomorrow, and the owners deprive us of it by depriving us of the means of exercising it". Anarchists likewise wish to use violence to overthrow the political ruling classes "because governments are the negation of freedom and we cannot be free without having overthrown them".<sup>86</sup>

#### **4.4 – Prefiguration**

The anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends led them to argue that working class social movements should establish horizontal social relations which are, as far as is possible, the same as those that would constitute an anarchist society. In so doing workers would not only attempt to construct the world as they wish it was during their struggle against the world as it is. They would also (a) develop into the kinds of individuals who were both capable of and driven to produce and reproduce an anarchist society and (b) create through experimentation in the present the real methods of organisation and association that people in the future could use to achieve the states of affairs that characterise an anarchist society. Kropotkin, for example, argued in 1913 that anarchists "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 . . . and how these might emerge in a liberated society".<sup>87</sup>

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this idea was labelled as prefiguration or prefigurative politics, although the term was not used by anarchists historically.<sup>88</sup> Anarchist

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<sup>86</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 147-8.

<sup>87</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 200.

<sup>88</sup> For the first uses of these terms see: Carl Boggs, "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism and the Problem of Workers' Control", *Radical America* 11 (1977), 99-122; Wini Breines, "Community and Organisation: The

organisations generally prefigured the future anarchist society in two ways. Firstly, by embodying the kinds of organisational structure and methods of deliberation and decision-making that a future society would contain. For example, making decisions within general assemblies in which everyone has a vote or creating affinity groups which are formed for specific purposes and dissolve when they are no longer needed. Secondly, by performing the kinds of functions that organisations in a future society will carry out, such as a community assembly enabling locals to run their own affairs, an anarchist school providing education to children and adult workers, or a co-op self-managing a workplace. Although a social revolution would mark a dramatic shift in social life, there would be no such dramatic shift in anarchist methods of organisation and association. The methods would remain the same. What would change is the context and the conditions under which these methods are applied and so the extent to which they can be fully put into practice.

Given this, anarchist organisations built under class society had a dual function. In the present they brought people together in order to directly satisfy unmet drives and struggle effectively against capitalism and the state. Through participating in anarchist organisations workers simultaneously attempt to achieve concrete goals and develop radical capacities, such as being able to make decisions within general assemblies, federate with other groups, co-ordinate action on a large scale, act for themselves through their own direct action and so on. At the same time, they acquire radical drives and consciousness, such as the desire to always have a say in decisions which affect them, the aspiration for a society inspired by the free way of life they experience within the organisation, and the theoretical knowledge of why capitalism and the state should be overthrown.

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New Left and Michels' "Iron Law"', *Social Problems* 27, no. 4 (1980), 419-29. For a broad overview of prefigurative politics see Raekstad and Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics*.

During a revolutionary period, anarchist organisations would take on a new role and either serve as the inspiration for how the emerging anarchist society would be organised or would themselves be converted from organisations which resisted and struggled against class society into organisations which ran a classless society. At such a point they would not only be the dominant structures through which society was generally organised. They would also continually produce and reproduce individuals who want to and are able to self-determine their lives within a community of equals bonded together through relations of solidarity.<sup>89</sup>

The strategy of prefiguration was not original or exclusive to the anarchist movement. From the 1840s onwards a tendency within the French socialist movement, which included Proudhon, had proposed the formation of workers' co-operatives as organisations which would grow in number under capitalism until they displaced capitalist firms and became the nodes of a socialist society.<sup>90</sup> During debates within the 1<sup>st</sup> International, this idea was extended to the 1<sup>st</sup> International itself, including the trade unions affiliated to it. The Belgian Internationalist César De Paepe, who was a collectivist but not an anarchist, proposed in his February 1869 article *The Present Institutions of the International in Relation to the Future* that “the International already offers the model of the society to come and . . . its various institutions, with the required modifications, will form the future social order”. For De Paepe, “the International contains within itself the seeds of all the institutions of the future. Let a section of the International be established in each commune; the new society will be formed and the old will collapse with a sigh”.<sup>91</sup> The influence these ideas had on the developing anarchist

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<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that some anarchists rejected this idea. Max Nettlau argued that anarchist organisations built in the present should not be viewed as the embryo of the future society because we should not “permit the present to mortgage or lay its hands upon the future” and we “have no real knowledge of the nature of society of the future, which, like life itself, will have to remain ‘without adjectives’”. See Nettlau, *Short History of Anarchism*, 196, 208, 282.

<sup>90</sup> Moss, *Socialism of Skilled Workers*, 34-6, 69.

<sup>91</sup> César De Paepe, “The Present Institutions of the International in Relation to the Future (1869)”, <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/2018/03/24/the-present-institutions-of-the-international-in-relation-to-the-future-1869/>. For an overview of his life and ideas see William Whitham, “César De Paepe and the Ideas of the First International”, *Modern Intellectual History* 16, no. 3 (2019), 897-925.

movement can be seen in the fact that the article was republished in April 1869 in *Le Progrès*, which was edited by Guillaume, and in May 1869 by the official organ of the Romance Federation of the 1<sup>st</sup> International, *Nø i*, which Bakunin wrote for and edited at the time.<sup>92</sup>

One of the earliest anarchist endorsements of prefigurative politics occurred when on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1871, the Jura Federation published the Sonvillier Circular in response to Marx, Engels and their supporters converting the General Council of the 1<sup>st</sup> International, which was supposed to perform only an administrative role, into a governing body which imposed decisions and policies on the organisation's previously autonomous sections.<sup>93</sup> As part of their critique of the actions of the General Council the Jura Federation stated that,

The society of the future should be nothing other than the universalisation of the organisation with which the International will have endowed itself. We must, therefore, have a care to ensure that that organisation comes as close as we may to our ideal. How can we expect an egalitarian and free society to emerge from an authoritarian organisation? Impossible. The International, as the embryo of the human society of the future, is required in the here and now to faithfully mirror our principles of freedom and federation and shun any principle leaning towards authority and dictatorship.<sup>94</sup>

For anarchists, as the Sonvillier Circular illustrates, building prefigurative organisations was essential because there is a connection between the means used to achieve the future society and the ends of the kind of society that would in fact be created. The consequence of this is that anarchist ends could only be achieved by anarchist means. As Bakunin wrote, a few months

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<sup>92</sup> Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 109; Eckhardt, *First Socialist Schism*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> For the context of the Sonvillier Circular see Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 167-175; Eckhardt, *First Socialist Schism*, 85-120.

<sup>94</sup> The Jura Federation, "The Sonvillier Circular (1871)" in *A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, 97-8. For Marx and Engels response in which they reject this position see Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, 64-70.



after the Sonvillier Circular was published, “the fashion and form of one’s organisation arises from and flows as a consequence from the nature of one’s aims”.<sup>95</sup> Kropotkin likewise argued in 1873 that revolutionaries must reject social relations within “the revolutionary organisation” which “directly contradict the ideal for the sake of which” the organisation has been formed, such as “a hierarchy of ranks which enslaves many people to one or several persons” or “inequality in the interrelations of the members of one and the same organisation”.<sup>96</sup>

This was important because, as Malatesta explained, “the abolition of government and capitalism is feasible only once the people, organising themselves, are equipped to perform those social functions performed today – and exploited to their own advantage – by rulers and capitalists”.<sup>97</sup> To this end anarchists, such as Goldman, proposed that workers in the present attempt, as much as was possible, “to prepare and equip themselves for the great task the revolution will put upon them” by acquiring “the knowledge and technical skill necessary for managing and directing the intricate mechanisms of the industrial and social structure of their respective countries”.<sup>98</sup> Anarchist organisations which prefigured the future anarchist society were the concrete means through which workers would learn to self-manage their lives and thereby become equipped to create a self-managed society. As Mella wrote in 1911,

The proletariat continues acquiring the capacity for cooperation and management precisely outside of political action. In workers’ associations, especially in those where political practices do not govern, workers are gaining the power of initiative, management practices, habits of freedom and direct intervention in common affairs, ease of expression and mental assurance, all things whose development is void in political entities that have as a base the delegation of powers, and, therefore, the

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<sup>95</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 180-1. See also Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 139.

<sup>96</sup> Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings*, 41.

<sup>97</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 20.

<sup>98</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 397.

subordination and discipline, and obedience to the elected. In social associations, initiatives come from below and from below come ideas, strength, and action. In this way, free men are made and are released to walk.<sup>99</sup>

Decades later in 1932 the Spanish anarchist Isaac Puente argued that just as a child learns to walk or ride a bicycle through trying and failing until they succeed, so too would workers learn to produce and reproduce an anarchist society through experiments in horizontal forms of association. He wrote,

Living in libertarian communism will be like learning to live. Its weak points and its failings will be shown up when it is introduced. If we were politicians we would paint a paradise brimful of perfections. Being human and being aware what human nature can be like, we trust that people will learn to walk the only way it is possible for them to learn: by walking.<sup>100</sup>

Anarchists argued with one another about what prefigurative organisations should be built and how these organisations should be structured. Anti-organisationalists advocated small affinity groups and informal social networks, whilst organisationalists advocated, in addition to this, large formal federations, such as trade unions. Some anarchists advocated forming intentional communities and workers' co-operatives, whilst other anarchists rejected this strategy.<sup>101</sup> One main area where anarchists generally agreed was on the need to construct emancipatory schools. This can be seen in the fact that both insurrectionist and mass anarchists founded or participated in schools in at least Spain, Italy, France, England and the United States. These

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<sup>99</sup> Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 91.

<sup>100</sup> Isaac Puente, *Libertarian Communism* (1932), <https://libcom.org/library/libertarian-communism>.

<sup>101</sup> Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 153; Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 358-60; Fleming, *Anarchist Way*, 129-30. For examples of anarchist co-operatives and intentional communities see Andrew Cornell, *Unruly Equality: US Anarchism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 96-100, 129-33; John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of British Anarchists* (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1978), 224-31.

schools lasted for varying lengths of time, ranging from one or two years to over four decades in the case of the Modern School of New York which opened in 1911, relocated to Stelton, New Jersey in 1915 and finally closed in 1953.<sup>102</sup>

The goal of these schools was not only to educate children and adults, but also to in so doing contribute towards fundamental social change. In 1898 a number of prominent anarchists, including Louise Michel, Reclus, Grave and Kropotkin, signed an article published in *Les Temps Nouveaux* which advocated the creation of anarchist schools. This strategy was justified on the grounds that “education is a powerful means of disseminating and infiltrating minds with generous ideas” and so could become “the most active motor of progress” which acts as “the lever that will lift up the world and will overthrow error, lies and injustice forever.”<sup>103</sup>

One of the most influential anarchist educationalists was Francisco Ferrer, who established a Modern School that taught pupils in Barcelona between 1901 and 1906. He advocated “the establishment of new schools in which, as far as possible, there shall rule this spirit of liberty that we feel will dominate the whole education of the future”.<sup>104</sup> Ferrer did not think that teachers would be able to establish a fully emancipatory school overnight. He instead argued that teachers should engage in pedagogical experiments which demonstrated through a process of trial and error what approaches to education enabled children to develop themselves and become adults who could think independently and horizontally associate with others.<sup>105</sup> Ferrer’s experiments in pedagogy were abruptly ended on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1909 when he was executed by the Spanish government for a crime he had not committed: orchestrating a week

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<sup>102</sup> Avrich, *Modern School*, 50-1, 261-4; Bantman, *French Anarchists in London*, 90-1; Fausto Buttà, *Living Like Nomads: The Milanese Anarchist Movement Before Fascism* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 120-9; Hoyt, “The Rise of Cronca Sovversiva”, 102-20.

<sup>103</sup> Ardouin et al, “Liberty Through Education: The Libertarian School”, *Les Temps Nouveau* (1898), trans. Shawn P. Wilbur, <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/working-translations/liberty-through-education-1898/>.

<sup>104</sup> Francisco Ferrer, *Anarchist Education and the Modern School: A Francisco Ferrer Reader*, ed. Mark Bray and Robert H. Haworth (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019), 86. See also *ibid*, 50-1.

<sup>105</sup> Ferrer, *Anarchist Education*, 85-93. Anarchists disagreed on whether or not schools run by anarchists should teach anarchist ideas. See *ibid*, 188-206; Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 185-201.

long working class insurrection against army reservists being called up to fight in Morocco. His martyrdom led him to become an internationally known figure and inspired the creation of emancipatory schools around the world.<sup>106</sup>

The theory and practice of anarchist prefigurative politics was largely concerned with the formation and structure of organisations and did not give sufficient attention to interpersonal relations between people in daily life, especially men and women. In the United States, for example, anarchists only shifted to focusing on prefiguration in daily life in the 1940s after anarchism had ceased to exist as a mass movement in the country.<sup>107</sup> This is not to say that anarchists prior to this did not think it was important to act like an anarchist in daily life. Reclus insisted in 1905 that “[i]t is above all within the family, in man’s daily relationships with those close to him, that one can best judge him.”<sup>108</sup> Nor is it to say that anarchists in this period never explicitly advocated some forms of prefiguration in daily life. In 1907 the Italian anarchist Camillo Di Sciullo argued that anarchists should “[b]uild a little anarchist world within your family”.<sup>109</sup>

The main form of prefiguration in daily life anarchists advocated was free love in the sense of a voluntary sexual relationship between equals which occurred outside of marriage. These relationships were mostly monogamous, although a few anarchists did advocate and practice polyamory. Notable examples of anarchists seriously attempting to engage in free love include the relationship between Rudolf Rocker and Milly Witkop and the relationship between Guy Aldred and Rose Witkop. In both cases Rocker and Aldred appear to have treated their partner in an egalitarian and anarchist manner. The evidence which is available unfortunately indicates that in the majority of other cases anarchist men did not build the gender and romantic relations

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<sup>106</sup> Avrich, *Modern School*, 29-31.

<sup>107</sup> Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 159-60, 163, 208-9.

<sup>108</sup> Reclus, *Anarchy*, 188.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 165.

of the future society within their own household. They instead treated women in a patriarchal manner, such as expecting their partner to become a mother who did the vast majority of housework and childcare. This, in turn, often led to anarchist women lacking the free time to properly participate within the anarchist movement.<sup>110</sup> In 1935 the Spanish anarchist Lola Iturbe complained that anarchist men “however radical they may be in cafés, unions and even affinity groups, seem to drop their costumes as lovers of female liberation at the doors of their homes. Inside, they behave with their compañeras just like common ‘husbands’”.<sup>111</sup>

A similar failure occurred in public organisations. The CNT, for example, was formally committed to the goal of a society in which men and women were free and equal, but this was generally not prefigured within the trade union’s day-to-day social relations. Soledad Estorach recalled in an interview that women would attend a meeting but not return due to experiences of sexism. Even trade union sections whose membership were mostly women were represented at congresses by men and only a few women spoke during a trade union’s local general assembly. Within the CNT’s Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth (FIJL) teenage boys would laugh at girls when they talked at meetings and would often even laugh before a girl had begun to speak.<sup>112</sup>

Women in both Europe and the United States responded to patriarchy within the anarchist movement by forming their own groups in order to enable women to more fully participate in the movement and struggle against patriarchal and class oppression simultaneously. An early example of this was the Women’s Emancipation Group, which was founded in 1897 by the Italian anarchists Maria Roda, Ninfa Baronio and Ernestina Cravello and had around fifteen

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<sup>110</sup> Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 46-52, 171-2; Goyens, *Beer*, 155-8, 185, 197-9; Mintz, *Casas Viejas*, 91-9; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 44-6; Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 154, 156, 171-2; Ginger Frost, “Love is Always Free: Anarchism, Free Unions and Utopianism in Edwardian England”, *Anarchist Studies* 17, no. 1 (2009), 73-94.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 115.

<sup>112</sup> Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 77, 87, 103, 115-20.

members. The group, which was based in Paterson, New Jersey, held regular meetings over seven years, printed and distributed feminist literature, and inspired other anarchist women to form their own groups, such as the Women's Propaganda Group in Manhattan.<sup>113</sup> Anarchist women in Spain similarly formed their own groups in the 1920s. These grew in number until they were formally linked together via the establishment of the national federation *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) in 1937 during the Spanish revolution. The organisation's significance can be seen in the fact that it mobilised over 20,000 women.<sup>114</sup>

One of *Mujeres Libres*' most important contributions was that they took anarchist ideas on prefiguration and applied them to the emancipation of women. Anarchists had claimed since the late 1860s that workers should build organisations which used the same structure and decision-making procedures as an anarchist society because through participating in them workers learned how to self-manage their lives and thereby how to create a self-managed society. *Mujeres Libres* developed this theory by arguing that enabling women to transform themselves into people capable of, and driven to, establish an anarchist society was not simply a matter of creating organisations which co-ordinated action via federations or made decisions via general assemblies. This is because one of the main barriers to women developing themselves through revolutionary practice was sexist treatment by men and women's own internalisation of patriarchal norms.

In October 1938 *Mujeres Libres* explained that one of the main goals of the organisation was "to empower women to make of them individuals capable of contributing to the structuring of the future society, individuals who have learned to be self-determining".<sup>115</sup> To achieve this *Mujeres Libres* organised educational programs specifically for women. These taught not only

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<sup>113</sup> Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 156, 159-60, 162-3.

<sup>114</sup> Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 21, 120-37.

<sup>115</sup> Quoted in Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 148.

basic skills, such as reading and writing, but also courses on “social formation” which focused on how women were capable of developing themselves and had to learn to take initiative and act independently of the men in their lives. Members of *Mujeres Libres* spread these ideas to the countryside during educational trips where they gave talks to other women. During these talks they explained that mothers could be anarchist militants, that men oppressed women, and that women should act themselves to stop this from occurring.<sup>116</sup> In so doing they were attempting to build the gender relations of anarchy during the struggle against capitalism and the state and the formation of an anarchist society, rather than waiting till after the revolution for their emancipation.

#### **4.5 – Direct Action**

The primary means by which the working classes would simultaneously transform themselves and the social world was direct action. Individuals or groups of people engage in direct action when they act themselves to bring about social change, rather than relying upon intermediaries or representatives to act on their behalf. Direct action, to quote Rocker, encompasses “every method of immediate warfare by the workers against their economic and political oppressors”. By “immediate warfare” Rocker meant actions such as strikes, boycotts, industrial sabotage, distributing anti-militarist propaganda and, in certain circumstances, the “armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty”.<sup>117</sup> Direct action thus included actions which contributed towards both evolutionary and revolutionary change. The social revolution was in a sense the ultimate form of direct action.

Anarchists initially did not use the term ‘direct action’ but instead used a variety of equivalent phrases. Bakunin wrote in 1871 that key participants in the Paris Commune were convinced

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<sup>116</sup> Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 151-4.

<sup>117</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 78.

that the social revolution must be achieved through “the action of the people themselves”, rather than by a political ruling class acting on their behalf.<sup>118</sup> A decade later Kropotkin declared that the “broad masses” aim “to wage war directly on the boss”.<sup>119</sup> It is difficult to trace, using texts which have been translated into English, when the term ‘direct action’ was first adopted by the anarchist movement. One early example is Malatesta’s claim in his article *Matters Revolutionary*, which was published in *La Révolte* on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1890, that anarchists want society to be reorganised “through [the] direct action of the people and without delegation of authority”.<sup>120</sup>

The term ‘direct action’ appears to have become commonly used due to the emergence and growth of revolutionary syndicalism as a social movement in France between the 1890s and the early 1900s. During this period, revolutionary syndicalists, many of whom were anarchists, consistently advocated and engaged in what they termed ‘direct action’. This phrase was initially used to refer to when workers drew on their own strength to personally struggle against capitalism and thereby achieve their own liberation through their own actions.<sup>121</sup> This perspective can be seen in Emile Pouget’s appropriately titled 1907 pamphlet *Direct Action*. According to Pouget, who was both an anarchist and a revolutionary syndicalist, direct action meant that “the working class . . . expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its methodology. It means that from now on the producer . . . means to mount a direct attack upon the capitalist mode of production in order to transform it by eliminating the employer and thereby achieving sovereignty in the workshop”. For Pouget direct action, so understood, was “merely trade union action . . . without capitalist compromises, without the flirtation with the bosses of which the

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<sup>118</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 203.

<sup>119</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 298.

<sup>120</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 105.

<sup>121</sup> Vadim Damier, *Anarcho-Syndicalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009) 13-5, 23-4.



sycophants of 'social peace' dream . . . [and] without friends in the government and with no 'go-betweens' horning in on the debate".<sup>122</sup>

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the term 'direct action' had become a staple of anarchist parlance and was used in a much broader sense than can be found in early revolutionary syndicalist texts. This trend can be seen in Goldman's 1910 argument that,

Direct action, having proven effective along economic lines, is equally potent in the environment of the individual. There a hundred forces encroach upon his being, and only persistent resistance to them will finally set him free. Direct action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism.<sup>123</sup>

This broader notion of direct action was shared by de Cleyre. During a 1912 lecture in Chicago she said that, "[e]very person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist."<sup>124</sup> Equipped with this more expansive definition of direct action de Cleyre illustrated the idea by referring not only to the actions of unionised workers. She, in addition to this, pointed to the example of abolitionists who helped slaves escape their owners through the underground railroad and John Brown who killed supporters of slavery and attempted to free and arm slaves through the seizure of the federal armoury at Harpers Ferry.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Emile Pouget, *Direct Action* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2003), 1, 3.

<sup>123</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 76-7. A few years later in her 1913 pamphlet *Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice* Goldman used the term 'direct action' in its original narrow syndicalist sense. See *ibid*, 94.

<sup>124</sup> de Cleyre, *Reader*, 48.

<sup>125</sup> de Cleyre, *Reader*, 52-5.

Anarchists themselves engaged in a wide variety of different forms of direct action at both a small and large scale. To give a few of the more exciting small-scale examples, anarchists in Paris organised a socialist removal service which would, under the cover of night, move the possessions of poor families from their apartment before they had paid rent. On at least one occasion anarchists gagged, tied up and left a landlord or concierge on his bed in order to achieve this.<sup>126</sup> The French anarchist May Picqueray and her friend Thérèse would covertly insert anarchist flyers in the belts of the police whilst they walked from the prefecture to board the crowded Metro.<sup>127</sup> In 1900 anarchists unsuccessfully attempted to free Berkman from prison by digging an underground tunnel through which he could escape.<sup>128</sup> Almost two decades later in 1919 nearly 150 anarchists, who were mostly women, rioted at the docks in Lower Manhattan. This occurred in response to their family members and loved ones being arrested and deported to Russia for being anarchists.<sup>129</sup>

Several examples of anarchist direct action involved guns. Anarchists in the Russian empire defended Jews against the 1906 pogroms by organising mobile defence units armed with pistols and bombs.<sup>130</sup> Spanish anarchists provided armed escorts to groups of working-class women who seized food from shops.<sup>131</sup> In 1902 Galleani led a march of between 1500 and 2000 striking dyers into Paterson, New Jersey which proceeded to break the windows and doors of several dye works in order to drive out scabs and to close down production. This soon escalated into an extended gun battle with the police during which Galleani received a minor gunshot wound to the face.<sup>132</sup> The Italian anarchist Augusto Masetti was conscripted into the army in order to

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<sup>126</sup> John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-Siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 55.

<sup>127</sup> May Picqueray, *My Eighty-One Years of Anarchy: A Memoir* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019), 35.

<sup>128</sup> Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 127-32; Goldman, *Living My Life Volume 1* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 246-9, 257-8, 275-7.

<sup>129</sup> Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 71-4.

<sup>130</sup> Maurizio Antonioli, ed. *The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam (1907)* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009), 164.

<sup>131</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 36.

<sup>132</sup> Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 77; Senta, *Galleani*, 98-9, 106-111.

fight in Libya. In response, on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1911, he shot at his commanding officer Colonel Stroppa whilst shouting “Long Live Anarchy! Down with the war!”.<sup>133</sup> In September 1923, the Spanish anarchist affinity group Los Solidarios, which included Buenaventura Durruti, stole 650,000 pesetas from the Gijón branch of the Bank of Spain in order to buy weapons for a planned, but never carried out, insurrectionary general strike.<sup>134</sup>

Anarchists advocated direct action not only because it was an effective means for achieving social change but also because it positively transformed those who engaged in it. According to the Austrian anarchist Siegfried Nacht the working classes would “educate themselves” through “action” and thereby acquire “a revolutionary mentality” over time.<sup>135</sup> This viewpoint was expressed by Pouget in detail. He held that, “direct action has an unmatched educational value” since it “teaches people to reflect, to make decisions and act” themselves, rather than following orders from above. It instils in people “the spirit of initiative” and so “releases the human being from the strangle-hold of passivity and listlessness” and “teaches him will-power, instead of mere obedience, and to embrace his sovereignty instead of conferring his part upon a deputy”.<sup>136</sup>

Such a transformation in people was essential for the achievement of anarchist goals because both the overthrow of class society and the construction of an anarchist society required the working classes to learn to act for themselves and collectively self-organise and self-determine their lives. This viewpoint was grounded in the theory that there is a connection between means and ends. For Kropotkin, the anarchist vision of a future society “necessarily leads us to develop for the struggle our own tactics, which consist in developing the greatest possible amount of individual initiative in each group and in each individual – unity in action being

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<sup>133</sup> Buttà, *Living Like Nomads*, 161.

<sup>134</sup> Abel Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), 49-54.

<sup>135</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 92.

<sup>136</sup> Pouget, *Direct Action*, 5.

obtained by unity of purpose and by the force of persuasion”.<sup>137</sup> The social revolution would, after all, only be successful if the working classes had already, to quote Pouget, “acquired the capacity and will” to transform society and overcome any difficulties that may arise during the revolution through their “own direct efforts” and the deployment of “the capabilities” that they themselves possessed. Direct action in the present laid the foundation for the social revolution by being a form of practice which produces people with the right kind of radical capacities, drives and consciousness for the task.<sup>138</sup> It was, as Galleani wrote, “the best available means for preparing the masses to manage their own personal and collective interests”.<sup>139</sup>

#### **4.6 – The Spirit of Revolt**

Anarchists believed that a social revolution would develop out of previous evolutionary change. This evolutionary change was not limited to spreading anarchist ideas through newspapers, pamphlets, books, talks and so on. They, in addition to this, advocated forms of direct action which were acts of revolt. In 1889 Malatesta wrote that, “the great revolution . . . will come as the result of relentless propaganda and an exceptional number of individual and collective revolts”.<sup>140</sup> In writing this Malatesta was not simply making a prediction that revolts would culminate in a social revolution. He was also arguing that revolts are a necessary aspect of the process of social change due to the manner in which they transform workers who participate in them or observe them from a distance. He held that “revolts play a huge part in bringing the revolution about and laying its ground-work” because they are a form of practice which develops people’s capacities, drives and consciousness in a radical direction and thereby makes them open to adopting anarchist views or at least coming to act like anarchists.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 189.

<sup>138</sup> Pouget, *Direct Action*, 7, 20.

<sup>139</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 32.

<sup>140</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 83.

<sup>141</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 90-1.

The working classes, who were “brutalized by exhausting toil; rendered anaemic by inadequate and unwholesome food; educated down through the ages in respect for priest, boss, and ruler; forever absorbed in the quest for their daily bread; superstitious; ignorant; fearful”, could not be expected to “one fine day perform an about face and emerge from their hovels, turn their backs on their entire past of patient submission, tear down the social institutions oppressing them and turn the world into a society made up of equals and brothers”. Given this, the working classes would only launch a social revolution if “a long string of extraordinary events forced their brains to think”. These events would include “a thousand revolts” which “taught them the art of people's warfare” and “nurtured” within them “the spirit of rebellion”, “an appreciation of their own strength”, “a feeling of solidarity towards their fellow oppressed” and a “hatred for the oppressor”.<sup>142</sup>

The notion that collective struggle would nurture the ‘spirit of rebellion’ within the working classes had previously been expressed by Kropotkin in depth through his idea of the spirit of revolt. He first articulated this theory in the 1881 *Le Révolté* articles *The Spirit of Revolt* and *Revolutionary Minorities*. These articles would go on to feature in his 1885 collection of essays *Words of a Rebel*.<sup>143</sup> For Kropotkin, a revolutionary situation could be transformed into a full-blown revolution through radical minorities engaging in direct action, both collectively and as individuals, which spread discontent with the existing social system, hatred of the ruling classes and reawakened “audacity, the spirit of revolt, through preaching by example”. Their acts would receive sympathy and support from workers who were not yet engaging in revolutionary action and thereby “find imitators”, such that as the first minorities were being imprisoned, “others will appear to continue their work” and “the acts of illegal protest, of revolt, of revenge,

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<sup>142</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 90-1.

<sup>143</sup> The subsequent quotes are from Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 70-5, 183-99. This phrase continued to be used by Kropotkin over several decades. See Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 140, 200, 348, 374; *The Great French Revolution*, 18-19; *Modern Science*, 190, 194.

will continue and multiply”. This would occur due to a combination of (a) revolutionary ideas spreading among previously indifferent workers who were now forced to pick a side in the on-going class conflict, (b) workers joining the on-going insurgency because its successes demonstrate the real possibility of overthrowing the ruling classes who had previously seemed invincible and (c) a vicious cycle of state repression angering the working classes and provoking more and more acts of revolt. Over time these acts of revolt would spread and grow in both size and number until a full-blown social revolution had broken out.

Kropotkin held that a wide range of different forms of activity would spread the spirit of revolt. This can be seen in his discussion of how the French revolution of 1789 emerged due to revolutionary minorities intervening within a revolutionary situation. In urban areas this included popularising radical ideas through pamphlets, leaflets, posters, and songs and organising protests where orators spoke, effigies of the ruling classes were burnt, and the police were attacked if they attempted to break up the demonstration. Over time this developed the militancy and daring of the masses until demonstrations transformed into riots and riots into a revolution.

Kropotkin described a similar pattern occurring in the countryside. According to Kropotkin, “[d]uring the whole year of 1788 there were only half-hearted riots among the peasantry. Like the small and hesitant strikes of today, they broke out here and there across France, but gradually they spread, became more broad and bitter, more difficult to suppress”. By 1789 the mass of peasantry had risen up to overthrow the ruling classes. They did so because they “saw that the government no longer had the strength to resist a rebellion” after “[a] few brave men set fire to the first chateaux, while the mass of people, still full of fear, waited until the flames from the conflagration of the great houses rose over the hills towards the clouds”.

The actions of these revolutionary minorities were the catalyst for a chain reaction of uprisings in which “revolt spread from village to village, and overnight half of France was on fire”. The revolution “became impossible to control” because “[i]t had broken out almost simultaneously in a thousand places; in each village, in each town, in each city of the insurgent provinces”. In each case “the revolutionary minorities, strong in their audacity and in the unspoken support they recognised in the aspirations of the people, marched to the conquest of the castles, of the town halls and finally of the Bastille, terrorising the aristocracy and the upper middle class, abolishing privileges. The minority started the revolution and carried the people with it”.

Kropotkin thought it would “be just the same with the revolution whose approach we foresee.” He predicted 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.” This would be achieved by “anarchist groups” spreading throughout the populace in order to “raise the red flag of the revolution.” Such collective struggles would culminate in a “revolution, breaking out simultaneously in a thousand places” which would “burn on until” capitalism and the state had been overthrown. During this process “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.”

#### **4.7 – Conclusion**

Anarchists were not naïve and did not expect social change to occur easily. They understood that it took dedicated struggle and that in order for this struggle to be effective it had to be guided by revolutionary theory. To this end, the authors of anarchism developed an overarching strategy for achieving an anarchist society that was grounded in the theory of practice. It consisted of advocating the simultaneous abolition of capitalism and the state through an armed insurrection during which the working classes overthrew the state, forcefully

expropriated the economic ruling classes, and established both workplace and community assemblies and workers' militias. These assemblies and workers' militias would co-ordinate action over a large area through, depending upon the kind of anarchist, either formal federations and informal social networks or only informal social networks. Anarchists did not expect this social revolution to appear out of nowhere and instead held that it would be a product of an extended evolutionary period. During this evolutionary period a significant portion of the working classes would, given the theory of practice, be transformed into the right kinds of people for overthrowing class society and establishing and reproducing an anarchist society through their experiences of participating in prefigurative social structures and engaging in class struggle through direct action. In advocating this strategy, anarchists were committing themselves to views which were distinct from the strategies advocated by state socialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The anarchist critique of these state socialist strategies will be rationally reconstructed in the next chapter.



## Chapter 5 – The Anarchist Critique of State Socialism

Anarchists rejected the strategy of attempting to abolish capitalism through the seizure of state power. This applied both to socialists who sought to conquer state power via parliamentary politics and elections, and those who proposed armed struggle, insurrections, or coups as the means to win state power. The anarchist critique of state socialism is routinely discussed, or at least briefly mentioned, in overviews of anarchism.<sup>1</sup> My rational reconstruction will expand upon this previous work by demonstrating in detail that anarchists did not reject state socialist strategies due to abstract arguments about morality, which ignore the harsh facts of real politics. They instead did so for fundamentally strategic reasons. Anarchists argued that, given the theory of practice, the means of seizing state power could never achieve the ends of creating an anarchist society. Such a goal could only be achieved through the unity of anarchist means with anarchist ends. In this chapter I shall first rationally reconstruct the general anarchist critique of parliamentarism and attempting to establish a workers' state. I shall then demonstrate that anarchists did not reject or ignore political struggle as is commonly claimed by Marxists.

### 5.1 – The Anarchist Critique of Seizing State Power

According to anarchists, state socialists argued that in order to achieve a stateless classless society (and so essentially an anarchist society) the working classes must first seize state power and use it to overthrow the capitalist class, reconstruct the economy along socialist lines and defend the revolution from counter-attack. The seizure of state power would be achieved by forming political parties which either won state power through parliamentary elections or took

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 54-6, 99-105, 109-111; Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 20-7; Joll, *Anarchists*, 108-10; Kinna, *The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism* (Pelican, 2019), 17-8, 26-7; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 24-8, 296-8, 644; Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 142.

state power via an armed insurrection. The reconstruction of the economy would take the form of private property being abolished in favour of state ownership of the means of production and land, production and distribution being organised through the state, and workers becoming employees of the state. Once the revolution had been successful and a classless society had been achieved the state would be disbanded. Anarchists and state socialists agreed on the ends of a stateless classless society but proposed different means to achieve it.<sup>2</sup>

Anarchists rejected the strategy of seizing state power via elections or armed insurrection because they held that the means of using state power was incompatible with the ends of achieving a stateless classless society. This rested on the theory of practice which led anarchists to conclude that, in Malatesta's words,

it is not enough to desire something; if one really wants it adequate means must be used to secure it. And these means are not arbitrary, but instead cannot but be conditioned by the ends we aspire to and by the circumstances in which the struggle takes place, for if we ignore the choice of means we would achieve other ends, possibly diametrically opposed to those we aspire to, and this would be the obvious and inevitable consequence of our choice of means. Whoever sets out on the highroad and takes a wrong turning does not go where he intends to go but where the road leads him.<sup>3</sup>

The anarchist application of the theory of practice to both participation in the state and participation in social movements that focus on attaining state power led them to conclude that state socialist strategies would fail to produce the kinds of individuals and social structures that are needed to achieve an anarchist society. Instead they would either fail to significantly transform society or, if successful, would produce what anarchists labelled state capitalism,

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<sup>2</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 91; *Modern Science*, 211, 220-1, 233.

<sup>3</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 46.

rather than the envisioned anarchist society in which the working classes were emancipated. I will first explain how anarchists applied the theory of practice to state socialist strategies and then, with this in place, discuss their predictions that these strategies would produce a state capitalist society.

The anarchist argument against seizing state power is sometimes reduced to the cliché that power corrupts.<sup>4</sup> Although this idea did form a component of the anarchist argument it was, as we shall see, much more complicated and intellectually sophisticated. Anarchists argued that since the state is a social structure like any other it follows that it is constituted by specific sets of activities and social relations which produce and reproduce particular kinds of people. The state is, by its very nature, a hierarchical institution in which a political ruling class monopolises decision-making power and determines the lives of the majority of the population. This ensures that those who wield state power necessarily engage in rulership and therefore, irrespective of their intentions, become oppressors of the working classes concerned with protecting and expanding their power over others. According to Malatesta, “the government is the aggregate of the governors” who “have the power to make laws, to regulate relations between men, and to force obedience to these laws”.<sup>5</sup> From this it follows that,

A government . . . already constitutes a class privileged and separated from the rest of the community. Such a class, like every elected body, will seek instinctively to enlarge its powers; to place itself above the control of the people; to impose its tendencies, and to make its own interests predominate. Placed in a privileged position, the government always finds itself in antagonism to the masses, of whose forces it disposes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Fleming, *Anarchist Way*, 263-4; Paul Blackledge, “Freedom and Democracy: Marxism, Anarchism and the Problem of Human Nature”, in *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red*, ed. Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta and David Berry (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 113,

<sup>6</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 130.

Those who exercised state power would not only become oppressors. They would also undergo a corresponding transformation to their drives and consciousness. Reclus argued that the state is,

a collection of individuals placed in a specific milieu and subjected to its influence. Those individuals are raised up above their fellow citizens in dignity, power, and preferential treatment, and are consequently compelled to think themselves superior to the common people. Yet in reality the multitude of temptations besetting them almost inevitably leads them to fall below the general level.<sup>7</sup>

In short, to quote Bakunin, the “habit of commanding” and “the exercise of power” instil in people both “contempt for the masses, and, for the man in power, an exaggerated sense of his own worth”.<sup>8</sup>

### **5.1.1 – Parliamentarism**

This theory had clear implications for parliamentarism. State socialists were wrong to think that they could enter the existing capitalist state, transform it from within and use it as a tool to build socialism. The capitalist state, which is a hierarchical institution that perpetuates the power of the economic and political ruling classes, would transform them. Bakunin predicted that once idealistic reformers from affluent backgrounds “enter state services . . . the iron logic of their position, the force of circumstances inherent in certain hierarchical and profitable political relationships, makes itself felt and the young patriots become bureaucrats from head to toe”.<sup>9</sup> Working-class politicians would likewise be “transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into a political atmosphere of wholly bourgeois political ideas” and as a result

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<sup>7</sup> Reclus, *Anarchy*, 122.

<sup>8</sup> Bakunin, *on Anarchism*, 145. This claim was repeated by anarchists again and again. For other examples see Berkman, *Anarchism*, 43, 95; Malatesta, *Café*, 148-9.

<sup>9</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 52.

“cease to be actual workers” and become “statesmen” who are “bourgeois, and perhaps more bourgeois than the bourgeoisie”.<sup>10</sup>

This position was shared by Malatesta, who argued that socialists would be “tamed” by their participation in the state and become “collaborators, and supporters of the prevailing order”.<sup>11</sup>

Reclus thought this would occur irrespective of their initial good intentions. He argued that “socialist leaders who, finding themselves caught up in the electoral machine end up being gradually transformed into nothing more than bourgeois with liberal ideas. They have placed themselves in determinate conditions that in turn determine them”.<sup>12</sup>

Socialist politicians would be transformed not only by the corrupting effects of wielding state power but also by the compromises that parliamentary politics forced them to make. In order to win elections, at both a local and national level, they had to secure as many votes as possible by appealing to as many people as possible, including non-socialists who would otherwise vote for republican or liberal political parties. The need to appeal to as many voters as possible would force socialist politicians to (a) reduce their political programme to very minor reforms to capitalist society and (b) oppose workers within the party, or affiliated trade unions, engaging in militant direct action because an election was near, and revolt might scare voters away. Socialist parties would, in addition, have to form alliances with bourgeois political parties in order to form coalition governments or successfully pass reform laws in parliament. These alliances would, in turn, require them to dilute their political programme even more until they were socialist in name only.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 149-50.

<sup>12</sup> Reclus, *Anarchy*, 147. For other examples of anarchists making this point about the effects of participating in a social structure on individuals see Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 14, 54; Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 124.

<sup>13</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 254, 260; Reclus, *Anarchy*, 145-7; Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 4, 12; Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 193.

For Bakunin, one of the most notable examples of the dangers of forming alliances with bourgeois political parties occurred when the Geneva section of the 1<sup>st</sup> International supported the 1872 electoral campaign of the lawyer Jean-Antoine Amberny, who was a member of both the 1<sup>st</sup> International and the bourgeois Radical Party. During his campaign he publicly promised fellow members of the bourgeoisie that the 1<sup>st</sup> international in Geneva would not engage in strikes that year and, in so doing, acted against the interests of local construction workers, who were at the time considering taking strike action in response to their employers reducing their wages. The leadership of the Geneva section chose to intervene on the side of Amberny and thereby sacrifice the direct struggle of workers themselves in order to protect the electability of a bourgeois candidate. This included unsuccessfully attempting to persuade construction workers to issue a declaration claiming that they were not planning to go on strike.<sup>14</sup> In response to these events Bakunin concluded that “whenever workers’ associations ally themselves with the politics of the bourgeoisie, they can only become, willingly or unwillingly, their instruments”.<sup>15</sup>

The problems with parliamentarianism were thus not limited to its negative effect on the movement’s leadership. The strategy had a dire effect on the socialist movement in general. It attracted, to quote Rocker, “bourgeois minds and career-hungry politicians into the Socialist camp” who, in turn, only accelerated the process by which parliamentarism transformed socialism into “an ordinary reform movement” that did not aim at the fundamental transformation of society by the workers themselves.<sup>16</sup> According to Malatesta, it not only ensured that “the most developed proletarian elements”, who were “the most active, able and popular people” within the socialist movement, would enter parliament and, as a result, be transformed “into a new privileged class” who developed an interest in maintaining the

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<sup>14</sup> Berthier, *Social Democracy and Anarchism*, 48-9; Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 259-60.

<sup>15</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 181.

<sup>16</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 55.

“subjection” of the working classes. They would also be separated from “the heart of the masses”, where they could do the most good as agitators, organisers or public speakers who inspired and helped workers to engage in direct action.<sup>17</sup>

Parallel to this the workers who composed the rank and file of the socialist movement would engage in forms of practice, such as voting in elections or campaigning for politicians, which instilled the wrong kinds of capacities, drives and consciousness within them. Rather than learning to self-organise and act for themselves through their own direct action, the working classes would instead learn to look to politicians to achieve their own emancipation and respond to injustices by putting their hopes in the next election.<sup>18</sup> Parliamentary politics, to quote Max Baginski, “degrades the proletariat, relegates it to the role of the patiently and passively waiting client who becomes a plaything, a guinea pig in the hands of the lawyers”.<sup>19</sup> The consequence of this is that the working classes become accustomed to trying to elevate party leaders into positions of power over them and so, in a revolutionary situation, are likely to establish a new political ruling class, rather than a classless society.<sup>20</sup>

Anarchists, in addition to this, rejected the claim that parliamentarism was a necessary or sufficient condition for winning immediate improvements within capitalism. Anarchists argued that workers could achieve immediate improvements through direct action alone. Even if socialist politicians were successfully elected and managed to pass laws in parliament which protected workers’ rights, it did not follow from this that the law would be enforced. As De Cleyre wrote in 1912, “[n]early all the laws which were originally framed with the intention of benefitting the workers, have either turned into weapons in their enemies’ hands, or become

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<sup>17</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 150, 153. See also Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 182.

<sup>18</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 4, 180-1; De Cleyre, *Reader*, 59-60.

<sup>19</sup> Baginski, *What Does Syndicalism Want*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 10, 44.

dead letters unless the workers through their organisations have directly enforced their observance. So that in the end, it is direct action that has to be relied on anyway.”<sup>21</sup>

Anarchists held that their critique of parliamentarism was confirmed by the history of state socialists in power.<sup>22</sup> To focus on a single country, in France the socialist Alexandre Millerand joined the bourgeois cabinet of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau in 1899 and became Minister of Commerce and Industry. He proceeded to attempt to establish compulsory arbitration in industrial disputes and thereby harm the ability of trade unions to engage in direct action. Pouget responded to this by labelling Millerand a “prisoner of capital” who “could not break the mould; he is only a cog in the machine of oppression and whether he wishes it or not he must, as minister, participate in the job of crushing the proletariat”.<sup>23</sup> Several years later in 1906 René Viviani, who had been a member of the Socialist Party, became Minister of Labour and under his watch nineteen workers were killed and an estimated 700 were injured due to state repression during strike action. This state repression included 40,000 soldiers being sent to police a miner’s strike in 1906 that had been launched in response to a mining accident which took the lives of 1,100 miners and was the worst of its time. In 1910 Aristide Briand, who had once been a socialist and an advocate of the general strike, joined Viviani in government as Minister of the Interior. He proceeded to defeat a French railway strike by arresting the strike committee and conscripting the railway workers into the army. In so doing he subjected any worker who refused to work to martial law and the potential punishment of execution for disobeying orders.<sup>24</sup> The anarchist prediction that state socialists who entered parliament would

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<sup>21</sup> De Cleyre, *Reader*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 93-102; Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 111-7.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Jeremy Jennings, *Syndicalism in France: A Study of Ideas* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990), 36.

<sup>24</sup> Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 36; F. F. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France: The Direct Action of its Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 58-61; Robert G. Neville “The Courrières Colliery Disaster, 1906”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 1 (1978), 33-52.



become fundamentally bourgeois and oppose the self-emancipation of the working classes was thus borne out by the bitter experience of class struggle.

### **5.1.2 – Workers’ State**

The anarchist critique of seizing state power was not limited to a critique of parliamentarism within the existing capitalist state. Anarchists went further and opposed the strategy of attempting to seize the existing capitalist state via elections or armed insurrection and transform it into a new socialist or workers’ state which would, in theory, be nothing but the rule or, to use 19<sup>th</sup> century language, the dictatorship of the proletariat themselves. Anarchists opposed this strategy for three main reasons.

Firstly, they argued that the self-rule of the working classes could never actually be achieved through the state. To understand why one must first understand the anarchist theory of the state. Anarchists argued that, given their in-depth analysis of the state as an existing social structure both historically and when they were writing, the state is necessarily a centralised and hierarchical institution wielded by a small political ruling class. Kropotkin was convinced that “the essence of every state” was “hierarchical centralisation” and that if an organisation ceased to be structured in this manner then “it ceases to be the State”.<sup>25</sup> Due to its organisational form the political power of the state could not in reality be wielded by the working classes as a whole. State power would instead be exercised by a minority of elected representatives acting in the name of the working classes. As Bakunin wrote,

It is bound to be impossible for a few thousand, let alone tens or hundreds of thousands of men to wield that power effectively. It will have to be exercised by proxy, which means entrusting it to a group of men elected to represent and govern them, which will

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<sup>25</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 310, 199, 227.

unfailingly return to all the deceit and subservience of representative or bourgeois rule.

After a brief flash of liberty or orgiastic revolution, the citizens of the new State will wake up slaves, puppets and victims of a new group of ambitious men.<sup>26</sup>

A state socialist might object by arguing that these representatives are workers themselves and so do not form a class which is distinct from the workers whom they represent. Bakunin responded to this argument by insisting that this minority are “former workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers’ world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people”.<sup>27</sup> In other words, they have transitioned from being members of the working classes to being members of the political ruling class in control of the state. The so-called dictatorship of the proletariat would therefore not be based on the self-rule of the proletariat. It would, to quote Malatesta, “be the dictatorship of ‘Party’ over people, and of a handful of men over ‘Party’”.<sup>28</sup>

If the new workers’ state was genuinely nothing but the self-rule of the working classes, then the disagreement with anarchists would merely be a semantic disagreement about how to define a state. Most state socialists did not, however, advocate federations of community assemblies, workplace assemblies and workers’ militias and then, unlike anarchists, choose to call these systems of organisation a state.<sup>29</sup> As Malatesta wrote in June 1919, the Bolsheviks did not mean by the dictatorship of the proletariat merely “the effective power of all the workers intent on breaking down capitalist society” via the forceful expropriation of the ruling classes and the

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<sup>26</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 255.

<sup>27</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 178.

<sup>28</sup> Malatesta, *Patent Work*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Council communists are an example of Marxists who advocated a dictatorship of the proletariat which was similar to what anarchists advocated but in different language. For a discussion of the similarities between council communism and anarchism see Saku Pinta, “Towards a Libertarian Communism: a Conceptual History of the Intersections Between Anarchisms and Marxisms” (PhD Diss, Loughborough University, 2013).

establishment of “a mode of life in which there would be no place for a class that exploited and oppressed the producers”. If this were the case, then “our dissent would have to do only with words”. Instead the Bolsheviks meant, judging by their actions, “a dictatorship of a party, or rather of the heads of a party; and it is a true dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal laws, its executive agents and above all with its armed force that serves today also to defend the revolution against its external enemies, but that will serve tomorrow to impose upon the workers the will of the dictators, to arrest the revolution, consolidate the new interests and finally defend a new privileged class against the masses”.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, anarchists argued that a workers’ state would not die out after the abolition of capitalism but would, instead, continuously reproduce itself as a social structure.<sup>31</sup> This is because the forms of practice involved in either exercising or being subject to state power produce people with the kinds of capacities, drives and consciousness which reproduce the state as a dominant structure, rather than people who will want to and be able to abolish the state. Elected representatives would, over time, be transformed by exercising state power, acquire distinct class interests as members of the political ruling class, and come to focus on maintaining and expanding their own power over the working classes, rather than allowing it to be abolished in favour of a stateless classless society.

The existence of a state ruled by a minority political ruling class would simultaneously have a dire effect on the working classes in general. Instead of directly self-managing their lives themselves through federations of workplace and community assemblies, the working classes would be subject to the rule of a minority and so engage in forms of practice that lead them to

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<sup>30</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 391-2. There appears to be a typo in this edition where Malatesta says that it will “defend the revolution for its external enemies”. I choose to replace “for” with “against” based on the translation available in Guérin, ed. *No Gods, No Masters*, 392.

<sup>31</sup> For the classic Marxist account of the idea that the state would wither away see Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 321.

become accustomed to oppressive social relationships continuing to exist after their supposed liberation. They would learn to obey and defer to their superiors rather than to think and act for themselves. Rather than learning how to associate with others as equals, they would learn to put those in power on a pedestal and venerate them in just the same way that people under capitalism learn to hero worship so-called ‘captains of industry’ or political figureheads such as royal families.<sup>32</sup> As Bakunin wrote, “power corrupts those invested with it just as much as those compelled to submit to it”.<sup>33</sup>

Given the self-reproducing nature of the state it could not be used to achieve an anarchist society. Although state socialists claimed that “this state yoke, this dictatorship, is a necessary transitional device for achieving the total liberation of the people; anarchy, or freedom, is the goal, and the state, or dictatorship the means”, they failed to realise that “no dictatorship can have any other objective than to perpetuate itself, and that it can engender and nurture only slavery in the people who endure it”.<sup>34</sup>

Thirdly, anarchists argued that the minority political ruling class in control of the workers’ state would, in order to protect and preserve their position of authority, eventually reintroduce private property by creating a new economic ruling class which owed them allegiance and so would protect their class interests. The state was, to quote Fabbri, “more than an outcome of class divisions” since “it is, at one and the same time, the creator of privilege, thereby bringing about new class divisions”.<sup>35</sup> According to Malatesta this would occur because,

Anyone in power means to stay there, and no matter what the costs he intends to impose his will – and since wealth is a very effective instrument of power, the ruler, even if he

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<sup>32</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 147.

<sup>33</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 136.

<sup>34</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 179.

<sup>35</sup> Fabbri, “Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, 20.

personally does not abuse or steal, he promotes the rise of a class around him that owes to him its privileges and has a vested interest in his remaining in power . . . Abolish private property without abolishing government, and the former will be resurrected by those who govern.<sup>36</sup>

This prediction was grounded in the historical narrative that economic and political power were originally established through violence and “united in the same hands – and often those of one single individual”. These rulers were simultaneously “proprietors, legislators, kings, judges and executioners”. This changed when, as populations grew and society became more complex, rulers were forced by the problems of controlling and reproducing a large-scale society to create a new privileged economic class who served them. In so doing they separated economic and political power into two distinct social structures: government and property. This economic ruling class then developed in power over time due to the supreme importance of production, and came to subordinate the government as the defender of its own class interests.<sup>37</sup> Malatesta saw no reason why a state socialist society, which united economic and political power into the single hands of the state, would be any different from what he thought had come before.

## 5.2 – State Capitalism

Anarchists not only argued that the seizure of state power could not achieve an anarchist society. They, in addition to this, rejected the idea that a state socialist society would in fact be socialist at all. For anarchists, it was more appropriate to label such a society state capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 123. See also, Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 115-6. I refer to government and not the state because this is Malatesta’s preferred language and he is not referring specifically to the modern nation state which arose, according to Bakunin and Kropotkin, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

<sup>38</sup> The term ‘state capitalism’ was later used by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in a different sense to refer to the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1921 in which capitalist markets and small businesses existed alongside state ownership and management of large-scale industry but were subject to control by a self-proclaimed workers’ state. The earlier and broader anarchist usage of the term should be not confused with this. See Lenin, *Selected Works*, 635, 685-6.

The reason for this is as follows. State socialists sought to establish state ownership of the means of production and land, organise production and distribution in a centralised manner through the state, and have workers become employees of the state. Were this to happen then a single entity – the state – would own and control the whole or the majority of the economy. Under such a system of state ownership and control the economy would, due to the state’s centralised and hierarchical nature, be owned and controlled by the minority of people who in fact wielded state power, rather than the working classes whom they claimed to represent. These workers would, instead of directly owning and controlling the economy themselves through organs of self-management, labour within state-owned workplaces that were hierarchically managed by state bureaucrats. These state bureaucrats would implement the policies that were ultimately decided by the minority ruling class who, even if elected via universal suffrage, actually exercised decision-making power within the state. Under such a system, workers would be wage labourers employed by the state and subject to its domination within the workplace in the same manner that they had previously been employed and dominated by individual capitalists and landlords.

This perspective can be seen throughout anarchist texts. Bakunin predicted in *Statism and Anarchy* that the leaders of socialist parties would, if they seized state power, concentrate “in their own hands all commercial, industrial, agricultural, and even scientific production” and subsequently “divide the people into two armies, one industrial and one agrarian, under the direct command of state engineers, who will form a new privileged scientific and political class”.<sup>39</sup> In *Modern Science and Anarchy* Kropotkin wrote that anarchists rejected “the new form of wage-labour which would arise if the State took possession of the means of production, and exchange, as it has already taken possession of the railways, the post office, education,

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<sup>39</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 181.

national security [*l'assurance mutuelle*], and defence of the territory". Such "industrial powers . . . would create a new, formidable instrument of tyranny".<sup>40</sup> Kropotkin referred to such a society as "state capitalism" on numerous occasions.<sup>41</sup>

State socialism would therefore lead to a reconfiguration of class society, rather than the abolition of class society in favour of worker self-management. The existing economic and political ruling classes – capitalists, landlords, bankers, politicians, judges, generals etc. – would be replaced by or subordinated to a new economic and political ruling class – the socialist party leadership – which exercised power through a single institution: the state. This new economic and political ruling class would in turn be aided by a vast array of state bureaucrats who would serve as a managerial class which was subject to the authority of the socialist party leadership but at the same time exercised power over the working classes.

Since state socialists sought to seize existing state power, it followed that this managerial class would be largely composed of the same bureaucrats who had previously managed the market capitalist state. State socialists would transform certain aspects of the state during their seizure of state power, such as writing a new constitution, but the bulk of the state's bureaucratic machinery would remain intact since the state could not function without it. This would occur even if state socialists genuinely wanted, in Lenin's famous words, to "smash the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one".<sup>42</sup> During a revolutionary period the leaders of the socialist party would not be in the position to replace or fundamentally reorganise the state bureaucracy, especially in societies where most people were illiterate. They would instead be forced by circumstances to use, and massively expand, the previously existing state bureaucracy in order to implement their plans as rapidly and as

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<sup>40</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 170.

<sup>41</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 165, 210, 288, 385-6,

<sup>42</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, 295-6.

effectively as possible, such as nationalising all of industry, organising the economy through central planning, and defending the revolution from counter-attack.

For Kropotkin, this was no different from when republicans overthrew monarchies and the form of the state was altered but the state bureaucracy continued to operate largely as before. He wrote that “the Third Republic, in spite of its republican form of government, remained monarchist in its essence”. This was because,

Those holding power have changed the name; but all this immense ministerial scaffolding, all this centralised organisation of bureaucrats, all this imitation of the Rome of the Caesars which has been developed in France, all this formidable organisation to ensure and extend the exploitation of the masses in favour of a few privileged groups that is the essence of the State-institution – all that remained. And these cogs [of the bureaucratic machine] continue, as in the past, to exchange their fifty documents when the wind has blown down a tree onto a national highway, and to pour the millions deducted from the nation into 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, its role as creator of monopolies, have remained. Like an octopus, they expand [their grip] on the country day-by-day.<sup>43</sup>

State socialism would therefore not only be a reconfiguration of class society. It would, in addition, be an expansion of existing class society in so far as the bulk of the existing state machinery would continue to operate largely as before and this state machinery would move

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<sup>43</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 274.



from organising only certain aspects of the economy – the post office, trains etc – to organising the whole or the majority of the economy.

Within such a society the state would, for all intents and purposes, act as a single massive capitalist since it now performed the various functions which were previously performed under market capitalism by multiple individual capitalists owning and directing different aspects of the economy. As a result, anarchists saw in state socialism not the abolition of capitalism but the replacement of individual capitalists competing in a market in favour of a single state capitalist that alone owned, directed and planned the economy.<sup>44</sup> Bakunin, for example, claimed that under state socialism the state would “become the sole proprietor . . . the single capitalist, banker, financier, organiser, the director of all national work and the distributor of every product”.<sup>45</sup> Kropotkin wrote that state socialists aim 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, 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”.<sup>46</sup> Anarchists rejected this vision and could not “see in the coming revolution a mere . . . replacement of the current capitalists by the State [as sole] capitalist”.<sup>47</sup>

It might be argued in response that a state socialist economy cannot be described as state capitalism because, although the state would perform functions previously performed by individual capitalists, such as organising food production or paying workers' wages, it would be ruled by the working classes themselves and so not be based on the same kind of class relationship as capitalism. For anarchists such a response ignores the fact that the minority of

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<sup>44</sup> Fabbri, “Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 88-9.

<sup>46</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 130-1.

<sup>47</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 198.

individuals who actually exercise state power would constitute a distinct economic and political ruling class who wielded power over the working classes they claimed to represent. To quote Malatesta,

Whoever has dominion over things, has dominion over men; whoever governs production governs the producers; whoever controls consumption lords it over the consumer. The question is this: either things are administered in accordance with agreements freely reached by those concerned, in which case we have anarchy, or they are administered in accordance with law made by the administrators, and we have Government, the State, which inevitably turns tyrannical.<sup>48</sup>

Anarchists were, in addition to this, afraid that state socialists would create something much worse than state capitalism ruled by an elected parliament. In centralising so much economic and political power into the hands of the state, they were creating an institution which could, in turn, be seized by a dictator and used to establish an even more tyrannical society. Kropotkin wrote in 1913 that, “as long as the statist socialists do not abandon their dream of socialising the instruments of labour in the hands of a centralised State, the inevitable result of their attempts at State Capitalism and the Socialist state will be the failure of their dreams and military dictatorship”. The state they created during a period of revolutionary turmoil “would be the stepping-stone for a dictator, representing reaction”. This would merely be a repeat of what had already happened after the French revolutions of 1793 and 1848. In the “centralised State . . . created by the Jacobins, Napoleon I found the ground already prepared for the Empire. . . Similarly, fifty years later, Napoleon III found in the dreams of a centralised democratic

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<sup>48</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 123-4.

republic which developed in France after [the revolution of] 1848 the ready-made elements for the Second Empire”.<sup>49</sup>

It was for these reasons that Kropotkin warned revolutionaries that the state is, “[a]n octopus with a thousand heads and a thousand suckers, like the sea monsters of the old tales, it makes it possible to envelop all society and to channel all individual efforts so as to make them result in the enrichment and governmental monopoly of the privileged classes”. As a result, “if the revolution does not crush the octopus, if it does not destroy its head and cut off its arms and suckers, it will be strangled by the beast. The revolution itself will be placed at the service of monopoly, as was the [French] revolution of 1793”.<sup>50</sup>

For anarchists these predictions were soon proven true by the single-party Bolshevik state which was established after the Russian revolution of 1917 and the subsequent seizure of this state by Stalin and his supporters after Lenin’s death in January 1924.<sup>51</sup> Malatesta prophetically wrote in June 1919 that although “Lenin, Trotsky and their companions are certainly sincere revolutionaries . . . they are preparing the governmental cadres that will serve those that will come, who will profit from the revolution and kill it. They will be the first victims of their method, and with them, I fear, will fall the revolution”.<sup>52</sup>

Goldman, who had been an eye witness to the Russian Revolution after arriving in Russia on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1920, wrote in December 1922 that the Bolsheviks had succeeded only in creating an “all-powerful, centralised Government with State Capitalism as its economic expression”

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<sup>49</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 191, 193.

<sup>50</sup> Kropotkin, *Modern Science*, 306.

<sup>51</sup> For a brief overview of this very complex history from an anti-Leninist perspective see: Maurice Brinton, “The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control 1917-1921: The State and Counter-Revolution” in *H q t " Y q t m g t u ø " R q y . The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton*, ed. David Goodway (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004), 293-378; Iain McKay, “The State and Revolution” in *Bloodstained*, 61-117.

<sup>52</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 392.

which was based on “the masking of autocracy by proletarian slogans”.<sup>53</sup> In 1938 Rocker remarked that the Bolshevik use of state power had resulted in “the dictatorship of a small clique over the proletariat and the entire Russian people” and organs of worker self-management – co-operatives, trade unions and soviets (workers’ assemblies) – being suppressed and brought under state, and so minority ruling-class, control. In so doing the Bolsheviks had forced Russia “into the slavery of a grinding state-capitalism”.<sup>54</sup>

The tragedy of the Russian Revolution demonstrated, according to anarchists, that they had been right and state socialists had been wrong. The liberation of the working classes could only be achieved through them crushing the octopus of state power and building their own organs of self-management – federations of workplace and community assemblies – and class power – federations of workers’ militias. These arguments have, from an anarchist perspective, only proven stronger with time, given that subsequent state socialist revolutions in China, Cuba and Vietnam have, like their predecessor in Russia, failed to produce a substantially free and equal society in which the working classes themselves own the means of production and self-manage their lives within both the workplace and wider society. Despite numerous achievements within certain domains, such as increasing literacy rates, these societies have not progressed towards, let alone come close to achieving, the self-proclaimed long term goal of state socialists: a stateless, classless, moneyless society based on distribution according to need.

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<sup>53</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 388, 394. Goldman and Berkman had been deported from America to Russia because of their opposition to the American government joining WWI and implementing conscription. See Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 269-72, 291-302.

<sup>54</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 12, 13, 63.

### 5.3 – Anarchism and Political Struggle

The anarchist rejection of seizing state power has led some Marxists to assert that anarchists rejected, and so ignored the need for, political struggle.<sup>55</sup> This argument dates back to Marx and Engels themselves. Marx wrote in an 1870 letter to Paul Lafargue that Bakunin thought that the industrial working class “must not occupy itself with politics” and instead “only organise themselves by trades-unions”. If they did this then they would make the fatal error of allowing “the governments, these great trade-unions of the ruling classes, to do as they like”. Bakunin had, according to Marx, failed to see “that every class movement as a class movement, is necessarily and was always a political movement”.<sup>56</sup> After the 1<sup>st</sup> International’s Hague Congress of 1872, Marx gave a speech in which he said that “[a] group has been formed in our midst which advocates that the workers should abstain from political activity” and thereby ignored that “the worker will have to seize political supremacy to establish the new organisation of labour”.<sup>57</sup> Engels likewise claimed in an 1872 letter to Louis Pio that anarchists in the 1<sup>st</sup> International advocated the “complete abstention from all political activity, and especially from all elections”.<sup>58</sup>

Anarchists, however, did not reject political struggle in and of itself. They rejected one form of political struggle – attempting to seize state power via elections or armed insurrection – in favour of a different form of political struggle – engaging in direct action outside and against the state with the long-term aim of abolishing it. Importantly, for many anarchists this political struggle included engaging in direct action to gain or enforce political liberties which expanded

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<sup>55</sup> For example: Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution Volume 4: Critique of Other Socialisms* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 154; Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, 12, 16, 343-8; Lenin, *Volume 5*, 328; Lenin, *Collected Works, Volume 10*, ed. Victor Jerome (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 71-3; George Plechanoff, *Anarchism and Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1912), 94-100.

<sup>56</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 43* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 490-1.

<sup>57</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 23*, 254-5.

<sup>58</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 44*, 331.

the ability of workers to self-organise, such as freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and freedom of the press.<sup>59</sup>

The anarchist view on political struggle can be seen in Bakunin's distinction between bourgeois reformist politics and the revolutionary proletarian politics of the anarchist movement. According to Bakunin it "would be the death of the proletariat" to focus "exclusively and solely with economic matters" and ignore "political questions". This is because if states enforce private property rights, and thereby ensure the exploitation of workers by capitalists and landlords, it follows that "the political question is inseparable from the economic question". Any significant attempt by the working classes to emancipate themselves economically will be met by state violence which serves the interests of the economic ruling classes. The working classes would therefore be "forced to consider politics – to fight it and overcome it". The 1<sup>st</sup> International would for this same reason "be compelled to intervene in politics so long as it is forced to struggle against the bourgeoisie". Its task as an organisation was "not just some economic or a simply material creative activity" but was "at the same time and to the same degree an eminently political process".<sup>60</sup>

The question for Bakunin was not whether we should engage in politics but what form our political interventions should take. For Bakunin the working classes must, like anarchists, reject "bourgeois politics" whose "objective is not the direct and immediate economic emancipation of workers" in favour of "the politics of Social Revolution which wants the abolition of the State and fully free economic organisation of the people from bottom to top through the path of federation". The politics of social revolution was for Bakunin "exclusively negative"

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<sup>59</sup> Rocker, *The London Years* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2005), 28; *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 73-8. For an anarchist discussion of the struggle to achieve political liberties see Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 39-43.

<sup>60</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 238-9, 226; *Political Philosophy*, 313; Quoted in Berthier, *Social Democracy and Anarchism*, 59.

because it consisted only in the “revolutionary power” of the working classes “demolishing political institutions” and “every power constituted by the bourgeoisie”.<sup>61</sup> Given this,

It is not true . . . to say that we completely ignore politics. We do not ignore it, for we definitely want to destroy it. And here we have the essential point separating us from political parties and bourgeois radical Socialists. Their politics consists in making use of, reforming, and transforming the politics of the State, whereas our politics, the only kind we admit, is the total abolition of the State, and of the politics which is its necessary manifestation.<sup>62</sup>

Bakunin’s distinction between bourgeois politics and revolutionary anarchist politics was repeated by other anarchists. During the 1<sup>st</sup> International’s 1872 Hague Congress, which was attended by Marx and Engels, Guillaume rejected “bourgeois politics” which aimed at “the conquest of political power” via “parliamentarianism” in favour of “the politics of labour” which sought “the destruction of political power”.<sup>63</sup> Andrea Costa wrote, with Bakunin’s assistance, a programme for the Italian section of the St Imier International sometime in late 1872 which distinguished between the “negative politics” of abolishing ruling class institutions and the “positive politics” of constructing a new society through the “revolutionary power” of the working classes.<sup>64</sup> Over two decades later, in 1897, Malatesta remarked that,

who has outdone us in arguing that the battle against capitalism has to be harnessed to the fight against the State, meaning political struggle? There is a school of thought these days in which political struggle means achieving public office through elections: but .

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<sup>61</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 52-3, 22, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Bakunin, *Political Philosophy*, 313.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Eckhart, *Fist Socialist Schism*, 341.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 183.

. . logic forces other methods of struggle upon those seeking to do away with government, rather than capture it.<sup>65</sup>

For Malatesta, like Bakunin before him, economic struggles would be transformed into political struggles because “workers who want to free themselves, or even only to effectively improve their conditions, will be faced with the need to defend themselves from the government” which uses “brute force” to enforce private property rights and defend the interests of the economic ruling classes. As a result of this, workers will be forced to move from “the economic struggle. . . to the political struggle, that is to the struggle against government” and to therefore “oppose the rifles and guns which defend property with the more effective means that the people will be able to find to defeat force by force”.<sup>66</sup> The manner in which capitalism and the state supported and created one another led Malatesta to conclude that the economic struggle against capitalism and the political struggle against the state were so interconnected that they should be viewed as two aspects of a single struggle against the ruling classes, rather than as two separate struggles.<sup>67</sup>

A significant number of anarchists held that politics would be abolished via the social revolution. An anonymous Spanish anarchist poem, for example, held that “politics” would “[d]isappear from the world” via “the establishment of anarchy”.<sup>68</sup> Other anarchists, in comparison, thought that politics was not inherently state-centric but would continue to exist, albeit in a very different form, after the abolition of the state. Kropotkin argued that, “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”. These new forms of political life must instead be

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<sup>65</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 20-1.

<sup>66</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 52-3.

<sup>67</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 167-8.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Mintz, *Casas Viejas*, 13.



“created by the workers themselves, in their unions, their federations, completely outside the State”. Given this, “the political aspect of a Social Revolution ought to be” the construction of “the free, Independent Communist Commune”.<sup>69</sup> The Marxist claim that anarchists rejected or ignored political struggle or, in every instance, sought the abolition of politics broadly construed is therefore entirely false.

## 5.4 – Conclusion

The anarchist movement shared a commitment to achieving the ends of an anarchist society through the means of social revolution, prefiguration and direct action. They held that an anarchist society could not be achieved through the means of seizing state power via elections or armed insurrection. In this chapter I have built upon previous overviews of anarchism by demonstrating in detail that anarchists did not think this due to abstract arguments about morality. They instead argued that state socialist strategies were constituted by forms of practice that would produce the wrong kinds of people and social relations for achieving the long-term goal of both anarchists and state socialists: a stateless classless society. The strategy of parliamentarism would result in the socialist movement and its leadership being transformed from revolutionaries into defenders of market capitalism with, at best, more welfare programmes. Any attempt to seize the existing capitalist state violently and transform it into a new self-proclaimed workers’ state would result in the dictatorship of the party leadership over the working classes and the establishment of state capitalism, rather than the genuine self-rule of the working classes themselves through their own organs of self-management. For anarchists, a stateless classless society could only be achieved through what Malatesta termed the method of anarchy or freedom: free initiative, free agreement and free association.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 535, 184; *Modern Science*, 164. See also Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 144.

<sup>70</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 141-3.

Although anarchists in general shared these basic strategic commitments there was a significant amount of disagreement between anarchists about, among other things, what kind of organisations they should build, what tactics they should engage in, and how anarchists should act to help bring about the social revolution. Broadly speaking the anarchist movement can be divided into two main strategic schools of thought: insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism. Insurrectionist anarchism advocated the formation of small loosely organised anarchist groups which engaged in an escalating series of individual attacks and collective insurrections against the ruling classes. In theory, these revolutionary acts would over time inspire an ever-increasing number of workers to rise up against their oppressors until a full-scale social revolution had been launched. Mass anarchism, in comparison, advocated the formation of large-scale formal anarchist organisations which struggled for immediate reforms in the present in order to build a mass movement capable of launching a social revolution via an armed insurrection.<sup>71</sup>

It should be kept in mind that although one can distinguish between insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism these are ideal types and individuals cannot always be neatly categorised into one or the other due to their combining elements of both or only subscribing to certain aspects of the theory in question. The anarchist movement contained a great deal of intellectual diversity and although some anarchists were dogmatic there were no rigid barriers between different kinds of anarchism which, in principle, prevented one kind of anarchist learning from and being influenced by another kind of anarchist. Most Italian anarchists who lived in North Beach, San Francisco, for example, subscribed to multiple publications from different kinds of anarchism and interacted socially with anarchists from other tendencies.<sup>72</sup> From this it follows that the distinction between insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism should be viewed as

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<sup>71</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 123-4.

<sup>72</sup> Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 99.

a simplification which is helpful for thinking about the major strategic disagreements within the anarchist movement, rather than being a perfect description of the ideological complexity of the anarchist movement. I shall rationally reconstruct the theory of insurrectionist anarchism in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6 – Insurrectionist Anarchism

Insurrectionist anarchists advocated the formation of small loosely organised anarchist-only groups which met to learn and discuss ideas, plan direct action, organise talks and counter-cultural activities such as dances and picnics, produce or distribute anarchist literature, and engage in violent acts of revolt against the ruling classes and their institutions.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate aim of these different methods of action was the same: to inspire or evoke a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge by the working classes. In theory, anarchists advocating, praising and engaging in violent attacks against the ruling classes and their institutions would provoke or inspire significant segments of the working classes to rise up, which would in turn motivate others to join them in insurrection. This would lead to a chain reaction of uprisings spawning an ever-increasing number of revolts until the working classes had formed a mass movement, forcefully expropriated the ruling classes and abolished capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society.<sup>2</sup>

This strategy was advocated by Galleani, who held that “the way to revolution” begins with “individual act[s] of rebellion” which are “inseparable from propaganda, from the mental preparation which understands it, integrates it”. Over time these individual acts of rebellion would lead “to larger and more frequent repetitions” in the form of “collective insurrections” which would in turn “flow into the social revolution”.<sup>3</sup> From this it is clear that, although insurrectionist anarchists favoured individual acts of rebellion, they believed that the social

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the creation of the anarchist movement in the 1870s the strategy of insurrectionist anarchism was advocated by Déjacque in 1854. Since I do not know if his ideas on strategy had any influence on the movement in general or the key insurrectionist theorists, such as Cafiero, Most or Galleani, I have decided to not discuss his ideas. See Joseph Déjacque, *The Revolutionary Question* (1854), trans. Shawn P. Wilbur, <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/working-translations/joseph-dejacque-the-revolutionary-question/>. Woodcock claims that Grave re-published Déjacque’s *No Work in 1899* but removed passages that could be interpreted as incitement to criminal acts. See Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 233.

<sup>2</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 20, 123, 128-131.

<sup>3</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 99.

revolution would be brought about by the working classes acting as a mass movement engaging in “collective insurrections”. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Cafiero also held that a social revolution would require “[t]he violence of the insurgent masses”.<sup>4</sup>

The strategy of insurrectionist anarchism centred on three main ideas: an opposition to formal organisations, a rejection of struggling for immediate reforms, and propaganda of the deed. These features of insurrectionist anarchism have been previously noted by Schmidt and van der Walt in *Black Flame*. My work will build on their brief overview by outlining a much more detailed rational reconstruction of insurrectionist anarchist strategy. I shall draw on a larger number of primary and secondary sources in order to establish both what insurrectionist anarchists thought and how they used the theory of practice to justify or reject particular strategies. I shall, in particular, expand upon *D n c e m* " ~~Remark that the~~ "meaning of propaganda of the deed changed over time through a comprehensive overview of the historical process by which this occurred.

## **6.1 – Opposition to Formal Organisations**

Insurrectionist anarchists held that anarchism as a movement should not be organised through large formal organisations characterised by such things as having a constitution, elected delegates, yearly national congresses which passed congress resolutions, and an official membership. Insurrectionist anarchists were initially in favour of federations due to the fact that anarchism as a movement developed within the federations of the 1<sup>st</sup> and St Imier Internationals. Paul Brousse, for example, was one of the main theorists of propaganda of the deed but also participated in a French anarchist federation which was affiliated with the St Imier International.<sup>5</sup> Over time insurrectionist anarchists like Cafiero came to reject formal

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<sup>4</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism: A Study of the Political Activities of Paul Brousse 1870-90* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 104-5, 108-9.

organisations for strategic reasons whilst still advocating federations as a key component of the future anarchist society. Eventually what had been a matter of strategy was transformed into a matter of principle and insurrectionist anarchists came to hold that formal organisations were fundamentally incompatible with anarchist values. It is for this reason that it is difficult to establish how many insurrectionist anarchists there were because, unlike trade unions, they did not keep records of their size.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that some insurrectionist anarchists claimed to reject all organisation they were not against organisation in the literal sense of people coming together to act collectively as a group.<sup>7</sup> This can be seen in a number of sources. Insurrectionist anarchists themselves usually distinguished between free association which they supported and organisation, by which they meant formal organisation, which they opposed. The Italian anarchist Giuseppe Ciancabilla wrote in 1899 that “organisation (not free agreement, nor free association, we mean) is absolutely anti-anarchist”.<sup>8</sup> In 1925 Galleani advocated “the autonomy of the individual within the freedom of association” whilst opposing “the political organisation of the anarchist party”, by which he meant a specific anarchist organisation, and “the organisation of the craft and trade unions”.<sup>9</sup>

Critics of insurrectionist anarchism were likewise aware that they did not literally reject all organisation. The Spanish proto-syndicalist anarchist Juan Serrano y Oteiza wrote in 1885 that they,

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<sup>6</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 41-2; Di Paola, *Knights Errant*, 61-2; Senta, *Galleani*, 57, 91-3. For an example of an insurrectionist group see Avrich, *Haymarket*, 150-6.

<sup>7</sup> This was pointed out by Malatesta during debates with anti-organisationalists. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 102; *Towards Anarchy*, 62; Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 95-7.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 61, 73-75.

do not accept any organisation except that of a group, and therefore they do not have organised trade sections, nor do they have local federations, district federations or federations of trade or trade unions . . . Their only and exclusive form of organisation are the groups or circles of social studies among which there has not been established any pact or constituted any commission which can serve as a centre of relations between the respective collective bodies that pursue the same ends.<sup>10</sup>

Insurrectionist anarchists opposed formal organisations for two main reasons. Firstly, it was thought that formal organisations made people unfree and inhibited their membership's freedom to act and take initiative.<sup>11</sup> They were therefore rejected by insurrectionist anarchists not only because they were incompatible with the anarchist commitment to individual freedom. Formal organisation was also opposed because, given the unity of means and ends, they failed to produce the self-determining individuals needed for a successful social revolution and the production and reproduction of an anarchist society. This hostile attitude towards formal organisation partly stemmed from the negative experiences anarchists had within the 1<sup>st</sup> International.<sup>12</sup>

In February 1887 the Italian anarchist paper *Humanitas* labelled formal organisations “the state in miniature” and argued that they destroyed “the spirit of initiative in individuals, who expect everything from this organisation”.<sup>13</sup> According to Galleani this was caused by the inherent structure of formal organisations. Constitutions forced the organisation to follow a particular set of procedures, rather than what was appropriate or necessary given on-going events and the nature of the present struggle. Formal avenues for decision-making and action, such as committees or congresses, filtered out original ideas and re-affirmed the orthodoxy of the

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Turcato, *Making Sense*, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 19; Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 191.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 216.

organisation. Even federations based on delegates were critiqued for leading to a situation in which representatives and those higher up in the organisation make decisions that the wider membership accepts out of discipline, regardless of their own opinions and interests. In each case the organisation would take on a life of its own and control its membership.<sup>14</sup>

Galleani went so far as to argue that it was impossible to “anarchically delegate to another person one’s own thought, one’s own energy, one’s own will”. As a result, he rejected the idea that delegates should represent others, even if they had been elected and mandated, because they could only represent themselves. He, in addition to this, rejected congress resolutions on the grounds that they subordinated the minority to the majority and thereby made people unfree. For Galleani congresses were only useful and consistent with anarchism if they were just meetings which provided an occasion for individual militants to meet, share ideas and work together.<sup>15</sup>

The second reason why insurrectionist anarchists opposed formal organisation was because they held that it made it too easy for the state to infiltrate, persecute and surveil the anarchist movement. In 1879 Cafiero responded to the state repression that the Italian section of the St Imier International had experienced by arguing that anarchists should establish “secret and firm bonds between all of us” because formal organisations “display all our forces to the public, i.e., to the police” and so reveal “how and where to strike us”.<sup>16</sup> One year later the Italian state issued the final killing blow to the International in Italy when the high court ruled that any internationalist organisation composed of five or more people was an association of

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<sup>14</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 74.

<sup>15</sup> Senta, *Galleani*, 126.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 169.



malefactors. This enabled the Italian state to arrest and imprison anarchists simply for being anarchists, even if they had not planned or engaged in any illegal actions.<sup>17</sup>

It was within this context that the Italian anarchist paper *La Gazetta Operaia* wrote in July 1887 that, “experience teaches that a vast association of a revolutionary character easily offers its flank to the police, therefore to persecution . . . United and fighting all together under the impetus of a vast association we run the risk of being crushed with a single blow by adversaries stronger than us.”<sup>18</sup>

As an alternative to large formal organisations insurrectionist anarchists advocated the formation of small loosely organised anarchist-only groups. These affinity groups, which were also called circles or clubs, were either more or less permanent cells or were formed for a specific task and dissolved once this task was complete. They typically had a membership of between four and twenty members and were given a wide variety of different names, such as Germinal (in honour of Émile Zola’s novel), The Termites Libertarian Circle, The Barricade Group, The Right to be Idle Group and the Revolutionary Propaganda Circle.<sup>19</sup> An 1885 article in *Le Révolté* claimed that, “[w]e do not believe in long term associations, federations, etc. For us, a group should come together only for a clearly defined objective or short term action; once the action is accomplished, the group should reform on a new basis, either with the same elements, or with new ones.”<sup>20</sup>

Anarchist affinity groups were viewed as superior to formal organisations because their small size and loose nature meant that they simultaneously enabled freedom of initiative whilst also being more effective at avoiding infiltration, persecution, and state surveillance. In 1890 Jean

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<sup>17</sup> Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 154-5.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 216.

<sup>19</sup> Hoyt, “The Rise of Cronca Sovversiva”, 49-53; Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 34-5; Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 19.

Grave argued in *La Révolte* that affinity groups accustom “individuals to bestir themselves, to act, without being bogged down in routine and immobility, thereby preparing the groupings of the society to come, by forcing individuals to act for themselves, to seek out one another on the basis of their inclinations, their affinities”.<sup>21</sup> Affinity groups were, in other words, thought to prefigure the social relations of an anarchist society and so were constituted by forms of practice which developed individuals with the right kinds of radical capacities, drives and consciousness for achieving anarchist goals.

Importantly, these affinity groups were not isolated entities. Insurrectionist anarchists sought to achieve co-ordination between different groups via informal social networks which were usually centred around specific periodicals, rather than through the establishment of a formal federation which organised congresses and had an administrative committee composed of elected delegates. This can be seen in the history of the paper *Cronaca Sovversiva*, which was edited by Galleani. It not only spread anarchist ideas and instilled a sense of anarchist identity in its readership, but also connected anarchist groups from across the United States by publishing their correspondence and announcements in a single place which they all read.<sup>22</sup>

Some insurrectionist anarchists were so committed to their rejection of formal organisation that they viewed those who advocated them as betraying the core principles of anarchism. This resulted in a great deal of polemical debate which could sometimes even turn violent. A noteworthy example of this occurred in September 1899 when the anti-organisationalist anarchist barber Domenico Pazzaglia shot Malatesta in the leg during a meeting at a saloon in

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Alexandre Skirida, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organisation from Proudhon to May 1968* (Oakland CA: AK Press, 2002), 50.

<sup>22</sup> Hoyt, “The Rise of the Cronca Sovversiva”, 8-9, 24-7, 33-5, 294-6.

West Hoboken, New Jersey due to his advocacy of formal organisations. Malatesta responded in a truly anarchist fashion by refusing to tell the police who had shot him.<sup>23</sup>

## 6.2 – Rejection of Struggling for Reforms

Insurrectionist anarchism opposed the strategy of struggling for immediate reforms in the present. As Cafiero argued in 1881, “[a]nything that facilitates and brings the time of the insurrection nearer, is good; all that keeps it away through maintaining the appearance of progress, is bad. This is the principle that guides us”.<sup>24</sup> This rejection of struggling for immediate reforms included not only parliamentary politics, which all anarchists rejected, but also participating within trade unions in order to struggle for higher wages, shorter working days, and improved working conditions. Those insurrectionists who did advocate participating within trade unions or strikes did so only when they thought it was a good opportunity to undermine the trade union bureaucracy, spread anarchist ideas, develop the spirit of revolt, and persuade workers that their involvement in the trade union was futile and would not achieve their emancipation.<sup>25</sup>

Insurrectionist anarchists rejected struggling for immediate reforms for three main reasons. Firstly, they held that reforms did not challenge, but rather rested upon, the on-going existence of dominant institutions. Social movements which aim to win reforms will therefore end up consenting to and reproducing the existing economic and political system, rather than overthrowing it. They may start out as revolutionary but the practice of struggling for reforms will develop un-radical capacities and cause radical drives to decay into ones compatible with

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<sup>23</sup> Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 60; Pernicone, “Introductory Essay” in Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, xxiii.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Di Paola, *Knight Errant*, 52-3.

<sup>25</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 76-80; Sensa, *Galleani*, 134; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 28-9; Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 53, 61. Galleani did not adopt a rigid anti-sindicalist perspective until around 1910 and 1911 and prior to this appears to have had a more positive view of trade unions. See Hoyt, “The Rise of the Cronca Sovversiva”, 243-4; Senta, *Galleani*, 106-7, 158-9, 172-3, 191-2.

dominant structures. Reforms which are initially viewed by a social movement as only a means or steppingstone to revolution will, over time, be transformed into the actual end goals of their action. For insurrectionist anarchists, this process of struggling for reforms weakening revolutionary movements could be clearly seen in socialist political parties which became less and less radical over time in order to gain votes and pass reformist laws through political alliances with bourgeois parties.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, they thought that the ruling classes only conceded reforms to the working classes in order to save its own power by calming popular discontent.<sup>27</sup> Reforms were viewed by Galleani as the “the ballast the bourgeoisie throws overboard to lighten its old boat in the hope of saving the sad cargo of its privileges from sinking in the revolutionary storm”. Such reforms would in turn produce a “dangerous mirage” that led workers to trust political parties with their emancipation and to mistakenly believe that the ruling classes were benevolent. Reforms could therefore have the dangerous effect of causing workers to desire a better and more humane master, rather than no master at all. Given this, Galleani held that reforms should be seen as the by-products of threats to ruling class power which are granted when “attacks against the existing social institutions become more forceful and violent”, rather than being the main immediate goal of political and economic struggle.<sup>28</sup>

Thirdly, insurrectionists subscribed to the iron law of wages, which had been advocated by the political economist David Ricardo and later popularised among socialists by Ferdinand Lassalle, who was one of the main founders of what would become German social democracy. The law claimed that real wages under capitalism would always tend towards the amount of money required to secure the subsistence of the worker. For Ricardo and Lassalle this was

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<sup>26</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 29-30.

<sup>27</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 28-29

<sup>28</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 30-1.

caused by population growth: an expansion of the supply of labour would lead to a decrease in wages, and living costs would increase due to larger families.<sup>29</sup> The insurrectionist anarchists, in contrast, focused on the idea that any increase in wages that workers won through struggle would be cancelled out by increases in the cost of living as capitalists and landlords charged more for basic necessities such as food and rent. If this were true, then trade unions fighting to win higher wages was futile and a waste of time and energy since any increase in wages they won would not last.<sup>30</sup>

In place of struggles for immediate reforms insurrectionists advocated violent confrontation with dominant institutions through “tactics of corrosion and continuous attack” such as “immediate attempts at partial expropriation, individual rebellion and insurrection” or “strikes” which adopt “an openly revolutionary character” and act to achieve “the unconditional surrender of the ruling classes” through “the use of force and violence”. Insurrectionist anarchists held that, instead of waiting for the revolution to happen, they should “start the revolution inside” themselves “and realise it according to the best of” their “abilities in partial experiments, wherever such an opportunity arises, and whenever a bold group of our comrades have the conviction and courage to try”. These tactics were thought to “exert the most spirited influence over the masses” and would therefore inspire the working classes to spontaneously rise up.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought Volume II: Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1974), 80-1; Jeremy Wolf, “Iron Law of Wages” in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. Michael Gibbons (Wiley Blackwell, 2014), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118474396.wbept0541/abstract>.

<sup>30</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 28, 79.

<sup>31</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 29, 96-7.

### 6.3 – Propaganda of the Deed

If revolutions were, as an article in *La Révolte* stated in 1890, “the product of a spontaneous explosion of the masses’ discontent and anger” then the role of revolutionaries was to ignite this anger.<sup>32</sup> Propaganda of the deed was in practice the primary means through which insurrectionist anarchists attempted to spread the spirit of revolt and thereby contribute towards the emergence of a social revolution. Historians of terrorism frequently make the mistake of equating the entire idea of propaganda of the deed with the kinds of high-profile assassination or bombings carried out by anarchists at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> The idea of propaganda of the deed did not, however, always refer to the advocacy and practice of individuals attempting to murder the ruling classes in the name of revolution. It underwent a process of development over three decades of discussion within the anarchist movement and a myriad of different attempts by anarchists at doing it in practice.<sup>34</sup>

What would come to be called ‘propaganda of the deed’ started out as the view that anarchist ideas could and should be spread through actions, rather than only through written or spoken propaganda. In 1870 Bakunin remarked that revolutionaries “must now embark on stormy revolutionary seas and . . . spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda”. The aim of these deeds was to “promote revolutionary activity” by “stirring the masses to action”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> For example David C. Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism” in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Cronin and James Ludes (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 50-2; Mary S. Barton, “The Global War on Anarchism: The United States and International Anarchist Terrorism, 1898-1904,” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 2 (2015), 306-8; Richard Bach Jensen, “The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of Interpol,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, no. 2 (1981), 324.

<sup>34</sup> For an in-depth account of this development see Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 76-115.

<sup>35</sup> Bakunin, *on Anarchism*, 195-6.

Propaganda of the deed proceeded to undergo two main phases of development. During its first phase between 1870 and 1880 it largely referred to the practice of anarchists collectively attempting to launch armed insurrections in order to spread their ideas and provoke a popular uprising. This went alongside the view that other forms of collective direct action, such as combative demonstrations, were an effective means of popularising anarchist ideas and gaining support for the anarchist movement. During its second phase, which lasted roughly from the 1880s to the early 1900s, it transformed into the idea that individual acts of violence, such as assassinating heads of state or throwing bombs into crowded cafes frequented by the rich, were a legitimate form of vengeance that would weaken the ruling classes and inspire the working classes to rebel.<sup>36</sup> Both notions of propaganda of the deed shared the idea that revolutionary action by an anarchist minority could successfully spread anarchist ideas and spark a chain of events that would culminate in a social revolution. Where they differed was the kind of action advocated and performed.<sup>37</sup>

### **6.3.1 – Propaganda of the Deed: First Phase**

The 1870s began with a series of unsuccessful insurrections. In September 1870 Bakunin and his associates launched a very quickly defeated insurrection in Lyon. On the 26<sup>th</sup> September they issued a programme, which was adopted by a crowd of 6,000 people, declaring the abolition of the state and the establishment of revolutionary committees for each commune which were subject to the direct supervision of the people. When they attempted to implement this programme two days later, they succeeded in storming the city hall and issuing a variety

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<sup>36</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 243.

<sup>37</sup> There are some usages of the term “propaganda by the deed” by anarchist authors which cannot be neatly fit into these two main versions. Malatesta wrote an article in 1889 called “propaganda by deeds” in which he proposes that anarchists should, either as individuals or affinity groups, beat up tax collectors, push landlords down the stairs when they show up to collect rent, seize and distribute the harvest among peasants rather than allowing it to be taken to the landlord, kill the animals of landlords and distribute the meat to starving peasants and provide landlords who evict people unable to pay rent “with a terrifying example of the vengeance of the oppressed”. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 79-83.

of decrees only to be forced to flee by late afternoon when the local municipal authorities called in the army. This was soon followed by an equally unsuccessful second insurrection in Lyon on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1871 and the rapid rise and bloody fall of the Marseille Commune between 23<sup>rd</sup> March and 4<sup>th</sup> April and the Paris Commune between 18<sup>th</sup> March and 28<sup>th</sup> May. The Spanish cantonalist rebellion of July 1873, in which anarchists participated, suffered a similarly violent defeat.<sup>38</sup>

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 1873 the French anarchist Paul Brousse, who would later become a state socialist, responded to the on-going cantonalist rebellion by writing an article for the Barcelona paper *La Solidarité Révolutionnaire*, which he had co-founded in April.<sup>39</sup> In this article he declared that “[r]evolutionary propaganda” was “above all made in the open, in the midst of the piled-up paving stones of the barricades, on the days when the exasperated people make war on the mercenary forces of reaction”.<sup>40</sup> This view, as he would later write in the August 1877 edition of the *Bulletin* of the Jura Federation, rested on the idea that teaching “socialism by means of action” was “a mighty means of rousing the popular consciousness”. This was because they could “see, feel, [and] touch” it and so gain knowledge that would be impossible to transmit via the written word. An insurrection which established a commune would have to defend itself but even if it was defeated, like the recent insurrections of the early 1870s, this would not matter in the long run since “[t]he idea would have been launched, not on paper, not in a newspaper, not on a chart” but in the real political practices of the working classes. Having captured the popular imagination the idea would “march, in flesh and blood, at the head of the people”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For the Lyon, Marseille and Paris commune see Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, 229-39; Archer, *First International in France*, 255-73; Carr, *Bakunin*, 394-6, 400-7; Guillaume, *Michael Bakunin: A Biographical Sketch* in Bakunin, *On Anarchism*, 40-2. For the Spanish cantonalist rebellion see Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 45-50; Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia*, 101-10.

<sup>39</sup> Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, 35-40. For a short overview of Brousse’s life see Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, 240-6.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 76-7.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Brousse, “Propaganda of the Deed (1877)” in *A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, 150-1.



Brousse's insistence on propaganda through insurrection developed in part out of his experience of being radicalised by the Paris Commune of 1871. The Paris Commune had, Brousse argued, done more to spread revolutionary ideas in two months of fighting than twenty-three years of traditional written propaganda. This was because, while a person must find, buy and read a book or newspaper in order to be radicalised by it, an armed insurrection rapidly gains the attention of large numbers of people, including those who cannot read, and puts them in a position where they must take a side in the on-going struggle.<sup>42</sup> This was not mere speculation on Brousse's part. In Italy a large number of revolutionaries were driven to socialism by news of the Paris Commune, including future prominent anarchists such as Malatesta, Cafiero and Costa.<sup>43</sup>

Brousse was not alone in holding that insurrections which establish communes have a powerful transformative effect on popular consciousness. Bakunin had himself made a similar point in his unsent 1872 letter to the editors of *La Liberté*, which was not published until 1910. He wrote in response to the Paris Commune that,

What makes this revolution important is not really the weak experiments which it had the power and time to make, it is the ideas it has set in motion, the living light it has cast on the true nature and goal of revolution, the hopes it has raised, and the powerful stir it has produced among the popular masses everywhere, and especially in Italy, where the popular awakening dates from that insurrection, whose main feature was the revolt of the Commune and the workers' associations against the State.<sup>44</sup>

This evaluation of the Paris Commune was shared by Cafiero. In an unpublished chapter of his 1881 essay *Revolution* he wrote that, "[t]he events of the Commune implanted militant

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<sup>42</sup> Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 77-8.

<sup>43</sup> Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 35-6, 44, 64-7; Turcato, *Making Sense*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 261. See also *ibid*, 184-5.

socialism in every civilized land, and the long-awaited distant goal of the propagandist was reached in an instant by the brilliant flash of events”.<sup>45</sup> Two years later Kropotkin claimed during his speech at the Lyon trial that after the defeat of the Paris Commune “socialism drew new life from the blood of its followers” and its “ideas about property” were “given an enormous circulation”.<sup>46</sup>

Nor was Brousse alone in holding that anarchists should, given the powerful propaganda effect of the Paris Commune, work towards the social revolution by launching insurrections which establish new communes. In an 11<sup>th</sup> August 1877 article in *Nø C xGamplev* Kropotkin reacted to the recent violently crushed railway strikes in the United States by proposing that the strikes would have gone differently if there had been anarchists present who had sought to transform the strikes into insurrections that established communes and rendered the workers “masters of capital, factories and workshops” via the forceful expropriation of the ruling classes. Even if these proposed communes had been defeated they would have, like the Paris Commune before them, served as “an immensely resounding act of propaganda for socialism”.<sup>47</sup> In 1879 Kropotkin argued for this strategy again by insisting that attempts at social revolution must perform “the deed of expropriation” because it is “the most powerful way of propagating the idea” among the general populace and thereby motivating other workers to join the emerging social revolution and expropriate their local economic ruling classes.<sup>48</sup>

Within the historical context of the rise and subsequent violent defeat of the 1848 revolutions, the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Spanish cantonalist rebellion of 1873, it was thought by

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<sup>45</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 63. The essay was never published in full because in September 1881 the newspaper *La Révolution Sociale* suspended publication when its editor, the undercover police agent Egide Spilleux, fled with its funds and Cafiero was arrested. See *ibid*, xi.

<sup>46</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 111.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 102-3. For an overview of these railway strikes see Avrich, *Haymarket*, 26-38.

<sup>48</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 500. Kropotkin thought his idea of the spirit of revolt was distinct from Brousse’s theory of propaganda of the deed. This disagreement appears to be largely semantic given that Kropotkin held, like Brousse, that ideas should be spread through actions and that these actions included insurrections. See Miller, *Kropotkin*, 260; Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 103-4.

anarchists that they were riding a revolutionary wave and that the social revolution was imminent. In 1883, whilst on trial in Lyon, Kropotkin declared to the court that “the social revolution is near. It will break out within ten years”.<sup>49</sup> Reflecting on this period in 1904 Kropotkin wrote that, “[r]evolutionaries 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”.<sup>50</sup>

If the revolution was near, then, as Costa wrote in January 1874 (with Bakunin’s approval), “[t]he time for peaceful propaganda has passed, it must be replaced by resounding – solemn propaganda of insurrection and barricades”.<sup>51</sup> These words were written in the journal of the Italian Committee for Social Revolution (CIRS), a secret association whose membership included key Italian anarchists such as Cafiero, Costa and Malatesta. The group sought to put theory into practice by launching multiple insurrections simultaneously across Italy, which had recently experienced a wave of strikes, demonstrations, and riots in response to high food prices and unemployment. This strategy was opposed by the majority of delegates of the St Imier International at a meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1874 on the grounds that socialism was not yet popular enough in Italy for armed insurrections to be launched. Despite lacking international support, the Italian federation nonetheless decided to proceed with its plan. The result was total failure.<sup>52</sup>

None of the insurrections attempted on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> August 1874 went as the Italian anarchists had hoped. The people did not rise up in response to CIRS’ calls for revolution, which they had

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<sup>49</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 111. Kropotkin predicted that a revolution was near several times during this period. For other examples see Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 32, 34-5, 205-6; *Direct Struggle*, 119, 291, 542.

<sup>50</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 545.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 78.

<sup>52</sup> Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 82, 85-6; Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 190, 194-5.

announced in a bulletin that had been posted to the walls of various cities. The thousands of revolutionaries that were expected to form armed bands did not turn up. Instead only several hundred assembled, with a mere five turning up to join Malatesta's insurrection in Puglia. In response the anarchist militants either quickly disbanded or were soon arrested. Other anarchists were arrested before they could even assemble due to police spies sharing the anarchists' plans with the authorities. Bakunin was forced to shave his beard and escape to Switzerland disguised as a priest.<sup>53</sup>

The insurrections of August 1874 were viewed by Costa, one of the main organisers, as an attempt at propaganda of the deed. In his 1890 memoir Costa wrote that, "the occasion had come if not to provoke the social revolution in Italy, at least to give a practical example that would demonstrate to the people what we wanted and to propagate our ideas with evidence of deeds."<sup>54</sup> Despite the failure of 1874, the Italian Federation of the St Imier International officially adopted propaganda of the deed as a strategy during its congress of October 1876. This was done because, as Cafiero and Malatesta explained in a letter published in the December edition of the *Bulletin* of the Jura Federation, "[t]he Italian Federation holds that the act of insurrection, designed to assert socialist principles through deeds, is the most effective method of propaganda and the only one that, without deceiving and corrupting the masses, can delve into the deepest strata of society and draw the cream of humanity into the struggle, backed by the International."<sup>55</sup>

In advocating propaganda through the deed of armed insurrection Italian anarchists were not advocating something new to Italian politics. The strategy had a prior history in the theory and

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<sup>53</sup> Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 90-5; Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 203-209. For Malatesta's account of his role in the insurrection see Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 12-3.

<sup>54</sup> Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 85.

<sup>55</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 11. Similar ideas had been expressed by Malatesta at the recent 1876 October Berne Congress of the St Imier International. See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 346.

practice of revolutionary Italian republicanism, which much of the Italian anarchist movement had developed out of.<sup>56</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini and his associates had sought to create a unified Italian republic through a strategy of armed bands of revolutionaries engaging in guerrilla warfare and attempting to “rouse the nation into insurrection”.<sup>57</sup> This can be seen in Mazzini’s hope that a defeated 1853 insurrection in Milan would have been “the kindling of a universal fire throughout Italy” if it had lasted twenty-four hours.<sup>58</sup> It is thus unsurprising that Malatesta later claimed, in 1897, that the early anarchist movement in Italy had believed in “the youthful illusion (which we inherited from mazzinianism) of imminent revolution achievable through the efforts of the few without due preparation in the masses”.<sup>59</sup>

The attempted insurrections launched by Italian republicans were consistently unsuccessful. They often failed, like the future anarchist insurrections, due to the state knowing of the plots before they were launched.<sup>60</sup> The exception was in 1860 when Giuseppe Garibaldi, a long-time associate of Mazzini, assisted Victor Emmanuel in his successful bid to become monarch of a unified Italian state by invading Sicily with roughly 1,000 poorly armed men and subsequently, after amassing a much larger army of 20,000 soldiers, capturing Naples.<sup>61</sup> An inkling of the effect that Garibaldi’s actions had on the developing socialist movement can be seen in Kropotkin’s insistence in an 1897 letter to Maria Isidine Goldsmith that between 1859 and 1860 “Garibaldi’s brave campaigns did more to spread the liberal, radical spirit of revolt and socialism right across Europe than anything else”.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The unsuccessful insurrections of 1874 were in part launched in order to out-compete Italian republican revolutionaries. See Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 84-5.

<sup>57</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *C " E q u o q r q n k v c p k u o " q h " P c v k q p u < " I , N a t i o n g r r g " O c / / k B u i l d i n g , a n d I n t e r n a t i o n a l R e l a t i o n s*, ed. Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 111.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 100.

<sup>59</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 336.

<sup>60</sup> D. M. Smith, *Mazzini*, 6-7, 10, 41, 47, 64-73, 98-101, 118-119; Martin Clark, *The Italian Risorgimento*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009), 41.

<sup>61</sup> Clark, *Italian Risorgimento*, 80-4.

<sup>62</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 140. One of the individuals inspired by Mazzini and Garibaldi was Bakunin who, prior to becoming an anarchist, met and attempted to work with them between 1862-4 in order to achieve Slav

Italian anarchists were particularly influenced by Carlo Pisacane, whose writings they discovered in the mid-1870s. Pisacane was a socialist influenced by Proudhon and was chief of staff of Mazzini's republican army of 1849.<sup>63</sup> In 1857, shortly before dying in a failed insurrection at Sapri (which he co-organised with Mazzini), he wrote that, "[i]deas spring from deeds and not the other way around. . . conspiracies, plots and attempted uprisings are the succession of deeds whereby Italy proceeds towards her goal of unity. The flash of Milano's bayonet was a more effective propaganda than a thousand volumes penned by doctrinarians."<sup>64</sup>

Undeterred by their previous failure in 1874 the Italian anarchists soon made a second attempt at insurrection which would come to be known as the Benevento Affair. In theory an armed band of anarchists would roam the Matese mountain range and its surrounding provinces in southern Italy spreading revolutionary consciousness. One of the insurrection's participants, Pietro Ceccarelli (who had previously participated in Garibaldi's campaigns), explained later in 1881 that they planned "to rove about the countryside for as long as possible, preaching [class] war, inciting social brigandage, occupying small towns and leaving them after having accomplished whatever revolutionary acts we could, and to proceed to that area where our presence would prove more useful". Believing "that revolution must be provoked, we carried out an act of provocation . . . We were a band of insurgents destined to provoke an insurrection that cannot and must not count on anything but the echo it may find in the population". They

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liberation as part of a wider democratic political revolution. Bakunin would go on to become a major critic of Mazzini and Garibaldi. See Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 13-20, 57-60, 84-5, 122-6, 131-3, 147-8, 255, note 19; Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 214-31.

<sup>63</sup> Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 11-13, 118-9, 169. The influence Pisacane had on Italian anarchism can be seen in the fact that Cafiero quotes him at length. See Cafiero, *Revolution*, 4-5, 10-11, 14, 23, 45, 47, 62, 66-7.

Despite being a republican martyr the political theory of Pisacane does not appear to have been widely known among Italian republicans in the 1860s. See Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 70-3.

<sup>64</sup> Carlo Pisacane, *Propaganda of the Deed* (1857), <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/2011/09/22/carlo-pisacane-propaganda-by-the-deed-1857/>. According to Nettlau the earliest re-print of this text he was aware of occurred in June 1878 within the Italian anarchist journal *N o C x x*. See Nettlau, *Short History of Anarchism*, 92.

were in short “[p]artisans of propaganda of the deed” who “wanted to carry out an act of propaganda”.<sup>65</sup>

James Guillaume described the ideas behind this strategy in detail. He wrote,

Our friends in Italy came to the conclusion that, in their country at least, oral and written propaganda were not enough, and that, to be clearly understood by the popular masses, especially the peasants, it was necessary to show them what could not be made living and real in any theoretical teaching, they had to be taught socialism through deeds so that they could see, feel and touch it. A plan was formed for teaching the Italian peasants, by means of a practical lesson, what society would be like if it got rid of government and property owners; for this, it would be enough to organise an armed band, large enough to control the countryside for a brief time and go from one commune to another carrying into effect Socialism through action before the very eyes of the people.<sup>66</sup>

Things did not go according to plan.<sup>67</sup> The Italian state was aware of the plot by mid-February 1877 due to reports from police spies who had infiltrated the anarchist movement. The following month, a member of the group, Salvatore Farina, disappeared having revealed the full details of their plans to the Italian state. Rather than flee the country, the anarchists decided to launch the insurrection at the beginning of April, a month earlier than planned. Doing so did not allow the anarchists to escape police repression. Several anarchists were arrested before they could even reach the agreed rendezvous point. Those who managed to arrive successfully were forced to flee the area with a fraction of their equipment after discovering and shooting at the four policemen who had them under surveillance. During their escape they were joined

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 119, 121.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 78.

<sup>67</sup> The following account of the Benevento Affair is a summary of Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 121-6; Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 225-9.

by ten fellow insurgents who had, by chance, eluded the police because they missed their scheduled train. Together the group of only twenty-six anarchists headed for the mountains.

The armed band was low on men, ammunition, weapons and food. Travelling to nearby large towns to gather supplies was not an option since, as the anarchists soon discovered, the government had already occupied the area with 12,000 troops. Given these circumstances the anarchists were only able to enter two small towns, Letino and Gallo. In each case they achieved what little they could by burning official documents taken from the town hall, distributing what weapons and money they could find to the local peasants, and giving a speech on the necessity and value of the social revolution. In his speech to the peasants of Letino Cafiero declared “[t]he rifles and the axes we have given you, the knives you have. If you wish, do something, and if not, go f— yourselves”.<sup>68</sup>

According to Brousse these actions had been a practical demonstration which taught the peasants how much contempt they should have for private property and the state.<sup>69</sup> This lesson appears to have had a limited effect since the peasants of both Letino and Gallo cheered and applauded the anarchists only to return to their daily lives once the band had left. One of the reasons why the peasants did not join the anarchists in insurrection was that they were legitimately afraid of what would happen if they rose up. Malatesta later recalled that a peasant in Gallo had asked him how they could know that the anarchists were not, in fact, undercover police attempting to entrap them. Even if they could be sure that the anarchists were not police, an insurrection was still deeply impractical. As the peasants explained to Malatesta, “the town is in no condition to defend itself, the revolution has not yet erupted on a vast scale, tomorrow the troops will come and massacre us all”.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 125

<sup>69</sup> Brousse, “Propaganda of the Deed”, 151.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 126.



After failing to escape the region due to poor weather conditions the anarchists took refuge for the night in a farmhouse near Letino. They were soon surrounded by soldiers after being informed on by a local peasant seeking a reward. Fighting was not an option for the anarchists because their weapons and ammunition had been rendered useless by rainfall. Knowing that they would be killed if they resisted the anarchists chose to surrender without a fight. With their arrests the insurrection was over.

The insurrection was not, however, a total failure. News of the insurrection and the subsequent trial, during which the defendants gave speeches on anarchism, garnered the International and its revolutionary socialist politics considerable national attention for several weeks. This was probably a contributing factor in the growth of the Italian section of the St Imier International over the following year and a half.<sup>71</sup> Cafiero, perhaps looking for a positive outcome of the failed insurrection he had participated in, later claimed that the Benevento affair had increased demand for Marx's *Capital* to such an extent that "one bookseller in Naples" was forced to find more copies after having sold out.<sup>72</sup>

Anarchists in Berne, Switzerland made less ambitious attempts at propaganda of the deed. They attended a demonstration on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1877, the anniversary of the Paris Commune, and brought red flags with them. The canton had prohibited the public display of the red flag and the previous year's demonstration by social democrats had ended in failure when it was attacked, dispersed and the red flag was torn up. The aim of the anarchists was to march through Berne defending the flag from attacks by the police. This action was inspired by a Russian demonstration on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1876 when students and workers had gathered outside Our Lady of Kazan Cathedral after a revolutionary had been killed in prison. At the demonstration a student carrying a red flag had declared the demonstration's solidarity with all who had

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<sup>71</sup> Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 126-7, 140-5.

<sup>72</sup> Cafiero, *Revolution*, 63-4.

suffered in the struggle against Tsarism. The subsequent brutal state repression of the demonstration led to a large increase in public sympathy towards the revolutionaries. The anarchists hoped that their demonstration involving a red flag would have a similar effect and lead to increased sympathy with and support for the Jura Federation, whose membership was in serious decline.

On the day of the protest in Berne roughly 250 demonstrators, several of whom were armed with sticks and truncheons, assembled themselves into a procession and marched forward with the Swiss anarchist Adhémar Schwitzguébel at their head brandishing a red flag. The demonstration, which was attended by several well-known anarchists including Guillaume, Kropotkin and the Frenchman Jean-Louis Pindy, was then attacked by police armed with sabres and the anarchists defended themselves. During the struggle six policemen and several protestors were seriously wounded. The anarchists were forced to abandon the original flag but did manage to escape with another red flag and take it to the meeting planned for the end of the demonstration.<sup>73</sup> Kropotkin claimed in letter written to Paul Robin on 24<sup>th</sup> March, that the protest had nonetheless been a success because 2000 people, instead of the expected seventy, had attended the meeting afterwards organised by the anarchists. Their act of revolt had gained them “an attentive and in part sympathetic public” since “[t]here is nothing like courage to win over the people”.<sup>74</sup> In August Brousse argued that the Berne protest was an act of propaganda of the deed which taught the Swiss working class “that they do not, as they thought they did, enjoy freedom”.<sup>75</sup> This lack of freedom was apparent in how the Swiss state responded to the Berne protest. Thirty of the demonstrators were brought to trial and sentenced to periods of imprisonment ranging from sixty days for the two anarchists who had struck policemen with sticks to forty days for Guillaume, thirty days for Brousse and ten days for the rest. All the

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<sup>73</sup> Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 80-2, 100-2; Miller, *Kropotkin*, 136-7; Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, 80-3.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 101.

<sup>75</sup> Brousse, “Propaganda of the Deed”, 151.

foreign participants were expelled from the Berne Canton for three years and with this the movement in Berne lost its leading militants.<sup>76</sup>

### 6.3.2 – Propaganda of the Deed: Second Phase

During its second phase propaganda of the deed developed into advocating or engaging in assassination and bombings.<sup>77</sup> This occurred in response to a vast array of factors which included: a vicious cycle of anarchists responding to state violence with violent individual attacks which led, in turn, to more state violence and so on; anarchists being influenced by assassinations and bombings carried out by contemporary social movements such as Italian republicans, Russian nihilists and Irish nationalists;<sup>78</sup> and the nefarious influence of police spies and agents.<sup>79</sup> It is difficult to chart the transformation of propaganda of the deed from collective uprisings into individual acts of violence. This is because it is rarely clear if a particular attack was carried out by a genuine anarchist attempting to implement insurrectionist theory and engage in propaganda of the deed. Attacks were frequently attributed to anarchists by the police or the press (including the anarchist press) with little to no evidence.<sup>80</sup>

The earliest alleged anarchist assassination attempts occurred in 1878 when Max Hödel on 11<sup>th</sup> May and Dr Carl Nobiling on 2<sup>nd</sup> June both tried unsuccessfully to kill the Kaiser of Germany

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<sup>76</sup> Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, 113.

<sup>77</sup> I have decided not to collectively label these acts ‘terrorism’. This is because although some of them were acts of terror against civilians, others were targeted attacks against specific individuals which occurred as part of an on-going armed conflict between anarchists and the ruling classes. They were thus more akin to special operations carried out during a war. This is in turn consistent with how anarchists viewed themselves as militants fighting a class war.

<sup>78</sup> For overviews of these other social movement see: Claudia Verhoeven, *The Old Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity and the Birth of Terrorism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Lindsay Clutterbuck, “The Progenitors of Terrorism: Russian Revolutionaries or Extreme Irish Republicans?” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 1 (2004); Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 20, 66, 149; Ronald Seth, *The Russian Terrorists: The Story of the Narodniki* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1966); K. R. M. Short, *The Dynamite War: Irish-American Bombers in Victorian Britain* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1979).

<sup>79</sup> Alex Butterworth, *The World That Never Was: The True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents* (London: Vintage Books, 2011), 297-8, 339-44, 390; Jensen, *The Battle Against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 44-52; Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 212-3; Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 43-5.

<sup>80</sup> Jensen, *Anarchist Terrorism*, 7, 23-4.

Wilhelm I. This was soon followed by Juan Olivia y Moncasi's failed attempt to assassinate King Alfonso XII of Spain on 25<sup>th</sup> October. It is not clear from the available evidence whether either Hödel or Nobiling were genuine anarchists. At best they were socialists with some loose connections to a few anarchist groups.<sup>81</sup> Although Moncasi was a member of the anarchist-led Spanish section of the St Imier International it is not clear whether he was an anarchist himself. Nor was it ever proven conclusively that he had fired a pistol at the King.<sup>82</sup>

The first definite anarchist assassination plot occurred in 1880. After guns had failed to kill the Kaiser the German anarchist August Reinsdorf planned to dig a tunnel under the Reichstag, plant explosives around the building's supports and ignite them while the Reichstag was in session. Reinsdorf made the mistake of explaining his plan in a letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1880 to his associate Johann Most, a German socialist who, at the time, lived in London, edited the journal *Freiheit* and had yet to become an anarchist. Oskar Neumann, a spy living in London, heard of the plan and subsequently informed the Berlin police. Reinsdorf was arrested on 14<sup>th</sup> November while carrying a long dagger near the home of the Berlin chief of police, Guido von Madai, whom he planned to assassinate.<sup>83</sup>

This escalation in political practice was mirrored by an escalation in theory. In December 1880 Cafiero advocated "permanent rebellion, by word, by writing, by dagger, by gun, by dynamite" in the pages of *Le Révolté*. He repeated the old insurrectionist idea that "it is action which gives rise to ideas, and which is also responsible for spreading them across the world". What had changed was the scope of acceptable action. Rather than merely advocating armed bands inspiring a popular insurrection he now insisted that anarchists should "use every weapon

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<sup>81</sup> Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 115-6, 139-41. For the argument that they were anarchists see *ibid*, 117-24, 143-8. For a critique of this view see Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 89-90. Kropotkin denied that there was any connection between these assassination attempts and the Jura Federation. See Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 388-9.

<sup>82</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 65-6; Anderson, *Age of Globalisation*, 115, note 90.

<sup>83</sup> Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 284-5.

which can be used for rebellion” since “[e]verything is right for us which is not legal”. Small groups of anarchists were to “fight and die” alongside popular movements and thereby ensure that the “the seeds of . . . revolutionary socialism” these movements carried grew and flowered. Instead of gradually developing their strength over time anarchists were to immediately attack the existing order and through these violent acts develop their strength “just as exercise develops the strength of our muscles”.<sup>84</sup> Cafiero, in short, held that engaging in revolutionary violence would simultaneously develop the capacities of anarchists and instil radical drives and consciousness within the working classes.

A few months later Cafiero wrote a letter to the paper *Il Grido del Popolo* where he advocated armed struggle in more detail. Anarchist militants were to form a group in their area composed of between six and ten men or women and thereby establish “a decentralised force, free and anti-authoritarian”. Each group would be their “own centre of action, with a plan all of its own, and a multiplicity of varied and harmonic initiatives”. These affinity groups were to engage in “violent means” and carry out a “war” aimed at “the destruction of all oppressors and exploiters”. Cafiero predicted that the actions of these groups would “find echoes all over the world” such that shortly afterwards “the whole country” would “be covered in groups” and “action” had “become generalised.”<sup>85</sup>

Propaganda of the deed soon came to be enshrined in the resolutions of the International Social Revolutionary Congress, which met in London between 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1881 and was

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<sup>84</sup> Carlo Cafiero, “Action (1880)” in *A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, 152-3; Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 186-8. Some authors have either falsely attributed this text to Kropotkin (Guérin, *Anarchism*, 74-5; Anderson, *Age of Globalisation*, 74) or implied that he approved of its message because it was published in the paper he edited (Joll, *Anarchists*, 127). Kropotkin in fact opposed the strategies advocated by Cafiero and this disagreement led to their relationship becoming increasingly strained. See Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 140-1.

<sup>85</sup> Cafiero, “The Organisation of Armed Struggle (1881), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/carlo-cafiero-the-organisation-of-armed-struggle>.

conceived as an attempt to re-found the International.<sup>86</sup> Delegates from various anarchist groups, which included the French police agent Égide Spilleux who operated under the pseudonym Serraux, agreed to adopt the policy that “propaganda by deed” should be added to “oral and written propaganda”. It was asserted that,

It is absolutely necessary to exert every effort towards propagating, by deeds, the revolutionary idea and to arouse the spirit of revolt in those sections of the popular masses who still harbour illusions about the effectiveness of legal methods . . . Whereas the agricultural workers are still outside the revolutionary movement, it is absolutely necessary to make every effort to win them to our cause, and to keep in mind that a deed performed against the existing institutions appeals to the masses much more than thousands of leaflets and torrents of words, and that ‘Propaganda by Deed’ is of greater importance in the countryside than in the cities.<sup>87</sup>

Edward Nathan-Ganz, delegate No.22 and one of the three members of the resolution committee appointed to summarise the proposals which had been put forward during the congress, connected propaganda of the deed to the manufacture of bombs when he wrote within the resolution that, “[w]hereas the technical and chemical sciences have rendered services to the revolutionary cause and are bound to render still greater services in the future, the Congress suggests that organisational and individuals affiliated with the International Workingmen’s Association devote themselves to the study of these sciences.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> According to a police report, almost identical resolutions had been passed a year earlier on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1880 at a meeting of 32 anarchist militants in Vevey, Switzerland, which included Kropotkin and Reclus. See Fleming, *Anarchist Way*, 172.

<sup>87</sup> The full declaration is quoted in Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 252-3. For Égide Spilleux see Jensen, *Anarchist Terrorism*, 17.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 253. Nathan-Ganz had a few months prior published an article on “Revolutionary War Science”, meaning the use of explosives, in his paper the *An-Archist: Socialistic Revolutionary Review*. See Avrich, *Haymarket*, 57-8; Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 81, 206, note 28.

Reinsdorf soon decided to follow these proposals and undertake a second attempt at blowing up members of Germany's ruling classes. As he explained in an 1882 letter to an American comrade only the bomb could "inject the whole bourgeoisie and their slaves with total terror" and achieve "complete and utter revenge" for "all the dirty tricks and atrocities" they committed.<sup>89</sup> This time Reinsdorf and his associates in the town of Elberfeld planned to use dynamite to kill Wilhelm I, alongside many other key members of the German ruling classes, at the inauguration of the Niederwald Monument on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1883.

The assassination did not go according to plan. Due to a sprained ankle Reinsdorf was unable to go himself and two of his associates, the saddler Franz Rupsch and the compositor Emil K  chler, went in his place. K  chler made the mistake of ignoring Reinsdorf's instructions to buy a waterproof fuse. The night before the assassination attempt it rained heavily and as a result the cheaper fuse failed to ignite at the crucial moment. News of the plot was made public on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1884 and by December Reinsdorf and his group were on trial for the attempted assassination of the Emperor in Niederwald. It turned out that one of Reinsdorf's associates, the weaver Carl Rudolf Palm who had donated 40 marks towards Rupsch and K  chler's travel expenses, was in fact a police spy and had been informing on the group from the very beginning. During the trial Reinsdorf exclaimed that "[t]he people will one day have enough dynamite to blow up all of you and every other member of the bourgeois". On the morning of 7<sup>th</sup> February 1885 Reinsdorf and K  chler were executed, with Rupsch having had his death sentence commuted to imprisonment for life.<sup>90</sup>

Reinsdorf and his associates were not the only anarchists in the region to engage in insurrectionary violence. Between 1882 and 1884 the anarchists Herman Stellmacher, Anton

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Ulrich Linse, "Propaganda by Deed' and 'Direct Action': Two Concepts of Anarchist Violence" in *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Europe*, ed. Wolfgang J Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), 210.

<sup>90</sup> Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 288-300.

Kammerer and Michael Kumics carried out a series of robberies within Germany and Austria in which they expropriated wealth in the name of the social revolution. During these robberies they killed a pharmacist, a soldier, a banker, and a money changer and his two sons aged nine and eleven. Stellmacher was eventually arrested on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1884 after he had killed a police agent in revenge for how the police had treated the families of workers.

The transformation of the idea of propaganda of the deed can be seen in how Most, who had moved to the United States and become an anarchist, reacted to these events.<sup>91</sup> During a speech at a meeting held in celebration of Stellmacher's courage he proclaimed that "[w]ith shouts of joy does the proletariat learn of such deeds of vengeance. The propaganda of the deed excites incalculable enthusiasm". After Stellmacher's execution in August a placard was placed by anarchists in Little Germany, the German-speaking neighbourhood of New York, which read "Herman Stellmacher is dead! Long live the propaganda of the act! Hurrah for the social revolution!"<sup>92</sup>

This interpretation of propaganda of the deed was consistently advocated by Most during this period.<sup>93</sup> In May 1883 he wrote that, "[t]he revolution has no respect for things or people who are connected with the existing system of robbery and murder. Such people are condemned and will sooner or later receive their just fate". By March 1884 he called for the destruction of the means of communication, the dynamiting of homes, offices, churches, stores, and factories. He claimed that "lead and dynamite, poison and knives are the weapons with which our brothers will open the skirmish". Like Reinsdorf he justified this violence as a legitimate form of

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<sup>91</sup> It is difficult to give an exact date for when Most became an anarchist, but it appears to have occurred sometime between 1881 and 1883. See Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*, 59-60, 93-4.

<sup>92</sup> Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 260-7; Messer-Kruse, *Haymarket Conspiracy*, 130. I do not know if Stellmacher and his associates shared the view that they had engaged in propaganda of the deed. They could have, for example, held that they engaged in acts of partial expropriation which included murder rather than acts of murder which were propaganda of the deed.

<sup>93</sup> The subsequent Most quotes are from Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 253-5.



revenge by the poor against their oppressors. On 7<sup>th</sup> June he stated that “it was time for the atonement of the crimes committed against society using the principle of ‘an eye for an eye’”. Most explicitly advocated assassination in October when he wrote that,

Every prince will find his Brutus. Poison on the table of the gourmet will cancel out his debt. Dynamite will explode in the splendid, rubber tyred, coaches of the aristocracy and bourgeois as they pull up to the opera. Death will await them, both by day and by night, on all roads and footpaths and even in their homes, lurking in a thousand different forms.

Shake you dogs, you blood suckers, you violators of young girls, you murderers and executioners – the day of retribution, the day of vengeance draws near.

In 1885 Most published a seventy-five page assassination manual for his readers based on the knowledge he learned working in an explosives factory. It was titled *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare: A Manual of Instruction in the Use and Preparation of Nitroglycerine, Dynamite, Gun-Cotton, Fulminating Mercury, Bombs, Fuses, Poisons, etc.*

In parallel with these developments a few isolated cases of anarchist violence occurred in France. During the spring of 1884 a gardener named Louis Chavès responded to being fired by the convent in Marseilles where he worked by murdering the Mother Superior. Chavès, who died during a shootout with the police when they came to arrest him, sent a letter into the Lyon based paper *Nø J { f t g " c*. In the letter he advised fellow anarchists that social change would not occur through “words or paper” and that “true anarchists” should follow his example and “arm themselves . . . with a good revolver, a good dagger, and a box of matches”.<sup>94</sup> In 1886 the French anarchist Charles Gallo, who had discovered anarchism whilst in prison for forging

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 249.

money, threw a bottle of sulphuric acid down onto the brokers in the Paris stock exchange. After doing so he drew his revolver and fired three shots which failed to hit anybody. During his trial he is reported to have shouted “Long live revolution! Long live anarchism! Death to the bourgeois judiciary! Long live dynamite! Bunch of idiots!” He, in addition to this, explicitly claimed that his attack had been “an act of propaganda by the deed for anarchist doctrine”.<sup>95</sup>

It was not until the 1890s that the new understanding of propaganda of the deed was implemented by anarchists on a grand scale. Focusing on France, on 11<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 1892 François Koenigstein, known more commonly as Ravachol, sought vengeance for state repression towards working-class protestors by bombing the apartment buildings where the Judge Benoit and the prosecutor attorney Bulot lived. Several months later on 8<sup>th</sup> November, Émile Henry left a bomb outside the offices of the Carmaux Mining Company in retaliation for its poor treatment of workers and attacks on the miner’s union, which included firing, suspending, and fining union leaders. The bomb exploded after being moved to a nearby police station, killing five people. On 9<sup>th</sup> December 1893 Auguste Vaillant, an unemployed anarchist who was unable to feed his wife and daughter, threw a small nail bomb into France’s chamber of deputies in order to call attention to the suffering of the poor. Due to its design the bomb only slightly wounded several deputies and a few spectators. Despite not having killed anyone Vaillant was sentenced to death. Seven days after Vaillant was executed Émile Henry sought revenge and threw a bomb into Paris’s Café Terminus on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1894. His aim was not to target any person in particular but to kill any random member of the bourgeoisie. The explosion killed one and wounded twenty. Events continued to escalate when on 24<sup>th</sup> June the

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<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Joll, *Anarchists*, 131.

Italian anarchist Sante Caserio sought retaliation for the execution of Henry and stabbed to death the French president Sadi Carnot.<sup>96</sup>

Similar events occurred outside France. In the United States Berkman unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate the capitalist Henry Clay Frick at his offices in Pittsburgh on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1892, after seven striking workers had been killed by Pinkertons at the Homestead steel works.<sup>97</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> September 1893 Paulino Pallás threw a bomb at Arsenio Martínez de Campos, the Captain General of Catalonia, during a military parade in Barcelona, Spain. The bomb, which was thrown in response to the execution of four anarchist militants, killed his horse and two spectators and wounded Campos and twelve others. Pallás was subsequently executed. Santiago Salvador, who had been converted to anarchism by Pallás, sought revenge for his friend's execution by throwing two bombs down onto the wealthy audience of the Liceo Opera theatre in Barcelona during its 7<sup>th</sup> November performance of William Tell. Only one bomb exploded, killing fifteen people and seriously injuring fifty others.<sup>98</sup>

Several years later anarchists successfully assassinated multiple members of the ruling classes. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1897 the Italian anarchist Michele Angiolillo assassinated the Spanish prime minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo in Mondragón, Spain. This was soon followed by the Italian anarchist Luigi Lucheni killing the Empress of Austria Elisabeth Eugenie on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1898 in Geneva, Switzerland and the Italian anarchist Gaetano Bresci assassinating King Umberto the 1<sup>st</sup> of Italy on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1900 in Monza, Italy. A year later the American anarchist Leon Czolgosz shot and fatally wounded the American president William McKinley on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1901 in the city of Buffalo.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Merriman, *Dynamite*, 71-3, 79-81, 99-105, 137-8, 145, 149-59, 180-1, 206.

<sup>97</sup> Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 52-9, 65-9.

<sup>98</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 178-9, 184-8.

<sup>99</sup> Pernicone and Fraser M. Ottanelli, *Assassins Against the Old Order: Italian Anarchist Violence*

Anarchist assassinations and bombings did not end suddenly at the dawn of the new century and continued for several years after. To give a few examples, anarchist bomb throwers unsuccessfully attempted to murder the King of Spain Alfonso XIII during his 1905 visit to Paris and 1906 wedding in Madrid. The explosions from these two assassination attempts injured 124 bystanders and killed twenty-three people.<sup>100</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1916 a suitcase bomb exploded at a ‘preparedness parade’ which had been called by the government of San Francisco to demonstrate the United States’ readiness for war. The bomb had been planted by the Italian anarchist group Anarchico Volonta as a protest against militarism. The group, which had been founded in 1916 and contained between thirty and forty regular members, were, unsurprisingly, anti-organisationists heavily influenced by the teachings of Galleani.<sup>101</sup> In 1919 the French anarchist Emile Cottin attempted to repeat the actions of Caserio towards Carnot when he tried, unsuccessfully, to assassinate the French Prime Minister Clemenceau in Paris.<sup>102</sup> Propaganda of the deed was, in short, as much of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon as it was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century one.<sup>103</sup>

Anarchists responded to the wave of assassinations and bombings which began in the 1890s in a variety of conflicting ways. Several authors, including Goldman, Galleani, De Cleyre, Kropotkin and Reclus, thought that the people who carried out such acts were sensitive or desperate individuals reacting to the much greater daily violence of capitalism and the state.<sup>104</sup>

Some anarchists opposed these acts on the grounds that they were tactically misguided, harmful to the anarchist movement, and immoral when they targeted innocent people. One of the most

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in *Fin de Siècle Europe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 112-3, 115-6, 132-3; Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 156-7, 161.

<sup>100</sup> Avrich, *Modern School*, 26; A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 163.

<sup>101</sup> Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 255-66; Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 99.

<sup>102</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 167.

<sup>103</sup> For other 20<sup>th</sup> century examples see Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 228-36; Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 97-104, 137-59, 205-7; Betta, *Living Like Nomads*, 200, 221-2, 229.

<sup>104</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 256-79; Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 84-90; de Cleyre, *Reader*, 173-6; Kinna, *Kropotkin*, 58-60; Clark, “Introduction” in Reclus, *Anarchy*, 57-9.

influential of these was Malatesta. He opposed Henry's bombing of the Café Terminus as "unjust, vicious, and senseless" and argued that Salvador's bombing of the Liceo Opera theatre killed and wounded "needless victims" whilst achieving "no possible benefit to the cause". In the case of Michele Angiolillo's assassination of the Spanish Prime minister, which did not harm any innocent people, Malatesta thought that although the act was morally justifiable "it is doubtful that his deed served the freedom of Spaniards". For Malatesta "it is for reasons of usefulness that, generally speaking, we are not in favour of individual attacks, which have been very common throughout history but almost always have not helped, and have very often harmed, the cause they were intended to serve".<sup>105</sup>

Other anarchists labelled the perpetrators as martyrs who acted heroically in the pursuit of social emancipation. Louisa Sarah Bevington wrote poems praising Ravachol and Pallas. In her 1895 manifesto of the London based Anarchist Communist Alliance she insisted that, "those who did these acts were the very best, the most human, unselfish, self-sacrificing of our comrades, who threw their lives away, meeting death or imprisonment in the hope that their acts would sow the seeds of revolt, that they might show the way and wake an echo, by their deeds of rebellion, in the victims of the present system".<sup>106</sup> In 1900 Goldman responded to Bresci's assassination of Umberto the 1<sup>st</sup> of Italy by claiming that the king "was justly put to death by a brave man who dared to act for the good of his fellow men".<sup>107</sup>

Those most committed to insurrectionist anarchism went further and argued publicly that these acts of propaganda of the deed were not only heroic acts of resistance but were acts which should be copied and emulated by others. The lyrics of the French anarchist song *La Ravachole*

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<sup>105</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 58, 124-7, 264-5. See also Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 187-91.

<sup>106</sup> Louisa Sarah Bevington, *An Anarchist Manifesto* (1895), <https://libcom.org/library/anarchist-manifesto>; Quail, *Slow Burning*, 168. The Anarchist Communist Alliance appears to have not done anything more than issue this manifesto. See *ibid*, 203.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 149. See also *ibid*, 142-3, 152, 165-6

declared “long live the sound of the explosion”, “all the bourgeois will taste the bomb”, “we’ll blow up all the bourgeois” and “death to the bourgeoisie”.<sup>108</sup> An Italian anarchist group in the United States named themselves after the day Bresci assassinated King Umberto 1<sup>st</sup> of Italy.<sup>109</sup> The Spanish anarchist paper *Tierra y Libertad* published an article in 1899 which argued that “instead of repudiating personal acts in which the individual pays with his life for carrying out a heroic action for the cause of justice, we should to the contrary praise them so that they have emulators, and these acts, becoming generalised, are the acts that can lead the spontaneous revolution”.<sup>110</sup>

Galleani wrote articles defending Pallas and Vaillant in December 1893 and publicly recommended a bomb-making manual in 1906 which featured an image of Ravachol on the front cover.<sup>111</sup> Several years later, in 1925, Galleani argued that a wave of individual acts of violence was “a necessarily intermediary phenomenon between the sheer ideal or theoretical affirmation and the insurrectionary movement which follows it and kindles the torch of the victorious revolution”. Just as Brousse had previously thought that anarchist-led insurrections transmitted lessons to the people so too did Galleani think that assassinating monarchs was a powerful means of communication. It taught the oppressed classes that a monarch, who is picked by God and wields a vast amount of power, can be killed and so “is like any other man, only a miserable bag of fragile flesh and bones”. Each anarchist assassin or bomber was to be admired since they “scourge cowardice, rebel against submission, engrave a lesson” and so “do the work of revolution”.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> “La Ravachol” in *Death to Bourgeois Society: The Propagandists of the Deed*, ed. Mitchell Abidor (Oakland CA, PM Press, 2015), 27-8.

<sup>109</sup> Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 52.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Miguel Amorós, *The Two Anarchisms ó Legalism and Illegalism in the Libertarian Movement in Late Nineteenth Century Spain* (2003), <https://libcom.org/history/two-anarchisms-legalism-illegalism-libertarian-movement-late-nineteenth-century-spain-mi>.

<sup>111</sup> Senta, *Galleani*, 65-6, 139-41.

<sup>112</sup> Galleani, *End of Anarchism*, 84, 94-5.

According to Richard Bach Jensen, during the 1890s real or alleged anarchist assassinations and bombings in Europe, the United States and Australia killed at least 60 people and wounded more than 200. Between 1878 and 1914, real or alleged anarchist assassinations and bombings globally (excluding Russia) killed more than 220 people and wounded over 750. Despite such human costs, the tactic of propaganda of the deed had failed to ignite the promised social revolution. It had instead made the social revolution a more remote possibility because it both convinced the political ruling classes, including heads of police, that they were threatened by an international co-ordinated anarchist conspiracy which had to be destroyed, and it provided them with a political opportunity for directing huge amounts of state repression towards the anarchist movement in particular and the socialist movement in general.<sup>113</sup> Kropotkin neatly summarised the consequences of this state repression in 1907 when he remarked that it had the “effect of thinning our ranks”.<sup>114</sup>

## 6.4 – Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that insurrectionist anarchists advocated the formation of small anarchist affinity groups, rejected struggling for immediate reforms and held that anarchists could effectively spread their ideas, develop the spirit of revolt and generate an increasingly large number of working-class insurrections through engaging in propaganda of the deed. These features of insurrectionist anarchism have been previously noted by Schmidt and van der Walt in *Black Flame*. My work has built on their brief account by examining a greater number of primary and secondary sources in order to establish in detail what insurrectionist anarchists thought and how they used the theory of practice to justify or reject

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<sup>113</sup> Jensen, *Anarchist Terrorism*, 36-8. For an overview of state repression in response to propaganda of the deed see Bantman, *French Anarchists in London*, 132; Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 21-2, 32, note 22; Buttà, *Living Like Nomads*, 34-5, 39; Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, 127-9, 154-8, 293-4; Di Paola, *Knights Errant*, 14-7; Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 167, 188-199; Fleming, *Anarchist Way*, 213-4; Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*, 191; Merriman, *Dynamite*, 207-10.

<sup>114</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 397.

particular strategies. A central aspect of this has been reconstructing the historical process through which propaganda of the deed transformed over several decades from the idea that anarchists should form armed bands which launched insurrections to spread anarchist ideas into the tactic of individuals engaging in assassinations and bombings.

Insurrectionist anarchism was unsuccessful in so far as the main forms of propaganda of the deed they advocated and engaged in failed to inspire the working classes to rise up and in so doing form a mass movement capable of overthrowing class society. The strategy of propaganda of the deed can appear to be doomed to failure from a 21<sup>st</sup> century vantage point equipped with the benefit of hindsight and the lessons of over 150 years of attempts to build socialism. As a result, it is essential to understand insurrectionist anarchists on their own terms and contextualise their ideas within the time they lived in. The strategy of insurrectionist anarchism did not develop out of nowhere. It was instead a product of anarchists being affected by and responding to their contemporary situation. This included: the belief that a social revolution was imminent due to a recent wave of insurrections in multiple countries; being deeply influenced by the actions and ideas of contemporary social movements, such as Italian republicans or Russian nihilists; responding to the much greater violence of the political and economic ruling classes towards the working classes in general and anarchism in particular; and the nefarious influences of police spies and agents provocateurs. Insurrectionist anarchism was nonetheless not the only strategy anarchists developed in response to their context. In the next chapter I shall rationally reconstruct the theory of mass anarchism.



## Chapter 7 – Mass Anarchism

Mass anarchists, such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, advocated the formation of large-scale formal organisations which organised and/or participated in collective struggles for immediate reforms in the present. It was held that these collective struggles for reforms would over time develop a revolutionary mass movement which was both capable of, and driven to, overthrow capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. They thought this would occur due to workers being transformed through (a) the practice of participating within prefigurative organisations and taking direct action against the ruling classes and (b) the influence of anarchists acting as a militant minority within social movements.<sup>1</sup> These features of mass anarchism have, like with insurrectionist anarchism, been previously noted by Schmidt and van der Walt in *Black Flame*. My work will build on their brief overview by establishing in much greater detail what mass anarchists thought and why through an examination of a greater number of primary and secondary sources. I shall, in particular, demonstrate how the strategy of mass anarchism was underpinned by the theory of practice.

### 7.1 – Support of Formal Organisations

Mass anarchists advocated building and participating in large-scale formal organisations which prefigured the kinds of organisation that would exist in a future anarchist society. The two main kinds of organisation they advocated were federations of trade unions, whose membership included both anarchists and non-anarchists, and federations of anarchist militants, which I shall refer to as ‘specific anarchist organisations’.<sup>2</sup> The size of organisation mass anarchists hoped to create can be seen in Kropotkin’s argument that the victory of the working classes

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 20, 124, 133-41.

<sup>2</sup> Some mass anarchists opposed building trade unions and instead argued that anarchists should focus on creating community organisations. I have been unable to find primary sources from Europe and the United States which discuss this view in detail. See Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 124, 134.

required “monster unions embracing millions of proletarians” and the establishment of “an International Federation of all the Trade Unions all over the World”.<sup>3</sup>

Large-scale federations were advocated by mass anarchists for two main practical reasons. Firstly, they held that they were necessary to achieve co-ordination between, and effective action by, large groups of people in different areas. In 1870, Bakunin argued that the self-emancipation of the working classes was impeded by their “lack of organisation, the difficulty of coming to agreements and of acting in concert”. He continued at length,

Certainly, there is sufficient spontaneous strength amongst the people, indubitably the strength of the latter is much greater than that of the government and that of ruling classes within it; but lacking organisation, spontaneous force is no real force. It is not in a [fit] state to sustain a protracted struggle against forces that are much weaker but much better organised. It is on this undeniable superiority of organised force over elemental popular force that all the power of the state resides. . . . Thus, the [real] question is not one of knowing if the people are capable of an uprising, but rather whether they are ready to form an organisation which will assure the success of a revolt, a victory which is not ephemeral, but durable and definitive.<sup>4</sup>

Given this, Bakunin argued in 1872 that in order to “eradicate the State’s military and civil might, it is necessary to organise the proletariat” and thereby develop “the people’s might”. Bakunin thought that the 1st International was the organisation which, at the time of writing, was achieving this goal due to it uniting workers from multiple countries into trade unions.<sup>5</sup> Almost a decade later, in 1881, Kropotkin argued that the working classes had to “become a powerful force which will, on the day of the revolution, impose its will upon exploiters of every

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<sup>3</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 318, 360.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Berthier, *Social-Democracy and Anarchism*, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 139. See also *ibid*, 65.

sort” and therefore must “[i]n order to be able to make revolution . . . organise themselves” into large trade unions which engaged in direct action.<sup>6</sup>

This argument was applied not only to the organisation of the working classes in general but also the organisation of workers who were anarchist militants. In 1889, Malatesta complained that some anarchists had “attacked the principle of organisation itself” in order to “prevent betrayals and deception, permit free rein to individual initiative, ensure against spies and attacks from the government”. In so doing they had unintentionally “brought isolation and impotence to the fore”.<sup>7</sup> Amédée Dunois similarly claimed at the 1907 International Anarchist Conference in Amsterdam that the French anarchist movement was disorganised and fragmented into unconnected small groups and isolated individuals. The negative consequence of this was that “[e]veryone acts in his own way, whenever he wants” and such “individual efforts are dispersed and often exhausted, simply wasted”. The solution to this problem was the formation of a specific anarchist organisation which united “all those forces that have been fighting in isolation up to now” under “a programme of concrete, practical action” in order to achieve the “might of joint” and “concerted action”.<sup>8</sup>

The second reason why mass anarchists advocated large-scale federations was that they were necessary for developing the kinds of people and social relations which were needed in order to abolish capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. In 1892 Malatesta argued that since “agreement, association, and organisation represent one of the laws governing life and the key to strength – today as well as after the revolution” it follows that the working classes must be organised prior to the social revolution. This is because “tomorrow can only grow out of today – and if one seeks success tomorrow, the factors of success need to be

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<sup>6</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 306, 309.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 177-8.

<sup>8</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 83, 89-90.

prepared today”.<sup>9</sup> It was especially important that this occurred given that, as Malatesta explained in 1897, workers cannot be “expected to provide for pressing needs” during the social revolution “unless they were already used to coming together to deal jointly with their common interests”. Important tasks, such as supplying bread to everyone in a city, would have to be organised and this required that “bakery workers” were “already associated and ready to manage without masters”.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas insurrectionist anarchists held that large-scale formal organisations were incompatible with the freedom of the individual, and so anarchism’s commitment to the unity of means and ends, mass anarchists believed that large-scale formal organisations were both compatible with freedom and a prerequisite for it. This is because they thought that large-scale co-ordination and collective action based on voluntary agreement expanded a person’s real possibility to act and develop themselves far beyond what an individual could attain by themselves or in a small isolated group.<sup>11</sup> They were, nevertheless, still anarchists and so opposed to any system of top-down organisation based on minority rule and centralisation.<sup>12</sup> The conclusions of the 1906 Russian anarcho-communist conference, which were written by Kropotkin, opposed “every form of hierarchical organisation that is characteristic of the parties of the State socialists” in which members are “obedient to a central power” and subject to “party discipline and compulsion”.<sup>13</sup> This perspective was shared by Baginski who, three years later, rejected “a centralistic apparatus” based on “commands and compulsory, soldierly behavior” whilst advocating “a federative association that does not demand subjection from its members”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 158.

<sup>11</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 148-54; Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 98-100.

<sup>12</sup> Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 58-9.

<sup>13</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 474-5.

<sup>14</sup> Baginski, *What Does Syndicalism Want*, 18.

One of the main kinds of hierarchical organisation that mass anarchists opposed were bureaucratic trade unions. In 1938 Rocker argued that trade unions in which decisions flow from a small minority of bureaucrats at the top to workers beneath them should be rejected on the grounds that they are “always attended by barren official routine” which “crushes individual conviction, kills all personal initiative by lifeless discipline and bureaucratic ossification, and permits no independent action”. Such top-down systems of decision-making systems were especially harmful because the minority who actually made decisions lacked immediate access to the local information needed to do so. To illustrate this point Rocker referred to trade unions allied with the Social Democratic Party of Germany in which strikes had to first be approved by the central committee which was usually very far away and “not in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions”. This had the effect that workers in a particular area were unable to engage in sudden direct action and so effectively respond to their immediate circumstances and concerns on the ground. Although centralisation was an appropriate mode of organisation for the state, which exists to establish “the greatest possible uniformity in social life” and maintain and expand the power of the ruling classes, it was inappropriate “for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters”.<sup>15</sup>

The form of organisation which would, in the opinion of mass anarchists, simultaneously enable effective co-ordination between large groups of people and the free initiative of its members were federations. The theory of what federations were supposed to look like can be understood by examining in detail Malatesta’s various descriptions of anarchist organisational structures, especially those he made during a series of debates with anti-organisationalist

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<sup>15</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 60-1.

anarchists in the 1890s.<sup>16</sup> It should nonetheless be kept in mind that these are Malatesta's specific proposals and, despite being influential, do not reflect what all mass anarchists thought or how all mass anarchist organisations actually operated. These organisational principles were, however, at least implemented by the specific anarchist organisation Malatesta was a member of during the early 1920s, the Italian Anarchist Union.<sup>17</sup>

According to Malatesta, whereas authoritarian organisations rest on a division between some who command and others who obey, anarchist organisations are free associations of equals which are formed in order to achieve a common goal. Organisations do this by uniting individuals under a "common programme" so that they can "educate and help one another in the common work" and co-ordinate collective action between individuals in pursuit of their shared goal.<sup>18</sup> In so doing they provide individuals with the real possibility to engage in actions which they could not engage in as isolated individuals, such as publishing a newspaper or launching a strike.

Given his commitment to the unity of means and ends, Malatesta held that there should be no substantial difference between how anarchists organised before and after the social revolution. He thought that anarchists should build organisations based "upon the will and in the interest of all their members" both "today for the purposes of propaganda and struggle" and "tomorrow in order to meet all of the needs of social life".<sup>19</sup> Anarchist formal organisations therefore had to be founded on "the principle of autonomy of individuals within groups, and of groups within

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<sup>16</sup> The following account is largely based on Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 63-5, 101-4; *Towards Anarchy*, 61-6, 73-4, 92-5, 130-5. For the historical context of this debate see Di Paula, *Knights Errant of Anarchy*, 59-91; Turcato, *Making Sense*, 188-95.

<sup>17</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 439-40.

<sup>18</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 63. See also *ibid*, 210.

federations” such that “nobody has the right to impose their will on anyone else, and nobody is forced to follow decisions that they have not accepted”.<sup>20</sup>

Decisions within the local groups which compose the federation would be made by a general assembly in which each member had a vote and an equal say in decisions that affect them.<sup>21</sup> Although Malatesta held that anarchists should aim for a situation in which everybody agreed on a decision, he understood that this would often not happen and there would be a division between a majority of people in favour of one position and a minority opposed to it. In such situations where it was impractical or impossible to pass multiple resolutions reflecting each faction’s distinct viewpoint, it was expected that the minority would voluntarily defer to the majority so that a decision was made and the organisation would continue to function. If the minority disagreed strongly with the majority and felt that this was an issue of supreme importance, then they were free to voluntarily dissociate and leave the organisation.<sup>22</sup>

Within the organisation “every association” and “every individual” was “free to federate with whom they please or not federate at all” and “to leave any federation they have joined when they please”.<sup>23</sup> This freedom of association included the freedom of the federation or groups within the federation to choose to disassociate from individuals who violated its programme, such as by campaigning for a politician or supporting an imperialist war.<sup>24</sup> Since the federation was only “an association of forces for the benefit of its members” which did not have the right “to impose upon the individual federated members” it followed that “any group just like any

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<sup>20</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 64, 73. See also Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 341.

<sup>21</sup> A small number of mass anarchists appear to have opposed all systems of voting, such as the Belgian syndicalist anarchist Georges Thonar who attempted to argue against voting at the 1907 International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam. He was swiftly told he was wrong by other anarchists and the congress continued to cast votes in favour of resolutions. See Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 90-1.

<sup>22</sup> A similar position on disagreements between majorities and minorities was advocated by The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Supplement to the Organisational Platform (November, 1926)” in Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 218.

<sup>23</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 210.

<sup>24</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 489-90.

individual must not accept any collective resolution unless it is worthwhile and agreeable to them”.<sup>25</sup> As a result, decisions made at the federation’s congresses, which were attended by delegates representing each group that composed the federation, were “binding only to those who accept them, and only for as long as they accept them”.<sup>26</sup>

Years later in 1927 Malatesta repeated this view when he wrote that congresses of specific anarchist organisations “do not lay down the law” or “impose their own resolutions on others”. Their resolutions are only “suggestions, recommendations, proposals to be submitted to all involved, and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them, and for as long as they accept them”. The function of congresses was to “maintain and increase personal relationships among the most active comrades, to coordinate and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means of taking action, to acquaint all on the situation in the various regions and the action most urgently needed in each; to formulate the various opinions current among the anarchists and draw up some kind of statistics from them”.<sup>27</sup>

In order to ensure that the delegates within the federation did not develop into a ruling minority who imposed decisions on the wider membership, Malatesta proposed a number of limits to their power. Firstly, the delegate would be mandated to complete specific tasks by the group who elected them, such as being a treasurer or voting as instructed at a congress, rather than being granted decision-making power, which would remain in the hands of the general assembly who had elected the delegate. Secondly, the delegate would serve for fixed terms and the position would be rotated regularly so that as many people as possible could learn to

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<sup>25</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 210.

<sup>26</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 206. This point is also made in Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 475.

<sup>27</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 489-90. See also *ibid*, 439-40.



perform these tasks and take initiative. Thirdly, the delegate could be instantly recalled and replaced by those who had elected them if they did not approve of what the delegate had done.<sup>28</sup>

A more concrete understanding of what federations built on anarchist principles actually looked like can be seen by examining the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist trade union the National Confederation of Labour (CNT), which was founded in 1910 and by February 1936 had a membership of 850,000.<sup>29</sup> Its organisational structure is shown below in the diagram figure 1. The CNT was initially composed of craft unions which belonged both to a federation of every union in their specific or similar crafts and a federation composed of all the other unions, irrespective of craft, in their local area. This formally changed in 1919 when delegates at the CNT's national congress voted to form 'single unions' which united all workers in a specific industry, irrespective of their profession, within the same union. These single unions were, in turn, broken down into individual trade sections who would deal with any issues specific to their craft.<sup>30</sup>

Decisions in the single unions were made by a general assembly composed of the entire membership. This general assembly elected a shop steward, who was granted the power to call for work stoppages when the membership instructed them to do so, and an administrative committee. The administrative committee of the single union was, according to the activist manual issued by the CNT during the Spanish revolution of 1936, composed of a general secretary, treasurer, accountant, first secretary, second secretary, third secretary, librarian, propaganda delegate and federal delegate(s). All the different trade sections within the single union had to be represented within the administrative committee. Who performed which role

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<sup>28</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 63, 437-9; *Towards Anarchy*, 133-4; *Patient Work*, 42, 153.

<sup>29</sup> Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 62, 74. For another example of how a federation was organised see Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*, 148; Avrich, *Haymarket*, 131-2.

<sup>30</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years 1868-1936* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 1998), 154-5, 164-5; A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 195, 237-49.

was decided upon by the elected members of the administrative committee themselves. The exceptions to this were the general secretary, treasurer and federal delegate who were specifically chosen by the general assembly of the single union.<sup>31</sup>

The single unions in a particular area then combined to form a local federation. The local federations then combined to form a regional federation and the regional federations together formed the national federation.<sup>32</sup> The local, regional and national federations were all self-managed by their own respective administrative committees. In order to prevent the rise of a bureaucracy within the CNT the only paid delegates within the trade union were the general secretary of the national federation and the secretaries of the regional federations. Every other delegate was expected to earn a living working in a trade. The administrative committees of the local, regional and national federations lacked the ability to impose decisions on shop stewards, who were only subject to the instructions of their single union. The local, regional and national administrative committees were, on paper, supposed to focus their activities exclusively on co-ordinating actions between various single unions, correspondence, collecting statistics and prisoner support, although in practice they took on greater responsibilities during periods of extreme state repression when the close links between the single unions and the CNT's main delegates were broken down.<sup>33</sup>

The committees of the regional federations were elected each year at the regional congresses which were attended by mandated delegates from the local federations. In certain unusual

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<sup>31</sup> Danny Evans, private communication, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

<sup>32</sup> In 1931 the majority of delegates at the CNT's national congress voted to form national industrial federations, which would unite all the single unions in a given industry together. These were to exist in parallel to the other geographical federations which united workers from different industries together based on their location. This decision was never implemented and was actively opposed by several anarchist delegates on the grounds that it would decrease the importance and autonomy of the local single unions. See Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 218-9; Stuart Christie, *We, the Anarchists! A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927-1937* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008), 90-2; Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution Volume 1*, 33-7.

<sup>33</sup> The higher committees of the CNT amassed far more power during the Spanish revolution and civil war of 1936-9. See Danny Evans, *Revolution and the State: Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2020), 39-40, 45-9.

situations, the members of the regional committees were expected to consult local trade unions and federations by means of either a referendum or correspondence. Despite this they could not be instantly recalled by the local federations who had elected them. A majority of local federations would instead have to call for an extraordinary congress to take place at which new delegates would be elected. The committee of the national federation, in contrast, was a role which was delegated to one of the regional committees on a temporary basis by the national federation's congress, which was attended by mandated delegates from every single union in the country. Between national congresses decisions in the CNT which involved multiple single unions were made at plenums. A local federation's plenum was composed of the federal delegates from each single union's administrative committee who were mandated on how to vote at the plenum by the general assembly who had elected them. These local federal delegates then elected and mandated a delegate to represent the area at a regional plenum of local committees which, in turn, sent mandated delegates to a national plenum of regional committees.<sup>34</sup>

A more detailed description of how the CNT was organised is made by the brickmaker José Peirats, who was a member of the CNT from 1922 onwards and was elected as the organisation's general secretary in 1947. According to Peirats the CNT was a confederation of trade unions which were "autonomous units" linked together "only by the accords of a general nature adopted at national congresses, whether regular or extraordinary". As a result of this, individual unions were "free to reach any decision which is not detrimental to the organisation as a whole". The "guidelines of the Confederation" were decided and directly regulated by the autonomous trade unions themselves. This was achieved through a system in which decisions at a "local, regional, or national" level were made by "the general assembly of the union, where

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<sup>34</sup> This account of how the CNT was organised was based on: Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 144-6; Christie, *We, the Anarchists*, 11, 13, 73; Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution Volume 1*, 52, 69, 158, 255-6, 259-60, 353, note 16; Evans, *Revolution and the State*, 12.

every member has the right to attend, raise and discuss issues, and vote on proposals". The Resolutions of these assemblies were "adopted by majority vote attenuated by proportional representation". The agenda of regional or national congresses were "devised by the assemblies" themselves. These general assemblies in turn "debated" each topic on the agenda and after reaching an agreement amongst themselves elected mandated delegates to attend the congress as "the executors of their collective will".<sup>35</sup>

The CNT's system of majority voting was explained in more detail within the organisation's constitution, which was printed in the trade union's membership card. It declared that since "Anarcho-syndicalism and anarchism recognise the validity of majority decisions" it followed that, although the CNT recognised "the sovereignty of the individual" and a militant's right to have their own point of view and defend it, members of the CNT were "obliged to comply with majority decisions" and "accept and agree to carry out the collective mandate taken by majority decision" even when they are against a militant's "own feelings" because "[w]ithout this there is no organisation".<sup>36</sup> Although Peirats thought that this system of majority voting in which decisions were binding on all members was appropriate within the CNT, he rejected it being implemented within the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI). The FAI, which was a specific anarchist organisation composed of small affinity groups, had previously made most of their decisions by consensus between all involved. Peirats' opposition was so strong that when the FAI adopted a system of majority voting, in which decisions were binding on all members, he decided to leave the federation in 1934.<sup>37</sup>

The extent to which anarchists within the CNT valued its federalist system of organisation can be seen in the actions of the 12-15,000 former members of the Durruti Column who had fled

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<sup>35</sup> Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution Volume 1*, 5. For the biographical details about Peirats see Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, 29-30, 141-2.

<sup>36</sup> Peirats, *What is the C.N.T?* (London: Simian, 1974), 19-20.

<sup>37</sup> Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, 77; Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution*, 28-9.

to France after the defeat of the Spanish revolution in 1939 and were imprisoned in the Vernet d'Ariège concentration camp. Despite the abysmal conditions of the camp – lack of adequate housing, food shortages, disease and very cold weather – the anarchists established a mirror image of the CNT. Every anarchist belonged to a general assembly within their camp hut which elected a hut committee to represent them. These hut committees then federated together and elected sector committees which in turn voted for a camp committee. The camp committee then sent demands from the general assemblies to the French authorities running the concentration camp. In so doing they practised what little anarchy they could within the direst of circumstances.<sup>38</sup>

Mass anarchists advocated and built large-scale federations but these were not the only kind of organisation they valued. They understood that different forms of organisation were appropriate for different tasks and to this end also advocated the formation of affinity groups which were either permanent or formed for specific actions and dissolved once the action was complete.<sup>39</sup> The CNT itself contained numerous affinity groups that performed a wide variety of tasks ranging from publishing texts, organising debates and lectures, engaging in prisoner support, being the bodyguards of prominent anarchist militants, robbing banks and assassinating class enemies.<sup>40</sup>

Given the above, mass anarchists were in favour of building large-scale formal organisations which enabled their members to engage in co-ordinated collective action and were structured in a federalist manner which prefigured the forms of organisation that would exist in a future anarchist society. Such large-scale formal organisations were advocated because they enabled workers to act effectively in order to achieve both short- and long-term goals, such as launching

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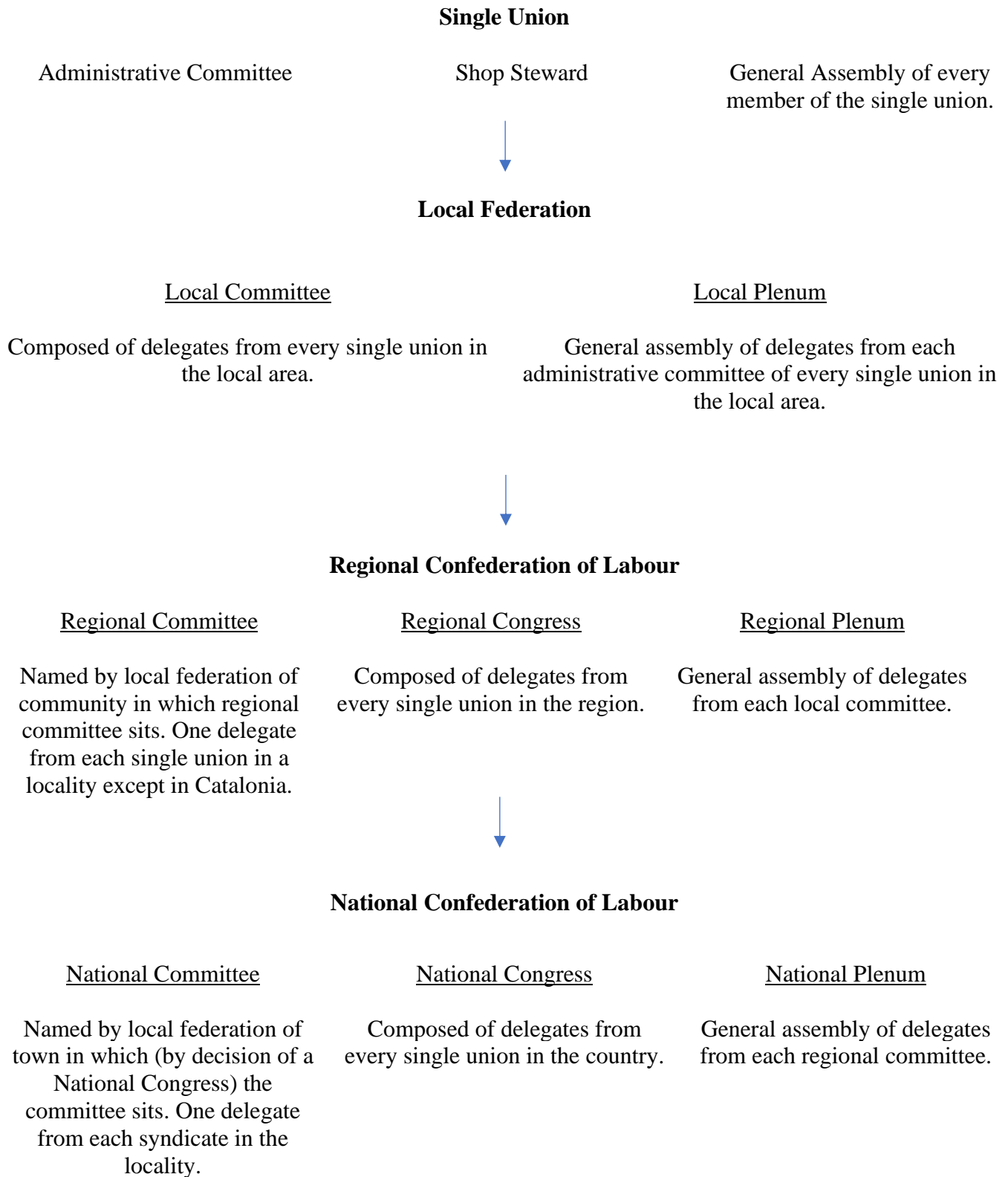
<sup>38</sup> Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, 122-3.

<sup>39</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 83; *Patient Work*, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 49-50; Guillaumon, *Ready for Revolution*, 28-30.

a huge strike or co-ordinating production and distribution during a social revolution. They were also deliberately structured in such a manner that they were constituted by, and reproduced through, forms of practice which developed within workers the necessary radical capacities, drives and consciousness for both overthrowing capitalism and the state and establishing an anarchist society. This included learning how to make decisions within general assemblies and co-ordinate action via a system of mandated delegates, acquiring the drive to associate horizontally with others, or developing the consciousness that society as a whole should be organised in accordance with anarchist principles. One of the main forms of activity that mass anarchists thought large-scale formal organisations should engage in under class society was struggling for immediate reforms via direct action. I shall discuss this position in the next section.

**Figure 1 – Structure of the CNT\***



\*Based on diagram in Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 230 and the accounts cited above.



## 7.2 – Reform not Reformism

Mass anarchists held that, to quote Rocker, “[s]ocial transformation can only be carried through by mass movements”.<sup>41</sup> In this respect they agreed with insurrectionist anarchists. What separated mass anarchists from insurrectionist anarchists is that they believed that, given their immediate social and historical context, the most realistic and effective means to develop mass movements was through the long and patient work of struggling for immediate reforms in the present, rather than isolated individuals or small anarchist groups engaging in propaganda of the deed in order to inspire a series of spontaneous popular uprisings. Mass anarchists used a variety of different terms to refer to reforms in the sense of modifications to existing dominant structures and social relations, such as ‘gains’ or ‘improvements’. I shall consistently refer to ‘reforms’ in order to avoid confusion.

An early example of this strategy can be found in an anarchist pamphlet published in 1872. It claimed that the objective of the International was to “gradually change the economic situation of the working class . . . improve working conditions, curtail, diminish and eliminate the privileges of capital, make these every day more dependent and precarious, until capital surrenders and disappears”. This was to be achieved through “resistance, with the legal and open weapon of the strike”.<sup>42</sup> This view was repeated four decades later by the CNT’s paper *Solidaridad Obrera* which claimed in January 1917 that radical trade union movements, such as the CNT, were simultaneously committed to achieving the “reformism” of “[t]he reduction of the working day, the increase in wages, etc” and the “revolutionism” of “the emancipation of the proletariat through the abolition of capital and of the wage earner”.<sup>43</sup> Fourteen years later

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Zurbrugg, *Anarchist Perspectives*, 12. See also Joll, *Anarchists*, 195; Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 401-2.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Walther L. Bernecker, “The Strategies of ‘Direct Action’ and Violence in Spanish Anarchism” in *Social Protest, Violence and Terror*, 90.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Ralph Darlington, *Radical Unionism: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 29.

the CNT declared in its 1931 Madrid congress resolutions that, although they were “openly at war with the state” and aimed “to educate the people to understand the need to unite with us to secure our complete emancipation by means of the social revolution”, they also had “the ineluctable duty of indicating to the people a schedule of minimum demands which they should press by building up their own revolutionary strength”.<sup>44</sup>

In order to understand why mass anarchists advocated this strategy, it is important to first outline their critique of insurrectionist anarchism. According to Malatesta, insurrectionists mistakenly viewed “present society as an indivisible block susceptible to no alteration beyond a radical transformation, and thus regarded as useless any attempt at improvements and concerned themselves solely with making revolution... which was then not made and remained a distant promise”.<sup>45</sup> Propaganda of the deed had been conceived as the means by which anarchists would spark a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge but the two main versions of it – small armed bands launching insurrections and individual acts of violence (assassinations or bombings) – had consistently failed to pave the way for mass uprisings, let alone achieve the promised social revolution. This was despite the fact that insurrectionist anarchists had engaged in numerous revolts, assassinations and bombings between the 1870s and 1890s.

It was argued that one of the key reasons for this failure was that these tactics actively encouraged anarchists to isolate themselves from the majority of the working classes in order to avoid state repression, surveillance and infiltration. This had the unintended consequence that anarchists were unable to influence or inspire the working classes in the way that they had intended and hoped for. In 1889, twelve years after the Benevento affair, Malatesta wrote that small armed groups of anarchists failed to inspire revolts because inadequate preparation

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution Volume I*, 39. It is important to note that some trade unions within the CNT opposed the idea of a minimum programme. See Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 218.

<sup>45</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 281.

among and contact with the populace led to the group being “scattered and defeated before the people even get to learn what it is that the band wanted!” Under these circumstances the local populace were “unable to take part in the band” and could merely look on impassively.<sup>46</sup>

Malatesta expanded upon this argument in 1894 when he concluded that a “great spontaneous insurrection” would most likely not launch the social revolution as insurrectionist anarchists had thought. This was because “[p]lots and conspiracies can only embrace a very limited number of individuals and are usually impotent to start a movement amongst the people of sufficient importance to give a chance of victory. Isolated movements, more or less spontaneous, are almost always stifled in blood before they have had time to acquire importance and become general”.<sup>47</sup> A few years later in 1897 Malatesta insisted that uprisings “cannot be improvised” and that “a revolution without resources, without an agreed-upon plan, without weapons, without men” would be doomed to failure. Anarchists could not expect workers “who do not know us, who may well never have heard of us or our ideas” to rise up spontaneously and risk their lives in response to a last-minute anarchist call to action.<sup>48</sup> Anarchists attempting to launch insurrections whilst they were such a small minority had only resulted in a cycle of “six months of quiet activity, followed by a few microscopic uprisings – or more often, mere threats of uprisings – then arrests, flights abroad, interruption of propaganda, disintegration of the organisation... Just to start the whole thing all over again two or three years further down the line”.<sup>49</sup>

The tactics of assassination and bombings, in contrast, contributed towards the anarchist movement suffering an extreme amount of state repression without achieving any substantial

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<sup>46</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 82.

<sup>47</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 182, 100-1. This same point was repeated by Malatesta in 1899. See Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 18-19, 21-3.

<sup>49</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 374.

social change which would have made it a price worth paying. Assassinations and bombings had been conceived of as acts of propaganda but were instead a key factor in why a significant number of workers came to stereotype anarchists negatively as dangerous individuals, mindlessly spreading wanton chaos and destruction and thereby became less likely to listen to anarchists and adopt their ideas.<sup>50</sup> The French anarchist Fernand Pelloutier remarked in 1895 that, “I know many workers who are disenchanted with parliamentary socialism but who hesitate to support libertarian socialism because, in their view, anarchism simply implies the individualistic use of the bomb”.<sup>51</sup> The Yiddish-speaking anarchist Yanovsky wrote after McKinley’s assassination in 1901, that “[t]he benefits that such an attempt can bring to the propaganda of our ideas are very questionable, the damage however is certain and sure”.<sup>52</sup>

Even Most, who had been a fervent advocate of anarchist assassinations and bomb plots during the 1880s, ended up changing his mind.<sup>53</sup> In 1892 he wrote that it was a great error “to believe that we as anarchists need only to commit any deed, no matter when, where, and against whom” because in order “[t]o have a propagandist effect, every deed needs to be popular”. If a deed was not popular or “meets with disapproval from the very part of the population it is intended to inspire, anarchism makes itself unpopular and hated. Instead of winning new adherents, many will withdraw”.<sup>54</sup> Shortly afterwards Most responded to Berkman’s unexpected assassination attempt against the American capitalist Frick by publicly opposing the act. He justified this stance on the grounds that the American anarchist movement was so small and

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<sup>50</sup> Haia Shpayer-Makov, “Anarchism in British Public Opinion 1880-1914”, *Victorian Studies* 31, No. 4 (1988), 487-516.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Ulrich Linse, “‘Propaganda by Deed’ and ‘Direct Action’”, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 87-90.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 89.

misunderstood that it could not “afford the luxury of assassinations” and should instead “limit” itself to “literary and verbal agitation”.<sup>55</sup>

According to Fabbri in his 1914 essay *Bourgeois Influences on Anarchism*, the negative stereotypes popularised by assassinations and bombings, in turn, attracted people to anarchism who believed these stereotypes were what anarchism actually was. Such individuals participated in the anarchist movement as a means to further their own individual search for vengeance or engage in rebellion for its own sake, rather than due to a commitment to the anarchist goal of establishing a non-violent society based on freedom, love and solidarity. This in turn negatively affected anarchist culture and the movement in general.<sup>56</sup>

Insurrectionist anarchists had above all been wrong to assume that the revolution was imminent and that the working classes would spontaneously rise up in reaction to the violent actions of a few. As early as 1885 the Spanish anarchist Serrano had insisted that “individual actions – even if they employ thousands upon thousands of kilos of dynamite – will not succeed in any region, nor will they succeed in destroying the bourgeoisie or in bringing about the Social revolution”.<sup>57</sup> Over a decade later, in an 1897 interview, Malatesta said that, “in the early days of the anarchist movement . . . there was the illusion that the revolution was just around the corner; and, as a result, any organisational work that required a long and patient endeavour was neglected”.<sup>58</sup> This view was reiterated by Malatesta in 1928 when he wrote that,

we put our hopes in general discontent, and because the misery that afflicted the masses was so insufferable, we believed it was enough to give an example, launching with arms

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Goyens, “Johann Most and the German Anarchists”, 21-2. In response Goldman attacked Most with a whip during one of his lectures. See Goldman, *Living My Life Volume 1*, 105-6.

<sup>56</sup> Fabbri, *Bourgeois Influences on Anarchism* (1914), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-bourgeois-influences-on-anarchism>.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 114.

<sup>58</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 319.

in hand the cry of ‘down with the masters,’ in order for the working masses to fling themselves against the bourgeoisie and take possession of the land, the factories, and all that they produced with their toil and that had been stolen from them.<sup>59</sup>

Kropotkin similarly wrote in a letter to Max Nettlau in 1902 that the insurrectionist wave was motivated by the belief “that all it took to trigger the revolution was a few heroic feats”. After this failed to happen several younger anarchists came to realise that “a revolution cannot be provoked by ten or a hundred” and it was a delusion to imagine “that a sharp push by a few might successfully spark revolution”. Instead a revolution could only be produced by “the slow work of organisation and preparatory propaganda among the working masses” which “prefaces all revolutions”.<sup>60</sup> This was of course not a new insight for mass anarchists, including Kropotkin. In his 1899 autobiography he claimed that, in the late 1870s, the Jura Federation, of which he was a member at the time, understood that “before the current ideas upon private ownership would be modified” a period of “tedious propaganda and a long succession of struggles, 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”.<sup>61</sup>

The strategy of engaging in individual acts of violence above all rested on a false view of social change. Social change was not just a matter of attacking the existing order until it collapsed. The transformation of society requires the transformation of the working classes’ capacities, drives and consciousness in an anarchist direction such that they learn to self-organise non-hierarchically, overthrow the ruling classes and establish an anarchist society. Killing a monarch or blowing up a building might temporarily scare the ruling classes or inspire a small

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 84. See also Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 526-7.

<sup>60</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 150, 154-5.

<sup>61</sup> Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 373.

number of workers, but it would not lead to fundamental social change. A new monarch will be crowned and the building will be repaired. Society will carry on as normal because the general population would have merely observed the actions of an isolated individual and so not have themselves engaged in forms of practice which in turn transformed them, such as participating in prefigurative organisations which engaged in direct action. In the aftermath of any anarchist attack, a typical worker would continue to perform the same kinds of practice as before and thereby reproduce the dominant structures of class society.

This sentiment can be seen in Kropotkin's remark made in 1891 that an "edifice built upon centuries of history cannot be destroyed by a few kilos of explosives".<sup>62</sup> Malatesta expressed this same point when he argued, in 1894, that "bourgeois society cannot be overthrown" by any number of "bombs" and "blows of the knife" because it is "based . . . on an enormous mass of private interests and prejudices, and sustained, more than it is by the force of arms, by the inertia of the masses and their habits of submission".<sup>63</sup> He later wrote in 1900 that achieving anarchism was not a matter of killing specific individual kings but instead required killing "all kings – those of the Courts, of parliaments and of the factories – in the hearts and minds of the people; that is, to uproot faith in the principle of authority to which most people owe allegiance".<sup>64</sup>

The mass anarchist alternative to propaganda of the deed, as understood by insurrectionists, was not inaction and relying solely on written or oral propaganda to spread anarchism until the day of revolution. Malatesta's anarchist programme of 1899 rejected this explicitly because they "would soon exhaust our field of action" having "converted all those who in the existing

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 55. Kropotkin opposed the tactics of assassination and bombings within the Russian anarchist movement. See Miller, *Kropotkin*, 206-7; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 59-60. For an overview of Russian anarchist's engaging in this kind of violence see *ibid*, 44-55, 63-70.

<sup>63</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 176.

<sup>64</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 56.

environment are susceptible to understand and accept our ideas”.<sup>65</sup> Mass anarchists, in other words, held that, since what people think or are open to thinking is a product of their social environment, it follows that focusing on spreading ideas alone will not lead to fundamental social change. Under present conditions, which reproduce class society, only a small number of people will ever learn about and become anarchists through the written or spoken word.<sup>66</sup>

Anarchists therefore had to cause a “gradual transformation of the environment” such that progress advanced “contemporaneously and along parallel lines between man and their environment” and an increasingly large number of workers were in a position to learn about and adopt anarchism.<sup>67</sup> This view was repeated by Malatesta in 1922 when he wrote that anarchists must bring about a change to “the will of humanity” by transforming social conditions and thereby cause “a reciprocal interaction between the will and the surrounding conditions” such that changed people acted and changed social structures which, in turn, changed more people and so on.<sup>68</sup>

Mass anarchists held that the most effective means for causing this gradual transformation in social structures and the people who produced and reproduced them was anarchists organising and participating in working-class social movements which struggled for immediate reforms in the present. In 1894 Malatesta argued that anarchists should “win” the working classes “over to our ideas by actively taking part in their struggles” and participating in “working-men’s associations, strikes” and “collective revolt[s]”.<sup>69</sup> Three years later, in 1897, he wrote that anarchists should “live side by side with the toiling masses”, “join their associations”, “share in their struggles” and “dedicate ourselves wholly to their welfare, always leading the way

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<sup>65</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 49.

<sup>66</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 14; Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 160; *Method of Freedom*, 470-1.

<sup>67</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 49.

<sup>68</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 82-3.

<sup>69</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 179.



when it comes to work, danger and sacrifices". He insisted that the success of anarchism required "long-term, constant, day-to-day work . . . done in conjunction with resistance societies, cooperatives, and educational circles" which "gradually" marshalled, organised and educated "all the fighting forces of the proletariat".<sup>70</sup>

The fact that Malatesta was advocating anarchist participation in working-class social movements which struggled for immediate reforms can be seen not only in the fact that Malatesta mentions trade unions and strikes. He also referred to specific reforms that were worth struggling for. In 1899 Malatesta argued that although anarchists should "push" the working classes "to demand greater things" they must in the meantime "encourage and assist" workers "in the battles they want to fight, providing that they are in the right direction, which is to say, that they tend to facilitate future gains and are fought in such a way that workers become used to thinking of their masters and governments as enemies, and to desiring to achieve what they want by themselves". For Malatesta an example of such a "reform" which would "tend to actually improve the status of workers and facilitate future gains" was achieving the eight-hour day. As a result, he thought that anarchists should, when unable to persuade workers to demand more, "support them in such a modest claim" and convince them to win it by forcing it upon capitalists by means of "direct action" rather than campaigning for new government legislation.<sup>71</sup>

The same strategy was advocated by other mass anarchists. During his 1892 speech in memory of the Haymarket martyrs, Kropotkin said that anarchists should "permeate the great labour movement which is so rapidly growing in Europe and America" in order to "bring our ideas into that movement, to spread them . . . among those masses which hold in their hands the

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<sup>70</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 99, 101.

<sup>71</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 67-9.

future issue of the revolution”. This view was repeated by Kropotkin in 1913 when he wrote that anarchists “must participate in the daily struggle against oppression . . . in order to maintain a spirit of revolt everywhere people feel oppressed and possess the courage to rise up”.<sup>72</sup>

Organising to win reforms through direct action was considered to be valuable for three main reasons. Firstly, and most obviously, achieving reforms improved the lives of workers living in the here-and-now and in so doing put them in a position where they had more time, energy and motivation to emancipate themselves fully. Malatesta wrote in 1897 that anarchists are “interested in people's circumstances being improved to the greatest possible extent, starting today” both because of the “immediate impact of reduced suffering” and “because when one is better nourished, has greater freedom, and is better educated, one has a greater determination and more strength to fully emancipate oneself”.<sup>73</sup>

It was this line of reasoning that persuaded Goldman to support the struggle for the eight-hour day and abandon her previous view, which she had adopted after persuasion by Most, that it was a pointless reform which distracted workers from launching a social revolution. She changed her mind after a worker at one of her talks against the eight-hour day explained to her that it would improve the lives of workers, many of whom would not live long enough to see a revolution, and would give them more time to read and enjoy life.<sup>74</sup> Rocker, in comparison, came to reject the idea that reforms should be opposed because they supposedly “distract the mind of the proletariat, and turn it away from the road which leads to social emancipation” after he visited extremely poor areas of London. During these visits he realised that “[t]hose who have been born into misery and never knew a better state are rarely able to resist and

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<sup>72</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 344, 200.

<sup>73</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life Volume 1*, 47-8, 52-3.

revolt". Revolutionaries could not expect workers "who are not prepared to fight for the betterment of their living conditions" to "fight for social emancipation".<sup>75</sup>

Secondly, participating in daily struggles for immediate reforms, such as strikes, provided the means to organise and make contact with not only committed socialists, who seek each other out, but also the large number of workers who are yet to become revolutionaries.<sup>76</sup> This was viewed as especially important by Malatesta because, irrespective of what anarchists did, state socialists would participate in working-class social movements and funnel them towards parliamentary politics. As a result, it was essential that anarchists joined struggles for immediate reforms in order to "spur the people on to ever-greater demands" whilst "reminding them of the need for the radical, final fight for complete emancipation".<sup>77</sup>

Thirdly, it was believed that the experience of collectively struggling for reforms by means of direct action within prefigurative organisations was a form of practice that would positively transform workers. Irrespective of whether or not a social movement won great victories the process of engaging in class struggle was valuable in and of itself due to the extent to which it would cause workers to develop radical capacities, drives and consciousness, such as learning how to organise a strike or realising that the police exist to violently defend the interests of the rich and powerful. Malatesta, for example, wrote in 1897 that workers "must train themselves for the great battles ahead by means of the gymnastics of day to day resistance directed against the masters and against the government".<sup>78</sup>

One of the main benefits mass anarchists focused on was how collective struggles for immediate reforms would transform the consciousness of workers and cause them to adopt

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<sup>75</sup> Rocker, *London Years*, 25-6.

<sup>76</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 309; Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 156.

<sup>77</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 189.

<sup>78</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 282-3.

anarchist ideas. Malatesta's anarchist programme of 1899 declared that, "the greatest value lies in the struggle itself" because, by experiencing it, workers "learn that the bosses' interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses".<sup>79</sup> In 1914 Guillaume rejected the view that "the starting point is the revolutionary ideal" and the "workers' struggle against the bosses only comes afterwards, as a consequence of the adoption of the 'ideal'". Instead, he held that, "the starting point is the struggle and the ideal comes after" when "it takes form in the workers' minds as the incidents of the class war give birth to it and cause it to develop".<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno thought, in 1932, that "it is only through the struggle for freedom, equality and solidarity that you will reach an understanding of anarchism".<sup>81</sup>

This theory, like much of mass anarchism, had previously been advocated by Bakunin during the 1<sup>st</sup> International. For Bakunin one of the key problems facing socialists was how to instil radical capacities, drives and consciousness within workers that belonged to the organisation, despite the fact that these workers were "miserable and ignorant – exhausted by work day-in and day-out" and as a result not in a position to learn easily by attending talks or reading books, pamphlets or newspapers. Bakunin's solution to this problem was that workers could develop the right kinds of radical capacities, drives and consciousness for abolishing class society "through practical action". The kind of practical action Bakunin favoured was the "workers' struggle and solidarity against their bosses, the organisation and the federation of resistance funds [strike funds]". The experience of engaging in "economic struggle" and "collective action and practice" would over time "lead workers to realise that their real enemies are the privileged classes, including the clergy, bourgeoisie, nobility and the state". The

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<sup>79</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 50-1.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> Makhno, *Struggle*, 71.

workers would “necessarily end up understanding that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the accomplices of reaction and their own dearest human concerns, and at this point, having arrived and realised this, they will not fail to squarely take sides, and will see themselves as revolutionary socialists”.<sup>82</sup>

This theory continued to be advocated for many decades by mass anarchists involved in the trade union movement. Baginski argued in 1909 that the working classes learn, through participation in daily struggles, that “it is always thrown back on itself, on its own strength and solidarity”, that “it accomplishes small improvements of its situation” through “direct intervention and struggle” and that “exploiters concede only what is wrested from them through the development of proletarian power”. The practice of engaging in direct action elevated workers from the position of being mere objects acted upon or represented by others into “self-confident, self-acting” people who “fight and act for themselves in their own struggle for liberation” and thereby gain a new sense of self-worth and the understanding that they possess, through their “comradeship” with other workers, “the power to shape social and economic conditions”.<sup>83</sup> Organising to win “higher pay and shorter hours” should therefore be viewed as “preparatory exercises, as training for the final event, the Social Revolution and the overthrow of wage slavery”.<sup>84</sup>

These same ideas were expressed by Rocker through the language of pedagogy in 1938. For Rocker the “economic alliance of the producers” was both “a weapon for the enforcement of better living conditions” and “a practical school, a university of experience, from which they draw instruction and enlightenment in richest measure”. Daily economic struggles, such as organising for higher wages, were “the best educative instrument for making the workers

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<sup>82</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 47-9.

<sup>83</sup> Baginski, *What Does Syndicalism Want?*, 11, 15, 16, 12.

<sup>84</sup> Baginski, “Aim and Tactics of the Trade-Union Movement” in *Mother Earth*, 305.

acquainted with the real essence of the social problem” and “training them for the struggle for liberation from economic and social slavery”. Strikes were a form of “continuous schooling” which developed the working classes’ “powers of resistance” and taught them that “every last right has to be won by unceasing struggle against the existing system”. The experience of class struggle transformed how workers thought about themselves and the world in which they lived. By reflecting on these life experiences, workers “developed . . . new needs and the urge for different fields of intellectual life”. The practice of engaging in class struggle was transformative not only at the level of an individual worker’s capacities, drives and consciousness but also altered the social relations between workers. Through their experience of co-operating with one another, such as going on strike in support of other striking workers, they developed a sense of solidarity amongst themselves which Rocker defined as a “feeling of mutual helpfulness”. Developing this sense of solidarity was essential because without it they would never learn to act as a united class and thereby transform society in their shared class interests.<sup>85</sup>

Although mass anarchists advocated struggling for immediate reforms, they were not reformists in the sense of people who view reforms as the only goal of social movements or hold that capitalism and the state could eventually be abolished through gradual reform. In September 1897, Malatesta wrote that,

the reforms, both economic and political, that can be obtained under certain institutions, are limited by the very nature of those institutions, and sooner or later, depending on the degree of popular consciousness and the more or less blind resistance from the

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<sup>85</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 78-80.

ruling classes, a point of irreconcilability is reached and the very existence of these institutions needs to be called into question.<sup>86</sup>

A month later, in an October 1897 interview with a state socialist, Malatesta explained that anarchists were not “a reformist party” because “in our view, reforms, if and where they can be won, should be only a first step on the way to revolution” and “this is why we want the people to win them for themselves and feel that reforms are a result of their vigour, so that their determination to demand ever more may develop”.<sup>87</sup> In arguing this Malatesta was re-stating the position he had previously adopted in 1890 in his article *Matters Revolutionary*. He wrote at length that,

We must immerse ourselves in the life of the people as fully as we can, encourage and egg on all stirrings that carry a seed of material or moral revolt and get the people used to handling their affairs for themselves and relying on only their own resources; but without ever losing sight of the fact that revolution, by means of the expropriation and taking of property into common ownership, plus the demolition of authority, represents the only salvation for the proletariat and for Mankind, in which case a thing is good or bad depending on whether it brings forward or postpones, eases or creates difficulties for that revolution.

As we see it, it is a matter of avoiding two reefs: on the one hand, the indifference towards everyday life and struggles that distance us from the people, making us unfathomable outsiders to them – and, on the other, letting ourselves be consumed by

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<sup>86</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 287.

<sup>87</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 320.

those struggles, affording them greater importance than they possess and eventually forgetting about the revolution.<sup>88</sup>

Mass anarchists therefore saw the struggle for reforms as an effective means to build a mass movement which was capable of launching a social revolution that would fundamentally transform society. By participating in working-class social movements anarchists aimed to contribute towards a chain of events whereby the working classes engaged in direct action, simultaneously transformed the social environment and themselves, and in so doing created the real possibility for future advances towards anarchy. The process would repeat until the conflict between the working classes and the ruling classes escalated to the point of an insurrection being launched by the social movements which had been developed during previous struggles for reforms. As Malatesta explained in his anarchist programme of 1899,

One always comes back to insurrection, for if the government does not give way, the people will end by rebelling; and if the government does give way, then people gain confidence in themselves and make ever increasing demands, until such time as the incompatibility between freedom and authority becomes clear and the violent struggle is engaged.<sup>89</sup>

Mass anarchists understood, alongside anarchists in general, that evolutionary change does not necessarily lead to progress or an anarchist revolution. As a result of this they were careful about which reforms they supported, who they worked with and the means they proposed to achieve these reforms. In 1897, Kropotkin insisted that anarchists “have to cling to our principles while working with others, among others” and therefore must “never allow ourselves to be chosen as or turn into exploiters, bosses, leaders”, “never have any truck with the building

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<sup>88</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 106.

<sup>89</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 55.



of some pyramidal organisation, be it economic governmental or educational-religious (even be it a revolutionary one)” and “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”.<sup>90</sup>

For mass anarchists it was essential, in the words of Malatesta, that they “fight and win” as “anarchists – for Anarchy” and so “remain anarchists and act like anarchists before, during and after the revolution”.<sup>91</sup> To participate within working-class social movements as committed anarchists was primarily for them to persuade workers to act in an anarchistic manner, such as taking direct action against the ruling classes, making decisions within general assemblies or co-ordinating action over a large area via federations. According to Malatesta, anarchists had to take “advantage of all the means, all the possibilities and the opportunities that the present environment allows us to act on our fellow men” and thereby incite the working classes “to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms that it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them”.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes, this would require anarchists to not use the words “socialism and anarchy” but this would not be harmful “as long as our practice is socialism and anarchy”.<sup>93</sup>

Malatesta explained in his interview in 1897 that “[a]s a rule, we always support reforms that, more than the others, highlight the conflict between property-owners and proletarians, rulers and ruled, and therefore are apt to foster a conscious feeling of rebellion that will explode into the definitive, final revolution”.<sup>94</sup> Two years later in 1899 Malatesta rejected “false reforms” which “tend to distract the masses from the struggle against authority and capitalism” and

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<sup>90</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 145-6.

<sup>91</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 491, 427.

<sup>92</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 49.

<sup>93</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 87.

<sup>94</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 320.

instead “serve to paralyze their actions and make them hope that something can be attained through the kindness of the exploiters and governments”.<sup>95</sup> One of the main reforms that mass anarchists consistently opposed was universal suffrage within existing capitalist states. In 1873 Bakunin argued against struggling to achieve the vote because it would legitimise the state by giving it the “false appearance of popular government” and thereby provide the economic ruling classes “with a stronger and more reliable guarantee of their peaceful and intensive exploitation of the people's labour”.<sup>96</sup> This opposition to universal suffrage included women's suffrage, which Goldman argued against in 1910 on the grounds that it would not further the emancipation of women.<sup>97</sup>

Mass anarchists, in addition to this, rejected methods of winning reforms which consolidated the dominant structures of class society, rather than building the revolutionary strength of the working classes. In Malatesta's words, anarchists should “never recognise the [existing] institutions”, such as the state, and instead win “all possible reforms in the spirit in which an army advances ever forwards by snatching the enemy-occupied territory in its path”.<sup>98</sup> This same perspective can be seen during previous debates within the St Imier International. In 1874, Guillaume responded enthusiastically to German-speaking socialists in Switzerland passing a resolution at their congress in Winterthur which asserted that workers should organise for the ten-hour day. He, however, rejected their idea that this should be achieved through campaigning for new legislation. Instead he proposed that they,

force the employers, through the pressure exerted on them by workers' organisations, to grant the ten-hour day, in that way, the reduction of the working day will depend on

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<sup>95</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 168. See also Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 80; Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 293-4.

<sup>96</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 114, 25. For another example see Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 98-101.

<sup>97</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 190-203.

<sup>98</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 81.

the power of the workers' organisations, and our victory, when we have won it, will be the reward for our direct efforts: the workers will have worked for their emancipation themselves; and the organisation, thanks to which they have won the ten-hour day can then be used to complete their enfranchisement.<sup>99</sup>

This view was repeated by Schwitzguébel in an 1875 article for the *Bulletin* of the Jura Federation. He argued that, “[i]nstead of begging the State for a law compelling employers to make them work only so many hours, the trade associations” should “directly impose this reform on the employers” and thereby bring about “a real economic change” through the “direct initiative of the workers” instead of “a legal text which remains a dead letter”.<sup>100</sup>

It was thought that reforms worth struggling for would only be won by imposing external pressure on the ruling classes via direct action until they gave in to workers' demands in an attempt to preserve their own position of power. As Bakunin argued in 1872, the ruling classes “will never make voluntary concessions to the proletariat, out of justice or generosity. . . . Even little concessions are conceded by the privileged only when their existence is beset and menaced, and only then are they forced by the rising power of the proletariat to give away more important concessions”.<sup>101</sup> Or, as Malatesta told a court whilst on trial in April 1898, “[t]here cannot be reforms on the part of a government, unless the people demand and impose them”.<sup>102</sup>

The extent to which some mass anarchists were in favour of winning reforms through extremely radical means can be seen in the history of the CNT. In 1931, brick workers successfully ended a system in which they worked for capitalists via exploitative contractors using a diversity of tactics. This included not only going on strike but also forming armed

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 226.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 226.

<sup>101</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 233-4

<sup>102</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 443.

groups which would both hunt down scabs escorted by the police and commit arson attacks against several brickworks. Bakery workers went further and, without even going on strike, forced capitalists to give in to their demands for the abolition of night work and changing the start of the working day to 5 a.m. This was achieved by bombing a number of bakeries. Those capitalists who refused to recognise the deal and punished organisers, were subject to an escalation of resistance. This began with boycotts which, after they proved unsuccessful, were followed up with more militant activity, such as more bombings of bakeries or, in one case, Peirats and a comrade visiting a capitalist armed with pistols in order to make him change his mind.<sup>103</sup>

From these two examples it is clear that mass anarchists within the CNT did not reject the use of guns and bombs to achieve reform. They, in addition to this, used them as a means of self-defence against the violence of the ruling classes. From 1914 onwards gunmen hired by capitalists and the state attempted to assassinate a significant number of anarchist trade unionists. In Catalonia, between 1920 and 1923, 104 anarchists were killed – including the former general secretary of the Catalan Regional Federation Salvador Seguí – and thirty-three were wounded. The militant wing of the CNT responded to these violent attacks by organising armed affinity groups to identify, locate and kill those responsible.<sup>104</sup> This included the assassination of the Spanish Prime Minister Eduardo Dato on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1921 by Pere Matheu, Lluís Nicolau and Ramon Casanelles, who belonged to an action group within the metal industry.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, 57-9.

<sup>104</sup> Christie, *We, the Anarchists*, 18-22; Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 48-51; Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution*, 31-2; Peirats, *CNT in the Spanish Revolution Volume 1*, 11-6; For an in-depth overview of this topic see A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 210-11, 250-3, 300-1, 312, 316-7, 323-37, 343-9, 351.

<sup>105</sup> A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 337.

Armed self-defence by anarchist militants continued over the following years, such as when the CNT's builders' union responded to a police raid on their offices with gunfire in July 1931. This led to a four-hour siege during which the building was surrounded by hundreds of policemen, assault guards and soldiers, six workers were killed and dozens were wounded on both sides.<sup>106</sup> Violence was also used by some mass anarchists to acquire funds for the revolution. From 1933 to 1935 militants within the CNT responded to the trade union's dire financial problems by launching armed robberies against banks, which on several occasions involved shoot outs with the police and fleeing the scene of the crime in stolen fast cars. Despite the financial gains these armed expropriations bought to the union, a significant section of the CNT opposed them, including Peirats.<sup>107</sup>

One of the main disagreements between mass anarchists concerned when social movements should shift from focusing on immediate reforms to attempting to spark the social revolution via armed insurrection. During the 1920s and 1930s there was a long-lasting dispute within the CNT between moderate and radical syndicalist anarchists. The moderates sought to build up the trade union's strength gradually through workplace organising, whilst the radicals, who belonged to armed affinity groups such as *Nosotros* and the CNT's defence committees, thought that the social revolution was near and that the time for reform had passed. This led the radical faction to engage in what they termed 'revolutionary gymnastics' which referred to the strategy of dedicated anarchist militants launching insurrections which would be repressed and thereby inspire an increasing number of workers to rise up. In practice the series of armed uprisings they organised in January 1932, January 1933 and December 1933 were all unsuccessful and defeated quickly due to a combination of lack of popular support, insufficient weaponry and the state being prepared to repress them. It is unclear whether these unsuccessful

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<sup>106</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 98.

<sup>107</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 144-8, 163; *Living Anarchism*, 66-7. It should be noted that some of the robberies were carried out by self-described individualist anarchist affinity groups.

insurrections played a role in causing the later 1936 Spanish revolution to occur. It is, after all, impossible to determine what would have happened had these previous insurrections never been launched.<sup>108</sup>

In summary, mass anarchists advocated struggling for reforms via direct action because doing so was an effective means to improve the lives of workers in the short term and develop a mass movement which was both driven to and capable of launching a social revolution that abolished capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. The struggle for reforms would, in other words, bring increasingly large numbers of workers together under a common aim due to their shared interest in improving their lives in the here and now. In struggling for these reforms workers would not only change social relations, such as reducing the length of the working day, but also change themselves due to the experience of participating in prefigurative organisations and engaging in direct action against the ruling classes. The consequence of this would be that a significant number of workers would, over varying lengths of time, go from being individuals who aimed only at small improvements within existing society to revolutionaries who were horizontally organised and united with others, had developed the initiative to act for themselves, and were committed to achieving more and more reforms until the class struggle escalated to the point of an armed insurrection being launched against the ruling classes. Mass anarchists did not, however, think that this process would occur automatically. They thought that it required the active involvement of anarchists themselves. I shall discuss this position in the next section.

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<sup>108</sup> Jason Garner, *Goals and Means: Anarchism, Syndicalism, and Internationalism in the Origins of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2016), 139-45; Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 87-9, 100-1, 130-40, 161-4; *Living Anarchism*, 60-70; Evans, *Revolution and the State*, 7-10, 15-23. It has been argued by Christie that the moderate syndicalist anarchists were not in fact anarchists or only paid lip service to anarchism. I have not been convinced by this claim. See Christie, *We, the Anarchists*, vii, 15, 26-8, 59-65, 68-73, 84-7, 93-4, 100-21.

### 7.3 – Militant Minority: The Anarchist Relationship with the Masses

Mass anarchists believed that, in order for struggles for reforms to develop a revolutionary mass movement and build towards a large-scale armed insurrection, rather than collapse into reformism, it was necessary for anarchists to participate in social movements as a militant minority. To do so was primarily to spread anarchist ideas, act as key and effective organisers, encourage or inspire workers to take direct action and ensure that organisations or informal groups were horizontally structured and made decisions in a manner which prefigured an anarchist society. In 1931, Malatesta wrote that, “anarchy can only come about gradually, as the masses become able to conceive it and desire it; but will never come to pass unless driven forward by a more or less consciously anarchist minority operating in such a way as to create the appropriate climate”.<sup>109</sup>

The notion that anarchists were a militant minority within working-class social movements was expressed by mass anarchists in a number of different ways. An 1892 article published in *La Révolte* claimed that although the revolution would “be made by the pressure of the masses . . . these masses themselves are looking for people to take the initiative, they are looking for men and women who can better formulate their thoughts, who will be able to win over the hesitant and carry with them the timid”. This required “active minorities” who were “avant-gardist” and embodied “individual initiative, put at the service of the collectivity”.<sup>110</sup> Malatesta referred to anarchists as a “conscious minority” and “vanguard”<sup>111</sup>, whilst Dunois labelled anarchists as “the most advanced, the boldest and the most uninhibited sector of the militant proletariat”.<sup>112</sup> Makhno, in comparison, referred to “anarchists” as “the vanguard” of “the revolutionary

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<sup>109</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 529.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 23.

<sup>111</sup> Malatesta, *Café*, 107, 149, 155; *Method of Freedom*, 344, 529.

<sup>112</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 87.

workers”.<sup>113</sup> This language was shared by the Vanguard Group which attempted to spread mass anarchist ideas in 1930s America. Within Spain the anarchist militants of the CNT were known among other workers as “the ones with ideas”.<sup>114</sup>

Such notions of anarchists being the “conscious minority” or “the vanguard” should not be mistaken for the view that anarchists viewed themselves as separate from the working classes or the workers’ movement. This would make no sense since anarchism was a social movement whose members were overwhelmingly drawn from the working classes. As Fabbri noted, “Anarchism . . . is de facto a teaching whose followers are almost exclusively proletarians” and those individuals within the movement who are “bourgeois, petit bourgeois, so-called intellectuals or professional people, etc are very few and far between and wield no predominate influence”.<sup>115</sup> In referring to themselves as a militant minority anarchists were only expressing the view that they had the most advanced revolutionary ideas within the working classes and, in virtue of this, a key role to play in the collective struggle for human emancipation.

The main task of anarchists as a militant segment of the working classes was to bring about a transformation in the consciousness of other workers such that they came to adopt anarchist ideas, overthrow capitalism and the state and build an anarchist society. For Dunois, the task of anarchists was to “provide . . . the modern proletariat . . . with a goal and the means of action” and so act as the “educators, stimulators and guides of the working masses”.<sup>116</sup> This point was repeatedly made by Malatesta. In 1897, he wrote that anarchists should “cultivate in the proletariat a consciousness of the class antagonism”, “the need for collective struggle” and the desire to establish a society in which there is “equality, justice and freedom for everyone”.

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<sup>113</sup> Makhno, *Struggle*, 58.

<sup>114</sup> Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 118-24; Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 41.

<sup>115</sup> Fabbri, “Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, 16. For an overview of the class composition of the anarchist movement around the world see Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 271-91.

<sup>116</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 87-8.



During his trial in April 1898 Malatesta told the court that anarchists “want the complete transformation of society, which must spring from the will of the masses, once they become conscious. It is precisely towards the formation of that consciousness that we are working, through the press, the talks and organisation”. Two years later in 1900, Malatesta claimed that since the anarchist “ideal will take root when the people have sufficient consciousness to realise it” a “foremost task” of revolutionaries is “to prepare and shape that consciousness”.<sup>117</sup>

How anarchists acted as a militant minority varied according to the context. In 1891 it took the form of anarchists in Rome launching a pre-planned riot by attacking the police at a May Day demonstration. This attack was triggered by the anarchist Palla-Venerio Landi giving his comrades a signal to begin when he ended his speech by declaring “Long live the revolution!” and then jumped off the speaker’s platform into the crowd. This riot, which the anarchist militant minority initiated, lasted for several hours after it spread quickly to the rest of the crowd and other districts of Rome. So sudden was the riot that both contemporary observers and modern historians have mistaken it for a purely spontaneous affair and failed to realise that it was the outcome of conscious anarchist activity. Six years later in 1897 Italian anarchists in Ancona, including Malatesta, acted as a militant minority in a different manner by actively supporting the unionisation of dock workers, bakers, barbers and shoemakers.<sup>118</sup>

The Yiddish-speaking anarchist Yanovsky acted as a militant minority during the early 1890s in London when he opposed a trade unionist called Lewis Lyons, who sought to organise master tailors, who were employers, alongside wage labourers. Yanovsky combated this attempt to unite groups with opposed class interests by denouncing Lyons’ plans in articles he wrote for the *Arbeter Fraynt* and by speaking at every public meeting that was held on the

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<sup>117</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 325, 443; *Towards Anarchy*, 230.

<sup>118</sup> Turcato, *Making Sense*, 81-9; Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 261-7.

question, irrespective of which side in the dispute organised it. In this way, Yanovsky was able to defeat Lyons and force him to leave the Jewish labour movement.<sup>119</sup>

Yanovsky was not unique in this respect. Jewish anarchists living in London, alongside Rocker, played a key role in organising trade unions and strikes. According to Rocker, “all the Jewish trade unions in the East End, without exception, were started by the initiative of the Jewish anarchists”. In 1912 this activity culminated in Jewish tailors launching a general strike to abolish sweatshops in the East End. The strike, which mobilised 13,000 workers in two days, was launched in solidarity with striking tailors in the West End, whose strike had initially been undermined by strike-breaking work within the East End sweatshops. During the strike Rocker acted as a militant minority by attending all the meetings of the strike committee, acting as Chairman of the Finance Committee, editing the daily *Arbeter Fraynt* and addressing three or four strike meetings a day. After three weeks on strike the workers employed in men’s tailoring emerged victorious having won shorter hours, an end to piecework, better sanitary conditions and the employment of union labour only. The strike continued within the women’s garment industry, where Jewish workers were overwhelmingly employed, until the capitalists gave in and surrendered. In so doing they had, according to Rocker, dealt “the death-blow to the sweatshop system”.<sup>120</sup>

Anarchist attempts to organise or participate in mass movements as a militant minority were of course not always successful. Focusing on England, Italian anarchists living in London tried on several occasions to organise restaurant workers but were unable to form a long-lasting trade union due, in part, to the temporary and seasonal nature of the work.<sup>121</sup> In September 1908 English anarchists in Leeds participated in a movement of unemployed people which began

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<sup>119</sup> Rocker, *London Years*, 62-3,

<sup>120</sup> Rocker, *London Years*, 90, 126-31.

<sup>121</sup> Di Paola, *Knights Errant*, 34-5, 95-6, 111-3, 205.

positively, from an anarchist perspective, by engaging in direct action but ended up being taken over by politicians, despite anarchist attempts to push it in a radical direction.<sup>122</sup>

Although mass anarchists viewed themselves as a militant minority who sought to influence the consciousness of other workers, they explicitly rejected authoritarian forms of vanguardism due to their commitment to the self-emancipation of the working classes. This rejection took four main forms. Firstly, mass anarchists sought only to influence other members of the working classes through persuasion and engaging in actions which provided an example to others. For Malatesta, whilst “authoritarians see the mass of the people as raw material to be manipulated into whatever mould they please through the wielding of power by decree, the gun and the handcuff”, anarchists “need the consent of the people and must therefore persuade by propaganda and by example”.<sup>123</sup> The Russian anarchist Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum, who was known as Voline, similarly wrote that, since “the realisation of the revolution” can only be achieved by “the broad popular masses” the “role” of anarchists in “this realisation will be limited to that of a ferment, an element providing assistance, advice, and an example”.<sup>124</sup> Such influence was entirely consistent with the goal of anarchism since according to Malatesta an anarchist society is one in which nobody is “in a position to oblige others to submit to their will or to exercise their influence other than through the power of reason and by example”.<sup>125</sup>

Secondly, the main goal of anarchist attempts to influence other workers via persuasion and engaging in acts which provided an example was to encourage workers to act for themselves and self-organise. According to Malatesta in his 1894 article *The Duties of the Present Hour*, “the constant preoccupation of the revolutionists, the point towards which all their activity must

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<sup>122</sup> Quail, *Slow Burning*, 250-1. Anarchists were able to more effectively organise unemployed people in the United States. See Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 217-23.

<sup>123</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 81.

<sup>124</sup> Voline, “Synthesis (Anarchist)”, 202-3.

<sup>125</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 56.

aim” is “to bring about” the “state of mind among the masses” whereby they are “ready to fight and ready to take the conduct of their affairs into their own hands”<sup>126</sup> As Malatesta later explained in a letter to Makhno written in 1929, “[w]hat matters most is that the people, men and women lose the sheeplike instincts and habits which thousands of years of slavery have instilled in them, and learn to think and act freely. And it is to this great work of moral liberation that the anarchists must specially dedicate themselves.”<sup>127</sup>

Thirdly, mass anarchists rejected the view that they were inherently superior to others and instead sought to treat non-anarchist workers as their equals.<sup>128</sup> In 1890 Kropotkin wrote that anarchists who label others as unintelligent if they do not immediately embrace anarchism upon hearing about it “forget that they were not anarchists from birth” and that it took an extended period of transformation for them to unlearn the prejudices they had been socialised into by class society. Five years later in 1895 Kropotkin argued that although anarchist militants had “an obligation to do everything possible to spread the anarchist idea among the working masses” they should not view themselves as “better than the ‘ignorant masses’ just because we are anarchists and they are not yet”.<sup>129</sup>

This same attitude was expressed by Malatesta. In 1894 he wrote that anarchists should “remember that people do not become Anarchists in a single day, by hearing some violent speeches”. Anarchists should therefore not “refuse to associate with working men who are not already perfect Anarchists” since “it is absolutely necessary to associate with them in order to make them become Anarchists”. When associating with other workers anarchists had to ensure that they did not act “with the smug arrogance of people who claim to hold the infallible truth and, from their alleged infallibility, look down their noses at those who do not subscribe to

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<sup>126</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 176.

<sup>127</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 110-1.

<sup>128</sup> Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 62-4.

<sup>129</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 332, 348.

their ideas”. They should instead “become brothers with the workers, struggle with them, and sacrifice ourselves alongside them”.<sup>130</sup> This idea was repeated by Malatesta in 1899 when he wrote that anarchists “must not look upon ourselves as superior beings who deign to stoop to the people’s level, but as comrades who offer and seek help from comrades for the common good”.<sup>131</sup> Anarchists had to, in short, “take the people as they are and . . . move forward with them”.<sup>132</sup>

This went alongside the view that anarchists had to not only teach anarchist ideas to other workers, but also themselves learn from the collective self-activity of the wider working classes. Malatesta thought that “by coming into contact with the people, even the most ignorant part of the people, we receive intellectually and morally a lot more than we give”.<sup>133</sup> This attitude can be seen in how Malatesta responded to a victorious strike organised by peasants in 1897. He wrote that anarchists should “[l]et the peasants teach us. They may certainly have fewer ideas than us, their understanding of the complexity of the social question may well lag behind ours; but they can do better than us. Let us follow them and help them”.<sup>134</sup>

Fourthly, mass anarchists opposed the seizure of state power in the name of the working classes. Malatesta held that “a revolution made by a party without the participation of the masses, even were it possible today, would lead only to the ascendancy of that party, which would not be an anarchist revolution at all”.<sup>135</sup> Kropotkin similarly critiqued those who “imagine that the government can be overthrown by a secret society, and that this society can take the government’s place”. Such a strategy was rejected because a genuine revolution could

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<sup>130</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 179, 172.

<sup>131</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 41.

<sup>132</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 87.

<sup>133</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 41-2.

<sup>134</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 190.

<sup>135</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 161

only be made by “the free initiative of the people” and “the dictatorship of one individual or one party” would, even if well intentioned, lead “to the death of the revolution”.<sup>136</sup>

Mass anarchists thought that during a revolution they should, instead of attempting to establish themselves in a position of power over the wider working classes, act only as a militant minority in the same manner that they had done prior to the revolution: spreading anarchist ideas and engaging in actions which implemented the anarchist programme and thereby served as an example to others. In 1910, Kropotkin argued that, during a revolution anarchists should not “let themselves be hoisted into power” and refuse to join any self-proclaimed revolutionary government. They should instead “remain on the streets, in their own districts, with the people – as propagandists and organisers . . . 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”.<sup>137</sup>

Mass anarchists continued to advocate this position in the aftermath of the Russian revolution. In 1922, Goldman opposed “[t]he political power of the Party, organised and centralised in the state” in favour of “[t]he industrial power of the masses, expressed through their libertarian associations”. Given this aim, the role of anarchists was “to guide the released energies of the people towards the re-organisation of life on a libertarian foundation”.<sup>138</sup> Two years later Malatesta explained that, “we cannot make the revolution exclusively ‘ours’ because we are a small minority” and “must therefore content ourselves with a revolution that is as much ‘ours’ as possible, favouring and taking part, both morally and materially, in every movement directed towards justice and liberty and, when the insurrection has triumphed, ensure that the pace of

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<sup>136</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 173, 170-1.

<sup>137</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 554.

<sup>138</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 390-1, 395, 393.

the revolution is maintained, advancing towards ever greater freedom and justice”.<sup>139</sup> In 1925 Malatesta wrote that during a revolution anarchists should “act together with all progressive forces and vanguard parties to attract the mass of people into the movement and arouse their interest, allowing the revolution – of which we would form a part, among others – to yield what it can”.<sup>140</sup>

If anarchists were successful in this then their position as a militant minority would fade away during the course of, or in the aftermath of, the social revolution itself as more and more workers came to adopt and implement anarchist ideas themselves. Kropotkin held that under present conditions “anarchism communism . . . was represented by feeble minorities” who would make their “way among the mass of the people” spreading their ideas and engaging in acts of revolt. In so doing they would ensure that “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”.<sup>141</sup>

Both Kropotkin and Malatesta thought that in order to achieve this it was essential that anarchists established autonomous regions during a revolution which refused to recognise the authority of any revolutionary government that was formed. Kropotkin wrote in 1891 that, during a revolution, anarchists would not “be able to avert . . . attempts at revolutionary government”. Instead anarchists could only “conjure up from within the people itself a force that is mighty in its actions” and grows “exponentially” in size due to “its achievements” at “tearing down and reorganising”. This force was the self-organisation of the working classes

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<sup>139</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 88-9.

<sup>140</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 472.

<sup>141</sup> Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 75.

themselves via “federated groups” which ignore “the authorities, no matter what name they may go under”.<sup>142</sup> This is because,

A people that will itself have organised the consumption of wealth and the reproduction of such assets in the interest of society as a 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 railways, its navy, its schools is not going to be susceptible to being administered anymore. 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 jailors.<sup>143</sup>

In the 1920 edition of Malatesta’s anarchist programme, which was based on the previous 1899 version and adopted by the Italian Anarchist Union, he wrote that anarchists should “push the people” to expropriate the ruling classes, establish workplace and community assemblies which collectively own and control the means of production, and refuse “to nominate or recognise any government”.<sup>144</sup> If the wider working classes choose not to do so then anarchists,

Must – in the name of the right we have to be free even if others wish to remain slaves and because of the force of example – put into effect as many of our ideas as we can, refuse to recognise the new government and keep alive resistance and seek that those localities where our ideas are received with sympathy should constitute themselves into

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<sup>142</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 578.

<sup>143</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 578.

<sup>144</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 186.



anarchist communities, rejecting all governmental interference and establishing free agreements with other communities which want to live their own lives.<sup>145</sup>

In summary, mass anarchists argued that they should participate in social movements as a militant minority in order to push them in an anarchist direction. Although anarchists viewed themselves as a militant minority, they were committed to the unity of means and ends and so rejected authoritarian forms of vanguardism which advocated the top-down rule of revolutionaries through the exercise of state power. They instead believed that the social revolution could only be carried out by the free initiative of the workers themselves. All anarchists could do to ensure this happened was to spread their ideas through persuasion and engaging in actions which served as an example to others.

#### **7.4 – Conclusion**

In this chapter I have demonstrated that mass anarchists advocated the formation of large-scale formal organisations that prefigured the future anarchist society by being federations of autonomous sections. The immediate goal of these federations, be they trade unions or specific anarchist organisations, was to organise and/or participate in collective struggles for immediate reforms in the present. These collective struggles for reforms were advocated as the means through which a revolutionary mass movement which was both capable of, and driven to, overthrow capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society would emerge and develop. They thought this would occur due a combination of workers being transformed through (a) the practice of participating within prefigurative organisations and taking direct action against the ruling classes and (b) being influenced by anarchists acting as a militant minority within social movements. These features of mass anarchism have been previously noted by Schmidt

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<sup>145</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 187. To compare these sections to the previous 1899 version see Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 55-6. See also Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 472.

and van der Walt in *Black Flame*. My work has built upon their brief account by establishing in much greater detail what mass anarchists thought and why through an examination of a greater number of primary and secondary sources. A central aspect of this rational reconstruction has been demonstrating how mass anarchist strategy was underpinned by the theory of practice. Historically, the main form of mass anarchism within Europe and the United States was syndicalist anarchism, which will be covered at length in the next chapter.

## Chapter 8 – Syndicalist Anarchism

Syndicalist anarchism advocated the formation of federally-structured trade unions which united the working classes into a collective force, were independent of political parties, and engaged in direct action against the ruling classes. This was to be achieved either by forming whole new trade unions or by participating within existing trade unions and transforming them from within. Historically, anarchist authors used a variety of different terms to refer to trade unions, such as societies of resistance to capital, resistance societies, workers' associations or the labour movement.<sup>1</sup> The term 'syndicalism' is itself derived from the French word for trade union – 'syndicat' – and the phrase 'syndicalisme révolutionnaire', meaning trade unionism that is revolutionary.<sup>2</sup> For the sake of simplicity I shall be using the English term 'trade union', rather than historical terms such as resistance societies, throughout my discussion of syndicalist anarchism.

Several academics have viewed syndicalism in general, which includes but is not limited to its anarchist variants, as a form of action that lacked a sophisticated political theory. Joseph Schumpeter insisted that syndicalism was “anti-intellectual . . . in the sense that it despises constructive programs with theories behind them” and that as a result it “cannot be espoused by anyone afflicted by any trace of economic or sociological training. There is no rationale for it”.<sup>3</sup> F. F. Ridley, in comparison, concedes that there were “theorists” of syndicalism but then goes on to claim that any attempt to reconstruct the political theory of syndicalism would be “the attempt of an outsider to give a rational account of something that was never intended to be translated into such words” since “syndicalists were neither philosophers nor politicians but

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<sup>1</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 118; Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 104; *Method of Freedom*, 170, 172, 338, 463.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Thorpe, “Uneasy Family: Revolutionary Syndicalism in Europe From the Charte d’Amiens to World War One” in *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism*, 25-6.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1994), 339.

workers . . . less concerned with ideas than with the actual, everyday struggle to improve their lives”.<sup>4</sup>

An examination of the documents produced by the syndicalist movement reveal, however, that they were committed to a sophisticated and coherent political theory. It is true that several theorists of syndicalism claimed that syndicalism was distinct from other kinds of socialism on the basis of the fact that it was concerned with action, rather than philosophising. Pouget, for example, remarked that what separated “syndicalism” from “the various schools of socialism” was “its doctrinal sobriety. Inside the unions, there is little philosophising. They do better than that: they act!”<sup>5</sup> Pierre Monatte similarly said that “[r]evolutionary syndicalism . . . has found a place for itself more through action than through theory and it must be sought in action rather than in books”.<sup>6</sup> Such statements should not, however, be interpreted as the claim that syndicalism lacked theory. Syndicalists rejected both theory without action and action without theory. They instead, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, produced an action focused theory in which the role of the political theorist was to develop revolutionary strategies that were both informed by the lessons of class struggle and served as an effective guide to changing the world.

Syndicalist anarchism was a form of mass anarchism and so sought to win immediate reforms for the working classes through direct action, such as strikes, sabotage and boycotts. It viewed these collective struggles for immediate reforms as the means which would, over time, develop an organised mass movement with the necessary radical capacities, drives and consciousness for launching and successfully defending a social revolution which abolished capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. The social revolution would, in theory, be launched

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<sup>4</sup> Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Pouget, *The Party of Labour*.

<sup>6</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 108.

through an insurrectionary general strike during which the working classes would stop work in order to occupy their workplaces and seize the means of production from the ruling classes, thereby expropriating them. During the social revolution itself the federally-structured trade unions would be converted from organisations which engaged in economic resistance against the ruling classes into organisations which self-managed the economy, either in part or whole.<sup>7</sup>

Although all syndicalist anarchists generally agreed on the above strategy, they disagreed with one another on two main questions. These were,

1. Should trade unions be politically neutral or should they be explicitly committed to achieving an anarchist society through anarchist means?
2. Are trade unions sufficient in and of themselves to achieve an anarchist society or do they need to be assisted by a specific anarchist organisation?

In this chapter I shall first outline the three main forms of syndicalist anarchism which emerged in response to these two questions – revolutionary syndicalism, ‘syndicalism-plus’ and anarcho-syndicalism.<sup>8</sup> This will be achieved through a condensed history of syndicalist anarchism as an ideology and social movement in order to provide the necessary historical context for understanding these ideas. With this important historical context in place I shall then rationally reconstruct the main strategies which syndicalist anarchists in general advocated. In so doing I shall demonstrate that syndicalism anarchism was based on an intellectually sophisticated theory grounded in the theory of practice.

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<sup>7</sup> Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, “The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism” in *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective*, ed van der Linden and Thorpe (Aldershot: Scolar Press), 1-2; van der Walt, “Syndicalism” in *Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, 249-50.

<sup>8</sup> The language of ‘syndicalism-plus’ was coined by McKay, “Communism and Syndicalism” (2012), <http://anarchism.pageabode.com/anarcho/communism-syndicalism>. Thanks to McKay for suggesting this phrase to me.

## 8.1 – From the 1<sup>st</sup> International to Anarcho-Syndicalism

The strategy of revolutionary trade unionism which would come to be known as syndicalism was first advocated during debates within the 1<sup>st</sup> International between 1868 and 1872 and the St Imier International between 1872 and 1877. The delegates at the 1869 Basel Congress of the 1<sup>st</sup> International passed a resolution which stated that “all workers should actively engage in creating resistance funds in the various trades” and work towards establishing “national associations of the various trades” which would co-ordinate the organisation of strikes and collective activity “until such time as the wages system is replaced with the federation of free producers”.<sup>9</sup>

One of the main proponents of this strategy was Bakunin. He held that, prior to the social revolution, the main task of the 1<sup>st</sup> International was to “give an essentially economic character to workers’ agitation in every land; setting as its goal the reduction of working hours and higher wages” through “the organisation of the mass of workers and the creation of resistance [strike] funds”. In so doing, the 1<sup>st</sup> International would, Bakunin predicted, grow into a mass movement which unified and organised millions of workers across Europe, if not the entire world, into trade unions. At such a stage of development the 1<sup>st</sup> International would “have the capacity to replace the political world of the state, and the departing bourgeois” when a revolution broke out due to the “force of circumstances”. In such a revolutionary situation the 1<sup>st</sup> International would, due to its extensive experience of collective struggle against the ruling classes, “find its real strength, one that knows how to act” and is “capable of taking things in hand and capable of giving them a sense of direction that will be really salutary for the people”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Louis Pindy, “Resolution on Resistance Funds” in *Workers Unite! The International 150 Years Later*, ed. Marcello Musto (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 133-4.

<sup>10</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 56.

This revolutionary strategy continued to be advocated within the resolutions of the St Imier International, which were passed at its founding congress in Switzerland on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1872.<sup>11</sup> They declared that the establishment of the free federation of free producers could “only be the outcome of the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself, its trades bodies and the autonomous communes”. Trade unions were advocated as one of the main forms that working-class self-organisation should take because they integrate “the proletariat into a community of interests”, train it in “collective living” and prepare it for “the supreme struggle”.<sup>12</sup> Given this, the resolutions proclaimed that,

we intend to organise and marshal resistance on a broad scale. We regard the strike as a precious weapon in the struggle, but we have no illusions about its economic results. We embrace it as a product of the antagonism between labour and capital, the necessary consequence of which is to make workers more and more alive to the gulf that exists between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, to bolster the toilers’ organisation, and, by dint of ordinary economic struggles, to prepare the proletariat for the great and final revolutionary contest.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1880s, this strategy continued to be advocated by Kropotkin. In 1881, he wrote that anarchists had to help “organise the workers’ forces” in order to make “[w]ar on capitalist exploitation” and pursue this “war relentlessly, day by day, by the strike, by agitation, by every revolutionary means”. In so doing they would build “a formidable MACHINE OF STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITAL”.<sup>14</sup> For Kropotkin the primary contemporary example of this strategy in action were Spanish anarchists who “remain within the working class, they struggle with it, for it” and “bring the contribution of their energy to the workers’ organisation and work to build

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<sup>11</sup> Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 198-9.

<sup>12</sup> “The St. Imier Congress (1872), 99-100.

<sup>13</sup> “The St. Imier Congress (1872), 100.

<sup>14</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 294.

up a force that will crush capital, come the day of the revolution: the revolutionary trades associations". In so doing, they were not only furthering the cause of workers' self-emancipation but were also being "[f]aithful to the anarchist traditions of the International".<sup>15</sup>

The Spanish anarchists to which Kropotkin was referring had founded the Workers' Federation of the Spanish Region (FTRE) on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1881. The organisation, which grew out of the Spanish section of the 1<sup>st</sup> International (FRE), was a federation of trade unions which by the end of 1882 was composed of 218 federations, 663 sections, and 57,934 members. Its main paper, *La Revista Social*, had 20,000 subscribers.<sup>16</sup> Spanish anarchists were not the only anarchists to actively participate within the trade union movement during the 1880s. Anarchists in Chicago, including the future Haymarket martyrs Albert Parsons and August Spies, attempted to build revolutionary trade unions and joined the struggle for the eight-hour day as a means to spread anarchist ideas.<sup>17</sup> In Turin and Milan some Italian anarchists played a key role within trade unions as organisers, delegates or editors of newspapers. This included Galleani who had yet to adopt his later rejection of trade union struggle and formal organisations but was already beginning to move in this direction by 1889.<sup>18</sup> Outside Europe and the United States anarchists in Cuba were instrumental in creating trade unions and launching strikes.<sup>19</sup> There were, in addition to this, several small-scale examples of anarchists organising strikes during this period, such as the 1888 strike in Como, Italy. One of the most active agitators during this strike was a fourteen-year-old anarchist girl called Maria Roda, who

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<sup>15</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 299.

<sup>16</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 80-4. The trade union was forced to suspend its activities in 1884 in response to state repression and was replaced by a new organisation in 1888. See *ibid*, 84-97, 117-22.

<sup>17</sup> Avrich, *Haymarket*, 72-3, 89-92, 181-8.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 19-20; Buttà, *Living Like Nomads*, 22-3, 31-2; Senta, *Galleani*, 18-19, 24-9.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement*, trans. Charles Bufe (Tucson, AZ: See Sharp Press, 2001), 19-24.



continued to participate in strikes as she grew older and co-founded the previously mentioned Women's Emancipation Group in 1897.<sup>20</sup>

Nor was Kropotkin the only well-known European anarchist theorist to argue for anarchist participation in trade unions during the 1880s. In 1884 Malatesta, for example, advocated "organising the labouring masses into trades associations based on the principle of resistance and of attacking the bosses".<sup>21</sup> Revolutionary trade unionism came to be endorsed by an increasingly large number of anarchists in response to the London dockland strike of 1889, which was reported on by Kropotkin, Malatesta and Pouget in several anarchist papers.<sup>22</sup>

This trend culminated in French anarchists participating in the creation of revolutionary syndicalism as an ideology and organised mass movement in France between the mid-1890s and early 1900s within The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and the Bourses du travail, which were labour exchanges that over time morphed into trade unions.<sup>23</sup> The CGT was not itself a majority anarchist organisation and contained several different factions, including reformist syndicalists. Nevertheless anarchists did exert a significant influence on the organisation in the early years of its existence.<sup>24</sup> In 1901, the anarchists Georges Yvetot and Paul Delesalle were elected as the general secretary and vice secretary of the National Federation of Bourses du travail. That same year Pouget, who had been the editor of the CGT's paper *La Voix du peuple* since its creation in 1900, was elected as the vice secretary of the

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<sup>20</sup> Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> Bantman, "From Trade Unionism to Syndicalisme Révolutionnaire to Syndicalism: The British Origins of French Syndicalism" in *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism*, 128-132; *French Anarchists in London*, 40-1; "The Militant Go-between: Émile Pouget's Transnational Propaganda (1880-1914)", *Labour History Review* 74, no. 3 (2009), 279-280; Turcato, *Making Sense*, 36-42; Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 5th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 94-6.

<sup>23</sup> Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, 63-71; Phil H. Goodstein, *The Theory of the General Strike from the French Revolution to Poland* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984), 53-9. For Pouget's account of the founding of the CGT and the rise of revolutionary syndicalism see Pouget, *The Party of Labour*.

<sup>24</sup> Damier, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 15; Thorpe, *Ö V j g " Y q t m g t u " V j g o u g n x g u ö < " T g x q n w v k International Labour 1913-1923* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 26-7. For an in-depth overview of reformist syndicalism see Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 114-40.

CGT. Pouget would remain in this position until late 1908 when he was briefly imprisoned for his involvement in the CGT's campaign for the eight-hour day and subsequently, after his release on October 31<sup>st</sup>, ceased to be active within the organisation. Delesalle likewise resigned from his position as vice secretary of the National Federation of Bourses du travail at the CGT's 1908 congress of Marseilles and instead focused his energies on running a second-hand bookshop and publishing radical literature. By 1914, despite anarchist influence within the CGT waning, roughly 100,000 members of the CGT supported anarchist positions at congresses through their elected delegates.<sup>25</sup>

The ideas of revolutionary syndicalism were formally crystalised by the CGT at its October 1906 congress where it adopted the Charter of Amiens with 830 votes in favour and only eight opposed. The Charter, which was drafted by Victor Griffuelhes, Louis Niel, André Morizet, Pouget and Delesalle in a restaurant, emerged out of a compromise between the revolutionary and reformist factions within the CGT.<sup>26</sup> It declared that the CGT sought to unite "all workers conscious of the struggle to be conducted for the disappearance of the system of wage-earning and management" irrespective of "their political schooling" in order to improve working conditions and eventually overthrow capitalism via expropriation and "the general strike". All members of the CGT had "the complete liberty . . . to participate, outside the unions in whatsoever forms of struggle conform to their political or philosophical views". It was requested that in return members "should not introduce into the unions opinions held outside it". The unions which composed the CGT were to engage in "economic action . . . conducted

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<sup>25</sup> Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 24, 138, 145-6; Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 32, note 37. According to Joll anarchists only seriously influenced the CGT "for ten or fifteen years" and had little influence within the CGT after 1914. Joll, *Anarchists*, 216.

<sup>26</sup> Thorpe, *Workers Themselves*, 27; Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 137.

directly against employers” and “not concern themselves with parties and sects, which, outside and alongside, may pursue social transformation in complete freedom”.<sup>27</sup>

The charter’s advocacy of political neutrality was worded in such a manner that revolutionaries and reformists could interpret the text in contradictory ways. For revolutionaries, the charter only committed the CGT to independence from political parties and so parliamentarism. Reformists, in comparison, interpreted the charter as entailing a much stricter commitment to independence from all forms of politics, including anarchism. This had the effect that when the CGT engaged in propaganda campaigns against militarism and patriotism, reformists viewed this as being in contradiction with its commitment to political neutrality.<sup>28</sup>

The reason why anarchists who were revolutionary syndicalists advocated political neutrality was because they believed that the function of a trade union was to unite workers on the basis of their shared class interests, rather than on the basis of the specific school of political thought they subscribed to. The trade union, to quote Pouget, “groups together those who work against those who live by human exploitation: it brings together interests and not opinions”.<sup>29</sup> As a result Pouget held that the CGT should be “open to all the exploited regardless of their political or religion views”, including those workers who are “a believer . . . in the State”. In theory workers would join the trade union “imbued with the teachings of some (philosophical, political, religious, etc.) school of thought or another” and through their participation in direct action on the “economic terrain” have “their rough edges knocked off until they are left only with the principles to which they all subscribe: the yearning for improvement and comprehensive emancipation”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Zurbrugg, *Anarchist Perspectives*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 134, 137-140; Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, 88-94, 180.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 30-1.

<sup>30</sup> Pouget, *The Party of Labour*.

This perspective on trade unions was famously articulated by the anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist Monatte on 28th August at the 1907 International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam.<sup>31</sup> According to Monatte,

Instead of opinion-based syndicalism, which gave rise to anarchist trade-unions in, for example, Russia and to Christian and social-democratic trade unions in Belgium and Germany, anarchists must provide the option of French-style syndicalism, a neutral – or more precisely, independent – form of syndicalism. Just as there is only one [working] class, so there should be only one single workers’ organisation, one single syndicate, for each trade and in each town.

Monatte argued for a neutral trade union because he believed that it would result in differences of opinion fading into the background as shared class interests came to the forefront. This was essential because the “class struggle” would only “develop to its fullest extent and have the greatest possible effect” when the working classes as a whole united into a vast trade union and thereby overcame “the obstacle of arguments between the various schools of thought and rival sects on every point”.

From this it followed for Monatte that revolutionary syndicalism was “sufficient unto itself”. By this he meant that revolutionary syndicalist trade unions could, by themselves, abolish class society. They were organisations which could (a) unite workers as a class, (b) organise direct action which enabled workers to develop radical capacities, drives and consciousness, (c) launch the social revolution through a general strike and (d) provide the organisational framework through which workers would take over and self-manage the economy. Given this, to say that “syndicalism is sufficient unto itself” was for Monatte merely to say that “the now-

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<sup>31</sup> The subsequent quotes are from Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 115. For the full speech see *ibid*, 108-116.

mature working class finally intends to be sufficient unto itself and not to entrust its emancipation to anyone other than itself". This position was shared by Pouget who argued in 1908 that "the trade union is . . . sufficient for all purposes" including "the expropriation of capital and the reorganisation of society".<sup>32</sup>

Given the above, the position of anarchists who advocated revolutionary syndicalism can be summarised as follows. They held that syndicalism was sufficient unto itself because trade unions could independently develop a large organised working-class social movement with the necessary radical capacities, drives and consciousness for a social revolution to be launched and succeed in establishing an anarchist society. They thought that, in order to achieve this, trade unions had to be politically neutral towards different left-wing factions, including political parties, and therefore not have an explicitly anarchist programme. This was because they believed that the goal of a trade union was to unite as many workers as possible on the basis of their shared class interests, rather than because of their shared ideological commitment to, for example, anarchism or Marxism. Anarchists who were revolutionary syndicalists did write critiques of political parties and parliamentarism, but they did not think that such positions should be the official position of the trade union. The trade union only had to be independent of political parties, rather than being explicitly opposed to them.

The CGT was the first self-described revolutionary syndicalist trade union, but it was not the only one. After the CGT's merger with the National Federation of Bourses du travail in 1902 at least nine trade unions within Europe and the United States either came to adopt syndicalist programmes or were founded as syndicalist organisations.<sup>33</sup> These were the Dutch National Secretariat of Labour (NAS), American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Central

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<sup>32</sup> Pouget, *The Basis of Trade Unionism* (1908), <https://libcom.org/library/basis-trade-unionism-emile-pouget>.

<sup>33</sup> Parallel to this syndicalist trade unions were established in Latin America and Asia, such as the Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA) or the All-Japanese Libertarian Federation of Trade Unions (Zenkoku Jiren). See Damier, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 34-7, 57-62.

Organisation of Swedish Workers (SAC), Spanish National Confederation of Labour (CNT), Italian Syndicalist Union (USI), Free Association of German Trade Unions (FVdG), which would develop into the Free Workers' Union of Germany (FAUD), and Portuguese National Workers' Union (UON), which would develop into the Portuguese, as opposed to French, General Confederation of Labour (CGT-P). In England the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) was founded in order to spread syndicalism within existing reformist trade unions.<sup>34</sup>

The fact that these trade unions emerged or adopted syndicalism after the CGT can make it appear that they were established simply due to revolutionaries hearing of and deciding to copy French syndicalism. This narrative should be rejected because it ignores the fact that they were created after an extended period of anarchists, and other socialists, actively participating within trade union movements. For example, in Spain, where anarchists had organised within trade unions since the 1870s, the anarchist journal *Natura* responded to the translation of a pamphlet on syndicalism by Pouget in 1904 by claiming it covered topics “well known here” and showed that “the spirit of free syndicalism, common in Spain, is making strides in France”. Anselmo Lorenzo, who seems to have translated the pamphlet, held that the French syndicalists had “returned to us, amplified, corrected and perfectly systematized, ideas with which the Spanish anarchists inspired the French”.<sup>35</sup>

The Spanish anarchists were not unique in this respect. During this period many anarchists looked upon the theory and practice of revolutionary syndicalism as a repeat or direct continuation of the politics of the federalist wing of the 1<sup>st</sup> International. Pouget himself wrote that the CGT emanated from and was the “historical continuation” of “the International Working Men’s Association” and “the federalists or autonomists” within it who opposed the

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<sup>34</sup> For a broad overview of these movements see van der Linden and Thorpe, ed. *Revolutionary Syndicalism*.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 142, note 44, 129.

conquest of state power and thereby remained “loyal to the spirit of the International”.<sup>36</sup> In 1907, Malatesta remarked, during his speech at the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam, that what syndicalists considered to be a new path had already been “established and followed within the international” by “the first anarchists”.<sup>37</sup> That same year Kropotkin wrote in the preface to a pamphlet on syndicalism by the Georgian anarchist Georgi Gogeliia that “the current opinions of the French syndicalists are organically linked with the early ideas of the left wing of the International”.<sup>38</sup> The connection between revolutionary syndicalism and anarchism was, in addition to this, understood by at least some Marxists at the time. In 1909, Karl Kautsky, who was one of the most influential orthodox Marxists within the German SPD, wrote that “syndicalism” was “the latest variety of anarchism” and that “the syndicalism of the Romance countries” was committed to “anti-parliamentarism” due to its “anarchistic origin”.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the connection between the politics of revolutionary syndicalism and the federalist wing of the 1<sup>st</sup> International a growing number of syndicalist anarchists came to believe that the revolutionary syndicalism of the CGT was not sufficient to achieve a social revolution which would abolish capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. Syndicalist anarchist critics of revolutionary syndicalism came to embrace either syndicalism-plus or anarcho-syndicalism. Anarchists who advocated syndicalism-plus agreed with revolutionary syndicalists that trade unions should be politically neutral but explicitly rejected the idea that syndicalism was sufficient unto itself. They held that anarchists had to both actively participate within the trade union movement and at the same time maintain an independent existence by organising outside trade unions within specific anarchist organisations. For proponents of syndicalism-plus these specific anarchist organisations were essential for spreading anarchist

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<sup>36</sup> Pouget, *The Party of Labour*.

<sup>37</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 122.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Nettlau, *Short History of Anarchism*, 279. See also Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 392, 403-11.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Road to Power* (Chicago: Samuel A. Bloch, 1909), 61, 95.

values, theory and kinds of practice among the working classes both in and outside of trade unions and were therefore necessary for achieving a social revolution which established an anarchist society. They argued, in short, that revolutionaries should create a syndicalist trade union plus a specific anarchist organisation. The details of this position will be discussed in the next chapter as part of my overview of organisational dualism.

Anarcho-syndicalists, unlike proponents of revolutionary syndicalism and syndicalism-plus, believed that trade unions should not be politically neutral and had to instead be explicitly committed to achieving an anarchist society through anarchist means. In practice this meant trade unions advocating an anarchist society as their end goal and being opposed to state socialist strategies and political parties within their constitution, declaration of principles or congress resolutions. Some anarcho-syndicalists argued that specific anarchist organisations should be formed in parallel with anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, whilst others opposed it.

The idea of anarcho-syndicalism was first advocated by Russian anarchists in the late 1900s, such as the South Russian Group of Syndicalist Anarchists, whose membership included factory workers, sailors, dockworkers, bakers and tailors. Yakob Isaevich Kirillovsky, who was the group's main theorist and wrote under the pen name Daniil Novomirsky, advocated what would later be called anarcho-syndicalism in his 1907 book *The Programme of Syndicalist Anarchism*.<sup>40</sup> Novomirsky argued that anarchists should participate "in the revolutionary trade union movement" in order to "make that movement anarchist" and advocated the formation of "anarchist revolutionary syndicates which are bent on bringing syndicalist anarchism to pass".<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 76-8; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 61-2, 77-8; Daniil Novomirsky, *C p c t e j k u o ø u " Trade Union Programme*, <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/3bk4c0>. Within these translations the phrase "anarcho-syndicalism" is used. In the original Russian, however, only the phrase "syndicalist anarchism" appears. Thanks to Kenyon Zimmer for showing this to me.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 77; Novomirsky, *C p c t e j k u o ø u " V t c f. With Skirda p " R t q i t c* the Russian for 'revolutionary trade union' has been translated as 'revolutionary syndicalism'. To avoid



A decade later anarcho-syndicalism continued to be advocated by anarchists during the Russian revolution. On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1917 the Petrograd Union of Anarcho-Syndicalist Propaganda adopted a founding declaration of principles in which they proclaimed that the social revolution had to be “anti-statist in its method of struggle, Syndicalist in its economic content and federalist in its political tasks”. Their goal was “the full realisation of the Anarcho-Communist ideal”.<sup>42</sup> The meaning of ‘anarcho-syndicalism’ within the Russian anarchist movement can be seen in *The Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists* (1926), which was written by a group of Russian anarchists who had fled to France in order to escape being killed or imprisoned by the Bolshevik government. Within the *Platform* they carefully distinguished between “revolutionary syndicalism” which exists “solely as a trades movement of the toilers possessed of no specific social and political theory” and “Anarcho-syndicalism” which advocates “the creation of anarchist-type unions”.<sup>43</sup>

The term ‘anarcho-syndicalist’ did not immediately catch on and spread outside the Russian anarchist movement. Alexander Schapiro, who had been active within the anarcho-syndicalist movement during the Russian revolution, claimed years later that “[w]hen the Russian anarchists nearly a half a century ago pioneered the hoisting of the anarcho-syndicalist colours, the word was rather coldly received by the anarchist movement”.<sup>44</sup> Anarchists instead continued to refer to their ideas as revolutionary syndicalism whilst advocating what Russian anarchists called anarcho-syndicalism. To give one prominent example, between 25<sup>th</sup>

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potential confusion with revolutionary syndicalism in the distinct CGT sense I have decided to alter the translation. See also N. Rogdaev, “On the Anarchist Movement in Russia” in *The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam*, 191.

<sup>42</sup> Golos Truda, “Declaration of the Petrograd Union of Anarcho-Syndicalist Propaganda”, in *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Paul Avrich (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 71. For the history of anarcho-syndicalism in the Russian revolution see Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 135-51, 185, 190-5; Thorpe, *Workers Themselves*, 98-100, 163-4.

<sup>43</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “The Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (June 1926)” in *Facing the Enemy*, 204.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander Schapiro, *Introduction to Anarcho-Syndicalism and Anarchism* (1963), <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/alexander-schapiro-pierre-besnard-anarcho-syndicalism-and-anarchism/>. For an overview of Schapiro’s activity during the Russian revolution see Thorpe, *Workers Themselves*, 238-244.

December 1922 and 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1923 the revolutionary syndicalist international, which was named the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), was founded at an illegal congress in Berlin. The congress was attended by over 30 delegates representing an estimated 1.5 to 2 million workers within various trade unions around the world, including the Mexican General Confederation of Workers (CGT-M), the Free Workers' Union of Germany (FAUD), the Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA), the Norwegian Syndicalist Federation (NSF), the Central Organisation of Swedish Workers (SAC) and the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI). The delegates representing the Spanish National Confederation of Labour (CNT) were arrested in Paris whilst travelling to Berlin and so were unable to attend.<sup>45</sup>

The congress adopted a declaration of ten principles of "revolutionary syndicalism" which had been agreed upon at a previous conference in June and were written by Rocker. The principles, which Rocker had based on his earlier speech in 1919 at the founding congress of the FAUD, committed the IWA to an anarcho-syndicalist programme in all but name.<sup>46</sup> This occurred as part of syndicalist anarchists formally breaking with the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), which was affiliated with the Bolshevik-led Communist International, after the congresses of the RILU and Comintern declared themselves in favour of core state socialist tenets which syndicalist anarchists could not subscribe to. This included parliamentarism, the seizure of state power by a communist party, joining reformist unions, centralisation and the subordination of trade unions to communist parties.<sup>47</sup>

The IWA's declaration of principles were, unlike those of the RILU and Comintern, explicitly in favour of the anarchist goal of "libertarian communism" and the establishment of "economic

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<sup>45</sup> For an overview of the congress see Garner, *Goals and Means*, 113-27, 306, note 52; Thorpe, *Workers Themselves*, 244-56, 313, note 13.

<sup>46</sup> Thorpe, *Workers Themselves*, 120-3; Rocker, *Declaration of the Principles of Syndicalism*, trans Cord-Christian Casper (1919), [https://www.academia.edu/39134774/Rudolf\\_Rocker\\_Syndicalist\\_Declaration\\_of\\_Principles](https://www.academia.edu/39134774/Rudolf_Rocker_Syndicalist_Declaration_of_Principles).

<sup>47</sup> Thorpe, *Workers Themselves*, chapters 3-7. For overviews of the congresses of the Comintern and RILU see *ibid*, 100-6, 132-45, 181-94.

communes and administrative organs run by the workers in the fields and factories, forming a system of free councils without subordination to any authority or political party". This goal was to be achieved through anarchist means: "the collective revolutionary action of the working classes themselves", "direct action", "the social general strike" and "bottom up" organisational structures in which there is the "voluntary federation of all forces based on mutual interests and shared convictions". The state socialist strategies of "parliamentary activity" and "the conquest of political power" were explicitly rejected because "no form of statism, even the so-called 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat', can ever be an instrument for human liberation" and will instead "always be the creator of new monopolies and new privileges". The "defence of the revolution" would, in line with anarchist theory, be "the task of the masses themselves and their economic organisations", rather than a specific "military body" which exists outside and above the "economic organisations" created by the workers themselves.<sup>48</sup>

It was only after the founding of the IWA that anarchists within Europe began to call themselves anarcho-syndicalists on a significant scale. This shift in language can be seen in the fact that in 1925 Malatesta felt the need to critique what he called "anarcho-syndicalists" within the periodical *Pensiero e Volontà*.<sup>49</sup> In September 1927 Fabbri distinguished between "a labour organisation open to all workers, and thereby having no particular ideological programme" and "the anarcho-syndicalists in Germany and Russia" who advocate a "labour organisation which has an anarchist programme, tactics and ideology".<sup>50</sup> A year later in 1928 the French anarchist Sébastien Faure wrote a text advocating a synthesis of the different forms of anarchism and included "anarcho-syndicalism" as one of the three main "anarchist currents".<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> IWA, "Declaration of the Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism (1922)" in *A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, 416-8.

<sup>49</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 464.

<sup>50</sup> Fabbri, *About a Project of Anarchist Organisation* (1927), <https://ithanarquista.wordpress.com/about-a-project-for-anarchist-organization-luigi-fabbri/>.

<sup>51</sup> Sébastien Faure, *The Anarchist Synthesis: The Three Great Anarchist Currents* (1928), <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/anarchist-beginnings/sebastien-faure-the-anarchist-synthesis-1828/>.

In 1937 Pierre Besnard, who was the secretary of the French Revolutionary Syndicalist General Confederation of Labour (CGTSR), publicly used the term ‘anarcho-syndicalist’ for the first time to describe the ideology of the trade union he belonged to.<sup>52</sup> During his speech he stated that, “Anarcho-Syndicalism is an organisational and organised movement” which “draws its doctrine from Anarchism and its organisational format from Revolutionary Syndicalism”.<sup>53</sup> The view that anarcho-syndicalism was the synthesis of anarchist theory with revolutionary syndicalist modes of organisation was repeated and popularised by Rocker in his 1938 text *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* but with one major difference. Unlike Besnard, Rocker did not specify that he was describing what it is for an organisation or movement to be anarcho-syndicalist.<sup>54</sup> This had the effect that the distinction between anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism was blurred, because if anarcho-syndicalism is an ideology based on the combination of anarchist theory with revolutionary syndicalist forms of organisation, then anarchists who were revolutionary syndicalists, such as Pouget, can now be viewed as anarcho-syndicalists. Doing so would, however, be a mistake due to the important debates and differences between revolutionary syndicalist anarchists who advocated politically neutral trade unions and anarcho-syndicalists who advocated explicitly anarchist trade unions.

Rocker not only blurred the distinction between anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism. He wrote that “Anarcho-Syndicalism had maintained its hold upon organised labour [within Spain] from the days of the First International” and in so doing anachronistically imposed anarcho-syndicalism as a category onto the pre-history of syndicalism before the term had been formed.<sup>55</sup> Rocker’s 1946 essay *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, which is an

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<sup>52</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 151-2.

<sup>53</sup> Pierre Besnard, *Anarcho-Syndicalism and Anarchism* (1937), <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/alexander-schapiro-pierre-besnard-anarcho-syndicalism-and-anarchism/>.

<sup>54</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 54.

<sup>55</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 60. Perhaps due to Rocker’s influence historians of anarchism frequently use the term anarcho-syndicalism in an anachronistic manner. Graham writes that Marx opposed Bakunin’s “anarcho-syndicalist program” and claims that in September 1871 “the political orientation of the majority of the internationalists in Italy, Spain and the Swiss Jura was anarcho-syndicalist in all but name”. Woodcock

abridged and slightly revised version of *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*, only made things more unclear for future generations. He repeated his previous claim that anarcho-syndicalism is a synthesis of anarchism and syndicalism only to go on to equate the two by writing that “Revolutionary Syndicalism . . . was later called, Anarcho-Syndicalism”.<sup>56</sup>

Rocker’s claim was technically correct in the sense that the organisations he belonged to, the FAUD and the IWA, did initially call themselves revolutionary syndicalists whilst advocating anarcho-syndicalism as an idea and then, as language evolved, switched to calling themselves anarcho-syndicalists. This can be seen in the fact that Rocker himself referred to “syndicalism” in his declaration of principles adopted at the founding of the FAUD in 1919 and “revolutionary syndicalism” in his declaration of principles adopted at the founding of the IWA in 1922. By 1938, his language had shifted. He now referred to the trade unions which formed the IWA, including the FAUD, as the “present day representatives” of “MODERN Anarcho-Syndicalism”.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately 21<sup>st</sup> century readers of Rocker have often been unaware of these historical details and have misunderstood both the origins and nature of anarcho-syndicalism, and how it dithered from the revolutionary syndicalism of politically neutral trade unions like the CGT.

The development of syndicalist anarchism from its pre-history in the 1<sup>st</sup> International to the widespread adoption of anarcho-syndicalism during the 1920s and 1930s occurred over a 70-year period. During this time three main kinds of syndicalist anarchism were developed within the anarchist movement. Revolutionary syndicalists argued that trade unions were sufficient to achieve a social revolution. In order to do so trade unions had to unite as many workers as

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asserts that “anarcho-syndicalists” first “appeared . . . in the French trade unions” during the 1880s. See Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 130, 167; Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 20. For other examples see Joll, *Anarchists*, 217-18, 221, 223; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 8-9, 280, 431, 437, 441-4.

<sup>56</sup> Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Freedom Press, 1988), 5-6, 25, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Rocker, *Declaration of the Principles of Syndicalism*, 3-4; IWA, “Declaration of the Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism”, 416-8; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 54.

possible and therefore must be committed to political neutrality and so not explicitly oppose political parties or state socialist strategies in favour of an anarchist programme. In response to revolutionary syndicalism a number of anarchists came to disagree with its ideas and propose the alternative positions of syndicalism-plus and anarcho-syndicalism. Proponents of syndicalism-plus agreed with revolutionary syndicalists that trade unions should be politically neutral but rejected its claim to be sufficient unto itself. They instead held that anarchists must also organise independently of trade unions within specific anarchist organisations. Anarcho-syndicalists, in contrast, rejected the political neutrality of revolutionary syndicalism and argued that trade unions should be committed to achieving an anarchist society through anarchist means. Some anarcho-syndicalists advocated the formation of specific anarchist organisations, whilst others opposed it. Having provided a condensed overview of how revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism emerged, I shall now rationally reconstruct the core strategies which all forms of syndicalist anarchism generally advocated.

## **8.2 – The Double Aim of Syndicalist Anarchist Unions**

Syndicalist anarchists held that trade union activity should have two main goals. These were (a) defending and advancing the interests of the working classes within existing society and (b) preparing for and ultimately carrying out a social revolution which abolishes capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society.<sup>58</sup> This can be seen in Pouget's remark that,

Trade union endeavour has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make

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<sup>58</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 56-7.

possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital.<sup>59</sup>

Syndicalist anarchism therefore, like mass anarchism in general, sought to win immediate reforms in the interests of the working classes, such as the “reduction of working hours, increased pay, improved hygiene”, force the ruling classes to actually implement previously won reforms and protect these previously won reforms from encroachment by the ruling classes. Crucially, syndicalist anarchists held that reforms had to be achieved, enforced and protected through the direct action of the working classes themselves. Even reforms which involved changes to the law had to be achieved “through outside pressure brought to bear upon the authorities and not by trying to return specially mandated deputies to Parliament”.<sup>60</sup>

This strategy generally, but not always, went alongside a rejection of the iron law of wages, which held that under capitalism real wages would always tend towards the amount required to secure the subsistence of the worker due to either population growth decreasing the value of labour, or higher wages being neutralised by increased costs of living. Pouget labelled it as “illusionary” and “false” because it was empirically untrue and ignored the fact that increased costs in living were themselves a product of class struggle, such as those between landlords and tenants.<sup>61</sup> Malatesta argued against the iron law of wages on the grounds that between the minimum limit of a worker being paid enough to survive and the maximum limit of a capitalist earning some profit “[w]ages, hours and other conditions of employment are the result of the struggle between bosses and workers” and so could be changed through collective action.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Pouget, “What is the Trade Union?” in *No Gods, No Masters*, 432-3.

<sup>60</sup> Pouget, “What is the Trade Union?”, 428, 434-5.

<sup>61</sup> Pouget, *Direct Action*, 10-13.

<sup>62</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 51. Malatesta attributes the iron law of wages to Marxism. It should be noted that Marx in fact argued against the law. See Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 253; Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, 69, 91-2.

Pouget and Malatesta's position was not shared by all syndicalist anarchists. Pelloutier, for example, opposed partial strikes because he subscribed to the iron law of wages whilst still being a syndicalist due to him advocating a revolutionary general strike as the means to overthrow class society.<sup>63</sup> Others held that, although any increase in wages would be cancelled out by increases in the cost of living, partial strikes were nonetheless important and should be encouraged due to their transformative effect on workers. This can be seen in Delesalle's article for *Les Temps Nouveaux* in 1900 which argued that whilst any increase in wages would only be temporary due to the iron law, a strike would still promote "a state of rebellion", develop class consciousness, and "could be the spark that heralds the revolution".<sup>64</sup>

The main forms of direct action which syndicalist anarchists advocated to achieve reforms were strikes, boycotts and sabotage. By sabotage syndicalist anarchists meant "workers putting every possible obstacle in the way of the ordinary modes of work". This included such tactics as working slowly for bad pay, strictly following legislation or contracts in order to reduce productivity and, at its most militant, damaging machinery so that strike breakers could not continue production.<sup>65</sup>

This strategy of struggling for reforms through militant tactics was put into practice on multiple occasions by syndicalist trade unions. In 1904 the CGT agreed at its congress in Bourges to campaign for the eight-hour day, which workers had unsuccessfully been petitioning for since 1889. Instead of begging the state to grant this reform the CGT, following Pouget's suggestion, decided that they should try to force the ruling classes to give in to their demands by engaging

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<sup>63</sup> Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 16-17. During the St Imier International Guillaume advocated the general strike whilst being wary of partial strikes for increased wages because he thought they were unlikely to succeed and would instead bring suffering to workers and sap their revolutionary spirit. See Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 222-5.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Delesalle, *The Strike!* (1900), <https://libcom.org/library/strike-paul-delesalle>. For other examples see Delesalle, *Anarchists and the Trade Unions* (1900), <https://libcom.org/library/anarchists-trade-unions-paul-delesalle>; Berkman, *Anarchism*, 78-9, 197-210.

<sup>65</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 84-5. For an overview of sabotage being advocated within the CGT see Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 44-6; Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, 120-3.



in direct action: workers were to either cease work after eight hours or go on strike until their demands were met. The CGT selected 1<sup>st</sup> May 1906 as the day of action and proceeded to prepare for the coming struggle over the next two years. This included holding union meetings and distributing posters with revolutionary messages in order to persuade workers to participate in the movement. How much energy was devoted by the CGT to this campaign can be seen in the fact that during December 1905 alone ten famous syndicalist militants organised conferences in eighty cities.

The French state unsurprisingly responded to the campaign with repression. On the eve of the strike its leaders, including Griffuelhes, Pouget, Alphonse Merrheim (secretary of the Federation of Metal Workers) and Gaston Lévy (the CGT treasurer), were arrested for a few days after the minister of the interior, Georges Clemenceau, claimed to have discovered a non-existent plot by syndicalists, anarchists, monarchists and right-wing Catholics to overthrow the Republic. Clemenceau, in addition to this, moved 60,000 soldiers into Paris. Despite this state violence, the strike went ahead and on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1906 the CGT publicly demanded that the French state reduce the legal working day to eight hours. This demand was followed the next day by the CGT launching a national general strike for the eight-hour day (which included workers striking for a nine- or ten-hour day). The general strike was composed of 295 separate strikes at 12,585 businesses which demanded a reduction to the workday. A total of roughly 200,000 workers participated in this direct action. Some of the strikes lasted over a hundred days, such as a strike by metal workers in Hennebont which ended in defeat. The strike at Hennebont was not alone in this respect. Only 10,177 workers out of 202,507 succeeded in forcing a capitalist to grant them any reduction to the workday. Despite this, the general strike should not be viewed as a total defeat. On July 13<sup>th</sup> 1906, France's political ruling class responded to the pressure from below by passing a law granting workers a mandatory day off

work once per week. Although the CGT continued to campaign for the eight-hour day over the following years it was not granted to the French working classes until 1919.<sup>66</sup>

The CGT was not unique in attempting to wrestle reforms from the ruling classes through direct action. In February 1919, the CNT's Catalan Regional Confederation (CRT) organised a strike at the Barcelona offices of the Anglo-American electricity company Ebro Power and Irrigation. This action was launched by the CNT in response to the company firing workers for attempting to form a union.<sup>67</sup> When the company refused to give in to the workers' demands for higher wages and the re-instatement of all the workers who had been fired, the CNT escalated the struggle and organised a strike at the company's electricity generating plant. This resulted in Barcelona being plunged into darkness and trams being stranded in the street unable to move. The strike soon grew to include most of the city's gas, water and electricity workers when, on 26<sup>th</sup> February, they voted to go on strike in retaliation to the Spanish state sending in the military to restore the power supply. They were subsequently joined by workers outside of Barcelona in Sabadell, Vilafranca and Badalona striking in solidarity.

On March 8<sup>th</sup> the Spanish state responded to the growing strike movement by militarising the gas, water and electricity workers who were army reservists subject to military law. The workers were then given the choice between breaking the strike by returning to work or being confined to the barracks as punishment. This state violence did not dampen the strike, which expanded to include tram workers and carters who transported essential supplies such as coal. They, like the gas, water and electricity workers before them, were soon militarised as well. Almost none of these militarised workers betrayed their class interests by returning to work

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<sup>66</sup> Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, 132-3; Nicholas Papayanis, "Alphonse Merrheim and the Strike of Hennebont: The Struggle for the Eight-Hour Day in France", *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 (1971), 159-60, 164, 166-9, 179-80. Spanish trade unionists, including anarchists, also organised a general strike for the eight-hour day on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1906 after being inspired by the CGT's campaign. See Angel, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 130-1.

<sup>67</sup> The following account of the strike is based on Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 160-3; A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 292-99.

and, in response, the Spanish state imprisoned 800 of them in the fortress of Montjuïc, in Barcelona. These workers were supported in their struggle by the printers' union, which refused to publish any of the Spanish state's proclamations calling up workers for military service or articles in the press opposed to the strike. This even included an announcement by the managers of Ebro Power and Irrigation which declared that workers who did not return to their job by March 6th would be fired.

Throughout the strike the CNT sought to win its demands by mobilising large groups of workers in order to impose unbearable pressure on the company and the state via direct action. This included workers implementing syndicalist tactics by sabotaging the transformers and power cables used by the company to try and restore power to the city and thereby break the strike. By early March the CNT's strike committee were, as a result of this working-class militancy, in a position where they could negotiate with the ruling classes. They successfully forced Ebro Power and Irrigation to increase wages, pay workers' wages for the period they had been on strike, recognise the union, grant an eight-hour day and reinstate workers who had lost their jobs due to participation in the strike. The CNT not only issued demands to the economic ruling class but also demanded that the Spanish state release all prisoners who had been arrested for engaging in class struggle. If the state did not do so in seventy-two hours the CNT threatened to re-launch the strike.

In response to the general strike the Spanish prime minister, Álvaro de Figueroa, Count of Romanones, attempted to soothe the working classes by decreeing the eight-hour day in the construction industry, which was to be expanded to all industries on 3<sup>rd</sup> April.<sup>68</sup> Despite this great victory, the CNT decided to launch another general strike on 24th March (the resolution was passed by one vote) in response to the electricity, gas and water companies not allowing

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<sup>68</sup> Even after this legislation was passed workers went on strike to demand that the eight-hour day was implemented. See A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 302-3.

all the strikers to return to work immediately and the Spanish state refusing to free a number of workers imprisoned in Montjuïc, including the CNT's general secretary Manuel Buenacasa. This time the Spanish state was ready and retaliated swiftly to the general strike by imposing martial law, closing all CNT union headquarters, arresting key anarchist militants and censoring the press. Following this wave of state repression, the CNT was forced to call for a return to work on 7th April 1919.

Both the CGT's campaign for the eight-hour day and the CNT's strike against Ebro Power and Irrigation illustrate the general tendency for syndicalist trade unions to focus on struggling for reforms through organising workers at the point of production. In response to this tendency there were multiple attempts in both theory and practice to expand the scope of syndicalist action from the workplace to the wider community. The Spanish syndicalist anarchist Joan Peiró argued that the CNT had focused too much on strikes in workplaces and should alter this situation by establishing district committees which organised collective action concerning any issue facing the working classes and thereby fostered direct action on a mass scale. This same conclusion was reached in January 1931 in an article for the CNT's paper *Solidaridad Obrera*. It claimed that syndicalists had focused too much on mitigating "the exploitation of the producers" and in so doing had "almost entirely forgotten to combat exploitation in the field of consumption", such as landlords charging extortionate rent. Organising against these other forms of exploitation was not only important in and of itself, but also provided an opportunity to radicalise the "great masses of the population" who are "indifferent to the struggles carried on by the unions" and often come to oppose union demands when they suffer the negative consequences of prolonged industrial action.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Nick Rider, "The Practice of Direct Action: The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931" in *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice*, ed. David Goodway (London: Routledge, 1989), 87-8.

Such community-based direct action was organised by the CNT itself during the Barcelona rent strike of July 1931.<sup>70</sup> The strike grew out of previous rent strikes which had been independently organised by workers in October 1930. This movement then gained the support of the Economic Defence Commission which had been created by the CNT's Construction Workers' Union on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1931 in order to study the living expenses of workers and examine ways they could be reduced. The Construction Union's concern with these topics stemmed from the fact that 12,000 of its 30,000 membership were unemployed. On 1<sup>st</sup> May the Economic Defence Commission presented its first demand to a large CNT meeting: a 40% reduction in rent. This demand, alongside proposals for combatting unemployment and high food prices, was then announced to the wider public through a series of articles in *Solidaridad Obrera* which appeared over the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May. At the end of June and the beginning of July, the Economic Defence Commission held a series of meetings in working-class areas of Barcelona and nearby towns where workers, a significant number of whom were women, were informed of the campaign and heard speeches attacking landlords as thieves.

These meetings were followed by a mass rally on 5<sup>th</sup> July where the following three demands were agreed upon: (a) that the extra month's rent demanded by landlords from new tenants as security should be taken as normal rent such that new tenants had to pay no more during the month of July, (b) that rent should be reduced by 40% and (c) that unemployed people should not have to pay any rent. If landlords refused to reduce the rent, workers would respond by announcing that they were going on rent strike as part of a wider movement and pay nothing.

The rent strike rapidly grew after its launch and expanded from 45,000 workers in July to over 100,000 in August. The ruling classes responded in late July by banning public meetings of the

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<sup>70</sup> The following account is based on Rider, "The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931", 88-98; Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 105-7, 112-18, 120. There had been earlier attempts by Spanish anarchists to organise tenants in 1903-4 and 1917-8. See A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 162, 265-6.

Economic Defence Commission and evicting workers with the assistance of the police. The tenants responded, in turn, by organising protests to prevent evictions, re-occupying houses after the eviction had taken place, moving evicted workers to the homes of other CNT members and marching on the homes of landlords in order to warn them not to re-evict tenants. One eviction in early October was prevented by a crowd of pregnant women and children whom the police officer in charge had decided not to attack. Other women protesting evictions were less fortunate such as those who were charged by eighty police officers on 21<sup>st</sup> October. The rent strike was eventually defeated between November and December as a result of the state arresting any worker who resisted evictions or returned to their home after eviction. Despite this it did continue in some areas, such as rent strikers in the La Torrassa neighbourhood who responded to increased harassment by the police at the end of 1932 by attacking the police, seizing some of their weapons and attempting to burn down the local office of the chamber of urban property, which was the main landlord association in Barcelona and had actively encouraged repression of the rent strike.

One of the main driving forces behind attempts to expand the scope of syndicalist action beyond the workplace were women within trade unions struggling simultaneously against both class and gender oppression. This can be seen in the FAUD's Syndicalist Women's Union (SFB) which was created by and for women in 1920. One of the co-founders of the group was the Ukrainian Jewish anarchist Milly Witkop-Rocker, who was the partner of Rudolf Rocker. In 1922, two years after the founding of the SFB, Witkop-Rocker argued in her pamphlet *What the Organisation of Women on the Basis of Anarcho-syndicalism is as necessary as the organisation of male workers on the same basis*. To this end, she proposed that, whenever a syndicalist union was established a separate women's organisation should be created in parallel such that "the sections of the syndicalist women's federation will cover the whole country like a net". For Witkop-Rocker "the most

important and noble task of the Syndicalist Women's Association" was to "bring women into the union", especially women who "are not directly employed in industry", and "promote their intellectual development in any way for them to finally realise their subhuman situation". This would have the consequence that women, who were often isolated from one another within their respective homes, would be brought closer together, establish bonds of solidarity with one another, and through their participation in the union develop a spirit of independence and personal initiative which they did not have before due to their patriarchal socialisation. It was important to organise housewives not only to further the emancipation of women but also because they could in particular use "the weapon of the boycott" to support and effectively fight alongside their husbands in the class struggle.<sup>71</sup>

Witkop-Rocker realised that in order for women to be able to participate effectively in the workers' movement they first had to be emancipated from the crushing toil of housework, giving birth to large numbers of children, and looking after said children. One of the main ways the FAUD and the SFB attempted to contribute towards this emancipation was by organising around what would today be called reproductive justice. They not only demanded the abolition of laws which criminalised advocating contraception and prohibited abortion but also held meetings on the "childbearing strike", educated women about birth control, distributed contraceptives and either performed illegal abortions or put women in contact with physicians who would. Syndicalist anarchists in Germany did this through participating in, and often becoming prominent members of, public organisations which were neither explicitly anarchist nor syndicalist. This included such organisations as the Reich Association of Birth Control and Sexual Hygiene and the Working Committee of the Free Sexual Reformers Association. A few syndicalist anarchists paid heavily for their actions. For example, the FAUD member Albrecht

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<sup>71</sup> Milly Witkop-Rocker, *What Does the Syndicalist Women's Union Want?* (1922), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/milly-witkop-rocker-what-does-the-syndicalist-women-s-union-want>.

was sentenced to three years of imprisonment in 1930 because she performed more than a 100 abortions for the local chapter of the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Hygiene.<sup>72</sup>

Given the above examples, syndicalist anarchists were clearly committed in both theory and practice to achieving, enforcing and protecting reforms through direct action within both the workplace and the wider community. In line with mass anarchist theory they did not view the struggle for reforms as an end in and of itself. For Pouget winning reforms, “far from constituting a goal, can only be considered as a means of stepping up demands and wresting further improvements from capitalism”.<sup>73</sup> Goldman similarly wrote that although syndicalist anarchism struggles for “immediate gains” and “wrests from the enemy what it can force him to yield” it ultimately “aims at, and concentrates its energies upon, the complete overthrow of the wage system”.<sup>74</sup>

Instead of viewing reform and revolution as inherently opposed to one another, syndicalist anarchists viewed struggling for reforms as an evolutionary moment within a process of social change that would eventually culminate in a revolutionary moment. This was because organising to win immediate improvements under capitalism was the concrete means through which a mass social movement which was both capable of, and driven to, launch and defend a social revolution would emerge and develop. This perspective can be seen in Pouget’s argument that in order for the creation of an anarchist society to be possible “preparatory work must have drawn together within existing society those elements whose role it will be to make it happen”. This would occur through “day to day struggles against the current master of

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<sup>72</sup> Dieter Nelles, “Anarchosyndicalism and the Sexual Reform Movement in the Weimar Republic” (paper presented at the Free Love and Labour Movement workshop at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Pouget, “What is the Trade Union?”, 433.

<sup>74</sup> Goldman, *Red Emma*, 91.



production” which undermined the “legitimacy” and “mastery” of capitalists and “little by little” escalated and intensified to the point where the working classes had developed sufficient “strength and consciousness” to forcefully expropriate the capitalist class.<sup>75</sup>

For Pouget “the fine distinction between ‘reformist’ and ‘revolutionary’ evaporates” when “one analyses the methods and the value of trade union action” because when syndicalist trade unions struggle for either reform or revolution they do so through the same method: the direct action of the working classes. If a social revolution consists in the overthrow and forceful expropriation of the ruling classes then in a sense struggles for reform which result in “a reduction in capitalist privileges” and “partial expropriation” through increases in wages are, rather than being fundamentally different to a social revolution, a step towards and component of the social transformation which the social revolution will fully bring about.<sup>76</sup>

### **8.3 – The Dual Function of Syndicalist Anarchist Unions**

Syndicalist anarchists were, like anarchists in general, committed to the idea that there must be a unity of means and ends. The application of this theory led syndicalist anarchists to conclude that, in order to successfully overthrow capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society, trade unions had to be structured in such a manner that they prefigured the kinds of large-scale organisations which would exist after the social revolution. As the Russian anarchist Gregori Maximoff wrote in 1927, trade unions “must be built on principles which will serve in the future, i.e. on liberty – the autonomy of individuals and organisations – and on equality”.<sup>77</sup> In order to instantiate these values trade unions had to be organised through a system of federalism in which there was, to quote Rocker, “the right of self-determination of every

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<sup>75</sup> Pouget, *Direct Action*, 6.

<sup>76</sup> Pouget, “What is the Trade Union?”, 435.

<sup>77</sup> Maximoff, *Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 50-1.

member” and the “free combination from below upward” through “the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions”.<sup>78</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists thought that in constructing and expanding trade unions which prefigured the future anarchist society they were literally, in the famous words of the preamble to the 1908 IWW constitution, “forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old”.<sup>79</sup> This was because they held that the trade union had, in addition to its double aim, a dual function. Under capitalism, it performed the function of bringing the working classes together in order to resist the power of the ruling classes through their own direct action. During the social revolution, the trade union would take on a new function by forcefully expropriating the means of production from the ruling classes and establishing federations of workers’ assemblies organised by trade and geographic region. This would be achieved by converting the federations and local sections of the trade union from organisations of economic resistance into organisations of economic administration which self-managed the emerging anarchist economy.<sup>80</sup>

The idea that trade unions should perform the dual function of resisting dominant institutions in the present and taking over and organising the economy in the future was not invented by syndicalist anarchists. It was, as far as I am aware, first advocated during debates within the 1<sup>st</sup> International. At the Brussels Congress of September 1868 the Belgian delegate De Paepe argued, like syndicalist anarchists would in the future, that trade unions should have the double aim of organising strikes in order to improve working conditions and resist the ruling classes

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<sup>78</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 60.

<sup>79</sup> IWW, “The Preamble to the Constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World (1908)” in *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*, ed Joyce L. Kornbluh (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>80</sup> Not all syndicalist anarchists were committed to this view. The Argentinean FORA opposed the idea that the structure of the future society should be constructed within capitalism and Malatesta argued in 1922 that trade unions were not establishing the framework of the future society due to the extent to which they were divided according to the capitalist division of labour. See Damier, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 102-4, 107-8; Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 113-4.

under capitalism and, ultimately, contribute to the abolition of capitalism itself and take over the organisation of the economy. Trade unions built under capitalism were therefore, in De Paepe's words, "the embryos of the great workers' companies which will one day replace the capitalist companies" and "embrace whole industries". In order to both effectively struggle against capitalism and take over the organisation of the economy trade unions had to form "an international federation" comprising workers from multiple trades and thereby prefigure the future society they were to help build and be a component of.<sup>81</sup>

De Paepe soon expanded upon this argument in his article *The Present Institutions of the International in Relation to the Future*, which was published in February 1869. For De Paepe, "the International contains within itself the seeds of all the institutions of the future" and one of the most important seeds, alongside the International's sections, cooperatives and credit unions, was its trade unions. He proclaimed that, "the society of resistance is destined to organise labour in the future . . . Nothing will be more easy, when the moment comes, than to transform the societies of resistance into cooperative workshops, when the workers have agreed to demand the liquidation of the present society".<sup>82</sup>

Several months later, the Swiss Courtelary District section of the 1<sup>st</sup> International held a general assembly on 29<sup>th</sup> August in which a report on resistance funds was approved. The report had been written by the engraver Adhémar Schwitzguébel who would go on to become the corresponding secretary of the Jura Federation's Federal Committee.<sup>83</sup> In the report it was argued that trade unions were a form of "collective resistance to the domination" of capitalists which also "have the great advantage of preparing the general organisation of the proletariat,

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<sup>81</sup> De Paepe, "Strikes, Unions, and the Affiliation of Unions with the International" in *Workers Unite*, 126-9; Raymond W. Postgate, ed. "Debates and Resolutions of the First International on The Control of Industry" in *Revolution from 1789-1906* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 393-4.

<sup>82</sup> De Paepe, "The Present Institutions of the International in Relation to the Future (1869)".

<sup>83</sup> Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*, 193; Musto, ed. *Workers Unite*, 138, note 28.

of accustoming workers to identify their interests, to practise solidarity and to act in common for the interests of all". Trade unions were as a result "the basis for the coming organisation of society, since workers' associations will have to do no more than take over the running of industrial and agricultural enterprises". In order to effectively struggle against and overthrow capitalism trade unions had to "organise resistance internationally" and therefore form an international federation of trade unions which supported one another through the establishment of a shared strike fund which they all paid into.<sup>84</sup>

Proto-syndicalist anarchist views continued to be articulated within the 1<sup>st</sup> International at its Basel Congress, which was held between 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September 1869 and attended by, among others, Bakunin and Guillaume. During the morning session of 11<sup>th</sup> September Jean-Louis Pindy and the Belgian Eugène Hins argued that trade unions should take over the organisation of production during the abolition of capitalism.<sup>85</sup> Pindy, who was a cabinetmaker and the delegate of the Paris Construction Workers' Trade Union, suggested that trade unions should federate together within and between existing nations, rather than only federating together at the local level of a town. This was justified on two grounds. Firstly, it would establish solidarity between workers of different regions and enable them to exchange important information, co-ordinate action, and assist one another financially. Secondly, trade unions built under capitalism had to be organised in a manner which prepared for the future socialist society in which organisation went "beyond the limits of a town", did not recognise existing state frontiers and borders, and established "a vast allocation of labour from one end of the world to the other". Given his endorsement of prefigurative politics, Pindy declared that the federation of workers at the level of the town would form "the commune of the future" just as the federation of workers at the national and international level would form "the workers' representation of the

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<sup>84</sup> Adhémar Schwitzguébel, "On Resistance Funds" in *Workers Unite*, 138-40.

<sup>85</sup> Archer, *First International in France*, 166-75; Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 117-8.

future” under which politics would be replaced by “the associated councils of the various trades and a committee of their respective delegates” administrating and regulating “work relations”.<sup>86</sup>

This perspective was echoed by the Belgian delegate Hins who argued that “resistance societies will persist after the abolition of the wages system, not by that name but in terms of what they do”. In the future society trade unions would “organise work”, “solve the problem of free exchange, by operating a vast allocation of labour from one end of the world to the other” and “replace the old political systems” with the “representation of labour”.<sup>87</sup> According to Hins, “the general representation of labour, regional, national and international” would be achieved through the “double form of organisation of local workers’ associations and general alliances for each industry”. Under such a system the “councils of the trades and industrial organisations” would “take the place of the present government” and thereby “do away, once and forever, with the governments of the past”.<sup>88</sup>

Bakunin himself endorsed this view when he argued in 1871 that, “[t]he organisation of the sections of skilled workers, their federations within the International Association, and their representation through the chambers of labour . . . sow the living seed of the new social order which shall replace the bourgeois world. They create not only the ideas but also the very facts of the future.”<sup>89</sup>

Some thirty years after the congresses of the 1<sup>st</sup> International, these same ideas were expressed in almost the same language by syndicalist anarchists. In 1905 Pouget wrote that, “[a]side from day to day defence, the task of the trade unions is to lay the groundwork for the future. The

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<sup>86</sup> Pindy, “Resolution on Resistance Funds”, 132-3. For the biographical details about Pindy see Guérin, ed. *No Gods, No Masters*, 217.

<sup>87</sup> Eugène Hins, “Resistance Societies as the Organisation of the Future” in *Workers Unite*, 135.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 47.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Nettlau, *Short History of Anarchism*, 122.

producer group should be the cell of the new society”.<sup>90</sup> This view was repeated almost word for word by Maximoff when he wrote in 1927 that, “[t]he revolutionary trade union, in the view of the Anarchists, are not only organs of the struggle against contemporary structure; they are also the cells of the future society”.<sup>91</sup>

The syndicalist anarchist position that trade unions should be the organisation through which workers take control of and re-organise the economy has since been critiqued by Murray Bookchin in his 1992 essay *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism* for downplaying or ignoring the importance of community-based organisations, such as communes, in creating an anarchist society.<sup>92</sup> Although this might be true of some syndicalist anarchists it is not reflective of them as a whole. In 1909 Pouget and Emile Pataud claimed in their fictional account of an imagined successful syndicalist revolution that, in addition to trade unions, village assemblies in the countryside and community assemblies in urban areas at the level of the street, district and city would be formed. These community assemblies could be attended by anybody irrespective of their occupation and so would bring people together as “inhabitants, and not as producers”. Their meetings would focus on such issues as “hygiene and health”, “the administration of the City” and the management and distribution of housing.<sup>93</sup> This view was shared by Besnard who claimed in his address to the IWA in 1937 that “anarcho-syndicalism” does not mean and aim “to be everything” or hold that “nothing else should exist alongside it”. It instead aims for self-management in every sphere of life, rather than just the workplace, and as a result advocates

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<sup>90</sup> Pouget, “What is the Trade Union?”, 435.

<sup>91</sup> Maximoff, *Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 50. See also Mella, *Anarchist Socialism*, 73-4.

<sup>92</sup> Bookchin, *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism* (1992), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-the-ghost-of-anarcho-syndicalism>. This view is shared by Woodcock who writes that anarcho-syndicalism placed “emphasis on the syndicate rather than the commune as the basic social unit”. See Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 263.

<sup>93</sup> Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 118-20, 140.

the formation of communes which federate together at a regional, national and international level in parallel to the federation of trade unions.<sup>94</sup>

This advocacy of communes in addition to trade unions can also be found within the CNT. The Spanish syndicalist anarchist Isaac Puente argued in his pamphlet *Libertarian Communism* in 1932 that “life in the future will be organised” through two currently existing institutions. These were “the free union”, which unites workers together on the basis of their labour, and “the free municipality”, which “is the assembly of the workers in a very small locality, village or hamlet” and so unites workers together on the basis of their location.<sup>95</sup> These ideas went onto inspire the CNT’s 1936 Zaragoza congress resolutions, which stated that during the course of the social revolution they would forcefully expropriate the ruling classes and establish both federations of producers’ associations which would self-manage the workplace and “libertarian communes” which would be “established in each locality”, organise “administration” such as housing, education and the “beautification of the settlement”, and federate together to form the “Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes”.<sup>96</sup> Members of the CNT, in addition to this, organised members of the working classes not only via trade unions but also through schools, neighbourhood educational and cultural centres called ateneos, and the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth (FIJL). The CNT’s construction of prefigurative organisations therefore occurred both within the workplace and the community.<sup>97</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists, like anarchists in general, advocated prefigurative organisations because it was only through participating in such organisations that the working classes would develop the radical capacities, drives and consciousness which were necessary both for struggling

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<sup>94</sup> Pierre Besnard, *Anarcho-Syndicalism and Anarchism*.

<sup>95</sup> Puente, *Libertarian Communism*.

<sup>96</sup> The 1936 congress resolutions are quoted in full within Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution Volume 1*, 101-110. Bookchin’s claim that syndicalist anarchism downplayed or ignored the importance of communes is especially confusing given that he himself refers to these congress resolutions in an earlier work. See Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 269-70.

<sup>97</sup> Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 80-8; Evans, *Revolution and the State*, 23.

effectively against existing dominant institutions and producing and reproducing the future anarchist society. It was thought that workers would learn how to self-manage the economy through their experience of self-managing a trade union which, like the economy of the future, was structured in a horizontal and federalist manner, made decisions within general assemblies in which everyone had a vote, and coordinated action on a large scale through a system of delegates. For Rocker, trade unions should not only be “the fighting organisation of the workers against the employers”. They also had to be “the school for the intellectual training of the workers” which “acquainted” them with “the technical management of production and economic life in general, so that when a revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principles”.<sup>98</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists thought it was very important to provide such technical education to the working classes because of their commitment to grounding their revolutionary strategy in an understanding of what the world was really like. In Baginski’s words,

the economic power to rule and lead production does not fall in the workers’ laps (in quiet submission to the fate of economic development) without their active engagement; no, they must gain it themselves by fighting with endurance and strength. Workers dream themselves too easily into the idea that one day the ‘social revolution’ will descend to earth like a supernatural godhead in order to heal all wounds and dry all tears in one swoop. Oh no! The sun, which as it set today looked down on shackled slaves, will not as it rises tomorrow behold free people. Workers must educate themselves through their own strength to become thinking and acting people. They have

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<sup>98</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 57.



to educate and prepare themselves for the great profession of administration and leadership in production.<sup>99</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists faced two major problems when trying to implement this theory. Firstly, in order for individual workers to be transformed through their participation within the trade union, they had to be members of the trade union for an extended period of time. Often this did not occur because a significant number of workers would join trade unions due to their immediate economic interests, such as a strike, but would leave the trade union once this situation was over. This was especially the case for temporary workers who lacked a permanent employer. As a result of this, and other factors such as workers deciding to join larger reformist trade unions, syndicalist trade unions had a high membership turnover. The SAC, for example, was founded in 1910 and by 1935 had 36,000 members. During this twenty-five year period a total of 250,000 workers had at one time been registered members of the trade union.<sup>100</sup>

Secondly, syndicalist trade unions, like anarchists in general, experienced a huge amount of state repression. The CNT was founded in 1910 only to be made illegal and have its headquarters shut down in September 1911. This occurred in response to the CNT attempting to launch a general strike in support of striking workers in the port of Bilbao. The general strike failed due to an informer and agent provocateur called José Sánchez González, who was the brother of a member of the strike committee, leaking information to the police and thereby enabling them to arrest CNT militants. The CNT began to re-organise itself from June 1912 onwards, when all the militants who had been arrested the previous September were released. The CNT's paper *Solidaridad Obrera* reappeared in May 1913 and members of the CNT were able to elect the regional committee of the recently legalised Catalan Regional Confederation

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<sup>99</sup> Baginski, *What Does Syndicalism Want?*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> Lennart K. Persson, "Revolutionary Syndicalism in Sweden Before the Second World War" in *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective*, 87.

(CRT) in July. By August the CRT was once again made illegal after it attempted to organise a general strike in support of textile workers. The CNT would not be made legal again until August 1914.<sup>101</sup>

Ten years later the CNT was made illegal in 1924 due to its resistance to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, which had been established in September 1923. The new regime required that trade unions provide the state with a complete list of their activities and membership, including the positions members held in the trade union and their home addresses. The CNT refused and different segments of the movement disagreed with one another over whether or not the organisation should go underground or try to operate as publicly as possible. On 28<sup>th</sup> May the Spanish state forced a decision upon the CNT when it responded to the assassination of the executioner of Barcelona, Rogelio Pérez Vicario, by making the trade union illegal, banning *Solidaridad Obrera* and arresting leading militants. The CNT was only made legal again in 1930 with the collapse of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship but nonetheless continued to experience significant amounts of state repression both under the subsequent quasi-dictatorship of Berenguer and the Spanish Republic, which was inaugurated in April 1931.<sup>102</sup>

#### **8.4 – The General Strike**

One of the main tactics that syndicalist anarchists advocated and engaged in were general strikes in which a significant number of workers went on strike at once. Rocker viewed the general strike as “the most powerful weapon which the workers have at their command” because it “brings the whole economic system to a standstill and shakes it to its foundations”.<sup>103</sup>

As a result of this he proposed that the working classes use the general strike in order to achieve

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<sup>101</sup> A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 203-5, 211.

<sup>102</sup> Garner, *Goals and Means*, 162-9, 234-5, 243; Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 190-1. For repression under the Spanish republic see Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*.

<sup>103</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 81, 82.

both reforms, such as compelling capitalists to grant workers the eight-hour day, and the revolutionary goal of abolishing capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society.<sup>104</sup>

This same perspective can be seen in Delesalle's 1906 distinction between four different kinds of general strike: (1) a general strike by individual unions, (2) a general strike across all industries on a specific day, (3) a general strike across all industries which places the working class in "a state of open war with capitalist society", and (4) a general strike which is a revolution.<sup>105</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists were neither the first nor the only group to advocate the general strike as a strategy through which the working classes could transform society in a positive direction.<sup>106</sup>

For example, in October 1833 an assembly of Glasgow workers associated with the Owenite movement passed a resolution which declared that rather than launching an insurrection to achieve social change, workers should simply fold their arms and abstain from work. This mass stoppage of work would, according to their optimistic prediction, have the consequence that "capital is destroyed, the revenue fails, the system of government falls into confusion, and every link in the chain which binds society together is broken in a moment by this inert conspiracy of the poor against the rich".<sup>107</sup>

The idea of the general strike continued to be advocated during the 1<sup>st</sup> International. At the Brussels Congress of September 1868 a resolution was passed which stated that if a war broke out then workers would stop it through the "legal practical means" of ceasing all work.<sup>108</sup> Several months later Bakunin argued in *The Double Strike in Geneva*, which had been co-written with Charles Perron and published in *Égalité* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1869, that the recent wave

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<sup>104</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 80-2.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Joll, *Anarchists*, 202.

<sup>106</sup> Goodstein, *General Strike*, 15-25; Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism Volume II* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1921), 81-90; William Benbow, *Grand National Holiday, and Congress of the Productive Classes* (1832), <https://www.marxists.org/history/england/chartists/benbow-congress.htm>.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Goodstein, *General Strike*, 21.

<sup>108</sup> Archer, *First International in France*, 129.

of strikes in Europe indicated that “the struggle of labour against capital is growing ever stronger” and that, as a result of this trend, “we are advancing at a great pace towards Social Revolution”. For Bakunin, this social revolution would involve a “general strike” which he claimed would result in “a great cataclysm” that gives “society a new skin”.<sup>109</sup>

The Belgian Federation of the St Imier International, who were not themselves anarchists, endorsed the general strike as a revolutionary strategy during their congress of August 1873 held in Antwerp. In response to this Guillaume wrote that,

The general strike, if it was realisable, would certainly be the most powerful lever of a social revolution. Just imagine the effect of the immense labour machine being stopped on a fixed day in all countries at once . . . In a word, the whole people descending into the street, and saying to their masters: ‘I will only start work again after having accomplished the transformation of property which must put the instruments of labour into the hands of the workers . . .’<sup>110</sup>

He was nonetheless unsure if “the International Federation of trade unions . . . will ever be strong enough, solid enough, universal enough to be able to carry out a general strike”. The general strike continued to be discussed and debated during the 1873 Geneva congress of the St Imier International. The Belgian delegates unsurprisingly argued that the general strike was “a means of bringing a movement onto the street and leading the workers to the barricades”. Guillaume similarly insisted that the general strike was the social revolution itself and that as a result revolutionaries should focus on bringing it about, rather than engaging in partial strikes.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 40-1. For the context of the article see Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 212, note 61.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 223.

<sup>111</sup> Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 223-4. For more information on this debate see Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, 50-1.

After the collapse of the St Imier International in 1877-1878, the idea of the general strike was frequently discussed by French trade unionists during the emergence of revolutionary syndicalism as a social movement. In 1887 at the Montluçon congress of the National Federation of Trade Unions (FNS) two anarchist workers, Berger and Combomreil, responded to the French state socialist Jules Guesde's proposal that capitalism should be abolished through the seizure of state power by advocating the general strike as an alternative method for achieving social change. A year later, the FNS passed a resolution on 28<sup>th</sup> November at its congress in Le Bouscat which stated that "the general strike, i.e., the complete cessation of labour, or the revolution, may be used by the workers for their emancipation".<sup>112</sup>

During the 1880s and 1890s many French trade unionists conceived of the general strike in a manner which differed significantly from how syndicalist anarchists would later theorise it in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This can be seen in a text which Aristide Briand co-wrote with Pelloutier in 1892 whilst Pelloutier was still a member of the French Workers' Party (POF) and had yet to become an anarchist. Within the text, which was not published in full, they depict the general strike as a "peaceful and legal" affair in which workers saved up enough money and provisions to last fifteen days without work and, on an agreed date, stayed at home. It was imagined that, in the absence of the working classes' labour capitalism would quickly cease to function and be abolished "smoothly, without the spilling of blood, solely by the combination of rest".<sup>113</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists, in comparison to many earlier advocates of the general strike, were not naïve and understood that a society wide strike which encompassed all branches of production was extremely unlikely to occur, especially at the beginning of the strike. Nacht, for example, wrote in 1905 under the pen name Arnold Roller that a general strike in which the entire international working classes simultaneously laid down their tools and overthrew capitalism

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<sup>112</sup> Goodstein, *General Strike*, 53-5.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 16. See also *ibid*, 232, note 25; Goodstein, *General Strike*, 57-8.

was a beautiful idea which will nonetheless “always be a dream”.<sup>114</sup> Given this, syndicalist anarchists aimed to achieve the more feasible goal of organising a general strike which began in key industries that the economy could not function without, such as coal, gas, railway and shipping. From this starting point, the general strike would, in theory, spread to the wider economy as workers in more and more industries either decided to join the strike in solidarity with its aims and as a response to state repression towards the strike, or were forced to cease work entirely due to the strike’s disruption of key infrastructure and raw materials not being transported to factories. This would in turn create a situation in which the large number of workers who were not organised within trade unions, or who were apolitical, were forced by the unfolding wave of events to take sides, participate in the general strike and thereby become radicalised.<sup>115</sup>

Unlike the previously mentioned proponents of the general strike, syndicalist anarchists did not view the general strike as a form of passive resistance in which the working classes simply ceased work, folded their arms and waited for dominant structures to collapse. In the advent of a revolutionary situation, they proposed that workers should use the general strike as a platform from which to launch the forceful expropriation of the means of production, land and the necessities of life from the ruling classes and establish federations of workplace and community assemblies. Kropotkin wrote in 1904 that “the general strike” is the “means of paralysing the bourgeois world in all countries at once” and “expropriation” is the “end”. Two years later the 1906 congress of Russian anarcho-communists stated in its conclusions, which were written by Kropotkin, that it was essential that the working classes immediately used “the first fruits

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<sup>114</sup> Arnold Roller, *The Social General Strike* (Chicago: The Debating Club No.1, 1905), 6.

<sup>115</sup> Roller, *Social General Strike*, 7-9; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 82; Goldman, *Red Emma*, 95; Pataud and Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, 15, 27-8, 50-1, 91-3.

of the victories that were gained through the general strike” and started “the expropriation of lands and means of production and consumption”.<sup>116</sup>

Kropotkin was not alone in advocating this strategy. During her speech at the founding of the IWW in 1905 Lucy Parsons, the Black anarchist militant and widow of the martyred Albert Parsons, advocated a “general strike” in which workers occupy their workplaces and “take possession of the necessary property of production”.<sup>117</sup> That same year Nacht wrote that a successful general strike “accomplishes expropriation and communalises the means of production”.<sup>118</sup> Pouget and Pataud claimed in 1909 that, during a fictional revolutionary general strike “the Unions in each industry, in each profession, took possession of the factories and workshops” and re-organised production on a communist basis by means of free agreement between federations.<sup>119</sup> Besnard argued in 1930 that a revolutionary general strike was distinguished from normal strikes on the grounds that workers would not only cease work but also “occupy the place of production, get rid of the boss, expropriate him, and get ready to get production moving again, but in the interests of the revolution”.<sup>120</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists attempted to clearly differentiate their active militant conception of the general strike from previous passive conceptions through their use of language. Nacht wrote in 1905 that the term “social general strike” should be used to refer to a general strike which involves the expropriation of the ruling classes and the establishment of an anarchist society, in order to clearly differentiate it from general strikes for reformist goals, such as higher wages or universal suffrage.<sup>121</sup> In 1907 the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam passed a series of resolutions on syndicalism which varyingly referred to “the revolutionary General

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<sup>116</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 550, 477.

<sup>117</sup> Parsons, *Writings and Speeches*, 82-3.

<sup>118</sup> Roller, *Social General Strike*, 32.

<sup>119</sup> Pataud and Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, 103-38. Quote in *ibid*, 121.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Richards, “Malatesta’s Relevance for Anarchists Today” in Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 271.

<sup>121</sup> Roller, *Social General Strike*, 5-6.

strike” and “the General Strike with Expropriation”.<sup>122</sup> Decades later, in 1930, Besnard referred to “[t]he expropriatory general strike, with violence” which would be “insurrectional”.<sup>123</sup>

Some syndicalist anarchists equated the general strike with the social revolution whilst others were careful to distinguish between the two. Nacht claimed that since a “social general strike” would involve the expropriation of the means of production and the establishment of an anarchist society, it followed that “the General Strike is not only the introduction of the revolution but is the social revolution itself”.<sup>124</sup> Malatesta, in comparison, held that “the general strike” was “an excellent means to set off the social revolution”.<sup>125</sup> Malatesta’s conceptualisation was shared by at least some trade unions. It was proposed at the founding congress of the CNT in 1910 that “a general strike” in which “all workers fold their arms at a given moment” will “result in such a substantial upheaval in the history of the present society of exploited and exploiters, that it will inevitably cause an explosion, a clash between antagonistic forces that are struggling today for their survival”.<sup>126</sup> The IWA’s declaration of principles in 1922 described “the social general strike . . . as the prelude to the social revolution”.<sup>127</sup>

Syndicalist anarchists did not think that all it took to initiate a revolutionary general strike was a trade union boldly proclaiming it whenever they fancied.<sup>128</sup> Syndicalist anarchists believed, instead, that a revolutionary general strike would develop out of smaller strikes for immediate improvements. This can be seen within Pouget and Pataud’s 1909 fictional account of an imagined successful syndicalist revolution called *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth*. They describe a period of escalating class

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<sup>122</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 134-5.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Richards, “Malatesta’s Relevance for Anarchists Today”, 271.

<sup>124</sup> Roller, *Social General Strike*, 7, 8.

<sup>125</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 124.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Mintz, *Casas Viejas*, 25, note 11.

<sup>127</sup> IWA, “Declaration of the Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism”, 418.

<sup>128</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 81; Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 477.



conflict prior to the launching of the general strike in which “[s]trikes followed strikes; lockouts were replied to by boycotts; sabotage was employed with ruinous intensity”. Under such conditions the “antagonism” between workers and capitalists developed to the point that workers came to consider themselves to be “in a state of permanent war” against the ruling classes. Through their experience of collective struggle within trade unions, they developed radical capacities, drives and consciousness such that they “became more warlike”, “took possession of the streets”, “familiarised themselves with the tactics of resistance” and “learned how to stand their ground before bodies of police, and how to deal with the troops marched against them”.<sup>129</sup>

In Pouget and Pataud’s fictional account, this class conflict then exploded into “a revolutionary situation” after a violent skirmish between striking construction workers and the police and army culminated in a massacre, during which the military shot at and launched a cavalry charge against the demonstrators. In response syndicalist trade unions seized their opportunity and called for a general strike in solidarity with the victims of state violence which they claimed would continue until the state had prosecuted the soldiers.<sup>130</sup> This general strike against a specific act of state violence then morphed over time into a revolutionary movement against capitalism and the state. This transformation occurred due to a combination of (a) syndicalist trade unions spreading anarchist ideas among participants of the general strike, publicly calling for the social revolution and preparing for the social revolution by seizing weapons and organising workers’ militias, (b) the working classes being compelled to expropriate and distribute goods in order to meet people’s needs, especially for food and (c) the working classes

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<sup>129</sup> Pataud and Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, 4-8.

<sup>130</sup> Pataud and Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, 1-3, 9, 12.

responding to increasingly extreme state violence against the general strike by overthrowing the ruling classes.<sup>131</sup>

It has been claimed by the historian Paul Avrich that syndicalists believed that an armed insurrection was not necessary to overthrow capitalism because a general strike would mobilise so many workers that the ruling classes would lose their will to resist, and so not prevent the working classes from expropriating the means of production.<sup>132</sup> Although true of some syndicalists, it does not apply to syndicalist anarchists. Kropotkin wrote in the conclusions of the 1906 congress of Russian anarcho-communists 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”.<sup>133</sup> The 1922 declaration of the IWA likewise claimed that “the decisive struggle between the capitalism of today and free communism of tomorrow will not be without conflict” and that as a result they recognised the need for “violence as a means of defence against the violent methods of the ruling classes during the struggle for the possession of the factories and the fields by the revolutionary people”.<sup>134</sup>

It should, however, be noted that some syndicalist anarchists did argue that a revolutionary general strike would provide a more effective means of defeating the police and military than the previous strategy of launching insurrections which established barricades. Nacht claimed in 1905 that the widening of streets since the French Revolution of 1789 and the uprisings of 1848 meant that “[t]he heroic times of the battle on the barricades have gone by”.<sup>135</sup> In the aftermath of WW1, Berkman wrote in 1929 that workers at a barricade would not be able to

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<sup>131</sup> Pataud and Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, 41-2, 57-8, 64, 67-84, 94.

<sup>132</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 75. A similar claim is made by the editors at the institute of Marxist-Leninism. In their edition of Lenin’s selected works they assert in a footnote that revolutionary syndicalists thought the working class “could overthrow capitalism without a revolution” by “organising a general strike”. See Lenin, *Selected Works*, 707, note 21.

<sup>133</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 477.

<sup>134</sup> IWA, “Declaration of the Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism”, 418.

<sup>135</sup> Roller, *Social General Strike*, 8.

defeat a trained military supported by artillery, tanks, bombers and poison gas. Such an idea of revolution was “obsolete” and had to be replaced by one which focused on the true power of the working classes: their ability to withdraw labour.<sup>136</sup> Rocker similarly wrote that the general strike was a replacement for “the barricades of the political uprising”.<sup>137</sup>

Rocker, Nacht, Pouget and Pataud all hoped that a general strike would occur over such a large area and involve so many workers that the military would be forced, by the sheer scale of the revolt, to scatter their troops into smaller units which could then be more easily defeated in combat or persuaded to join the workers in revolt.<sup>138</sup> The idea that a significant number of troops would mutiny and refuse to obey their orders to crush the general strike was not purely wishful thinking and had some basis in experience. In 1871 the Paris Commune was created after army soldiers, who had been sent to seize cannons from the national guard in the district of Montmartre, disobeyed multiple orders to fire on workers and guardsmen defending the cannons and, instead, fraternised with the people, a significant number of whom were women. Several years later, in 1907, striking workers who belonged to the CGT were killed at Nantes, Narbonne and Raon L’Etape. This state violence went alongside one detachment of troops deciding to mutiny on their way to a picket line.<sup>139</sup> During Spain’s tragic week of 1909, a general strike against army reservists being called up to fight in Morocco mutated into an armed insurrection in which the working classes attacked the police specifically, whilst persuading some local soldiers to not fire on them. The insurrection was, however, soon defeated when soldiers from outside Barcelona were called in and the barricades that workers had assembled were destroyed by artillery.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Berkman, *Anarchism*, 196-7.

<sup>137</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 83.

<sup>138</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 83; Roller, *Social General Strike*, 10-15; Pataud and Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, 48-9, 59-61, 67-77, 90-6.

<sup>139</sup> Merriman, *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune of 1871* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 39-44; Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 138.

<sup>140</sup> Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 133-7; A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 173-7.

Even if Rocker, Nacht, Pouget and Pataud were overly optimistic about the effectiveness of a general strike in diminishing the power of the military and police, they nonetheless did all advocate an armed uprising as part of the general strike and the expropriation of the ruling classes and thought that workers would have to defend themselves from the violence of the police and army. Pouget and Pataud were, by far, the most naive and, in their fictional account of a successful syndicalist social revolution, they depicted the forces of reaction, including the invading armies of foreign states, being easily defeated by a variety of science fiction weapons. This included electromagnetic waves which caused far away enemy ammunition to explode and aerial torpedoes dropped from remote controlled planes.<sup>141</sup> These weapons are so ridiculous for the time that it is unclear if the authors seriously advocated them or merely intended to entertain the reader. Kropotkin nonetheless asserted in his preface to the 1913 English edition of Pouget and Pataud's book that the authors had significantly underestimated the violent resistance which the social revolution would face and have to overcome.<sup>142</sup>

Although syndicalist anarchists generally attempted to produce a realistic conception of the general strike, they consistently faced three key problems when trying to implement it. Firstly, syndicalist trade unions in Europe and the United States were unable to organise or initiate genuine national general strikes across multiple key industries by themselves, due to them having either small memberships or large memberships concentrated in specific parts of a country or industries. Secondly, given the previous point, in order to launch national general strikes they had to rely on support from reformist trade unions which failed to materialise on a number of occasions. In Spain, the CNT, whose membership was largest in Catalonia, organised a short general strike in December 1916 with the General Union of Workers (UGT), which was affiliated with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). This was followed by

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<sup>141</sup> Pataud and Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution*, 164-5, 194-207.

<sup>142</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 561.

a general strike in August 1917, which the leadership of the PSOE-UGT seriously failed to prepare, and which was only launched after they were forced into action by the UGT's largest union independently calling for a general strike. A few years later the UGT refused to support a general strike in 1920. When Primo de Rivera established himself as dictator of Spain in September 1923 the CNT responded by calling for a general strike, whilst the UGT not only did not support the general strike but collaborated with the regime.<sup>143</sup>

Thirdly, general strikes organised by anarchists were militarily crushed on numerous occasions. A long list of examples can be found in the history of Spanish anarchism. To give one example, on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1902 a general strike in Barcelona, which spread to nearby industrial towns, was launched in solidarity with the striking Metalworkers' Federation, who had been on strike for two months. The general strike only lasted a week and was defeated following the declaration of martial law, the deployment of the military, the closure of union headquarters and the arrest of several hundred organisers.<sup>144</sup> Spanish syndicalist anarchists were themselves aware of this problem. At the CNT's congress in 1911, a report was read out which claimed that, "experience has taught us that" when "the general strike" is "localised at one point and the workers of the rest of the nation remain completely passive, the forces of public order, at the service of the bourgeoisie, will concentrate on that location, and it will be relatively easy for the government to crush the revolt".<sup>145</sup>

This is not to say that general strikes were always unsuccessful. Swiss anarchists participated in a 1907 general strike against local chocolate companies, including Nestlé, after a worker was unfairly fired. The general strike, which lasted from 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> March, spread to

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<sup>143</sup> Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 150-2, 174-6, 190-1; Garner, *Goals and Means*, 75-8, 162-3; A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 264-5, 275-83, 335.

<sup>144</sup> A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, 92-4, 122-3. For other examples see *ibid*, 281-3; Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 117-8.

<sup>145</sup> CNT, *The First Congress of the National Confederation of Labour* (1911), <https://libcom.org/history/first-congress-national-confederation-labor-cnt-barcelona-september-8-10-1911>.

Montreux, Lausanne and Geneva in response to gendarmes firing on and wounding ten workers, and resulted in the re-hiring of the worker, recognition of the trade union and various material improvements.<sup>146</sup> Even when general strikes were militarily crushed or failed to achieve their immediate objectives, they could still bring about social change or were important acts of working-class resistance against domination and exploitation by the ruling classes. Within the history of the CNT this includes the previously mentioned general strike in 1919 which won the eight-hour day, and the Zaragoza general strike in 1934 which was launched in response to bus and tram drivers losing their licences because they had joined a previous short strike in support of arrested workers.<sup>147</sup>

## 8.5 – Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that, contrary to what some academics have claimed, syndicalist anarchism was committed to a sophisticated and coherent action focused political theory that served as a guide to changing the world. All forms of syndicalist anarchism generally adhered to a common set of strategies to achieve social change. They believed that syndicalist trade unions should have the double aim of struggling for immediate reforms and attempting to launch a social revolution. These two aims were viewed as being interconnected because the struggle for reforms via direct action within prefigurative organisations was conceived as the means by which a large number of workers would engage in forms of practice that transformed them into revolutionaries with the right kinds of radical capacities, drives and consciousness for abolishing capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. Syndicalist anarchists thought that trade unions had, in addition to this double aim, a closely related dual function. Trade unions were to both struggle against dominant institutions in the present and, during the course of a social revolution, take over the organisation of the economy (in part or whole) such

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<sup>146</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 47-8.

<sup>147</sup> Bookchin, *Spanish Anarchists*, 240.

that the federations and local sections of the trade union were converted from organs of resistance to organs of self-management. The revolution so understood was to be launched through an insurrectionary general strike, during which workers not only ceased work, but also expropriated the means of production from the ruling classes and used organised violence to overcome the forces of reaction, such as the police and army, who defend the interests of the ruling classes.

During the course of syndicalist anarchism's history, three main forms emerged: revolutionary syndicalism, syndicalism-plus and anarcho-syndicalism. Revolutionary syndicalism advocated politically neutral trade unions which were thought to be sufficient to achieve a social revolution. Advocates of syndicalism-plus agreed with revolutionary syndicalists that trade unions should be politically neutral but disagreed that trade unions were sufficient to achieve a social revolution. In order to achieve this objective, it was necessary for anarchists to organise independently of trade unions within specific anarchist organisations. Anarcho-syndicalists rejected the political neutrality of revolutionary syndicalism and argued that trade unions should instead be committed to achieving an anarchist society through anarchist means. Some anarcho-syndicalists advocated the formation of specific anarchist organisations, whilst others opposed it. The position that anarchists should simultaneously organise mass trade unions and smaller specific anarchist organisations has come to be known as organisational dualism. I shall explore the history of organisational dualism in the next chapter.

## Chapter 9 – Organisational Dualism: From Bakunin to the Platform

For a significant number of mass anarchists a trade union or community organisation was insufficient to bring about the social revolution. They held that anarchists must, in addition to this, form specific anarchist organisations which would exist alongside mass organisations.<sup>1</sup> These specific anarchist organisations were advocated as the means to unite committed revolutionaries in order to develop correct theory and strategy, co-ordinate their actions both amongst themselves and within broader mass organisations and/or movements and push the revolutionary struggle forward through persuasion and engaging in actions which provided an example to others. This theory has come to be known as organisational dualism.

During the course of anarchism's history several different specific anarchist organisations were founded, usually in parallel with trade unions. For example, the Italian Communist-Anarchist Union (1919), which changed its name to the Italian Anarchist Union in 1920, existed alongside the USI.<sup>2</sup> In France militants came together within the Anarchist Revolutionary Communist Federation (1913). During the course of its development and varying ideological changes it came to be known as the Anarchist Federation (during and after WW1), the Anarchist Union (1920), the Anarchist Communist Union (1926), the Revolutionary Anarchist Communist Union (1927) and finally, again, the Anarchist Union (1934). A section within the organisation then split off to form the French-Speaking Anarchist Federation (1936).<sup>3</sup> Spanish anarchists formed the Anarchist Organisation of the Spanish Region (1888) which united various kinds of anarchist in order to provide the Federation of Resistance Against Capital, which was a federation of politically neutral trade unions, with a revolutionary orientation. Decades later the most famous Spanish specific anarchist organisation, the Iberian Anarchist Federation

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 239, 244.

<sup>2</sup> Fausto Buttà, *Living like Nomads*, 186, 196.

<sup>3</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 28, 84-5, 174-5, 184-5, 102, note 3; Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 99, 103.



(1927), was founded during the CNT's period of illegality between 1924 and 1930 under the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Its founding was initiated by the Portuguese Anarchist Union (1923), the Federation of Spanish-Speaking Anarchist Groups in France (1925) and the Federation of Anarchist Groups in Spain.<sup>4</sup>

Specific anarchist organisations varied significantly in size. In 1938 the French Anarchist Union had an estimated size of between 2500 and 3000 members. Larger specific anarchist organisations include the Italian Anarchist Union, which had at most 20,000 members at its height prior to the triumph of fascism.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to determine the size of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI). According to Christie, the FAI had no more than 1,000 members between 1927 and 1931. This rose to an estimated 5,500 members in 1933 but had decreased to 3,500 by 1936. Casas, in comparison, lists the size of the FAI as 10,173 members in 1933. Peirats, who was secretary of the Barcelona section of the FAI until he resigned in 1934, estimated that, at its high point, it had 30,000 members across Spain, with 3,750 in Barcelona.<sup>6</sup> The size of specific anarchist organisations should not be confused with the extent of their influence. The paper of the French Anarchist Union, *La Libertaire*, had a print run of 6000-7000 in 1934. This increased to 17,000 in October 1936 and 25,000 after May 1937 before declining to 18,000 in 1938. The organ of the Italian Anarchist Union, *Umanità Nova*, whose main editor was Malatesta, sold 50,000 copies a day at its peak in the early 1920s and was in some areas the most widely read paper among workers.<sup>7</sup>

Within this chapter I shall, given the enormous scale of the history of organisational dualism, focus on only three main aspects of its theoretical development. These are (1) Bakunin's

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<sup>4</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 118-22; Juan Gómez Casas, *Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1986), 76-7, 92-7, 107-116; Christie, *We, the Anarchists*, 32-43.

<sup>5</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 307-8; Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists*, 119. For examples of much smaller specific anarchist organisations see Zimmer, *Immigrants*, 91; Zurbrugg, *Anarchist Perspectives*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> Christie, *We, the Anarchists*, 46, 113, 147-8, 173; Casas, *History of the F.A.I*, 133; Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, 74-5, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 307-8; Buttà, *Living like Nomads*, 186.

advocacy of organisational dualism between 1868 and 1872, (2) various proposals made between the 1890s and 1930s on what the relationship between anarchism and syndicalism (or trade unions in general) should be and (3) debates between proponents of platformist and synthesist specific anarchist organisations which occurred from 1926 onwards. These elements of the history of organisational dualism have been previously discussed in Schmidt and van der Walt's *Black Flame*.<sup>8</sup> My overview will build on this previous work by examining the arguments of anarchists who advocated organisational dualism in greater detail and using the theory of practice to interpret their ideas.

## **9.1 – Bakunin and the Alliance**

The strategy of organisational dualism was first advocated by Bakunin. During the late 1860s and early 1870s he argued that anarchists should simultaneously organise and participate within mass public organisations which had a broad programme, such as trade unions, and form small secret organisations committed to a narrow anarchist programme. This theorising occurred in parallel to Bakunin's actual attempts to form secret revolutionary organisations. The history of these attempts is extremely complex, but a condensed version is as follows. During his 1864-7 stay in Italy, Bakunin tried to transform the loose network of revolutionaries he knew into an organisation which adhered to a specific programme.<sup>9</sup> In late 1864 Bakunin, who had recently moved from London to Florence, founded his first proper revolutionary organisation: the Brotherhood. Although the Brotherhood certainly existed and had a membership of at least thirty individuals from largely republican circles, it did not last long and soon faded away after Bakunin moved to Sorrento, near Naples, at the end of May 1865. Bakunin, who was becoming increasingly socialist and shifting closer to his mature anarchist politics, then moved to Naples in October and met a number of republican revolutionaries. Sometime between late 1865 and

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<sup>8</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 239-63.

<sup>9</sup> Eckhardt, *First Socialist Schism*, 2, 156-7.

early 1866 Bakunin persuaded these individuals to join a new secret revolutionary socialist organisation called the International Brotherhood, which was the spiritual successor to the previous Brotherhood based in Florence.<sup>10</sup>

Bakunin subsequently co-founded two distinct but overlapping organisations: the public International Alliance and the secret Alliance in October 1868. The public International Alliance applied to join the 1<sup>st</sup> International and, after its application was rejected, converted itself into a Geneva section of the 1<sup>st</sup> International in July 1869. The Geneva public Alliance decided to disband in August 1871 in the aftermath of various splits and conflicts within the Romance Federation of the 1<sup>st</sup> International and took this decision without consulting Bakunin. The original secret Alliance disbanded soon after its founding due to personal conflicts between its members. It continued to exist only as an informal social network composed of a few individuals who were mainly from Spain, Italy and Switzerland and members of Bakunin's inner circle. In parallel with this, a distinct secret organisation called the Alianza de la Democracia Socialista was founded in Spain to co-ordinate the activity of key militants and promote the growth of the Spanish section of the 1<sup>st</sup> International. The Alianza decided to dissolve itself in April 1872 and continued to adhere to this decision despite Bakunin writing a letter attempting to persuade them to do otherwise. A few months later, Bakunin co-founded a new secret society called the Alliance of Social Revolutionaries in September 1872, after Bakunin had been expelled from the 1<sup>st</sup> International by the Hague Congress.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Carr, *Bakunin*, 308-18; Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 29-34, 38-40, 48-56; Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 16-22; Arthur Lehning, "Bakunin's Conceptions of Revolutionary Organisations and Their Role: A Study of His 'Secret Societies'" in *Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr*, ed. Chimen Abramsky (London: The Macmillan Press, 1974), 57, 61-3. Bakunin had previously attempted to establish a secret society of revolutionaries in 1848, which was two decades before he became an anarchist, but this attempt was unsuccessful and never went past the planning stages. See Carr, *Bakunin*, 181-6.

<sup>11</sup> Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*, 2-12, 47-65, 71-8, 153-8, 243-62, 318-9, 350-1, 354-5; Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 183.

An early example of Bakunin's strategy of organisational dualism can be found within his *Programme of the Brotherhood* (1866). He proposed that "the dedicated revolutionaries of every land" should gather "at once into both public and private association with the twofold object of broadening the revolutionary front and at the same time paving the way for simultaneous concerted action in all countries in which action proves initially possible, through secret agreement among the wisest revolutionaries of all countries". The central task of these revolutionaries was to fuse, or in other words organise, "the elements of social revolution" which "are already widespread in practically all countries of Europe" into "an effective force".<sup>12</sup> In the autumn of 1868 Bakunin wrote in the draft programme of the secret Alliance that the organisation had been founded in order to help "prepare, organise and hasten" the social revolution. In order to achieve this long term goal the secret Alliance would pursue the immediate "dual objective" of (a) spreading revolutionary consciousness through "journals, pamphlets and books" and "founding public associations" and (b) recruiting "intelligent, energetic, discreet men of good will who are sympathetic to our ideas, both in Europe and as far as possible in America, in order to form an invisible network of dedicated revolutionaries, strengthened by the fact of alliance".<sup>13</sup>

The same idea was expressed by Bakunin in the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1872 letter he wrote to an Italian called Celso Ceretti, who admired the republican revolutionary Garibaldi. In the letter, Bakunin advocated a "secret alliance" composed of "nuclei intimately bound together with similar nuclei presently being organised, or that will be organised, in other regions of Italy and abroad". This organisation had "a double mission: at first they will form the inspiring and vivifying soul . . . of the International Workingmen's Association in Italy and elsewhere, and later they will occupy themselves with questions that will be impossible to discuss publicly. They will

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<sup>12</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 173-4. For the evidence that this programme was a draft see Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*, 285, 317-9.

form the necessary bridge between the propaganda of socialist theories and revolutionary practice”.<sup>14</sup>

The reason why Bakunin proposed the formation of a secret revolutionary organisation was not because he had a hidden authoritarian agenda. It was instead motivated by the deeply practical view that a secret revolutionary organisation was necessary in order to avoid state repression. This can be seen in his June 1872 letter to members of the Spanish Alianza in which he argued that the organisation could not be public because if it were then it would be persecuted and crushed.<sup>15</sup> This concern with secrecy is especially understandable given that Bakunin himself had been imprisoned in 1849 by the state of Saxony for having fought in an insurrection launched by the people of Dresden. Bakunin was subsequently handed from one state to another as he moved from being imprisoned by Saxony to being imprisoned by Prussia, which imprisoned him for a year in a cell where he was chained to the wall, and then finally Russia from May 1851 onwards. Both Saxony and Prussia sentenced Bakunin to death only to alter his sentence at the last minute after a secret agreement was made to transfer him ultimately to Russia. Bakunin remained imprisoned in Russia’s Peter and Paul fortress, where all his teeth fell out due to him developing scurvy, until the Tsar permanently banished him to Siberia in 1857.<sup>16</sup>

Bakunin thought that the mass public organisation – the 1<sup>st</sup> International – and the small secret anarchist organisation – the Alliance – had distinct but complementary roles in the revolutionary process. The role of the mass public organisation was to unite as many workers as possible within an organisation which prefigured the future society and to engage in large-

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians*, 160.

<sup>15</sup> Bakunin, “To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain (1872)”, trans. Shawn P. Wilbur, <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/bakunin-to-the-brothers-of-the-alliance-in-spain-1872/>. Extracts of the letter are quoted in Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*, 244-6, 261-2. See also Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Carr, *Bakunin*, 189-224, 240.

scale direct action against the ruling classes. The role of the small secret specific anarchist organisation was, in comparison, to enable dedicated revolutionaries to co-ordinate their activity effectively and participate in the collective struggles of the working classes. In so doing, anarchists would spread their ideas and help organise and co-ordinate the spontaneous uprisings of the working classes into a force capable of abolishing capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. Bakunin explained his views on this topic in detail in a private letter he wrote to the Alianza member Charles Alerini between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May 1872.<sup>17</sup> According to Bakunin,

the Alliance and the International, although they both seek the same final goals, follow, at one and the same time, different paths. One has a mission to bring together the labour masses – millions of workers – [reaching] across differences of trades or lands, across the frontier of every state into one single compact and immense body. The other, the Alliance, has a mission to give a really revolutionary direction to these masses. The programmes of the one and the other, without in any way being opposed, are different, in keeping with the extent of the development of each. That of the International, if it is taken seriously contains in germ – but only in germ – the whole programme of the Alliance. The programme of the Alliance is the elaboration of the programme of the International.<sup>18</sup>

Bakunin thought that the mass public organisation and the small specific anarchist organisation should have distinct programmes due to their different roles. The 1<sup>st</sup> International's role was to achieve the “practical organisation of labour's international economic struggle against capital” and prepare “the way for the international social revolution”. It would do so by being the means

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<sup>17</sup> This letter to Alerini has been misattributed within Bakunin's *Œuvres complètes* as being part of Bakunin's 21<sup>st</sup> May 1872 draft letter to Tomás González Morago. This error is repeated in Zurbrugg's edition of Bakunin. See Eckhart, *First Socialist Schism*, 259-61, 281, 512-3, note 55.

<sup>18</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 210.

through which workers engaged in class struggle and thereby developed into conscious socialists. Given this, it should have a broad programme based on the shared “aspirations of the proletariat of every country for solidarity, for material and economic liberation” and so be inclusive to as many workers as possible. Were the 1<sup>st</sup> International to adopt a narrow programme then it would fail in its mission and merely create “a very small association, a sect, but not an armed camp for the proletariat of the entire world [set] against the exploiting and dominant classes”. The Alliance, in contrast, had to have an “explicitly revolutionary programme” which advocated the abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. This included a commitment to atheism which Bakunin held should not be part of the 1<sup>st</sup> International’s programme because doing so would exclude the “millions of perfectly serious workers” who believe in God.<sup>19</sup>

This view was repeated almost word for word by Bakunin in his later April 1872 letter to the members of the Spanish Alianza. He wrote that the 1<sup>st</sup> International unites “all honest labourers” irrespective of their “political and religious beliefs” providing “that they accept . . . the solidarity of the struggle of the labourers against bourgeois capital, exploiter of labour”. This broad programme is “absolutely necessary, so that the International can embrace hundreds of thousands of workers” and thereby become “a true power”. As a result, he argued that “no theory, whether political, socialist, or philosophical, can ever become the official, obligatory theory of the International” because if this occurred then “it would barely number a few thousand members, and it would exclude millions who labour in industry or on the earth”. Bakunin instead held that an increasingly large number of workers within the 1<sup>st</sup> International would become “more and more educated by the struggle and by the free propaganda of different ideas”, and thereby acquire “revolutionary consciousness” due to “practice itself and the

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<sup>19</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 210-5. The Alliance’s commitment to atheism can be seen in Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 174.

inevitable consequences of the universal solidarity of the struggle of labour against capital”. This would, in turn, lead to the working classes slowly elaborating “their own thoughts” and “theories” which would “emerge from bottom to top” rather than being imposed “from top to bottom”.<sup>20</sup>

Although Bakunin thought that a small secret society of dedicated revolutionaries would play an important role in the process of workers becoming organised and adopting socialist ideas, he remained committed to the self-emancipation of the working classes. For example, in his resignation letter to the Jura Federation in 1873, he reminded them that the “organisation of the forces of the proletariat . . . should be the work of the proletariat itself”.<sup>21</sup> A number of modern authors have argued against such an interpretation of Bakunin on the grounds that these public declarations are contradicted by his private programmes and letters in which they allege he argued for a fundamentally authoritarian and un-anarchist strategy. Critics of Bakunin rely on two main sources to support this: his 1<sup>st</sup> April 1870 letter to Albert Richard and his 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1870 letter to Sergei Nechaev.<sup>22</sup>

In the letter to Richard, who was a French member of the Alliance that never fully endorsed its anarchist programme and would go on to write a pamphlet arguing for the re-instatement of Napoleon III as Emperor, Bakunin varyingly advocated a “collective, invisible dictatorship” or an “invisible collective power” which is “the only dictatorship I accept”. He wrote that, “[t]here is only one power and one dictatorship whose organisation is salutary and feasible: it is that collective, invisible dictatorship of those who are allied in the name of our principle – and this

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<sup>20</sup> Bakunin, “To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain”.

<sup>21</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Texts*, 249.

<sup>22</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, 46; Joll, *Anarchists*, 87; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 286-7; Draper, *My Days with Bakunin* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 94-6.



dictatorship will be all the more salutary and effective for not being dressed up in any official power or extrinsic character.”<sup>23</sup>

Bakunin’s advocacy of an “invisible dictatorship” has been wrongly jumped on as key evidence demonstrating his hidden authoritarianism. The Marxist historian Hal Draper argues that Bakunin advocated “an anarchist ‘secret dictatorship,’ centralised in the hands of one all-powerful dictator” which would “hold the real reins of power”. As a result, “Bakuninism in operation meant the imposition of its own authority in autocratic forms: the establishment of a special sort of despotism by a self-appointed elite who refused to call their dictatorship a ‘state’”.<sup>24</sup> Draper goes so far as to assert that the “political strategy” of Bakunin’s anarchism was “the conspiratorial putschism of the then current left-Jacobin tradition of the B’s, that is, Babeuf, Buonarroti, Blanqui, Barbès (what historians nowadays loosely call ‘Blanquism’).”<sup>25</sup> This is a rather confusing thing to say about an anarchist, given that the Blanquist conception of revolution was a secret society of socialists seizing state power via an armed coup and establishing a top-down revolutionary dictatorship, centered in Paris, which would then educate the working classes to support communism.<sup>26</sup>

Similar views can even be found in authors who are sympathetic to anarchism. Avrich accuses Bakunin of being a proponent of “a secret revolutionary party bound together by implicit obedience to a revolutionary dictator”. As a result, although Bakunin’s “ends pointed towards freedom . . . his means – the clandestine party – pointed towards dictatorship”.<sup>27</sup> Marshall similarly labels Bakunin an inconsistent vanguardist who preached liberty in public whilst

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<sup>23</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 180, 178, 181. For information on Richard see Archer, *First International in France*, 159-61, 217-8; Carr, *Bakunin*, 343-4, 349, 363, 414-5; Eckart, *First Socialist Schism*, 205.

<sup>24</sup> Draper, *Volume 3*, 55-7, 93-6; *Volume 4*, 144-7.

<sup>25</sup> Draper, *Volume 4*, 130. Bakunin in fact explicitly opposed the strategy of Babeuf. See Bakunin, *Basic Writings*, 54-6.

<sup>26</sup> For an overview of Blanquist revolutionary strategy see Spitzer, *Blanqui*, 135-79. A very similar strategy was advocated by Babeuf and Buonarroti. See Richard N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels Volume 1: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy 1818-1850* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 7-9.

<sup>27</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, 67, 13.

being an advocate of “absolute dictatorship” and “tightly organised, authoritarian, hierarchical secret organisations” in private. According to Marshall, Bakunin endorsed an “authoritarian strategy of manipulating others through secret societies” and establishing an “invisible dictatorship” which would most likely “be even more tyrannical than a Blanquist or Marxist one”. This is because its secret nature meant that “its policies could not be openly known or discussed” and there was nothing to “prevent the invisible dictators from grasping for absolute power”. Bakunin was ready “to use a dictatorship in order to achieve ‘absolute liberty’” and had therefore “failed to realise that only libertarian means can be used to achieve libertarian ends”.<sup>28</sup>

To refute such ominous readings of Bakunin it is necessary to establish in detail exactly what Bakunin meant by an “invisible dictatorship” by placing this phrase within the full context of the letter.<sup>29</sup> Firstly, Bakunin repeated within the letter both the standard anarchist critique of state socialism and the standard anarchist conception of a social revolution. He rejected “centralisation”, “individual power” and a “revolutionary State” modelled on the French revolution in which decisions for an entire country are made by a “National Convention or Committee of Public Safety”. He argued that “the movement for popular emancipation does not mean the triumph and dictatorship of individuals” because “the domination and glorification of individuals” will be “reaction” and lead to “bourgeois” politics rather than to “socialism”. He thought that the revolution should instead be achieved through the formation of “workers’ . . . associations” which would expropriate “the instruments of labour”, be “armed and organised by streets and quarters” and “form the revolutionary federation of all the quarters, the federative commune”. Bakunin’s letter is, in this respect, entirely consistent with his statements elsewhere.

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<sup>28</sup> Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 287, 277, 306-7. Also see *ibid* 263, 271-2, 276-7, 282, 286-7.

<sup>29</sup> The subsequent quotes are from Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 178-82.

Secondly, one of the reasons why Bakunin referred to an “invisible dictatorship” is because he was contrasting his view with the idea of an “overt dictatorship” based on minority rule by a political ruling class that was advocated by Richard and which Bakunin was trying to persuade him to reject. This is similar to how Marx used the phrase ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, instead of ‘rule of the proletariat’, when he was in dialogue with Blanquists due to their support for revolutionary dictatorships.<sup>30</sup>

Thirdly, at no point does Bakunin claim that the “invisible dictatorship” will make decisions and impose them on the working classes. He instead held that it would only act to influence or guide the working classes. He declared that, during a revolution, “political revolutionaries” who support “overt dictatorship” will “advocate the muting of passions, and speak for order, trust and submission to the established revolutionary powers” and thereby “reconstitute the state”. Given that this will lead to the domination of a new minority ruling class, rather than socialism, “[w]e . . . must foment, awaken and unleash all the passions”, “produce anarchy and, like invisible pilots in the thick of the popular tempest . . . steer it not by any open power but by the collective dictatorship of all the allies – a dictatorship without insignia, titles or official rights, and all the stronger for having none of the paraphernalia of power”. This view is repeated later in the letter when Bakunin wrote that the “invisible collective force” can “alone . . . preserve and guide the revolution”.

Bakunin made similar points in his later letter to Nechaev, who was a Russian acquaintance of Bakunin committed to the formation of an authoritarian top-down secret society that engaged in any means, including assassinating members of the ruling classes and launching coups, to

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<sup>30</sup> For an overview of Marx’s usage of the term see: Draper, *V j g " ÷ F k e v c v q t u j k r " q h " v j g " R t q n* *Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 11-35; Hunt, *Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 284-336.

trigger a revolution.<sup>31</sup> As in the previous letter, sections of it can be quoted out of context in order to give the false impression that Bakunin was a hidden authoritarian, such as his advocacy of “the collective dictatorship of a secret organisation”. Such an interpretation should be rejected once again. Bakunin argued, in line with anarchist theory, that any attempt to overthrow class society must be “popular” and involve the participation of the majority of the working classes because “any attempt which is not popular in character” but is instead “artificial, and deals in secret plots, sudden assaults, surprises and blows, is bound to wreck itself against the State” and be defeated. He, in addition to this, described himself as an “anarchist” who rejected “every sort of official power” and “publicly declared dictatorship” even if they are “ultra-revolutionary”.

According to Bakunin, the success of a popular social revolution, which cannot be artificially provoked but will, instead, emerge organically in response to wider historical events, required “a secret society . . . to arouse, unite and organise spontaneous popular forces”. If the working classes are the “revolutionary army” then the secret organisation of committed revolutionaries would be the “general headquarters of this army, and the organiser not of its own, but of the people’s forces, as a link between the people’s instincts and revolutionary thought”.<sup>32</sup> Such a military analogy should not be misunderstood as the claim that the secret society would, as in the army, give orders to workers who were subject to their authority and forced to obey by the threat of corporal punishment or court-martial. Bakunin wrote explicitly that “it is the servant and helper of the people, and by no means their ruler”. It must “not in any circumstances, not even on the pretext of the people’s welfare . . . be their master”.

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<sup>31</sup> The subsequent quotes are from Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 182-94. For Nechaev’s views and actions see: Seth, *Russian Terrorists*, 31-6; Philip Pomper, “Nechaev and Tsaricide: The Conspiracy within the Conspiracy”, *The Russian Review* 33, no.2 (1974), 123-38.

<sup>32</sup> The same point was made by Bakunin to an Italian comrade. See Joll, *Anarchists*, 108-9.

The secret organisation would instead be composed of “small groups” dispersed throughout the country who are “united and inspired with a single idea” and act “everywhere along the same lines”. During a “spontaneous revolution”, these small groups would formulate a revolutionary programme which was “the fullest expression” of “popular instincts, desires and demands” and spread it “among a crowd of the people who would be struggling without any purpose or plan”. In so doing they would “create round themselves a circle of people who are more or less devoted to the same idea” and “are naturally subject to their influence”. They would then collectively participate within on-going “popular movements” in order to “lead the people towards the most complete realisation of the social-economic ideal and the organisation of the fullest popular freedom”.

It is this event which Bakunin called “the collective dictatorship of a secret organisation”. Importantly, just as in his letter to Richard, Bakunin introduced this phrase in order to contrast the “methods” by which “anarchists” will “influence the people” with the “publicly declared dictatorship” that he opposed. Bakunin’s so-called dictatorship would not “impose any new resolutions, regulations or ways of living on the people”. It “only unleashes their will and gives a wider opportunity for their self-determination and their social-economic organisations, which should be created by them alone from the bottom upwards, and not from the top downwards”. To achieve this goal the secret organisation,

influences the people exclusively through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power, are scattered in an unseen web throughout the regions, districts and communes, and, in agreement with each other, try, in whatever place they may be, to direct the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the people towards the plan that has been discussed beforehand and firmly determined.

Its only methods to “direct the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the people” were persuasion and acting as organisers. Bakunin believed that the “secret dictatorship” would “carry out a broadly based popular propaganda, a propaganda that would really penetrate to the people, and by the power of this propaganda and also by organisation among the people themselves join together separate popular forces into a mighty strength capable of demolishing the State”.

Critics of Bakunin have not only misrepresented what Bakunin meant by an invisible or collective dictatorship but also failed to mention that, in several other sources, he makes exactly the same proposals as in his letters to Richard and Nechaev without using any dictatorial language. This is extremely important because the only two instances in which Bakunin advocates a dictatorship as an anarchist are in two letters he wrote as attempts to persuade authoritarian revolutionaries to adopt anarchist strategy. Outside this context Bakunin does not use this language and so it appears most likely that he only adopted the language as a rhetorical device and not as an expression of his hidden authoritarian agenda.

In the programme of the International Brotherhood (1868) Bakunin wrote that a social revolution “rules out any ideas of dictatorship and custodial control” because it “must be created by the people” via the establishment of the “free federation of agricultural and industrial associations”. Within such a revolution it is necessary that there also exist a “secret universal association of international brothers” who form “a kind of revolutionary general staff” that are “an agent in the thick of the popular anarchy which will constitute the very life and all the energy of the revolution”, achieve “the unity of revolutionary thought and action” and thereby act as “intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the popular instinct”. This text is almost identical to passages from Bakunin’s letters to Albert and Necheav but, at no point, does

he refer to any invisible dictatorship. Indeed, he explicitly opposes “dictatorship” and insists that “supreme control must always belong to the people”.<sup>33</sup>

In his *La Liberté* article *A Few Words to My Young Brothers in Russia* (September 1869) Bakunin wrote that formally educated young people in Russia should “[g]o among the people” and “[l]earn amid these masses whose hands are hardened by labour how you should serve the people’s cause”. It was especially important that “the cultured youth” remembered that they “should be neither master nor protector nor benefactor nor dictator to the people, only the midwife of their spontaneous emancipation, the uniter and organiser of their efforts and their strength”.<sup>34</sup>

Two years later Bakunin wrote in the *Paris Commune and the Idea of the State* (1871) that during a social revolution,

All that individuals can do is elaborate, clarify and propagate the ideas that correspond to the popular feeling and, beyond this, to contribute by their ceaseless efforts to the revolutionary organisation of the natural power of the masses, but nothing beyond that. And everything else should not and could not take place except by the action of the people themselves. Otherwise one would end with political dictatorship, that is to say, the reconstruction of the State . . . and one would arrive by a devious but logical path at the re-establishment of the political, social and economic slavery of the popular masses.<sup>35</sup>

Bakunin described the Alliance in his April 1872 letter to members of the Spanish Alianza as,

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<sup>33</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> Bakunin, *Basic Bakunin*, 164.

<sup>35</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, 203.

an essentially militant association, seeking the organisation [of] the power of the popular masses in preparation for destruction of all the States and all presently existing institutions, whether religious, political, legal, economic or social, with an eye to the absolute emancipation of the enslaved and exploited laborers of the entire world. The aim of our organisation is to urge the masses to make a clean slate, so that the agricultural and industrial populations can reorganise and federalise themselves, according to the principles justice, equality, liberty and solidarity, from top to bottom, spontaneously, freely, apart from all official tutelage, whether it be of a reaction or even a so-called revolutionary variety.<sup>36</sup>

In a letter to Pablo, whose date I am unable to determine, Bakunin wrote that the “powerful but always invisible revolutionary collectivity” leaves the “full development [of the revolution] to the revolutionary movement of the masses and the most absolute liberty to their social organisation” whilst “always seeing to it that this movement and this organisation should never be able to reconstitute any authorities, governments, or States and always combatting all ambitions, collective (such as Marx's) as well as individuals, by the natural, never official, influence of every member of our Alliance”.<sup>37</sup>

Having gone through the evidence thoroughly, it is clear that Bakunin was not a hidden authoritarian who preached anarchism in public and top-down minority rule by a secret society in private. Both his public and private statements were entirely consistent with one another and with his anarchist commitment to the self-emancipation of the working classes. Bakunin held, in short, that the success of a social revolution required a specific anarchist organisation of dedicated militants who organised secretly to avoid state repression and were united under a common theoretical and strategic programme. The main goal of this organisation was to

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<sup>36</sup> Bakunin, “To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain”.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Cutler, “Introduction” in *Basic Bakunin*, 27.



participate in popular social movements in order to spread anarchist ideas and help organise and co-ordinate the spontaneous uprisings of the working classes into a force capable of abolishing capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. On only two occasions Bakunin labelled this as an invisible or collective dictatorship of a secret organisation, but in so doing all he actually meant was that a specific anarchist organisation would influence the wider working classes through persuasion and acting as key organisers and militants within the on-going class struggle. Importantly, this would occur in parallel with and as a complement to workers transforming themselves through their own experiences of revolutionary practice within mass public organisations which were committed to broad programmes, such as trade unions prior to the social revolution and federations of producers associations and workers' militias during the social revolution.

Bakunin attempted to implement this theory by participating in the mass public 1<sup>st</sup> International via a secret informal social network known as the Alliance of Socialist Democracy. This secret network was never in a position where it could influence the working classes during a social revolution and failed to live up to the great role which Bakunin had given it. Despite these limitations its importance should not be underestimated. Founded in 1868, it was arguably the first specific anarchist organisation in history and its members played a key role in formulating the theory and practice of the anarchist movement. From the intellectual and practical foundation which Bakunin and the Alliance built the future history of specific anarchist organisations would emerge.

## **9.2 – Syndicalism and Specific Anarchist Organisations**

After the collapse of the St Imier International in 1877-1878, mass anarchists continued to advocate the strategy of forming mass organisations and small specific anarchist organisations simultaneously. In the build up to the 1881 International Social Revolutionary Congress in

London, Kropotkin proposed in letters to Malatesta, Cafiero, Schwitzguébel and an unnamed Belgian comrade, that anarchists should form “two organisations; one open, vast and functioning openly; the other secret intended for action”. The secret organisation was to be composed of dedicated anarchist militants who “know how to work on the spot” and were “men of action”. The public organisation was, in comparison, to be a trade union which grouped workers “under the flag of the Strikers’ International”. The trade union was advocated both because it was the sole means through which “the forces of labour, the masses, can be successfully grouped together” and because it would “provide forces, money and a place for secret groups” to operate.<sup>38</sup> For Kropotkin this secret organisation would be a direct continuation of the Intimité Internationale, a secret association of anarchists within the St Imier International that he had joined in 1877 and which, at the time of writing, still existed.<sup>39</sup> Given this, Avrich has been wrong to claim that Kropotkin rejected Bakunin’s commitment to the formation of a secret specific anarchist organisation.<sup>40</sup>

In the subsequent years after 1881 Kropotkin consistently remained an advocate of organisational dualism. In his short history of anarchism, Nettlau described Kropotkin as advocating “the penetration of the masses and their stimulation by libertarian militants, in much the same way as the Alliance acted within the International”.<sup>41</sup> Such positive references to the Alliance can be seen in Kropotkin’s remark in 1914 that, whilst the “syndicate is absolutely necessary” as “the only form of workers’ association which allows the direct struggle against capital to be carried on without a plunge into parliamentarianism . . . 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”. As a result, “[t]here is need of the other

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<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 145-7. See also Miler, *Kropotkin*, 146-7.

<sup>39</sup> Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 106, 145, 317-8, note 77; Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism*, 54-5.

<sup>40</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 24-5, 27-8.

<sup>41</sup> Nettlau, *Short History of Anarchism*, 277.

element which Malatesta speaks of and which Bakunin always professed”, namely a specific anarchist organisation.<sup>42</sup>

What element Malatesta spoke of can be established by examining the articles he wrote during the 1890s. In 1894, Malatesta argued in his article *Let Us Go to the People* that anarchists “should organise among ourselves, among folk who are perfectly persuaded and perfectly in agreement; and, around us, in broad, open associations, we should organise as many of the workers as we can, accepting them for what they are and striving to nudge them into whatever progress we can”.<sup>43</sup> This view was repeated in 1897 when he wrote that anarchists should “set up as many groups of convinced and agreeable comrades as possible and, once several groups have been founded in a given region, to bind them together into a Regional Federation that maintains regular liaison with those Federations already in existence”. In parallel with this, it was essential that anarchists “all join the labour movement with fervour, helping already existing workers’ organisations and striving to promote new ones”.<sup>44</sup> In 1899 he continued to argue for the “organisation of us anarchists and the anarchist organisation of the masses”.<sup>45</sup>

Malatesta held, in line with Bakunin, that the mass organisation should not have a distinctly anarchist programme. In June 1897 he argued that “the workers’ organisations . . . gather the exploited for the economic struggle against the masters” on the basis of “the interests shared by all workers . . . regardless of persuasion” and so must “be separate and distinct from the organisations of the various parties”, including specific anarchist organisations.<sup>46</sup> Several months later in November he distinguished between “the anarchist party, which should be made up of men subscribing to the same ideas and bound by common purposes” and “the workers’

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Nettlau, *Short History of Anarchism*, 280-1.

<sup>43</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 173.

<sup>44</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Malatesta, *Towards Anarchy*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 174-5.

movement” which “should be whatever it can be and vary with the varying degree of development attained by the proletarians”.<sup>47</sup>

Malatesta came to adopt this position in response to the lessons of the International in Italy, which “was never anything other than the anarchist socialist party”. The negative consequence of this had been, as Bakunin predicted, that “it was weak as an organisation for economic resistance” because “it was unable to make headway among the masses who were frightened by its overly advanced program”. Many of the workers who did join “had little grasp of anarchy and socialism and, having been drawn by the hope of immediate revolution, melted away every time an insurrectional attempt, or the hope of it, failed”.<sup>48</sup>

After the birth of revolutionary syndicalism as a doctrine between the late 1890s and the early 1900s Malatesta’s advocacy of organisational dualism was articulated in response to the ideas of the CGT and other revolutionary syndicalist trade unions. Malatesta’s critique of the theory of revolutionary syndicalism has since been misrepresented by historians as a rejection of syndicalism, in the broad sense of revolutionary trade unionism, in and of itself, rather than a rejection of a particular version of syndicalism.<sup>49</sup> Such a perspective ignores the fact that during his debate with the revolutionary syndicalist and CGT member Monatte at the 1907 International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam, Malatesta argued that he was a supporter of “the workers’ movement” and advocated anarchists entering trade unions to spread anarchist ideas among workers. As a result, he was “a syndicalist, in the sense of being a supporter of the syndicates”. It was also the case that Malatesta agreed with revolutionary syndicalists that trade unions should be politically neutral and had argued for this position prior to the merger of the federation of Bourses du travail and the General Confederation of Labour in 1902.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 364.

<sup>48</sup> Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 364.

<sup>49</sup> For example: Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 83-4; Joll, *Anarchists*, 179, 204-5.

<sup>50</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 121-2; Malatesta, *Patient Work*, 175.

What Malatesta rejected during his speech was “syndicalism” as “a doctrine”, by which he meant revolutionary syndicalism in my sense of the term. He did so because he opposed the claim by revolutionary syndicalists that trade unions were “sufficient unto itself” and so “a necessary and sufficient means for social revolution”.<sup>51</sup> Malatesta continued to advocate this position decades later. He wrote in 1927 that, although “anarchists must recognise the usefulness and importance of the union movement”, “support its development and make it one of the levers in their action, doing all they can to ensure that, by cooperation with other forces for progress, it will open the way to a social revolution” it would be a “fatal mistake to believe, as many do, that the labour movement can and should, of its own volition, and by its very nature, lead to such a revolution”.<sup>52</sup>

Malatesta thought that trade unionism was not sufficient to achieve a social revolution because he believed that trade union activity was constituted by forms of practice which over time had a tendency to transform them into reformist institutions concerned with reproducing themselves within capitalism, rather than abolishing class society. As he explained in his November 1907 article *Anarchism and Syndicalism*,

Labour movements, which always commence as movements of protest and revolt, and are animated at the beginning by a broad spirit of progress and human fraternity, tend very soon to degenerate; and in proportion as they acquire strength, they become egoistic, conservative, occupied exclusively with interests immediate and restricted, and develop within themselves a bureaucracy which, as in all such cases, has no other object than to strengthen and aggrandise itself.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Antonioli, ed. *International Anarchist Congress*, 121.

<sup>52</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 483.

<sup>53</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 338.

This would occur for two main reasons. Firstly, trade unions must, if they are to fulfil their purpose, be open to any worker, irrespective of their politics, who wants to win immediate improvements from the economic ruling classes. The consequence of this is that trade unions will be forced by circumstances to “moderate their aspirations, first so that they should not frighten away those they wish to have with them, and next because, in proportion as numbers increase, those with ideas who have initiated the movement remain buried in a majority that is only occupied with the petty interests of the moment”. Secondly, given their function of winning immediate improvements for their membership, trade unions will have to operate not too far outside of the law, interact with members of the political and economic ruling classes, and concern themselves primarily with the interests of workers who belong to the trade union, rather than workers in general or the unemployed. These two factors would, in turn, lead trade unions which gain a large membership to “assure, in accord with rather than against the masters, a privileged situation for themselves” compared to workers outside the trade union, with whom they are in economic competition with, “amass large funds that afterwards they are afraid of compromising”, and seek the support of the state.<sup>54</sup>

Malatesta repeated this argument in December 1925 in his letter to the Spanish anarchist paper *El Productor*. Although trade unions may be initially founded by dedicated revolutionaries,

before long, as the number of members grow, short-term interests gain the upper hand, revolutionary aspirations become an obstacle and a danger, ‘pragmatic’ men, conservatives, reformists, eager and willing to enter into any agreement and accommodation arising from the circumstances of the moment, clash with the idealists and hardliners, and the workers’ organisation . . . ceases to be a revolutionary force and

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<sup>54</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 341.

becomes involved in a balancing act between capital and labour and possibly even a factor in preserving the status quo. . .<sup>55</sup>

For Malatesta this tendency of trade unions to develop into reformist institutions which balanced the interests of capital and labour was confirmed by such trade unions as the American Federation of Labour in the United States which “does not carry on a struggle against the bosses except in the sense that two business men struggle when they are discussing the details of a contract”.<sup>56</sup> Kropotkin appears to have shared Malatesta’s concerns. In 1919 he complained that after the collapse of the 1<sup>st</sup> International “the majority of the active members of” English trade unions were so “occupied day after day with the organisation of these unions and their strikes” that they “lost sight of the final end of the workers’ organisation – social revolution” and the “daily struggle of the local unions against the exploiters took the place of more distant ends”.<sup>57</sup>

Anarcho-syndicalists held that a solution to this problem was for trade unions to explicitly commit themselves to achieving an anarchist society through anarchist means. In 1925 Malatesta responded to those who aspired to “fuse into one the Labour and Anarchist movements” by giving “the labour organisations a purely anarchistic program” with the following argument. The purpose of a trade union is to unite as many workers as possible in order to win immediate reforms, such as higher wages and improved working conditions, and thereby act as “a means of education and a field for propaganda” until workers “are in a position to make the social revolution”. Yet, since the majority of workers are not anarchists, any trade union which allowed only committed anarchists to join it would “be the very same thing as an anarchist group and would remain unable either to obtain better conditions or to bring about

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<sup>55</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 112.

<sup>57</sup> Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle*, 585.

the revolution”.<sup>58</sup> Malatesta’s claim that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions would end up being specific anarchist organisations which called themselves trade unions was certainly applicable to some groups. The French CGTSR, for example, had only 6,000 members in 1936 and so did not possess the size necessary to be an organ of genuinely large-scale class struggle.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, if an anarcho-syndicalist trade union allowed any worker into it and thereby performed its function as an organ of large-scale class struggle then, as it grew in size, it would come to be an organisation in which the majority of members were not anarchists and its anarchist programme would exist only on paper as “an empty formula to which nobody pays any more attention”. Malatesta therefore concluded that any “fusion” of anarchism and the trade union movement would result “either in rendering the union powerless to attain its specific aim, or in attenuating, falsifying and extinguishing the spirit of Anarchism”.<sup>60</sup>

It was for these reasons that Malatesta rejected the strategy of committing existing trade unions to an anarchist programme or splitting off from large conservative trade unions to form much smaller anarchist ones. He instead advocated participating within the largest trade unions as a militant minority in order to be able to influence the largest number of workers.<sup>61</sup> In Malatesta’s specific context during 1920s Italy this was the syndicalist USI and the General Confederation of Labour, which had close ties with the Italian Socialist Party. Outside of this context Malatesta could have consistently selected less radical trade unions to organise within since he thought that which trade unions anarchists should join necessarily varied between time and place.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 464-5.

<sup>59</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 151, 255.

<sup>60</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 465-6. See also Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 30.

<sup>61</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 32-3.

<sup>62</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 397-8; *Life and Ideas*, 109.



Since Malatesta thought that trade unions had a tendency to become reformist organisations due to the inherent nature of their activity he held that the “revolutionary spirit must be introduced, developed, and maintained by the constant actions of revolutionaries who work from within their ranks as well as from outside, but it cannot be the normal, natural definition of the Trade Unions’ function”.<sup>63</sup> The goal of anarchists who participated in the trade union movement was to “strive to make them as much as possible instruments of combat in view of the Social Revolution”, spread radical theory and strategy in order to persuade workers to become anarchists, and oppose “all that tends to render them egoistic, pacific, conservative”. This included such things as, “heavy contributions and the accumulation of invested capital”, “good relationships with the masters” and “the appointment of bureaucratic officials, paid and permanent”.<sup>64</sup>

Although Malatesta advocated anarchist participation within the trade union movement, he maintained that anarchism should not subsume itself into the trade union movement but instead maintain an independent existence outside of it within specific anarchist organisations. He argued that anarchists should work within the trade union movement for “anarchist purposes as individuals, groups and federations of groups” but “always keep in contact with the Anarchists and remember that the labour organisations do not constitute the end but only one of the various means, no matter how important it may be, of preparing the advent of anarchy”.<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere he argued that “there is an impelling need for a specifically anarchist organisation which, both from within and outside the unions, struggle for the achievement of anarchism and seek to sterilise all the germs of degeneration and reaction”.<sup>66</sup> In other words, Malatesta advocated syndicalism plus a specific anarchist organisation.

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<sup>63</sup> Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, 110.

<sup>64</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 341-2.

<sup>65</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 466-7.

<sup>66</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 483.

The strategy of syndicalism plus a specific anarchist organisation was also advocated by some, but not all, anarcho-syndicalists whose main substantial disagreement with Malatesta was his commitment to politically neutral trade unions. Focusing on Spain, the former general secretary of the CNT's Catalan Regional Federation, Salvador Seguí, claimed in a speech in 1920 that "[t]he mission of the anarchists" was to participate "in the Trade Unions, to watch over their development and to provide them with direction" since the greater their influence the "more libertarian" the trade union will become. Crucially, this did "not by any means imply that the existing anarchist groups must be dissolved". Such groups were important in so far as "[t]he more influence they exercise, the more Anarchism and anarchists there will be". This could be seen in the fact that it was due "to the influence exercised by the anarchists" that the CNT had formally adopted "the conquest of libertarian communism" as its goal in 1919.<sup>67</sup>

Seven years later, in 1927, the Anarchist Liaison Committee of Catalonia, which had been set up to organise the founding of the FAI, issued a manifesto. They described themselves as "workers" who were "almost all active in the ranks" of the CNT and supporters of the doctrine of the IWA, whilst holding that "it is not enough to be active inside the union". They had to, in addition to this, organise outside and independently of the CNT in "anarchist groupings" which would "disseminate our theories . . . organise rallies, publish anarchist reading materials, and sow the seed of anarchism in every direction". This work was essential because they had to ensure that anarchists both instigated and inspired the coming social revolution and, once it had been launched, remained active within it in order to "propel it as far forward as we may" and prevent the revolution from being defeated, as had recently happened in Russia, by the establishment of a new minority political ruling class.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Salvador Seguí, *Anarchism and Syndicalism* (1920), <https://libcom.org/library/anarchism-syndicalism-salvador-seguí>.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Christie, *We, the Anarchists*, 35-8.

This commitment to an anarcho-syndicalist version of organisational dualism was repeated at the founding meeting of the FAI in July 1927. The minutes claim that the “labour organisation should turn to anarchism” and “work not only for day-to-day improvements but also for full emancipation, anarchism”. In parallel to this “the anarchist organisation of groups should be established alongside it, with the two organisations working together for the anarchist movement”. This was to be achieved by the CNT and the FAI holding “joint plenums and local, district, and regional meetings” and forming “general federations” of the anarchist movement with “general councils composed of representatives of the unions and the groups”. These general councils would organise “Commissions of Education, Propaganda, Agitation, and other areas of equal concern to both organisations”.<sup>69</sup> It was believed that, by organising joint councils, the FAI and CNT would establish a ‘trabazón’ with one another, which can be translated into English as an ‘organic link’. This ‘trabazón’ was subsequently implemented at the CNT’s national conference in January 1928, where it was agreed by delegates from the FAI and CNT to form a National Committee of Revolutionary Action and a National Prisoners’ Aid Committee composed of members of both organisations.<sup>70</sup>

The advocacy of anarcho-syndicalism plus a specific anarchist organisation was not a uniquely Spanish position. The French anarcho-syndicalist Besnard argued during his speech at the IWA congress of 1937 that “anarcho-communist groups”, which were distinct from the trade union, should “go prospecting among the labouring masses”, “seek out recruits and temper militants” and “carry out active propaganda and intensive pioneering work with an eye to winning the greatest possible number of workers hitherto deceived and gulled by all the political parties, without exception, over to their side and thus to the anarcho-syndicalist trade unions”.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Casas, *History of the F.A.I.*, 110.

<sup>70</sup> Garner, *Goals and Means*, 214, 222-6.

<sup>71</sup> Besnard, *Anarcho-Syndicalism and Anarchism*. For another example see Maximoff, *Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 50-2.

In summary, a segment of mass anarchists held that trade unions were not sufficient to achieve social revolution and that it was necessary to form specific anarchist organisations which existed independently of the trade union movement whilst also organising within it to push the revolutionary struggle forward. This was considered to be necessary due to the tendency of the main forms of practice which trade unions engaged in under capitalism – winning immediate improvements and increasing the size of their membership – to result in trade unions ceasing to be revolutionary instruments of class struggle and becoming bureaucratic institutions which balanced the interests of capital and labour. Proponents of this form of organisational dualism either advocated syndicalism plus, due to their advocacy of politically neutral trade unions, or anarcho-syndicalism. I have so far focused on the debates surrounding the relationship between mass organisations and specific anarchist organisations. I shall now turn to one of the main debates which occurred on the nature of specific anarchist organisations themselves.

### **9.3 – Platformism and Synthesisism**

In 1918, the Confederation of Anarchist Organisations (Nabat) was founded in Ukraine. It was viewed by Voline, who was one of its members, as a specific anarchist organisation which would embrace anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists and individualist anarchists and thereby achieve what he termed a “united anarchism”. The Nabat’s first congress on 18<sup>th</sup> November described its primary duty as “organising all of the life forces of anarchism; uniting the various strands of anarchism; bringing together through a common endeavor all anarchists seriously desirous of playing an active part in the social revolution”. This aspiration never became a reality due to the anarcho-syndicalists deciding not to join. In response the Nabat choose not to send a delegate to the third All-Russian Conference of Anarcho-Syndicalists.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Nabat, “Proceedings of Nabat”, 487; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 204-8.

Voline continued to advocate the formation of a specific anarchist organisation which would unite all the different strands of anarchism together after he was forced to flee Ukraine for Paris in order to escape Bolshevik repression. This position came to be known as the anarchist synthesis and was expounded not only by Voline but also by the French anarchist Sébastien Faure. In his 1928 article *The Anarchist Synthesis*, Faure utilised an analogy with chemistry to argue that anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism and individualist anarchism were “three elements” which should be mixed together and synthesised through a process of on-going experimentation. This would reveal which “dosage” of each element was most appropriate for a specific context such that the “formula” for this metaphorical chemistry experiment would vary “locally, regionally, nationally or internationally”. The organisational basis for this synthesis in France was the recently formed Association of Anarchist Federalists (AFA). It was described by Faure as “an entirely new regrouping of anarchist forces” which would unite all committed anarchists “without distinction of tendency” in order to “give more cohesion, influence and effectiveness to our dear propaganda” and enable anarchists “to work together rather than against one another, to live in peace rather than make war”.<sup>73</sup>

In Faure’s *Anarchist Encyclopedia*, published in 1934, Voline repeated this view when he defined the “anarchist synthesis” as “a tendency currently emerging within the libertarian movement seeking to reconcile and then ‘synthesize’ the different currents of thought that divide this movement into several more or less hostile fractions”. Voline, in other words, sought not only to unite different anarchists in the same organisation but also to combine the different ideas of anarchist tendencies together. This was motivated by two main positions. Firstly, although anarchism’s fragmentation into distinct sub-types had initially led to beneficial developments in anarchist theory and practice, it had in the long run ceased to be useful and resulted in unnecessary conflict between anarchists who each viewed their “parcel” as “the sole

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<sup>73</sup> Faure, “The Anarchist Synthesis”.

truth and bitterly fought against the partisans of the other currents”. In so doing, they ignored the important ideas which other anarchist tendencies had to offer and the fact that anarchism could be improved by fusing each separate element together into “an organic whole”. Secondly, any specific anarchist organisation composed of different kinds of anarchist which did not establish a synthesis of their different ideas would only be “a ‘mechanical’ assemblage” in which “each holds on to his intransigent position”. The result of “[s]uch a unification would be not a synthesis, but chaos”.<sup>74</sup>

In parallel with the emergence of Voline and Faure’s anarchist synthesis, a distinct and opposed tendency developed which came to be known as platformism. In June 1926 a group of anarchists, who had participated in the Russian revolution and been forced to flee to Paris to escape Bolshevik repression, issued the *Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists (Draft)* through their journal *Dielo Truda* (The Cause of Labour). The *Platform* emerged out of discussions within the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, whose members included Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov and Ida Mett, about how a specific anarchist organisation should be structured and operate in order to overcome the perceived disorganisation and ineffectiveness that the anarchist movement had fallen into. In so doing they hoped to ensure that the anarchist movement would not be defeated, as it had been in Russia, during the next revolution.<sup>75</sup>

The Dielo Truda group, in line with organisational dualism in general, advocated the formation of mass organisations which brought the working classes together on the basis of production and consumption, such as trade unions, workers’ councils or co-operatives, and a specific anarchist organisation which united the most revolutionary and militant workers on a “libertarian communist theoretical basis” in order to prepare the working classes for a social

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<sup>74</sup> Voline, “Synthesis (Anarchist)”, 197-205.

<sup>75</sup> Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 121-5; The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Organisational Platform”, 192.

revolution, awaken and nurture class consciousness, spread anarchist ideas, co-ordinate action and participate effectively in collective struggles. The goal of this specific anarchist organisation, which they called the general union of anarchists, was to ensure that anarchism would become “the guiding light”, “spearhead” or “driving force” of the social revolution when it occurred such that there was an “anarchist theoretical direction of events”.<sup>76</sup>

By this, the Dielo Truda group did not mean that the general union of anarchists should seize power, establish themselves as a political ruling class and impose their ideas from the top-down in the name of the working classes whom they claimed to represent. Rather, they sought only “to assist the masses to choose the genuine path of social revolution and socialist construction” and establish the “genuine self-governance of the masses” which would be “the practical first step along the road to the realisation of libertarian communism”. This goal was to be achieved by “campaigning inside” mass movements, such as “revolutionary trade unions”, in order to spread “libertarian ideas” within them and steer the movement “in a libertarian direction, so as to turn it into an army active in the service of the social revolution”.<sup>77</sup>

The *Platform* differed from other forms of organisational dualism in its conception of how the specific anarchist organisation should be structured. The Dielo Truda group held that specific anarchist organisations should, in order to be able to effectively influence the working classes, adhere to a common or homogenous ideological and tactical programme which would act as a guide for achieving their shared goals via an agreed upon route. This emerged from the experience of the Russian revolution in which, according to Arshinov in his 1925 article *Our Organisational Problem*, the anarchist movement had been out-manoeuvred by other revolutionary tendencies due to adopting “positions that were, yes, correct, but too general,

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<sup>76</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Organisational Platform”, 200-2, See also *ibid*, 213; Makhno, *Struggle*, 64-5.

<sup>77</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Organisational Platform”, 201, 207, 204-5. See also *ibid*, 213.

acting all at once in a diffuse way, in multiple tiny groups, often at odds on many points of tactics”.<sup>78</sup> Ideological and tactical unity was therefore a necessary means to focus the organisation’s limited resources on specific forms of activity in order to achieve concrete objectives and prevent the different segments of the organisation from engaging in “mutually antagonistic” tactics which did not complement one another, such as one group advocating participation in trade unions whilst another tried to persuade workers not to join them.<sup>79</sup>

The Dielo Truda group therefore rejected Voline and Faure’s theory of the anarchist synthesis. This was for two reasons. Firstly, they thought that it made little sense to advocate the synthesis of anarcho-syndicalism, anarcho-communism and individualist anarchism since it was already the case that anarcho-syndicalists advocated communism as a goal and most anarcho-communists advocated participation in trade unions. Nor was there any need to incorporate the insights of individualist anarchism. Individualists rejected the need for collectively organised class struggle and anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism were already based on a commitment to the freedom of the individual. Secondly, it was impractical to attempt to synthesise the different anarchist tendencies into a single organisation because it would “inevitably break up on impact with life” due to its members having opposed views on theory and practice.<sup>80</sup>

The authors of the *Platform* believed that the common ideological and tactical programme of the specific anarchist organisation would, as Makhno explained elsewhere, be implemented through each individual member engaging in “revolutionary . . . self-discipline” and enacting the “well defined policy of action” which had been collectively agreed upon.<sup>81</sup> Given this, the

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 122.

<sup>79</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Organisational Platform”, 193, 211. See also Makhno, *Struggle*, 62-3.

<sup>80</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “The Problem of Organisation and the Notion of Synthesis (March 1926)” in *Facing the Enemy*, 188-91; “Organisational Platform”, 193.

<sup>81</sup> Makhno, *Struggle*, 67-8.



general union of anarchists “while acknowledging every member of the organisation’s right to independence, to freedom of opinion, initiative and individual liberty, charges each member with specific organisational duties, insisting that these be rigorously performed, and that decisions jointly made be put into effect”. This included a commitment to decisions made by majority vote at congresses being binding on every group within the organisation. The authors of the *Platform*, in parallel with this, rejected the “unaccountable individualism” of some anarchist groups in favour of a system of “collective responsibility” whereby the general union of anarchists was “answerable for the revolutionary and political activity of each of its members” and each of its members was “answerable for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union as a whole”.<sup>82</sup>

Most controversially of all, the Dielo Truda group proposed the formation of an “Executive Committee” which would achieve co-ordination and coherence between different sections of the general union of anarchists. It was tasked with “implementation of decisions made by the Union, which the latter have entrusted to it”, “theoretical and organisational oversight of the activity of isolated organisations, in keeping with the Union’s theoretical options and overall tactical line”, “scrutiny of the general state of the movement” and “maintenance of working and organisational ties between all of the organisations of the Union, as well as with outside organisations”. Crucially what “rights, responsibilities and practical tasks” the executive committee possessed or was to perform would be “prescribed by the Congress of the General Union” in order to ensure that the executive committee did not take on a life of its own and subordinate or oppress the membership.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Organisational Platform”, 212. See also Peter Arshinov, “The Old and New in Anarchism: Reply to Comrade Malatesta (May 1928)”, in *Facing the Enemy*, 240-1.

<sup>83</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Organisational Platform”, 213.

The *Platform* aroused a great deal of debate within the European anarchist movement. Unfortunately, these responses tended to be based on misunderstanding or misrepresenting its ideas due, in part, to a poor French translation produced by Voline and the ambiguous language within the *Platform* itself, such as references to collective responsibility, an executive committee and leadership of the working classes.<sup>84</sup> In 1927, a different group of Russian anarchists, which included Mollie Steimer, Senya Fleshin and Voline, released a critique of the *Platform*. They interpreted the *Platform* as advocating the formation of a centralised party ruled from the top-down by an executive committee which was merely a central committee under a different name. This centralised party would, in turn, act as leader and director of both the anarchist movement and working-class movements in general, rather than offering only ideological assistance to workers as equals in the class struggle. As a result, they concluded that the Dielo Truda group had abandoned anarchist principles in favour of “revisionism towards bolshevism”.<sup>85</sup>

A more politely written response was issued by Malatesta in October 1927. Malatesta, like Steimer, Fleshin and Voline, viewed the *Platform* as rejecting the anarchist commitment to free initiative and free agreement in favour of a Bolshevik inspired authoritarian system of organisation. The *advocacy* of collective responsibility, binding congress resolutions made by majority vote, and an executive committee was interpreted by Malatesta as being a proposal for an organisation in which the membership was monitored by a small group of elected representatives and could act only with their permission or under their orders.<sup>86</sup>

He argued that,

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<sup>84</sup> Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 131.

<sup>85</sup> Mollie Steimer, Simon Fleshin, Voline, Sobol, Schwartz, Lia, Roman, Ervantian, “Concerning the Platform for an Organisation of Anarchists” in *Fighters for Anarchism: Mollie Steimer and Senya Fleshin*, ed. Abe Bluestein (Libertarian Publications Group, 1983), 52-3, 58, 61-2. The authors hostile attitude to the platform was shared by their friends Goldman and Berkman. See Avrich and Avrich, *Sasha and Emma*, 349.

<sup>86</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 486-91.

if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if one does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee.<sup>87</sup>

As a result, Malatesta concluded that the Dielo Truda group had proposed means which would, “far from helping to bring about the victory of anarchist communism . . . only falsify the anarchist spirit and lead to consequences that go against their intentions”.<sup>88</sup>

In response to these critiques the authors of the *Platform* issued a number of texts clarifying their position. Firstly, they were not in favour of subordinating the working class to the top-down rule of an anarchist organisation. They explicitly wrote that,

The action of steering revolutionary elements and the revolutionary movement of the masses in terms of ideas should not be and cannot ever be considered as an aspiration on the part of anarchists that they should take the construction of the new society into their own hands. That construction cannot be carried out except by the whole of labouring society, for that task devolves upon it alone, and any attempt to strip it of that right must be deemed anti-anarchist.<sup>89</sup>

Given this, anarchists “will never agree to wield power, even for a single instant, nor impose their decisions on the masses by force. In this connection their methods are: propaganda, force

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<sup>87</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 486-7.

<sup>88</sup> Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 486.

<sup>89</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Supplement to the Organisational Platform”, 219.

of argument, and spoken and written persuasion”.<sup>90</sup> The *Platform* references to anarchists providing direction to the working classes meant only that they would “influence” workers and provide “a guiding idea” in just the same manner that famous anarchist theorists such as “Bakunin, Kropotkin, Reclus, Malatesta” had already done. The *Platform* merely held that in order for this “ideological . . . direction” to become a “permanent factor” it was necessary to form “an organisation possessed of a common ideology . . . whose membership engage in ideologically coordinated activity, without being side-tracked or dispersed as has been the case hitherto”.<sup>91</sup> This organisation would then participate in, for example, the trade union movement “as the carriers of a certain theory” and “prescribed work plan” in order to “disseminate within the unions its ideas regarding the revolutionary tactics of the working class and on various events”.<sup>92</sup>

In summary, the “masses of the people . . . will make the revolution” but “the revolutionary mass is forever nurturing in its bosom a minority of initiators, who precipitate and direct events” and “in a true social revolution the supporters of worker anarchism alone will account for that minority”. Once the working classes “have defeated capitalist society” the “anarchist organisations and, with them, the General Union, will lose all their significance” and “gradually melt away into the productive organisations of the workers and peasants”, rather than subjecting workers to their rule.<sup>93</sup>

Secondly, in advocating “an Executive Committee” within the specific anarchist organisation they were not proposing the formation of “a Party Central Committee” which “issues orders, makes laws and commands”. The authors of the *Platform* not only thought that an Executive

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<sup>90</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Supplement to the Organisational Platform”, 222.

<sup>91</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Reply to Anarchism’s Confusionists (August 1927)” in *Facing the Enemy*, 229-30.

<sup>92</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Supplement to the Organisational Platform”, 219-20.

<sup>93</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Reply to Anarchism’s Confusionists”, 230, 235.

Committee was consistent with anarchism but that “such an organ” already “exists in many anarchist and anarchist-syndicalist organisations”.<sup>94</sup> What the *Platform* called an “Executive Committee” was not “a body endowed with any powers of a coercive nature”. It was merely “a body performing functions of a general nature in the Union” and so could have been called the “Chief Secretariat of the Union”. It would not restrict the activity of groups within the organisation and instead only “steer their activity” by providing “ideological or organisational assistance”, such as advising a group on the current “tactical or organisational line adopted by the Union on a variety of matters”.<sup>95</sup>

If a group within the specific anarchist organisation decided to adopt its “own tactical line” then one of three outcomes would occur: the minority would agree to follow the majority position within the organisation due to it not being an issue of supreme importance; the minority and majority position would co-exist providing it was feasible; or the minority would leave the organisation to form their own group. Crucially, which of these outcomes transpired would be “resolved” not by “the Executive Committee which, let us repeat, is to be merely an executive organ of the Union, but by the entire Union as a body: by a Union Conference or Congress”.<sup>96</sup>

Thirdly, the idea of collective responsibility did not entail the view that the members of the organisation would have to follow the orders of an executive committee. Arshinov explained in his response to Malatesta that, since members of the organisation joined together under a common programme which, in so far as they were members, was “binding upon them”, then it followed that the “organisation would be the union of those who would share a common conception of the theoretical, tactical and political policy line to be observed”. Given this, “the

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<sup>94</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Reply to Anarchism’s Confusionists”, 234.

<sup>95</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Supplement to the Organisational Platform”, 217.

<sup>96</sup> The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “Supplement to the Organisational Platform”, 217-8.

practical activity of a member of the organisation is naturally in complete harmony with the overall activity, and conversely the activity of the organisation as a whole could not be at odds with the conscience and activity of each member, assuming he has accepted the program fundamental to this organisation".<sup>97</sup> Therefore,

It is this which characterizes the principle of collective responsibility: the Union as a body is answerable for the activity of each member, in the knowledge that he could only carry out his political and revolutionary work in the political spirit of the Union. Likewise, each member is fully answerable for the Union as a whole, since its activity could not be at odds with what has been determined by the whole membership.<sup>98</sup>

From Arshinov's response it is clear that Malatesta's critique was based on a misunderstanding of what the authors of the *Platform* meant by collective responsibility. Malatesta himself realised that this was potentially the case. In a December 1929 letter to Makhno, he wrote that "anyone who associates and cooperates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to coordinate his actions with those of his fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others, and thus, the common cause". Within such an organisation each member should "respect the agreements that have been made – except when wishing sincerely to leave the association" and "those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association". If this was all that the authors of the *Platform* had meant by "collective responsibility" then although Malatesta thought it was "an incorrect use of language . . . it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached".<sup>99</sup>

Malatesta further clarified his views on the topic in a July 1930 letter he wrote to a platformist group based in the Montmartre district of Paris. In the letter he says that although he continued

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<sup>97</sup> Arshinov, "The Old and New in Anarchism", 240.

<sup>98</sup> Arshinov, "The Old and New in Anarchism", 240.

<sup>99</sup> Malatesta, *Anarchist Revolution*, 107-8.

to reject the phrase collective responsibility in favour of moral responsibility, “I find myself more or less in agreement with their way of conceiving the anarchist organisation (being very far from the authoritarian spirit which the ‘Platform’ seemed to reveal) and I confirm my belief that behind the linguistic differences really lie identical positions”.<sup>100</sup> Malatesta nonetheless remained opposed to the position that congress resolutions made by majority vote should be binding on every group within a specific anarchist organisation and to this extent was not a platformist.

The immediate practical effect of the *Platform* was somewhat limited. The Dielo Truda group organised a number of discussion meetings on the *Platform* which were attended by militants from around the world, including France, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Poland and China. This culminated in an attempt to form an Anarchist International at a meeting held in a Parisian cinema on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1927.<sup>101</sup> During the meeting Makhno proposed a five-point programme to be discussed. These were: “(1) recognition of the class struggle as the most important factor of the anarchist system; (2) recognition of anarcho-communism as the basis of the movement; (3) recognition of syndicalism as one of the principal methods of anarcho-communist struggle; (4) the necessity of a ‘General Union of Anarchists’ based on ideological and tactical unity and collective responsibility; (5) the necessity of a positive programme to realise the social revolution”.<sup>102</sup>

These five points were then pedantically rephrased by the attending delegates in a manner which changed their language but not their ultimate meaning. The five points of discussion agreed upon were: (1) recognition of the struggle of all oppressed and exploited against state and capitalist authority as the most important factor of the anarchist system; (2) recognition of

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<sup>100</sup> Malatesta, *On Collective Responsibility* (1930), <https://ithanarquista.wordpress.com/nestor-makhno-archive/nestor-makhno-archive-english/platform-english/on-collective-responsibility-errico-malatesta/>.

<sup>101</sup> Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 124-8, 134-5.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Garner, *Goals and Means*, 205-6.

anarcho-communism as the basis of the movement; (3) recognition of the labour and union struggle as one of the most important means of anarchist revolutionary action; (4) necessity in each country of as general as possible a Union of Anarchists who have the same goals and tactics, as well as collective responsibility; (5) necessity of a positive programme of action for the anarchists in the social revolution”.<sup>103</sup> Before the delegates could move on to discuss these points, the French police broke into the meeting and arrested everybody in attendance.

The commission which had been elected to form the Anarchist International, whose members were Makhno (Ukrainian), Ranko (Polish) and Chen (Chinese), issued a letter on 1<sup>st</sup> April which declared the existence of an International Libertarian Communist Federation and, for reasons that are unclear, expressed the original five point programme for discussion that had been formulated by Makhno, rather than the version which had been revised by the delegates. This contributed towards the delegates from other anarchist groups, including the Italian anarchists who were members of the Italian Anarchist Union, deciding to disassociate from the project.<sup>104</sup> Fabbri, Camillo Berneri and Ugo Fedeli explained in their letter that the members of the *Pensiero e Volontà* group had decided not to join because,

there exists among you a spirit which is quite distant from that which underlies our way of conceiving an international anarchist organisation, that is one which is open to the greatest number of individuals, groups and federations who agree with the principles of struggle organised in an anarchist way against capitalism and the State, on a permanent national and international basis, but all this without any ideological or tactical exclusivism and without any formalism that could impede the autonomy or freedom of

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Garner, *Goals and Means*, 206.

<sup>104</sup> Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 135; Garner, *Goals and Means*, 206.



the individuals in the groups or of the groups themselves in the various national and international unions.<sup>105</sup>

A few months later the French Anarchist Communist Union was renamed the Revolutionary Anarchist Communist Union by a platformist majority of delegates at its autumn 1927 congress in Paris. The consequences of this was a number of dramatic changes to the organisation. These were: the results of majority votes were now binding on all individual members; positions adopted at annual congress could not be subject to criticisms within the pages of the Union's official paper, *Le Libertaire*, apart from during a three-month period immediately prior to the next congress; membership was only possible via a group such that isolated individuals could no longer join; and being a member involved paying a subscription fee and receiving a membership card. This resulted in a split within the organisation and proponents of synthesist anarchism leaving to form the previously mentioned AFA. These changes to the Anarchist Union did not last long. The platformist position was soon defeated at the Union's 1930 Paris congress where, despite a speech by Makhno, the synthesist delegates won the vote by fourteen to seven, regained control of the organisation and abandoned the above policies. In response to this platformists left and formed the Libertarian Communist Federation (FCL) in 1934, only to rejoin the Anarchist Union two years later in 1936.<sup>106</sup>

In summary, from 1926 onwards there was an important debate within the anarchist movement about how specific anarchist organisations should be organised. Proponents of synthesis federations, such as Faure and Voline, argued that specific anarchist organisations should unite all the schools of anarchism – anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism and individualist

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<sup>105</sup> Fabbri, Camillo Berneri and Ugo Fedeli, *Reply by the Pensiero e Volontà Group to an Invitation to Join the International Anarchist Communist Federation*, <https://ithanarquista.wordpress.com/nestor-makhno-archive/nestor-makhno-archive-english/reply-by-the-pensiero-e-volonta-group-to-an-invitation-to-join-the-international-anarchist-communist-federation/>.

<sup>106</sup> Berry, *French Anarchist Movement*, 173-6; Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 135-6, 143.

anarchism – into a single organisation and develop a new form of anarchism which combined the best of each. Supporters of platformist federations, in comparison, argued that synthesis federations would soon collapse due to internal disagreements over theory and practice. They argued instead that specific anarchist organisations should be committed to theoretical and tactical unity such that they brought anarchists together under a narrow programme which enabled effective and co-ordinated action. The debate between synthesists and platformists was unfortunately marred by the *Platform* committee's 'commitment' to collective responsibility and an executive committee being misrepresented as advocating a top-down, un-anarchist, authoritarian organisation modelled on the Bolsheviks. Such a negative interpretation of the *Platform* ignores the fact that its commitments were not a break with anarchism. They were instead one of many ways in which anarchists sought to build upon and update the kind of specific anarchist organisation that Bakunin had advocated decades previously.

#### **9.4 – Conclusion**

In this chapter I have provided a rational reconstruction of the theory and history of organisational dualism. Organisational dualism, which was first advocated by Bakunin between 1868 and 1872, argued that a trade union or community organisation was insufficient to bring about the social revolution. Advocates of organisational dualism held that anarchists must, in addition to this, form specific anarchist organisations which exist alongside mass organisations. These specific anarchist organisations were advocated as the means to unite committed revolutionaries in order to develop correct theory and strategy, co-ordinate their actions both amongst themselves and within broader mass organisations and/or movements and push the revolutionary struggle forward through persuasion and engaging in actions which provided an example to others.

Bakunin's theory of organisational dualism has been misrepresented by a number of authors, including Draper, Marshall and Avrich, as advocating an authoritarian strategy based on the invisible dictatorship of a secret society. I have shown through a detailed examination of what Bakunin actually wrote that he rejected the strategy of a secret society seizing power and ruling over workers. All Bakunin ever meant by such ominous phrases as "the collective dictatorship of a secret organisation" was anarchists influencing other workers through persuasion and acting as key organisers and militants within the on-going class struggle. After Bakunin's death proponents of organisational dualism disagreed with one another on a number of topics. Advocates of syndicalism-plus, such as Malatesta, argued for politically neutral trade unions plus a specific anarchist organisation, whilst some anarcho-syndicalists advocated an organic link between trade unions committed to an anarchist programme and specific anarchist organisations. One of the main areas of discussion was over how specific anarchist organisations should be structured. From 1926 onwards a debate occurred between proponents of synthesist federations, which advocated a broad programme that would unite every kind of anarchist, and platformist federations, which advocated a narrow programme in order to achieve theoretical and tactical unity.

These elements of the history of organisational dualism have been previously discussed in Schmidt and van der Walt's *Black Flame*.<sup>107</sup> My overview has built on this previous work by examining the arguments of anarchists who advocated organisational dualism in greater detail and using the theory of practice to interpret their ideas. For example, I have shown that Malatesta's critique of revolutionary syndicalism rested on the premise that trade unionism was constituted by forms of practice which over time had a tendency to transform them into

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<sup>107</sup> Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 239-63.

reformist institutions concerned with reproducing themselves within capitalism, rather than abolishing class society.

## Chapter 10 – Conclusion

This thesis has contributed to the history of political theory by providing a rational reconstruction of what anarchists living in Europe and the United States thought about revolutionary strategy between 1868 and 1939. It has demonstrated that, contrary to what a number of academics and Marxist revolutionaries have asserted, anarchists developed a coherent and sophisticated political theory which guided their attempts to bring about fundamental social change.

The previous main overview of the revolutionary strategy of anarchism is Schmidt and van der Walt's *Black Flame*. This study was limited in so far as it (a) did not discuss key areas of anarchist political theory in sufficient depth, (b) described what anarchists thought about revolutionary strategy but did not include a detailed explanation of why they did so, and (c) did not systematically establish how different aspects of anarchist political theory connected with and underpinned one another. I have utilised the method of rational reconstruction in order to provide a new detailed overview of anarchist revolutionary strategy which draws upon the latest primary and secondary literature, establishes in depth how different aspects of anarchist political theory interconnected with one another, and uses this understanding of anarchist political theory as an interconnected system to explain why anarchists adopted the strategies that they did.

The central argument of this thesis is that the reasons anarchists gave for supporting or opposing particular strategies were grounded in a theoretical framework – the theory of practice – which claimed, among other things, that, as people engage in activities they simultaneously change the world and themselves. This theoretical framework was the foundation for the anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends: the means that revolutionaries proposed for achieving social change had to be constituted by forms of activity which would develop

people into the kinds of individuals who were capable of, and were driven to, (a) overthrow capitalism and the state and (b) construct and reproduce the end goal of an anarchist society. Although anarchism's commitment to the unity of means and ends has been observed by previous historians of anarchism, this is the first detailed study to ground it, alongside anarchist revolutionary strategy in general, in the theory of practice. Doing so has enabled me to establish the intellectual depth of historical anarchist revolutionary strategy in a manner which has hitherto not been achieved.

In Chapters 2 I demonstrated that anarchists were materialists who thought that society was a process constituted by, and reproduced through, human beings engaging in practice: deploying their capacities to satisfy a psychological drive and, in so doing, simultaneously changing both the world and themselves. I then showed, in Chapter 3, that anarchists were committed to the view that individuals should be free, equal and bonded together through relations of solidarity and that this value system led anarchists to advocate the abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society.

With this in place, I established one of the main problems anarchist revolutionary strategy sought to overcome. Anarchists realised that, according to the theory of practice, the dominant social structures of capitalism and the state produce individuals with the wrong kinds of capacities, drives, and consciousness for establishing and reproducing an anarchist society. In order to transform society, they needed transformed people, but in order to have transformed people, they needed a new society. The anarchist solution to this problem was that the working classes could simultaneously transform themselves and society through engaging in forms of revolutionary practice.

In Chapter 4, I rationally reconstructed the main forms of revolutionary practice which anarchists thought could achieve the abolition of capitalism and the state in favour of an

anarchist society. They believed that class society could only be abolished through an armed insurrection during which the working classes overthrew the state and forcefully expropriated the economic ruling classes and established workplace and community assemblies and workers' militias. These assemblies and workers' militias would co-ordinate action over a large area through, depending upon the kind of anarchist, either formal federations and informal social networks or only informal social networks. Anarchists did not expect this social revolution to appear out of nowhere. They instead believed that it would be a product of an extended evolutionary period. During this evolutionary period, a significant portion of the working classes would, given the theory of practice, be transformed into the right kinds of people for overthrowing class society and establishing and reproducing an anarchist society through their experiences of participating in prefigurative social structures and engaging in class struggle via direct action.

Throughout this chapter, I demonstrated that anarchists advocated the strategies they did due to their beliefs about what forms of practice constituted them and how these forms of practice would simultaneously transform people and social relations. In particular, I showed that the anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends was grounded in the theory of practice. In so doing I established the intellectual depth of anarchist revolutionary strategy in a manner which has hitherto not been achieved.

I then argued, in Chapter 5, that the anarchist commitment to the unity of means and ends led them to conclude that an anarchist society could not be achieved through the means of seizing state power via elections or armed insurrection. Anarchists argued that state socialist strategies were constituted by forms of practice that would produce the wrong kinds of people and social relations for achieving the long-term goal of both anarchists and state socialists: a stateless classless society. The strategy of parliamentarism would result in the socialist movement and its leadership being transformed from revolutionaries into defenders of market capitalism with

at best more welfare programmes. Any attempt to violently seize the existing capitalist state and transform it into a new self-proclaimed workers' state would result in the dictatorship of the party leadership over the working classes and the establishment of state capitalism, rather than the genuine self-rule of the working classes themselves through their own organs of self-management.

Although anarchists in general shared these basic strategic commitments, the movement was divided between two main strategic schools of thought: insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism. The distinction between these two kinds of anarchism was first made in Schmidt and van der Walt's *Black Flame*. My thesis has built upon this previous work by drawing upon a greater number of primary and secondary sources to develop a more sophisticated rational reconstruction of the theory of insurrectionist anarchism and the theory of mass anarchism than has previously been the case.

In Chapter 6 I showed that proponents of insurrectionist anarchism advocated the formation of small anarchist affinity groups, rejected the struggle for immediate reforms and maintained that anarchists could effectively spread their ideas, develop the spirit of revolt and generate an increasingly large number of working-class insurrections by engaging in propaganda of the deed. In so doing, I demonstrated that this strategy was, like the rest of anarchism, grounded in the theory of practice. For example, insurrectionist anarchists argued against struggling for immediate reforms because they believed such struggles were constituted by forms of practice that would lead to social movements losing their revolutionary character. A central aspect of this chapter was reconstructing the historical process through which propaganda of the deed transformed over several decades from the idea that anarchists should form armed bands which launched insurrections to spread anarchist ideas into the tactic of individuals engaging in assassinations and bombings. Through outlining this historical process in detail, I not only built



upon the accounts of previous historians, but also contextualised insurrectionist anarchist strategy within its historic moment and the real attempts at implementing it.

In Chapter 7, I rationally reconstructed the strategy of mass anarchism, which advocated the formation of large-scale formal organisations that prefigured the future anarchist society by being federations of autonomous sections. The immediate goal of these federations, be they trade unions or specific anarchist organisations, was to organise and/or participate in collective struggles for immediate reforms in the present. These collective struggles for reforms were advocated as the means through which a revolutionary mass movement which was both driven to and capable of overthrowing capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society would emerge and develop. They believed that this would occur as a result of a combination of workers being transformed through (a) the practice of participating within prefigurative organisations and taking direct action against the ruling classes and (b) being influenced by anarchists acting as a militant minority within social movements.

The main form of mass anarchism was syndicalist anarchism. In Chapter 8, I showed that the three main forms of syndicalist anarchism – revolutionary syndicalism, syndicalism-plus and anarcho-syndicalism – generally adhered to a common set of strategies to achieve social change. They held that syndicalist trade unions should have the double aim of struggling for immediate reforms and attempting to launch a social revolution. These two aims were viewed as interconnected because the struggle for reforms via direct action within prefigurative organisations was conceived as the means by which a large number of workers would engage in forms of practice that transformed them into revolutionaries with the right kinds of radical capacities, drives, and consciousness for abolishing capitalism and the state in favour of an anarchist society. Syndicalist anarchists thought that trade unions had, in addition to this double aim, a closely related dual function. They were to both struggle against dominant institutions

in the present and, during the course of a social revolution, take over the organisation of the economy (in part or whole) such that the federations and local sections of the trade union were converted from organs of resistance to organs of self-management. The revolution so understood was to be launched through an insurrectionary general strike during which workers not only ceased work, but also expropriated the means of production from the ruling classes and used organised violence to overcome the forces of state repression, such as the police and army, who defend the interests of the ruling classes.

In Chapter 9, I rationally reconstructed the theory and history of organisational dualism from its advocacy by Bakunin between 1868 and 1872, to various proposals made between the 1890s and 1930s on what the relationship between anarchism and syndicalism (or trade unions in general) should be, and debates between platformist and synthesist anarchists from 1926 onwards. Proponents of organisational dualism argued that a trade union or community organisation was insufficient to bring about the social revolution. They held that anarchists must, in addition to this, form specific anarchist organisations which exist alongside mass organisations. These specific anarchist organisations were advocated as the means to unite committed revolutionaries in order to develop correct theory and strategy, co-ordinate their actions both amongst themselves and within larger and broader mass organisations and/or movements and push the revolutionary struggle forward through persuasion and engaging in actions which provided an example to other workers.

In this thesis I have established that, contrary to the assertions of a number of academics and Marxist revolutionaries, anarchists developed a sophisticated and coherent political theory which was grounded in the theory of practice. I have achieved this through a detailed examination of the primary and secondary sources on the anarchist movement in Europe and the United States between 1868 and 1939 which are available in English. My research has therefore been limited both by the sources it has drawn on and by the number of anarchist

movements it covers. Given this, two main avenues future research could take would be expanding upon my research by (a) using a greater number of primary and secondary sources which have not been translated into English and (b) rationally reconstructing the political theory of anarchists in South America, Africa, Asia and Oceania. Doing both of these together would result in a genuine trans-national history that could demonstrate how anarchist political theory developed through interactions between anarchists from around the world, and could explore how anarchist ideas remained the same or varied between different national contexts. Some further important directions for future research would include examining how anarchist political theory, strategy and action developed and changed after 1939. This would enable historical and modern anarchist revolutionary strategy to be put in conversation with one another such that the ongoing relevance of historical anarchist ideas could be evaluated. This is a topic which is especially important in the light of recent waves of protests occurring internationally and the global resurgence of anarchism as a working-class social movement aimed at fundamental social change.

Although which elements of historical anarchist theory and strategy are still relevant is a controversial topic, I believe that this thesis has established at least one main position that the modern anarchist movement should adhere to: the means that revolutionaries propose for achieving social change have to be constituted by forms of practice that develop people into the kinds of individuals who are capable of, and are driven to, (a) overthrow capitalism and the state and (b) construct and reproduce the end goal of an anarchist society. Even if the specifics of historical insurrectionist anarchism, mass anarchism, syndicalist anarchism and organisational dualism are deemed to be no longer appropriate strategies within modern society, the core insight of historical anarchist strategy would remain – anarchist ends can only be achieved through anarchist means.

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