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This is an excellent work, recommended to both anarchist activists and those interested in the rise of modern, revolutionary, anarchism. Berthier, a veteran French anarcho-syndicalist activist, has produced a work which successfully challenges both the standard narrative on the First International (written, as usual, by the winners) and those who seek to deny the actual history of anarchism and its roots in the European labour movement. Somewhat surprisingly, given this, that number includes Berthier himself.

Berthier's account shows how the *International Workers' Association* (IWA) was formed in 1864 by French and British trade unionists and quickly became a forum for socialist discussion over both strategy ("political action" against direct action unionism) and goals (nationalisation against workers' self-management); how Marx and Engels used bureaucratic

manipulation to secure their control over the body and, in so doing, marginalise themselves so completely they ended up expelling the majority of the organisation; that Bakunin came to play a key role in the IWA because he articulated the majority position, what came to be called (over thirty years later) "syndicalist" – namely, direct class struggle by means of federations of unions; and, finally, that Marx and Engels, regardless of claims by post-1914 Marxists, were social democrats and that their attempts to foster this position on the IWA killed it.

All of which, in my opinion, is correct and Berthier supports his arguments well (although he ignores some writings by Marx and Engels which shows how obviously social democratic they were, Lenin's confusion of "the state" with "the state machine" notwithstanding). He also seeks to understand why the "anti-authoritarian" IWA disappeared in 1877 in spite of being the majority of the European labour movement a mere five years previously. This is where he makes his only mistake.

He suggests that the anarchist movements that emerged within that body "marked a break with positions defended by Bakunin" (163) rather than being the continuation of them. Here he is on weaker ground – as can be seen from what can only be considered as a complete misreading of Malatesta's and Kropotkin's ideas on both organisation and syndicalism. Berthier is right that the IWA disappeared when many anarchists, inspired by ultra-revolutionary notions and an exaggerated suspicion of organisation provoked by the bureaucratic manoeuvres of Marx and his clique, started to build badly, if at all, federated anarchist groups rather than militant unions. This isolation from the working class proved fatal to the IWA – it is no surprise that the Spanish movement was an exception as it organised *both* federated unions and anarchist groups. So Berthier confuses mistakes by *some* anarchists (most of whom ended up social democrats!) with anarchism *as such* – as can be seen from both Malatesta and

Kropotkin urging others to follow the Spanish anarchists' example.

This isolation allowed Marxist social democracy to gain a predominance which, in turn, allowed the rewriting of the First International's history Berthier rightly laments in spite, as he also indicates, its confirmation of Bakunin's predictions. Ultimately, social democracy won out because organising militant unions is far harder than organising political groups. Moreover, it allowed an avenue of a practical activity which isolated anarchist groups did not. So, perhaps, some kind of workers' party was inevitable but it took Marx and Engels to portray it as anything other than reformism. So Berthier is right that we have much to gain from "Bakuninism" – active participation *as anarchists* in popular movements to encourage anarchist tactics and organisational principles to win reforms and build up a mass movement which goes beyond that. Whether its members vote in elections or not is irrelevant (although, sadly, not to followers of Marx who seem keen to repeat history and in so doing provide the farce).

In short, this is an important contribution to our understanding of the rise and fall of the IWA, its key debates and the birth of anarchism. It is a shame, then, that it wrongly contrasts a syndicalistic Bakunin to an individualistic Kropotkin when, in reality, the latter followed former's ideas and constantly pointed to the IWA as his ideal of how anarchists should be applying themselves. Hopefully, though, Berthier's work in spite of this flaw will help anarchists today avoid the mistakes in the 1870s he rightly – echoing, ironically, both Malatesta and Kropotkin – bemoans. Non-anarchists will gain a better understand of the habitually misrepresented Bakunin as well as where anarchism comes from so better to understand what it is (libertarian *socialism*) and, perhaps more importantly what it is not (i.e., just opposition to the state).

Finally, A.W. Zurbrugg should be praised not only for producing an excellent translation of Berthier's work but also

for supplementing it with an appendix which provides critical Congress resolutions and minutes plus other works. This is a valuable addition and one which makes you wish that James Guillaume's *L'internationale: documents et souvenirs* (Paris 1905–09) was available in English.

Social Democracy and Anarchism in the International Workers' Association 1864–1877

René Berthier
Translated by A.W. Zurbrugg
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