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The Voice of the Penal Colony

The Anarchist Convicts of Guyana

1893

While the populations panic and cheer the hangman tsar, while the bourgeois and the governmentals congratulate themselves on the success of their stratagems and observe that human stupidity is always so great, a protest must come, proud and energetic, to remind the bourgeois that there are still *free men*, even, and especially, in their prisons and their penal colonies.

We must remind our leaders, who, in the joy of their triumph, lick the boots of the hangman of nihilists and whipper of women, that in the French penal colonies are also found those whose only crime has been to dream of a society of justice and equality.

The anarchist convicts in the penal colonies of Guyana address to us a manifesto in which, still and always glorifying the humanitarian principles that they have defended by *deed* and by word, before the so-called bourgeois justice, they make known to us the foul tortures, the vulgar and stupid means employed to conduct them more rapidly to death.

Even in irons they are still those who have made the bourgeois capitalists tremble, and that is why every means is used against them, in order to make them disappear.

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Their outraged protest will be known, their words will be heard, while we await the hour, so much desired, when we can finally avenge them.

Dear Comrades,

We take advantage of an occasion that presents itself to bring you some news of the situation we face in the penal colonies where the bourgeois detain us.

When the bourgeois, who bear the name of magistrates, have struck at us, they have not dared to strike us with special laws enacting punishments created for us; they sense that they have already done something offensive in the joining together of the words convicts and anarchist, and they feign to apply to us their famous equality before the law.

Lies and hypocrisy, like everything done by a ruler. It is not the common penal servitude that they apply to us, but a penal servitude where all the cowardice of the tyrants and the hatred of the bourgeois weigh upon us.—You know by our previous letters that comrade Duval, the first who has been sent to Guyana, had to submit to all sorts of nuisances, each one as cowardly as the others, that his correspondence had been intercepted, and that finally, without any reason, he had been confined to the Île Royale (one of the Îles du Salut). That island, which is nothing but a rock in the middle of the ocean, has been chosen by the prison administration for the detainment of the convicts considered *incorrigible*, as well as those on the continent, either at Cayenne or at Maroni, who have been guilty of escape attempts, thefts crimes against persons and have been condemned again by the special maritime tribunal charged with judging the convicts. On that island there is a discipline more savage than anywhere, and the commandant there is a machine for handing out solitary confinement and irons.—Like comrade Duval, the comrades Pini and Girier, as well as the comrade Simon [Biscuit, accomplice of Ravachol], arrived in the last convoy, are all confined on that rock.

Our conduct with regard to the regulations, however, has never provided reasons for the internment imposed on us, but is instead to avoid the possibility of any escape on our part; and our jailers have judged it proper to isolate us in the midst of the ocean and to subject us to an iron discipline. Even that rigor does not seem to have satisfied them; for some time, instead of sleeping in the common hut, on a hammock, we are forced to sleep in the prison, in the narrow, filthy room where they cram the convicts condemned by the special tribunal to seclusion. There, we have a plank for a hammock, as if the ironclad doors, the bars and the ocean were not enough to hold us.

They chain us by the feet to an iron bar, which in the language of the penal colony is called the “spit.” — It is a spit, in fact, to which we are secured like game ready for roasting, while our persecutors, in the shelter of a mosquito net, rest on soft bunks that this good Administration furnishes them with the taxpayers’ money.

In the face of this last measure of cruelty, we have demanded the reasons of the commandant, who has responded to us in the language of the torturer who believes himself sheltered from the vengeance of his victims. I have, he responded to us, demanded this measure of the higher Administration in order to safeguard my personal security. We have the right to take such measures with regard to dangerous men, and you are dangerous since you are anarchists.

Dangerous!!! Read it, comrades! The anarchists are dangerous, but not those who have snatched women and children; not those who have chopped women in bits; not the cousin of the politician Reinach, the famous Altmayer. The administrators surround themselves with those men, and they have made them faithful servants whose mission is to double the guard by spying on the words and deeds that can be accomplished by the anarchist convicts, who have been able to preserve a certain respect with those charged with torturing them.—They are right to do so, by the way, as it is those who know how to hold up their heads and make themselves

respected who are dangerous, not those who crawl like vipers or who come like dogs to lick the hands of those who strike them. So, despite the danger that there is in remaining men, we will not weaken in the face of adversity and we will show our tyrants that the smock of a convict is still not thick enough to hide the heart of an anarchist.

We cannot depict for you here all the vexations of which we are the object. That would require entering into the detail of life in the penal colony and that would lead us too far afield, but what it is important to make known to you, because we want it to be known, is the barbarity with which the Administration has deprived us of our correspondence. Comrade Girier, in Guyana, has had no news of his family in 18 months. A single letter was given him on his arrival, and nothing since.

To inform you of all the crimes committed in the name of the law in this country of death would take volumes.—So you will see défilé before your eyes some wretches chained and pummeled with blows by the guard, and the cowardly convicts charged with aiding them in accomplishing their ferocities!

You will also see—an unbelievable thing!—you will see tied to a tree, at the foot of which is found an anthill, arms and legs plastered with brown sugar destined to attract the manioc ants, big as your little fingers and armed with sharp, powerful antennae.

We could continue on this subject, but what would be the use? When you know that there are so-called “civilized” savages, capable of committing the atrocities that we have cited, you will easily imagine what can arise from these barbaric brains

We will stop there, authorizing you to give our letter all that publicity that you can, for it is time that the people know what crimes are committed in their name; it places a grave responsibility on them, since they are the ones who give the power to other men who use it for the triumph of disgrace.

All men with a heart have the duty to think that those condemned by the magistrates in the name of the people have, if they

were guilty, only had a glimmer of crime in their thoughts, and have only been criminals for a moment; and the still more criminal society avenges itself in a cowardly manner on these wretches by committing crimes against their persons for the full duration of their existence.

Publish this letter so that all the comrades also know how we are treated, and so that those who still believe there is something good in the bourgeois tear off the last blindfold that blinds them.

Let them all also be convinced that we have preserved all our courage and our love for anarchy, and let them not believe that the men fallen in the struggle are men doomed for the future. That is false. Our courage is greater than ever, and today we also have the hatred that our persecutors have poured into our hearts.

Forward, comrades, have no fear of coming to join us, but fight. We are wretched here, our food is disgusting, our lodgings unhealthy, the climate murderous, the men are like a plague for us, but all of that cannot make an anarchist suffer, for in the midst of these miseries, we have within us a deep joy from having struggled for the truth.

And we have the good fortune to know that others still fight, and the firm hope of fighting once again.

Courage then, comrades, strike hard against the monster of authority, break the machine of exploitation, squeeze the canker of religion, and fly without fear the flag of Anarchy.

The hearts of the anarchist convicts accompany you in the battle.
Long live Anarchy!