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Anarchism in the Labour Movement

López Arango and Abad de Santillán

1925

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From Robert Graham (Ed.), *Anarchism: A Documentary
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Anarchism (300 CE to 1939)*.

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Editor's Note: Emilio López Arango (1894-1929) was one of the editors of the leading Argentine anarchist paper, *La Protesta*, and a member of the anarcho-syndicalist bakers' union, which Malatesta had helped found in 1887. He was originally from Spain, as was Diego Abad de Santillán (1897-1983). Abad de Santillán joined López Arango and others first in publishing the anarchist papers, *La Campana*, and then *La Protesta*. Abad de Santillán later contributed articles from Europe where he became involved with the revived anti-authoritarian International Workers Association (IWA), an international federation of anarcho-syndicalist organizations (Selection 114), in 1922. In 1925, López Arango and Abad de Santillán wrote *El Anarquismo en el movimiento obrero* [*Anarchism in the Labour Movement*] (Barcelona: Cosmos, 1925), in which they emphasized the anarchist component of anarcho-syndicalism, being equally critical of pure syndicalism and Marxist-Leninism. As with Antilli, despite their strong disagreements over the question of violence, they reject a narrowly working class conception of anarchism, as Malatesta

had done before them (Selection 60). The translation is by Paul Sharkey.

WE DO NOT WHIMSICALLY CONFOUND the workers' movement with syndicalism; syndicalism, as we see it, is a revolutionary theory, one of the many that pop up along the path of the revolution in order to misdirect its aims or clip the wings of the combative idealism of the masses. And plainly, given a choice between this theory and anarchism, we cannot hesitate for a single moment, in that we contend that one comes to freedom only through freedom and that the revolution will be anarchic, which is to say, libertarian, or it will not be at all...

The a-political reformists stand on the road to dictatorship: they counter the communist formula of proletarian dictatorship and the workers' State with the class-based call for "all power to the unions." But in point of fact, setting aside the communists' political persuasions and their confessed dictatorial aims, neutral syndicalism actually embraces all of the Marxist contingencies: it takes capitalism's economic dominion as the basis for the accomplishment of economic aims that defy all political and ideological characterization.

We ought not to forget that the Syndicate is, as an economic by-product of capitalist organization, a social phenomenon spawned by the needs of its day. Clinging to its structures after the revolution would be tantamount to clinging to the cause that spawned it: capitalism.

The notion of class strikes us as a contradiction of the principles championed by anarchism. We consider it the last refuge of authoritarianism, and while fighting to liberate the workers' movement from the political parties, we are, if we assert the notion of class, preparing the ground for a new dominion.

The fact that revolutionaries emerge almost exclusively from the ranks of the oppressed and exploited does not mean

that the revolution is a class affair: for those oppressed and exploited who do their bit for the task of transforming society have arrived at an egalitarian outlook on life that rules out the narrow interests of the revolutionaries themselves, taken as a particular group.

The proletariat as a class is an abstract invention ... In actuality, the proletariat is a motley collection which in part passively endures the blights of society, in part enters into tactical or express alliances with the bourgeoisie and the reaction, and in part also bands together to fight for Freedom and Justice ...

In our view, anarchism is not some laboratory discovery nor the fruit of inspired thinkers, but rather a spontaneous movement of the oppressed and exploited who have grasped the human predicament, the harmfulness of privilege and the uselessness of the State, and who are eager to fight for a social order that will afford man some scope for free development...

We anarchists have no magical powers: we do not imagine ourselves the creators of universal happiness, direct creators at any rate, and we acknowledge and declare as much. In this we also stand apart from those revolutionaries who in actual fact simply yearn to impose their wishes upon more or less well-meaning peoples...

The anarchist revolution will redeem men from the mortal sin of abdication of personality, but the anarchist revolution is not made in accordance with such and such a more or less libertarian program, but is made by means of destruction of the State and all authority. It is a matter of very little consequence to us whether the revolution of the future will be founded upon the family, the social group, branches of industry, the commune or the individual. What concerns us is that the building of a free social order is a collective endeavour in which men do not mortgage their freedom, be it voluntarily or under coercion. The anarchist revolution is, today, the natural revolution, which will not let itself be led astray nor hijacked by authority wielding groups, parties or classes.