Anarcho
Voltairine De Cleyre: Her revolutionary ideas and legacy
1886 — 1912 : From Individualism to Communism
January 12, 2006

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A review and evaluation of Voltairine De Cleyre's politics, showing why modern radicals would gain from reading her. It uses three recently published books of her writings to discuss her ideas and their evolution from an individual to a communist anarchist and how it related to changes in North American anarchism. An important figure in Anarchist history whose ideas are of interest today, particularly as we still suffer from the patriarchy, capitalism and statism she opposed.

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As has been hopefully shown, it is wonderful that works by Voltairine are available again in book form. It is just unfortunate that there are three to choose from! Of the three, the best is the VdCR in terms of content and introductory material. Assuming they ignore the contributions of the editors, ER is a must read for any anarchist as it contains important works not found in VdCR (and vice versa). However, it is hard to determine whether the mistakes in ER as regards anarchism are the product of ignorance or malice. I would like to think the former but at times it is hard to believe that someone so obviously ignorant of anarchism as Sartwell is would be so happy to expose that ignorance to the world. For those seeking to understand Voltairine's ideas in the context of anarchism, GoF is far better as Delamotte understands both it and the social context Voltairine worked in. As GoF contains such seminal essays as "The Gates of Freedom" it is, I feel, also required reading.

Voltairine de Cleyre was an important anarchist thinker whose writings on numerous subjects (like anarchism, feminism, the class struggle, etc.) are still relevant today. An eloquent writer and speaker, her ideas should be of as useful to the current generation of anarchists and rebels as they were in her time. It is a shame that she was allowed to fall into such obscurity even within our movement. These books should help end that disgraceful state of affairs, restore her rightful place in the history of our movement and inspire new rebels to fight for a better society.

Voltairine de Cleyre distinguished herself as a leading intellectual, activist, speaker and writer within the American and worldwide anarchist movement. Emma Goldman called her' "the most gifted and brilliant anarchist woman America ever produced." Her activity and works covered many subjects, including anarchism, feminism, education and the labour movement.

Drawn to anarchism when aware of the injustice meted out to the Haymarket Martyrs, Voltairine initially was an individualist anarchist. However, she quickly moved to the revolutionary mutualism of her mentor Dyer D. Lum before working with Goldman and Berkman on their magazine "Mother Earth." While finally becoming a communist-anarchist, she advocated "Anarchism without Adjectives"

Her odyssey through anarchism reflected the change in American anarchism itself as America moved from a predominantly rural pre-capitalist society to a predominantly urban capitalist one

This article is a review of three books by and about one of the leading anarchists in America. It discusses her evolution from individualist to communist anarchism.

The Voltairine De Cleyre Reader, A. J. Brigati (Editor), AK Distribution (ISBN: 1902593871), £10.00

Gates of Freedom: ***Voltairine De Cleyre and the Revolution of the Mind***, Eugenia C. Delamotte, University of Michigan Press (ISBN: 0472098675), £17.95

Exquisite Rebel: ***The Essays of Voltairine De Cleyre – Anarchist, Feminist, Genius***, Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell (Editors), State University of New York Press (ISBN: 0791460940), £15.50

Typical. The anarchist movement waits nine decades for a book of Voltairine De Cleyre's writings to appear and three turn up at once! Was it worth the wait? Yes, most definitely.

In her short life, Voltairine de Cleyre distinguished herself as a leading intellectual, activist, speaker and writer within the American and worldwide anarchist movement. Emma Goldman called her *"the most gifted and brilliant anarchist woman America ever produced."* Her activity and works covered many subjects, including anarchism, feminism, education and the labour movement, bit sadly, both are virtually unknown today. Except for Paul Avirch's classic biography of 1978 (***"An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre"***), she has resided in near obscurity since her early death in 1912 at the age of 46. Only one collection of her writings has previously been published — *The Selected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre* in 1914, edited by Alexander Berkman and published by Goldman's ***"Mother Earth"***. Even this was hardly complete, leaving important works buried in little known papers and magazines. Since then, Voltairine has descended into undeserved obscurity.

Hopefully these new books with provide a new generation of radicals access to her ideas and activism. Of the three, two are collections of her writings, namely the **Voltairine de Cleyre Reader** (VdCR) and **Exquisite Rebel** (ER). The third, **Gates of Freedom** (GoF) aims to investigate her ideas and, as such, has little in the way of her writings. It has, however, an excellent overview of her life and ideas as well as commentary on her works by its author, Delamotte. Sadly, only a few articles, poems and letters by Voltairine are reprinted but these do include important texts. It is a shame Delamotte did not include all the works quoted in her essays as this would have ensured that it would have become the essential Voltairine book.

So there are significant differences between the three books. Undoubtedly, fans of Voltairine will want all three of them, particularly as each contains important works not found in

gued that Haymarket Martyrs had been hanged because they had said *"that real justice and real liberty might come on earth; that it was all false, all unnecessary, this wild waste of human life, of bone and sinew and brain and heart, this turning of people into human rags, ghosts, piteous caricatures of the creatures they had it in them to be, on the day they were born; that what is called 'economy', the massing up of things, is in reality the most frightful spending — the sacrifice of the maker to the made."* (quoted by Delamotte in **"Gates of Freedom"**) Hierarchy, in other words, destroyed an individual's full potential, a potential that only freedom could allow to blossom.

Indeed, this basic materialist position was a core aspect of her feminist arguments. For example, she while refuting the "sexism is natural" argument, she dismissed "natural rights" (a mainstay of much "anarcho"-capitalist dogma) by noting that *"**justice is progressive**! It does not follow that justice of one age is justice of the next. On the contrary the burden which our ancestors bore in no wise fits our shoulders ... I insist on this point of the progressiveness of justice, first because I do not wish you to think me a metaphysical dreamer, holding to the exploded theory that 'rights' are positive, unalterable, indefinite somethings passed down from one generation to another in some mysterious manner at the exact moment that humanity emerges from apedom."* (*"The Gates of Freedom"*)

So rather than substituting philosophical idealism for vulgar materialism, as Presley suggests, Voltairine argued that while people and their ideas are obviously shaped by their circumstances, they can become inspired by new ideas and seek to apply those ideas in practice, so changing circumstances. How far that is possible is dependent on the situation at hand. In this, she held similar views as Malatesta and other anarchists.

and shake off the mental chains that support it. Only this could ensure that the physical chains of capitalism and the state be ended. Her argument is the basic anarchist point that struggle not only changes the world, but it also changes those who take part in it. Thus her essay *"The Dominant Idea"* strikes a blow against the kind of vulgar materialism rampant in Marxist circles of the time (and, sadly, since). Human beings are part of the material world and so are their ideas. As such, the ideas in people's head play a role in how society develops just as changes in the economic base do. It is this interaction between people and environment that Voltairine bases her hope for social change on, urging people to remember that even in the hardest circumstances they make a difference – if they hold to their ideals and apply them.

Given this, ER editor Sharon Presley is wrong to state that *"[i]n place of the Marxian formula, 'Men are what circumstances make of them,' [Voltairine] substitutes the opposite, 'Circumstances are what men make of them.'"* In fact, Voltairine explicitly denies this: *"I contend that both these things are true up to the point where the combating powers are equalised, or one is overthrown. In other words, my conception of mind ... is not that it is a powerless reflection of a momentary condition of stuff and form, but an active modifying agent, reacting on its environment and transforming circumstances, sometimes slightly, sometimes greatly, sometimes, though not often, entirely."* (*"The Dominant Idea"*) In other words, she shares the more sophisticated *"Marxian formula"* expounded by the likes of Anton Pannekoek that the human mind is an active factor and ideas play an important role in social change (see, for example, his ***"Lenin as Philosopher"*** where he refutes Lenin's vulgar materialism that ideas are mere reflections of material circumstances).

Moreover, Voltairine clearly was aware that people's ideas were shaped by the society they found themselves in. That was why she wanted to change society! For example, she ar-

the others. For those who simply want a feel of her ideas, a short summary of the differences would be useful in determining which to read before discussing why you should read Voltairine's work and its importance for today's anarchists.

VdCR has 16 essays on anarchism, direct action, libertarian education and feminism. It has a biographical introduction, a "Short Chronology of Significant Events" and 23 of her poems. In contrast, ER reprints 21 essays and articles, grouped by theme (on topics like anarchism, justice, direct action, education, feminism, freethought and aesthetics). It has three biographical essays, two new ones by Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell, and a rarely reprinted one from Emma Goldman (although only Goldman's is worth reading). Both have 10 essays in common: "In Defense of Emma Goldman and the Right of Expropriation," Those Who Marry Do Ill," Anarchism and the American Tradition," "The Dominant Idea," "Direct Action," "The Economic Tendency of Free Thought," "Sex Slavery," "Crime and Punishment," "McKinley's Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint," and "The Eleventh of November 1887." GoF has 26 selections, including such important works as "The Gates of Freedom", "Sex Slavery" and "The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy."

Compared to ER, *VdCR* includes 6 extra essays (namely, "The Making of an Anarchist", "Francisco Ferrer," "Dyer D. Lum," "The Heart of Angiolillo," "The Mexican Revolt," and "The Drama of the Nineteenth Century"). ER, on the other hand, includes 11 pieces not in the Reader (namely, "Anarchism," "Why I am an Anarchist," "Events are the True Schoolmaster," "A Correction," "Secular Education," "Modern Educational Reform," "Our Present Attitude," "Literature the Mirror of Man," "The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy," "The Woman Question," and "The Political Equality of Woman."). It should also be noted that in ER but not in GOF is the feminist essay, "The Political Equality of Woman." In GOF but not in ER or VDCR are "The Gates of Freedom," "The Past and

Future of the Ladies Liberal League," The Death of Love," "The Hopelessly Fallen," (an edited) "The Commune Is Risen" and several poems and letters.

Sadly, this means by all three books contain essential essays by Voltairine and, consequently, no one book is more definitive than others. Of the three, VdCR is the best (and published by anarchists!) as it contains most of her key essays. ER, while having some essential writings, is marred by the editors' introductions and essays. If you can stomach or ignore these, ER is worth buying as it complements VdCR well by containing important texts like "Anarchism" and "Why I am an Anarchist." GOF's essays, in contrast, do an excellent job of explaining Voltairine's ideas and placing them in the context of the anarchist movement and its ideas.[1] Sadly, the selections of her works are limited in comparison to the other two books but it does contain such classics as *"The Gates of Freedom"* and other material not in the other two which makes it a good buy for any Voltairine fan.

Why Voltairine is important

So why is Voltairine so important? Simply because of the quality of her thought. Its richness makes it as fresh and relevant for radicals today as it was one hundred years ago. Though never as (in)famous as Emma Goldman, her ideas on anarchism, feminism, class struggle, freedom and capitalism are of equal importance.

[1] To those ignorant of "anarcho"-capitalism, it may seem strange that the academic author of GoF does a far better job of placing Voltairine's ideas in the context of the wider anarchist movement than the self-proclaimed "anarchist" editors of ER. However, those more familiar with that oxymoron will not be remotely surprised. Given how at odds it is with anarchism, it comes as no surprise that the editor's of ER get so many basic anarchist ideas wrong. The typical "anarcho"-capitalist is as ignorant of anarchism as the typical Marxist and both are not shy in inflicting their ignorance on others.

It is hard to find much closeness between an ideology which attacks the state for defending capitalist property rights and power with one which says it does not do it enough! Nor does it strike an anarchist as much of an improvement to see strikers shot by private police rather than state ones. Nor, for that matter, to be ordered about only by bosses rather than by bosses and their paid politicians. Nor to see "anarchists" attack strikers in the same tones as their bosses, opining that workers should "love it or leave it" while forgetting that "actually existing" capitalism is not even a capitalist "free market" in their rush to defend the wealthy few against those whose labour produces that wealth to begin with. As Delamotte (again) correctly notes, Voltairine's *"views should be sharply distinguished from contemporary Ayn Rand-style libertarianism, the key tenets of which are diametrically opposed to her views on capital and labour and her strong focus on union action as a means of bringing about social revolution."*

Presley is, however, right that *"Voltairine's plea for tolerance and cooperation among the anarchist schools strike a contemporary note."* Genuine anarchists should, at the very least, work together more in campaigns with goals in common and spend less time attacking ideas on the non-existent anarchist society of the future. However, "anarcho"-capitalism is simply not part of our (**socialist**) tradition and so, ultimately, if not usually part of the "external real enemy" are the defenders and apologists for one section of it (i.e. capitalists, landlords, etc.). It is no co-incidence, surely, that neo-liberalism has appropriated the rhetoric of the "libertarian" right to promote the consolidation of private power.

The Power of Ideas

For Voltairine, people had the power to shape their own fates, to rise above the degrading environment of hierarchical society

parison to modern day capitalist "anarchists", Tucker stressed that socialist-anarchism (his favoured term for individualist anarchism) aimed to end the exploitation of labour by capital and ensure that workers the full product of their labour.

Finally, it should be noted that Voltairine saw the reality of the situation clearly. As she noted in *"Direct Action"*:

"Nearly all laws which were originally framed with the intention of benefiting workers, have either turned into weapons in their enemies' hands, or become 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."

Things have not changed much since Voltairine's time. As is well known, bosses habitually ignore any legislation that does not suit them, ***particularly*** labour legislation. It is hard to take seriously anyone who uses this as an example of the evils of state intervention when those laws are so regularly flouted in practice. Even assuming that Presley's claim is remotely true, what choices does this restrict? Essentially, the choice of which boss women can be ordered about by and make profits for (given how the state skews the labour market in favour of the capitalists — not that this is worthy of mention). As Voltairine was well aware, exchanging sex slavery for wage slavery is hardly that grand a step towards women's liberty.

All of which suggests that Presley's claim that "anarcho"-capitalism should be included in the anarchist tradition seem to be quite hollow. She notes that in political circles there is *"more bitter in-fighting with those close in ideology than with the external real enemy."* Given that "anarcho"-capitalists do not consider capitalists as an enemy and spend much time defending their rights and power, it is understandable that they and anarchists fight each other. The champions of freedom can hardly have much in common with the champions of the capitalistic class.

Drawn to anarchism once she was aware of the injustice meted out to the Haymarket Martyrs, Voltairine initially was an individualist anarchist in the mould of Benjamin Tucker. However, she quickly saw the limitations of that position and moved to the revolutionary mutualism of her mentor Dyer D. Lum before working with Goldman and Berkman on their magazine **"Mother Earth."** While finally becoming a communist-anarchist, she (like Errico Malatesta) advocated *"Anarchism without Adjectives,"* recognising there was little point in splitting the movement over future social arrangements and that an anarchist society would see a multitude of social experimentation and diversity based on individual desires and objective circumstances.

Her odyssey through anarchism reflected the change in American anarchism itself as America moved (with help of the state) from a predominantly rural pre-capitalist society to a predominantly urban capitalist one. As she put it:

"Originally the American movement, the native creation which arose with Josiah Warren in 1829, was purely individualistic; the student of economy will easily understand the material and historical causes for such development. But within the last twenty years the communist idea has made great progress, owning primarily to that concentration in capitalist production which has driven the American workingman to grasp at the idea of solidarity, and, secondly, to the expulsion of active communist propagandists from Europe." (*"The Making of an Anarchist"*)

Her changing positions allow an insight into why social anarchism is more popular within anarchist circles than individualism or mutualism. It also indicates why anarchism and capitalism are incompatible. However, it is the common thread of hatred of hierarchy and the means to end it which makes Voltairine's ideas so important and worth reading today. Her emphasis on self-liberation, her awareness that we must free ourselves from mental as well as physical fetters and that the oppressed (such as women and workers) have to rely on their

own efforts and practice what they preach that makes her such an important thinker.

Anarchism, for her, not only raises the possibility of a better future, one which genuinely respects individual freedom, but also urges us to apply what we can of our ideas today. By encouraging the oppressed to revolt, we bring anarchism closer:

"Anarchism ... teaches the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all, and in which the opportunities for complete development of mind and body shall be the heritage of all ... [It] teaches that the present unjust organisation of the production and distribution of wealth must finally be completely destroyed, and replaced by a system which will insure to each the liberty to work, without first seeking a master to whom he [or she] must surrender a tithe of his [or her] product, which will guarantee his liberty of access to the sources and means of production... Out of the blindly submissive, it makes the discontented; out of the unconsciously dissatisfied, it makes the consciously dissatisfied ... Anarchism seeks to arouse the consciousness of oppression, the desire for a better society, and a sense of the necessity for unceasing warfare against capitalism and the State." (*"McKinley's Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint"*)

There are five main aspects of Voltairine's ideas which I feel are important to discuss in more detail and which anarchists will find of useful in their struggles today. First, obviously, is her feminism. Second, her views on the labour movement. Third is what her evolution from individualist to communist anarchist tells us about anarchism today. Fourthly, her awareness that capitalism is inherently authoritarian. Fifthly, and finally, her ideas on the power of ideas in social change. In the process, I will have to correct a few misconceptions raised by the editors of ER and indicate why "anarcho"-capitalism, unlike individualist anarchism, cannot be considered a form of anarchism.

This it simply wrong. While this blindness on the class nature of the modern state may afflict "anarcho"-capitalism, the same cannot be said of individualist anarchism. Benjamin Tucker, for example, recognised that *"capital had so manipulated legislation"* that they gained an advantage on the so-called free market which allowed them to exploit labour (*"State Socialism and Anarchism"*). As such, the state did not foster economic oppression by accident but because it was run by capitalists, for capitalists, and, consequently, enforced capitalist property rights and passed laws to skew the market in the interests of the capitalist class. It is more than mere co-incidence that, to re-quote Voltairine, *"through this precious monopoly ... the market of labour is so overstocked that workmen and workwomen are cutting each others' throats for the dear privilege of serving their lords"* (*"Sex Slavery"*)

What is significant about Presley's argument is her sole example of such laws: *"protective labour legislation, which perpetuates the idea that women are weak, and which protect men's interests at the expense of women."* Yes, of course, the main threat to women's freedoms in Bush's America is *"protective labour legislation"*! Obviously. Is it really the case that defence of the power of the boss seems so ingrained in "anarcho"-capitalists that, when faced with a right-wing government at the beck-and-call of the religious right, they can only think of labour legislation as an example of the way the state restricts women's choices? Apparently.

This is hardly a new occurrence. Benjamin Tucker pointed out that the "free market" capitalist Herbert Spencer, *"amid his multitudinous illustrations ... of the evils of legislation, he in every instance cites some law passed ostensibly at least to protect labour, alleviating suffering, or promote the people's welfare... But never once does he call attention to the far more deadly and deep-seated evils growing out of the innumerable laws creating privilege and sustaining monopoly."* Unsurprisingly, he dismissed Spencer as a *"champion of the capitalistic class."* In com-

ernment or husband to dictate to you. In other words, to fight authority and eliminate those rights which create it.

Which indicates the fallacy of Presley's comment that Voltairine's anarchism *"challenges activists such a liberals and communalist anarchists to be less emotionally sloppy and unconcerned about individual rights in their quest for justice."* Yet the whole point of anarchism is to ***increase*** the individual rights of those subject to authority, whether in the workplace, home or society as a whole. Until such time as their power is ended, this involves fighting the restrictions on freedom imposed by property owners and patriarchs as much as by the state.

For example, if workers restrict the bosses right to manage their time autocratically by forming a union, then this is obviously a reduction in the capitalist's "individual rights" to dictate what happens on their property (that is why bosses almost always hate unions). However, it is an increase in the individual rights (freedom) of the workers. Given the often visceral hatred of unions by "anarcho"-capitalists, it would be fairer to say that they are intellectually sloppy and unconcerned about individual rights in their quest for absolute property rights (I cannot bring myself to equate this with "justice"!).

Champions of the capitalistic class

Presley seeks to differentiate between types of anarchist feminists by contrasting their position on why women are exploited under "really existing" capitalism. She argues that the *"communist and social anarchist feminists believe that the States protects capitalism, which in turn exploits women. The individualist anarchist feminists believe that the State has fostered economic oppression and institutionalised gender role stereotypes through laws that restrict women's choices."*

Anarcha-feminism

Obviously, feminism (or the "Women Question" as it was called back then) was a major focus for Voltairine. Reading her feminist essays such as *"Sex Slavery"* gives you a glimpse why. They paint a horrifying picture of how stifling the lives of women were at that time.

Not having the vote was just the start of it. Women had few legal rights and married women became little more than the property of their husband. They could not dispose of their own property without the husband's consent, could not sign contracts, sue or be sued, nor did they have any custody rights. The father's parental right superseded the mother's. Violence within marriage against women was allowed (the concept of marital rape simply did not exist). Economically, there were few opportunities for either single or married women. Sweatshop conditions, long hours and low pay were the lot of working class women while those of the middle classes might be able to work as a teacher or nurse. Sex outside of marriage was considered shameful and that women may want and like it was not considered a possibility outside of radical circles (if at all). Birth control was nearly unheard of and abortion rights non-existent (Emma Goldman, for example, was imprisoned for publicising both).

Yet while, in the west, things have got better (thanks to the women's movement and activists and thinkers like Voltairine), sexism and patriarchy still remain and so does the relevance of Voltairine's work. Given that women have had the vote for some time, it is clear that sexism has deeper roots than can be got at by a mere cross on a bit of paper every four or five years. At a time when the mainstream women's movement asked for little more than the right to vote, Voltairine challenged the status quo on many levels. She refuted the idea that women were inferior to mean by nature, she demanded an end to people being assigned roles or tasks based on their sex, called for eco-

nomic independence for women, demanded autonomy inside and outside marriage for women, and showed how the church, state and capital oppressed women. Moreover, she placed this feminist analysis within a general critique of hierarchical social relations, including those between citizen and state as well as employee and employer, and urged the end of all forms of oppression and exploitation.

She rightly rejected the idea that patriarchy or sexism could be ignored by radicals as a side issue, arguing that you *"can have no free, or just, or equal society, nor anything approaching it, so long as womanhood is bought, sold, housed, clothed, fed, and **protected**, as a chattel."* She rejected the idea that fighting patriarchical relationships could wait until "after the revolution" (as many socialists and anarchists did at the time). They had to be fought now, as part of the general struggle for freedom for *"if social progress consists in a constant tendency towards the equalization of the liberties of social units, then the demands of progress are not satisfied so long as half society, Women, is in subjection... Woman ... is beginning to feel her servitude; that there is a requisite acknowledgement to be won from her master before he is put down and she exalted to — Equality. This acknowledgement is, **the freedom to control her own person**."* (*"The Gates of Freedom"*) However, she did not stop there. For Voltairine, whether in society, the workplace or in the home, the *"freedom to control her own person"* has to be wrested from authority whether it was exercised the state, bosses or by men.

Voltairine attacked the idea that gender roles are inherent in human nature, seeing them as the result of socialisation. In *"The Gates of Freedom,"* she skilfully refuted one pseudo-scientific explanation of women's inferior position in society by demonstrating the author's assumptions simply reflected the society he was trying to defend. She stressed that while inequality bred the social and mental habits that are used to justify it, *"equal opportunity, and the same environment which developed the present intellectual superiority of man will soon de-*

anarchistic. The same applies to the capitalist firm. This means that the social relations within an association are what makes it libertarian or not and, consequently, being voluntary is a necessary, but not sufficient, requirement for an anarchy. It is this simple logic that shows why "anarcho"-capitalism is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.

This does not mean that an anarchist society would ban experimentation except for a few approved options. It is likely that as well as different types of anarchist communities, a free society may also see voluntary non-anarchist ones as well. Religious people may create theocracies, Marxists state socialist regimes, "anarcho"-capitalists their system of privatised states enforcing the power of the landlord and capitalist, and so on. However, none of them are anarchist simply because each would be marked by hierarchy (in varying degrees).

Yet, consent and ability to exit does not equate to freedom — as any worker subject to a boss can tell you. And if they did mark a system anarchist then "anarcho"-capitalists really have no cause for complaint about the current system, particularly as they can now immigrate to Somalia (a country touted as "anarcho"-capitalist by some of them). After all, most people see nothing wrong with statism just as most women see nothing wrong with patriarchy (*"The sad part of it is, the majority of women think it is all right"* and are *"content to thus sacrifice their individuality,"* Voltairine de Cleyre, *"The Gates of Freedom"*).

Of course anarchists seek to change people's mind about this and encourage them to resist and destroy all forms of hierarchy. Which makes Sartwell's comment that Voltairine's anarchism meant *"[o]ne was to leave others free not only to live as they liked and to be as they liked."* How to explain, then, Voltairine's constant arguments and agitation against sexism and capitalism? She hardly thought that women or working people should be "free" to be oppressed but instead urged that they fight for their freedom precisely in order to *"be as they liked."* This meant using direct action to fight against the freedom of the boss, gov-

really make the system "anarchist"? Hardly – it is voluntary feudalism, nothing more.[5]

There is a long history of sophisticated liberal defenders of slavery, monarchy and other forms of autocratic governments based on consent. "Anarcho"-capitalists, like other "libertarian" capitalists, are firmly part of this tradition. Take slavery, where the contractual arguments for slavery go back to Roman times and, ironically, re-raised by right-wing "libertarian" Robert Nozick who argued that an individual should be able *"to sell himself into slavery."* Locke argued along the same lines, except he called it *"drudgery"* rather than slavery (which he accepted and profited from, rationalising it as a result of a just war). The same logic applied to dictatorship as well, with Nozick arguing that *"if one starts a private town ... persons who chose to move there or later remain there would have no right to a say in how the town was run, unless it was granted to them by the decision procedures for the town which the owner had established."* Locke, likewise, favoured government by property owners (or their representatives) whose decisions the property-less majority had no say in and would have to abide by unless they left the regime. That this logic is currently applied to economic social relations goes without saying, with the restrictions of freedom created under wage labour justified purely in terms of consent.

Clearly, being voluntary is hardly a sufficient requirement for a community or organisation to be considered an anarchy if within them the few govern the many. The current democratic state is "voluntary" — no one forces you to live in a specific state — yet that does not make it an anarchy. Similarly, a fascist party is a voluntary association but that hardly makes it

[5] I'm deliberately ignoring the issue of inequality and how conditions ensure that the many sell their liberty to the few. "Anarcho"-capitalists, unlike anarchists, ignore how social inequality raises questions about what counts as voluntary entry into a contract. The circumstances created by capitalist property rights, in other words, effectively turn freedom into little more than the freedom to pick a master.

velop the intellectual equality of woman. We are inferior in these things, because we have never had the chance to be equal."

As an anarchist, she based her ideas on reaching such an environment on the need for self-liberation, on the oppressed using direct action to break their chains. As she put it, *"**as a class** I have nothing to hope from men ... No tyrant ever renounced his tyranny until he had to. If history ever teaches us anything it teaches this. Therefore my hope lies in creating rebellion in the breasts of women."* This implied that women had to look to themselves for change, not men or the state. *"I never expect men to give us liberty,"* she argued. *"No, Women, we are not **worth** it, until we **take** it ... By insisting on a new code of ethics founded on the law of equal freedom: a code recognising the complete individuality of woman. By making rebels wherever we can. By ourselves **living our beliefs**... We are revolutionists. And we shall use propaganda by speech, deed, and most of all life — **being** what we teach."* (*"The Gates of Freedom"*)

This advocacy that women must put into practice their ideas of equality is an important contribution of Voltairine's. She herself lived in conformity with her feminist principles and this forced those who came into contact with her to confront her ideas, and their own sexism and assumptions, in concrete not just abstract terms. This was the case within the anarchist movement itself, which (in theory) was meant to oppose patriarchy along with all other forms of hierarchy. In practice, this was not the case, as Voltairine points out in the essay *"Sex Slavery"* even those who repudiate the State still clung to the notion that they were the heads of families and that a woman's place was in the home (the anarcha-feminist **Mujeres Libres** group in 1930s Spain generated considerable hostility from male anarchists who failed to apply their libertarian principles in the home).

Marriage was a key subject for Voltairine, with her considering it as inherently authoritarian, *"the sanction for all manner of bestialities."* In marriage, women became the property of their

husbands, *"a bonded slave, who takes her master's name, her master's bread, her master's commands, and serves her master's passion"* (*"Sex Slavery"*) Voltairine, like other anarchist feminists, did not just question the unfair nature of marriage laws of the time. She broadened her attack by repudiating institutional marriage and the conventional family structure, seeing in these institutions the same authoritarian oppression as they saw in other forms of hierarchy, particularly the state. Marriage, due to its hierarchy, was an institution that crippled the growth of the free individual.

Although she valued love, Voltairine's rejection of formal marriage was extended to the free unions other anarchists favoured. She considered that living together limited the autonomy of those involved and that even the most anarchistic of couples would end up recreating the evils of patriarchy against their will. This led her to call for lovers to have separate living quarters even when they were a couple in case it produced dependency and, as a consequence, the end of individuality. *"It is the permanent dependent relationship,"* Voltairine wrote, *"which is detrimental to the growth of individual character to which I am unequivocally opposed."* (*"The Woman Question"*)

She rejected the idea that the state could help women, noting that mainstream socialist-feminists advocated *"a scheme of State organisation which they call co-operation, whose motto instead of equal liberty is equal slavery, and one of whose intents is to make woman dependant on 'the State' instead of upon a husband."* (*"The Gates of Freedom"*) Women had to free themselves, by their own efforts (with help from men who support their cause, of course). To depend on an outside power would simply mean a change from private to state patriarchy in the same way that nationalisation would turn private capitalism into state capitalism.

This, however, did not mean that Voltairine did not consider herself a socialist. Like other anarchists, she knew that anarchism was part of the socialist tradition. Consequently, she

under individualist anarchism labour would not be exploited and non-labour income (i.e. profit, interest and rent) would disappear (and, as noted above, logically his ideas point towards co-operative labour and self-employment as the economic basis of anarchy). Moreover, they, like Bakunin and Kropotkin, followed Proudhon and opposed capitalist property rights in favour of possession ("occupancy and use").

"Anarcho"-capitalism, in contrast, is fanatically anti-socialist and argues that not only are profit, interest and rent not exploitation, they would continue in their system. Their support of capitalist property rights and the power they produce goes without saying and they are, almost always, anti-labour and anti-union. Whether she would have welcomed into the movement a theory so at odds with the anarchist tradition is, obviously, a moot point as she is dead. However, it seems unlikely. Given that Voltairine recognised that "voluntary" tyranny is still oppression, it seems likely that she would join with almost all anarchists in rejecting the claim that "anarcho"-capitalism is a form of anarchism.

Is Voluntarism enough?

This analysis raises the question of whether a regime being voluntary is enough, in and of itself, to count as being anarchist. "Anarcho"-capitalists claim it is and so dismiss arguments that their support for capitalism automatically excludes them from the anarchist movement. Yet the obvious answer is no and the reason is clear. If the world were divided between 20 monarchs, all of whom proclaimed their decisions absolute over their land and those who lived there, would being able to change monarch if another one allowed you to settler in their regime

wives leave?" she pointed out how the state had restricted the options of working people so that the fear of unemployment and insecurity made them "consent" to such abuse:

"Will you tell me where they will go and what they shall do? When the State, the legislators, has given to itself, the politicians, the utter and absolute control of the opportunity to live; when, through this precious monopoly, already the market of labour is so overstocked that workmen and workwomen are cutting each others' throats for the dear privilege of serving their lords ... when seeing and hearing these things reported every day, the proper prudes exclaim, 'Why don't the women leave?,' they simply beggar the language of contempt." (*"Sex Slavery"*)

She recognised that individual freedom meant little without equality and the necessary "*material conditions"* were needed to ensure *"equal chances for every one to make the most of himself"* otherwise *"freedom, either of though, speech, or action, is equally a mockery."* Only when working people organise, *"take possession of land, mines, factories, all the instruments of production"* and *"conduct their own industry without regulative interference from law-makers or employers"* would "*the only condition which can guarantee free speech (and no paper guarantee needed)"* be achieved. Until then, workers would be *"begging for the opportunity to be a slave, receiving the insults of bosses and foreman ... in these factories they built, whose machines they wrought."* Ultimately, when fighting oppression *"we may hope for the only help which counts for aught — Self-Help."* (*"In Defence of Emma Goldman and the Right of Expropriation"*)

Given all this, Voltairine's support for *"Anarchism without Adjectives"* really does not imply that "anarcho"-capitalism belongs in the anarchist camp or that Voltairine would have considered it as a valid type of anarchism. At her time, all the schools of anarchism (individualist, mutualist, collectivist, syndicalist and communist) considered themselves socialist. Tucker, for example, always called himself a socialist-anarchist and while he was not opposed to wage labour, he argued that

argued that working men and women should co-operate to create a *"socialistic nursery"* so that they can free themselves from having to look after children by themselves: *"Thus Socialism disposes of the physical bars to independence."* (*"The Gates of Freedom"*)

Lastly, Voltairine was aware that the evils of patriarchy fed into other aspects of live, such as anti-social acts. Refuting the idea that the state was required to stop crime, she noted how her *"inquiry into the criminal question made plain that the great mass of crimes are crimes against property; even those crimes arising from jealousy are property crimes resulting from the notion of a right of property in flesh. Allowing property to be eradicated, both in practice and in spirit, no crimes are left but such are the acts of the mentally sick."* (*"Why I am an Anarchist"*) When women were no longer considered the property of their husbands (as they currently were/are) then their partners would be less likely to be possessive about them.

Her vision of a society in which people related to each other as people rather than things to be owned and used, is still inspiring. It would benefit all — even the working class men who gain, however marginally, from sexism – in terms of the richness of life it will produce. No longer crushed by the gender roles both had to restrict themselves to, men and women would be free to develop their full potential, tastes and talents.

Anarcha-syndicalism

Like Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and a host of other anarchists (individualist and communist alike), Voltairine viewed the labour movement as a key means of creating anarchism. Indeed, her ideas (like other communist-anarchists) reflected most of the key ideas of anarcho-syndicalism (even if she did not use the term). This is understandable, given that the exploitation of labour is at the root of most social problems

and that, as with sexism, only those subject to oppression in the workplace can end it.

She recommends the typical anarchist position that workers *"must learn that their power does not lie in their voting strength, that their power lies in their ability to stop production."* Needless to say, her prediction that all a socialist party *"could do, even if its politicians remained honest, would be to ... win certain political or economic palliatives"* has been proven time and time again. (*"Direct Action"*) The success of such parties in Europe, for example, resulted in knocking a few rough edges off of capitalism, not socialism or anything remotely like it.

Her comments on the future of the labour movement are worth quoting as they are still relevant today:

"I quite agree that the sources of life, and all the natural wealth of the earth, and the tools necessary to co-operative production, must become freely accessible to all. It is a positive certainty to me that unionism must widen and deepen its purposes, or it will go under; and I feel sure that the logic of the situation will gradually force them to see it. They must learn that the workers' problem can never be solved by beating up scabs, so long as their own policy of limiting their membership by high initiation fees and other restrictions helps to make scabs. They must learn that the course of growth is not so much along the line of higher wages, but shorter hours, which will enable them to increase membership, to take in everybody who is willing to come into the union. They must learn that if they want to win battles, all allied workers must act together, act quickly (serving no notice on bosses), and retain their freedom to do so at all times. And finally they must learn that even then (when they have a complete organisation) they can win nothing permanent unless they strike for everything — not for a wage, not for a minor improvement, but for the whole natural wealth of the earth. And proceed to the direct expropriation of it all!" (*"Direct Action"*)

Looking at the US labour movement, her prediction that a narrow purpose would see it "go under" seems vindicated.

"**If** the State may be said too properly **own** its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there **is** no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. **So long** as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property."

An anarchist could not have come up with a better explanation why capitalism is incompatible with anarchism! Rothbard attempted to save his ideology from this obvious contradiction by trying to explain the difference between these two identical forms of hierarchy. He argued that the state could not own its territory as it was "unjustly" acquired (i.e. by force). Ignoring the obvious objection that the modern distribution of property is just as much a product of force as is the modern state, anarchists are struck by how weak this argument is. According to Rothbard, something can look like a state (i.e. have the "ultimate decision-making power" over an area) and act like a state (i.e. "make rules for everyone" who lives in an area, i.e. govern them) but not be a state. This not a viable position for obvious reasons. If the state is to be opposed then so must capitalist property — for reasons, ironically enough, "anarcho"-capitalism itself makes clear!

This shows why Voltairine called capitalism a *"form of slavery"* (*"Direct Action"*) and why mutualist and communist anarchists reject the *"notion that men cannot work together unless they have a driving-master to take a percentage of their product"* and think that in an anarchist society *"the real workmen will make their own regulations, decide when and where and how things shall be done."* By so doing workers would free themselves *"from the terrible bondage of capitalism."* (*"Anarchism"*)

Even when Voltairine was an individualist anarchist, she effectively refuted Block's argument. When replying to the stock answer concerning abusive husbands *"Why don't the*

wage slavery, unless they subscribe to the rather implausible assertion that vacating your will for eight plus hours a day for weeks, months, or years on end is fine but not over 24 hours a day via marriage.

For the "libertarian" capitalist, authoritarianism is only wrong when it is the state doing it. If bosses are authoritarian, then that is their right as lord and master. This can be seen from Walter Block, a leading right-libertarian ideologue, when he discusses sexual harassment in the workplace:

*"Consider the sexual harassment which continually occurs between a secretary and a boss ... while objectionable to many women, [it] is not a coercive action. It is rather part of a package deal in which the secretary agrees to **all** aspects of the job when she agrees to accept the job, and especially when she agrees to **keep** the job. The office is, after all, private property. The secretary does not have to remain if the 'coercion' is objectionable."*

Needless to say, Block would have a fit if you suggested that he "consents" to pay tax to the government because he decides to remain a citizen of it. Why should the words "private property" make an action acceptable or not? If governments did what bosses habitually do, such as ban free speech (no talking back), ban freedom of association (no unions), tell people want to wear, how to behave and what to do, few people would fail to label it for what it is, tyranny.

This is confirmed, ironically, by leading "anarcho"-capitalist Murray Rothbard' and his attempt to show the difference between private property and the state. In the somewhat misnamed "**The Ethics of Liberty"**, he argued that the state "arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area." He then notes that "[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc." This meant that:

After successfully winning economic improvements for their members, they left it at that and forgot that people do not live by bread alone. Accepting capitalism, they ended up adjusting themselves to it and when the capitalists saw they could do without them, they were handicapped in fighting back. In this, they repeated the same mistakes popular movements had made before:

"None of them has attempted a final solution of the social war. None of them, except the Industrial Workers [of the World], has recognised that there is a social war, inevitable so long as present legal-social conditions endure. They accepted property institutions as they found them." (*"Direct Action"*)

Sadly, though, none of these books contain her *"A Study of the General Strike in Philadelphia"* which would be of interest of any union member seeking better ways of fighting their bosses. It is, however, contained in ***"Anarchy!: An Anthology of Emma Goldman's 'Mother Earth'"*** edited by Peter Glassgold (an essential read which also contains the following by Voltairine: "Anarchism and American Traditions", "The Paris Commune", "They Who Marry Do Ill", "The Dominant Idea", "The Feast of Belshazzar", "The Philadelphia Farce", "On Liberty" and "The Mexican Revolution")

That article saw her conclude the necessity of workers to organise by industry rather than by trade and to strike quickly to maximise impact and euphemism (and why give the boss time to prepare?). She also urged the sit-down strike, two decades before its use by American workers in the 1930s: *"it must be the strike which will **stay in** the factory, not **go out**? which will guard the machines and allow no scab to touch them? Which will organise, not to inflict deprivation on itself, but on the enemy? which will take mover industry and operate it for the workers, not for franchise holders, stockholders, and officeholders"*

I should also point out that Voltairine's argument that workers' must expropriate the capitalists had been a long standing one. In 1893, for example, she argued that when work-

ers *"conceive the possibility of a complete international federation of labour, whose constituent groups shall take possession of land, mines, factories, all the instruments of production ... , in short, conduct their own industry without regulative interference from law-makers or employers, then we may hope for the only help which counts for aught — Self-Help."* While noting that she was *"an individualist,"* the only difference between this and her later, communist, position was that she thought that the workers would *"issue their own certificates of exchange"* and that *"competition in one form or another will always exist."* (*"In Defence of Emma Goldman and the Right of Expropriation"*) Within 15 years, she would change her mind.

Anarcha-Communist

The editors of ER argue that historian Paul Avrich "*dispels the myth created by erroneous claims of Rudolph Rocker and Emma Goldman that Voltairine became a communist anarchist.*" Like Avrich, they base this claim on a note of 1907 (*"A Correction"*) in which Voltairine replied to claims she was an anarcho-communist by saying that *"I am not now and never have been at any time a Communist."* Yet Voltairine lived for another 5 years, more than enough time for her opinion to change. The evidence suggests she did.

Looking at *"Why I am an Anarchist"* (ironically reprinted in ER), we find Voltairine had concluded *"that the best thing ordinary workingmen or women could do was to organise their industry to get rid of money altogether ... Let it be this way: Let there be an end of the special monopoly on securities for money issues. Let every community go ahead and try some member's money scheme if it wants ... But better for the working people let them all go. Let them produce together, co-operatively rather than as employer and employed; let them fraternise group by group, let each use what he needs of his own product, and deposit the rest*

of freedom which made her oppose capitalism: *"the instinct of liberty naturally revolted not only at economic servitude, but at the outcome of it, class-lines."* (*"Why I am an Anarchist"*) This is, obviously, of relevance today and one anarchists would stress (particularly as capitalism is returning more and more to the form that Voltairine faced one hundred years ago).

Voltairine (like other socialists) did see that capitalism had positive aspects in that it broke down previous forms of oppression and created the potential for a better world. In particular, she argued that capitalists did break down some barriers to women by seeking to employ (exploit) them. This gave them the opportunity to earn money and become independent of men. However, this did not stop her recognising it was a partial liberation: *"But now the child of Feudalism. Capitalism, with its iron-shod feet, tramps the blood from the heart of woman, who is no more the household goddess, but the tool which fashions profits."* (*"The Political Equality of Woman"*)

Her opposition to capitalism flowed naturally from her opposition to patriarchy. Thus we find Voltairine arguing in 1890:

"Break up the home? Yes, every home that rests in slavery! Every marriage that represents the sale and transfer of the individuality of one of its parties to the other! Every institution, social or civil, that stands between man and his right; every tie that renders one a master, another a serf." (*"The Economic Tendency of Freethought"*)

This perspective explains her move from individualism to mutualism, as wage labour obviously fits this criteria. The key evil in patriarchy is that one person in the contract becomes dominated by the other (as Voltairine noted, the marriage contract meant the *"sale of the control of your person in return for 'protection and support'"* (*"The Gates of Freedom"*)). Yet this is also the case for the wage contract. The difference is that the wage contract involves the sale of the control of your person for some of, rather than all, the hours in the day. Thus a consistent feminist, like a consistent anarchist, must also oppose

(*"A correction"*) The only logical anarchist position is *"that some settlement of the whole labour question was needed which would not split up the people again into land possessors and employed wage-earners."* (*"Why I am an Anarchist"*) Hence her movement towards mutualism and then communism — it was the only logical position to take in a rapidly industrialising America which had made certain concepts of individualism obsolete.

Finally, we must note that this contradiction in individualism anarchism is not an essential part of the theory. Rather, it flows from the social circumstances in which it was created, a pre-capitalist rural economy. In a modern industrialised economy, the contradiction resolves itself in two ways. Either its adherents turn, like Voltairine, to co-operative labour associations to work industry (as per Proudhon's mutualism) for only co-operatives ensure that workers govern themselves during working hours, occupy and use the land in question and gain the full fruit of their labour. Or they, to quote Kropotkin, "*abandon the ranks of the anarchists, and are driven into the liberal individualism of the classical economist"* (today, this may mean they become "anarcho"-capitalists).

Experiencing the reality of capitalism, Voltairine could only take the first option and our movement benefited immensely from it. Her attacks on capitalism in the name of liberty are essential reading for any modern anti-capitalist.

Capitalism: The Enemy of Freedom and Women

Some disagree. The editors of ER stress that Voltairine's relevance for today includes her *"radical insistence on the inherently authoritarian nature of the Church and the State and their joint role in oppressing women."* Yet you would have to be seriously ideologically blind to ignore the fact that she also saw capitalism as being inherently authoritarian. Indeed, it was her love

in the storage-houses, and let those others who need goods have them as occasion arises." Just to state the obvious, getting *"rid of money altogether"* is communism and, consequently, Voltairine is advocating communist-anarchism as the best solution to the social question.

Four years later, in 1912 (the year of her death), she was arguing in an essay on the Paris Commune that while *"making war upon the State, she had not made war upon which creates the State ... the Commune respected property ... [and] had left common resources in private hands ... In short, though there were other reasons why the Commune fell, the chief one was that ... the Communards were not Communists. They attempted to break political chains without breaking economic ones."* (*"The Commune Is Risen"*) Two things stand out. Firstly, her analysis echoes Kropotkin's standard communist-anarchist analysis of the Commune and its failings. Secondly, it seems strange that she would bemoan the fact that the Communards' chief failing was that they shared her own economic position!

Avrich is right that Voltairine did not state she was a communist-anarchist in print but it seems clear that by 1908 she held those views. As such, Rudolf Rocker was correct when he stated that *"Voltairine de Cleyre, one of the most gifted women which America has produced, turned to the ideas of Peter Kropotkin and of communist anarchism."* It seems likely, therefore, that if she had lived longer she would have publicly proclaimed her anarcho-communism.

This, of course, does not mean she rejected *"anarchism without adjectives"* or the freedom for people to live under any economic regime they wanted (anarchist or not). As such, an evolution towards anarcho-communism does not exclude her comment that *"I am an Anarchist, simply, without economic labels attached."* This is because communist-anarchists have always stressed that in an anarchist society people who did not want to live as communists would be free to work their own land or tools.

The (social) anarchist as violent authoritarian?

It is a strange irony of ER that it seems intent on portraying anarcho-communists as violent psychopaths while, at the same time, bemoaning sectarianism in the anarchist movement!

This can be seen in the introduction to Voltairine's classic essay *"Direct Action"* by Crispin Sartwell where the reader is informed that in *"the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'direct action' was a euphemism for violence, and in particular assassination, as a mode of political agitation."* It was no such thing, as Voltairine made clear:

"Every 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. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.

"Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts; many persons will recall the action of the housewives of New York who boycotted the butchers, and lowered the price of meat; at the present moment a butter boycott seems looming up, as a direct reply to the price-makers for butter." (*"Direct Action"*)

If any term was so considered it was ***"Propaganda by the Deed"***, not ***"Direct Action."***[2] The latter expression was popularised by French syndicalists in the 1890s to mean any form of resistance to authority conducted by those involved. To state otherwise is to show either ignorance or a desire to smear. Ironically, in *"Direct Action,"* Voltairine bemoans this confusing of

[2] Interestingly, though, Voltairine happily used *"Propaganda by the Deed"* in the correct, original, meaning of applying your ideas in practice in her 1890 essay *"The Gates of Freedom."*

workers get their wages. Given that market price changes, it is extremely unlikely that this will always equal the cost price of the product. As such, the situation that an individual worker would get his "natural" wage would be unlikely and so they would be exploited by their employer. At best, individualist anarchism would ensure that, as a group, employees would get their full product but this collectivism runs at odds with their philosophy and would be cold comfort to the individual in question.

There are two more reasons why individualist anarchist acceptance of (non-exploitative) wage labour is in contradiction with its principles. The first lies with their own principle of *"occupancy and use"* as regards land. Obviously, the employer hardly "occupies and uses" the land their capital stands on — their workers do. It seems highly illogical to propose *"occupancy and use"* for land (and housing) but not for workplaces. Why is a landlord owning 1,000 square metres of land and employing 100 people to work it unacceptable while an employer owning capital that covers the same area but employees 10,000 workers acceptable? Why should the farmer be allowed to occupy the land they use but not the worker?

The second is that the boss takes to themselves a monopoly of decision making power over their property and, consequently, their workers are subject to their will. The owner can tell those who use their property what to do, how to do it and when. That is, they are the sole authority over the workplace and those who use it. However, according to Tucker, the state can be defined (in part) as *"the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it."* Why should the boss's assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it any better? So any anarchism which proclaims that wage labour is libertarian is fundamentally flawed.

Little wonder Voltairine argued that she had become *"convinced that a number of the fundamental propositions of individualistic economy would result in the destruction of equal liberty."*

or small machinery which can be moved about; but what about the gigantic machinery necessary to the operation of a mine, or a mill? It requires many to work it. If one owns it, will he not make the others pay tribute for using it?" (*"Why I am an Anarchist"*) As such, a free market may not result in a non-exploitative society and, consequently, it would not be socialist and so not anarchist.

This problem was recognised by Tucker himself in the postscript to a 1911 London edition of his famous essay *"State Socialism and Anarchism."* While arguing that when he wrote his essay 25 years earlier *"the denial of competition had not effected the enormous concentration of wealth that now so gravely threatens social order"* and so a policy of mutual banking might have stopped and reversed the process of accumulation, the way in 1911 was *"not so clear."* This was because the tremendous capitalisation of industry now made the money monopoly a convenience, but no longer a necessity. Admitted Tucker, the *"trust is now a monster which … even the freest competition, could it be instituted, would be unable to destroy"* as the *"concentrated capital"* could set aside a sacrifice fund to bankrupt smaller competitors and continue the process of expansion of reserves. Thus natural barriers to entry, resulting from the process of capitalist production and accumulation, had ensured that mutualism could no longer reform capitalism away and the problem of the trusts *"must be grappled with for a time solely by forces political or revolutionary"* (although he recommended neither).

Clearly, then, *"the freest competition"* in an industrially developed capitalist society would not result in an anarchist society (and this more than anything shows the differences between individualist anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism). Individual ownership of large-scale industry would not, therefore, end exploitation. Equally, the owner of a factory would not own simply his (labour) share of the total product produced within it. He (and it usually is a he) owns everything produced while

direct action with terrorism to smear anarchists (*"This was either very ignorant or very dishonest of the journalists"*). We can only wonder what she would have thought of a self-proclaimed "anarchist" doing exactly the same thing in a book of her work!

Sartwell then states that Voltairine *"also insisted on a wider interpretation of the phrase, considering 'direct' action any action outside mainstream electoral politics. And even at her most radical, Voltairine carefully disassociated herself from what we would today all 'terrorism.'"* Thus Voltairine's correct interpretation becomes "wider", "radical" is equated to "violent" and "direct action" yet again with terrorism. One would hate to think what he would write if he were trying to smear social anarchists in some kind of sectarian attack!

We soon find out, when Sartwell states that the *"communist anarchists of Europe … engaged in terrorism as well as more widespread and systematic forms of violent action as strategies of agitation. The great Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), for example, seemingly formed a secret violent cell every few weeks, and indeed seemed at times more enthusiastic about conspiracy than violence itself."* All of which is nice and vague. Yes, a few anarchists did commit acts of violence, generally against oppressors, but the vast majority did not. Why generalise from a handful of people to label a whole movement? Unsurprisingly, Sartwell fails to note that the anarchist acts of violence were almost always in response to much more violent acts of state or employer terrorism. Equally unsurprisingly, Delamotte provides the necessary context when she notes that police, militia, and private security forces harassed, intimidated, bludgeoned, and shot workers routinely in conflicts that were just as routinely portrayed in the media as worker violence rather than state violence. So given this, the employers' were guilty of *"more widespread and systematic forms of violent action"* than anarchists have ever been.

And what, exactly, are the *"more widespread and systematic forms of violent action"* beyond these (few) acts of terrorism? I

am at a lost to think of any. Does he mean anarchist revolts in Spain in the 1930s? Or anarchist resistance to Bolshevik and White dictatorship in the Ukraine or fascism in Italy and Spain? If so, then he should say so. It seem unlikely as neither were "strategies of agitation" but rather acts of self-defence against tyranny or attempts to end exploitation and oppression once and for all. Either way, they were not comparable to the atrocities of modern terrorism or even the (usually revengeful) violence of "propaganda by the deed."

As for Bakunin, there is no evidence that he nor any of his secret organisations advocated or committed acts of violence nor that they were set up to do so. At best you could say his organisations, like communist-anarchists, aimed for revolutions and revolutions can be violent (usually when those in power resist attempts to overthrow them). Just as well Sartwell used the word *"seemingly,"* it excuses him of having to provide any evidence for his claims.

Lastly, not content with smearing communist-anarchists, he then smears Voltairine herself. He presents a piece of second-hand hearsay as "evidence", stating that according to Christine Stansell, the Greenwich Village raconteur Mabel Dodge said *"I felt they had Plans ...and many times they referred to the day when blood would flow in the streets of New York."* He then goes on to note that Berkman had plotted to shot Frick (and does not put it in context by failing to mention that Frick's private cops had murdered strikers). Then he states that there *"is no reason to think that Voltairine engaged in conspiracies of this kind, but also no reason to think that, by the end of her life, she would not have, if she believed that such actions were likely to be effective."* That both Goldman and Berkman, like almost all anarchists, firmly rejected individual acts by that time seems not to bother him.

Unsurprisingly, as in most matters relating to anarchism, Delamotte gets it right rather than ER's self-proclaimed "anarchist" editor. She notes that by 1901, Berkman realised that

good, and are rendered vicious merely by the interference by the State." She notes that the *"extreme Individualist"* argued that *"the system of employer and employed, buying and selling, banking, and all the other essential institutions of Commercialism"* would exist under their form of anarchism.

Property in land, however, would be modified so that it could be held by individuals *"for such time and in such allotments as they use only."* (*"Anarchism"*) However, individualist anarchists argued that workers would no longer be exploited as under capitalism. This was because profit, interest and rent could not exist and the worker would get the full product of his or her labour in wages.

In the economic context in which individualist anarchism was born and developed, this was a radical solution to social problems. Predominantly rural, the abolition of capitalist property rights in land would have turned most workers into self-employed farmers and increased the bargaining power of remaining employees drastically. The question becomes whether this, in itself would have ended the exploitation of labour (i.e. capitalism) and whether it was a viable solution in a modern industrial economy.

Voltairine came to the conclusion it would not. Discussing the limitations of the Single Tax land reform, she noted that *"the stubborn fact always came up that no man would employ another to work for him unless he could get more for his product than he had to pay for it, and that being the case, the inevitable course of exchange and re-exchange would be that the man* ***having received less than the full amount****, could buy back less than the full amount, so that eventually the unsold products must again accumulate in the capitalist's hands; and again the period of non-employment arrives."* This obviously applied to individualist anarchism. In response to objections like this, individualists tend to argue that competition for labour would force wages to equal output. Yet this ignores natural barriers to competition: *"it is well enough to talk of his buying hand tools,*

ever, this ignores the obvious fact that the individualist anarchists were pretty explicit in arguing against ***capitalist*** property rights (Tucker rightly calls his ideas socialist).

This can be seen from Voltairine's work. In 1901, she noted that the individualist anarchism would see *"property, real property, would at last exist, which it does not at the present day, because no man gets what he makes."* (*"Anarchism"*) In 1908, when Sartwell claims she had changed her analysis, she was still arguing that *"I wish a sharp distinction made between the legal institution of property, and property in the sense that what a man definitely produces by his own labour is his own."* Clearly, there is no change in the analysis and the Voltairine of 1901 would have agreed with the one of 7 years later when she wrote that exploitation and inequality were *"the inevitable result of the whole politico-economic lie that man can be free and the institution of property continue to exist."* (*"Our Present Attitude"*)

As such, Sartwell is wrong to state that *"[l]ater, de Cleyre stepped up her critique of capitalism."* Rather Voltairine stepped up her critique of markets, something radically different unless you equate all forms of market with capitalism. It is this, the awareness (and resolution) of a contradiction in individualist anarchism to which I turn now.

From Individualism to Communism

Voltairine's movement away from individualist anarchism is understandable. Given her wholesale opposition to hierarchy it would be strange that she would exclude wage slavery from her attacks. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the issue of employer and employee relations stand at the heart of her move from individualism towards mutualist and then communist anarchism.

As Voltairine pointed one, individualist anarchists held that the *"essential institutions of Commercialism are in themselves*

individual acts of violence had no meaning in an American context. In this he joined most communist anarchists, who had long rejected the tactic and shared the view of Kropotkin that the masses, not individuals, made the social revolution. This meant favouring direct action, i.e. mass resistance and collective action to state and capitalist oppression. It seems redundant to note that anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchism would know this.

Moreover, there does seem to be an underlying attempt to imply that communist-anarchists are violent authoritarians at work in ER. Thus we find Sartwell arguing in his introductory essay that under anarchism *"[a]s many voluntary systems ought to be tried as there were people who wanted to live in them. Goldman, to her credit, also realised that something like this was the only position consistent with anarchism."* Given that every anarcho-communist thinker has argued this position and, moreover, stressed the voluntary nature of their ideal, it hardly makes sense to "credit" Goldman with simply repeating the standard anarcho-communist position! By so doing, he implies that the typical anarcho-communist does not hold that particular position and so seek to impose their ideas on others, which is a lie.[3]

[3] While anarcho-communists have argued that an anarchist society would see individualist and mutualist experiments within it (and vice versa), the same can hardly be said of "anarcho"-capitalism. While proclaiming freedom to experiment, they do so in the context of capitalist property rights and (if followers of Rothbard) capitalist "Natural law." In effect, in order to experiment you must purchase some land and other resources become you become a collective capitalist subject to capitalist laws, rights and markets! Such a position was as alien to Voltairine as it was to Goldman. As the former put it, *"that a 'free country' in which all the productive tenures were already appropriated was not free at all ... to be free one must have liberty of access to the sources and means of production ... the land and all that was in it was the natural heritage of all, and none had a right to pre-empt it, and parcel it out to their heirs, administrators, executors, and assigns."* (*"Why I am an Anarchist"*)

And, ironically, ER's other editor praises one of Voltairine's essays as it *"belies the notion that all anarchists are violent"!*

Individualist Anarchism

While you would expect the "anarcho"-capitalist editors of ER to get anarcho-communism wrong, they also get individualist anarchism wrong. This is unsurprising as an accurate account of it would show how far "anarcho"-capitalism is from it.

Sartwell, for example, argues that the short essay *"Our present attitude"* shows Voltairine's *"late movement toward more radical solutions and toward communist anarchism. The view of property and poverty that she articulates here is the classical anarchist one of Proudhon, who held that a person has a natural right to the product of her own labour, but that property considered as ownership beyond that point is 'theft'"* The only problem with this is that the "early" Voltairine, like other individualist anarchists, also held to the *"classical anarchist"* analysis of property.[4]

We need only look at Tucker's classic introduction to his ideas, *"State Socialism and Anarchism,"* to see this. He explicitly grounds American individualist anarchist ideas in Proudhon's, noting that *"Warren and Proudhon arrived at their conclusions singly and unaided is certain."* Tucker denounced the *"land monopoly"* in an explicitly "Proudhonist" way as consisting of *"the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation. It was obvious to Warren and Proudhon that, as soon as individualists should no longer be protected by their fellows in anything but personal occupancy and cultivation of land, ground-rent would disappear,*

[4] As usual, Delamotte gets this right. Moreover, it should be noted Voltairine was aware of Proudhon's analysis of property in 1891: *"What then is woman? property! Since the days when Proudhon uttered his famous sentence, 'Property is robbery' the word has had an ugly sound in the ears of those who aim the ideal glory of humanity."*(*"The Gates of Freedom"*)

and so usury have one less leg to stand on." Like Proudhon, Tucker attacked usury — rent, interest, profit — as exploitation ("theft") and argued that individualist anarchism would ensure the worker would receive *"the natural wage of labour is its product; that this wage, or product, is the only just source of income."*

So the simple fact is that both individualist and communist anarchists share the same analysis of private property. Basing themselves on Proudhon's sublime **"What is Property?"**, all anarchists argue that possession would replace property in a free society. Both agree that the land ownership should be based on *"occupancy and use."* They differ in the best way this would be applied. Anarcho-communists argue that we would best maximise liberty by pooling the product of our labour while the individualists stress that individual workers would own it.

All of which means that Sartwell is expressing his ignorance when he argued that the *"main practical disagreement between communist and individualist concerns the institution of property. Communists ... held it to be antithetical to human freedom, whereas individualists ... considered it essential. Both, however, were critics of rapacious capitalism and shared a vision of voluntary social arrangements."* As can be seen, both communists and individualists shared an analysis of property, although differing somewhat in the best way to apply it. The individualists keep to Proudhon's original position while the communists recognised the limitations of that position (obviously, I am writing here as a communist!). Both, in other words, were critics of capitalism, not just *"rapacious"* capitalism and the form of property it is based on.

Unfortunately, most individualist anarchists tended to call this new system of possession "property" and thus caused endless confusion. For example, it allows "anarcho"-capitalists to argue that, as the individualist anarchists were in favour of "property", they must, likewise, be considered anarchists. How-