

Where Are the Anarchists Going?

**A Keen and Biting Criticism of the School of Communistic Anarchists as
Represented by Kropotkin, Reclus, and Others.**

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1877-1878

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[In presenting this translation of Lefrançais' pamphlet to the readers of *The Alarm* I am in part actuated by the desire to ascertain how much there is of common belief among those calling themselves anarchists, and consequently how much there is for united action looking toward a common end. To those who are not acquainted with the author I may say that in France he is known as one of the sincerest and most active revolutionists; and, indeed, the soundness of his revolutionary character is guaranteed by the chief organ of the party against whom his criticisms are mainly directed, *Le Revolte*. Lefrançais was a member of the Commune of Paris of 1871, in which body he adhered to the socialist minority. His sketch of the movement ("Etude sur le Mouvement Communaliste du 18 Mars, 1871"), written immediately after the failure, though not the most complete, is yet, perhaps, the best work on the subject. The present pamphlet was published in Paris by the central committee of the Socialist Union for Revolutionary Action.

In pursuance of my object of attempting to determine how much and why the various schools of anarchists differ I propose to add a few notes to the pamphlet to make clear the points on which I am not entirely in accord with Lefrançais. It may be as well to explain that while Lefrançais seems to entirely disavow anarchy, he is himself an anarchist in the sense in which many of the best-known anarchists in this country use the term. So far as I can gather from his writings he is a federalist and mutualist of the school of Proudhon, and his record shows him to be about as consistently anarchistic as any one taking an active part in the popular movement of the day can be.—J. F. K.]

THE MODERN ANARCHISTS

I.

In taking up this question we feel bound to declare that we do so not in any fault-finding spirit, and above all not in a spirit of recrimination.

We count among the anarchist such excellent friends as Kropotkin, Reclus (Elisée), and the brothers Thomachot, of whom the one died scarcely two years ago in Paris, and of whom the other was compelled to go into exile with his family, all work being withdrawn from him in general on account of his opinions.

This is enough to show that we have no animosity towards the anarchists.

But as, within the last ten years especially, a new regiment has joined itself to the revolutionary socialist army, grouping around its banner a large number of young and active minds who profess to lead the social revolution towards its true destinies, it ought to be permitted us to ask if, in spite of their assurances and their good will, they would not conduct us, in good faith of course, backward.

In all times the name anarchist has been applied by the conservatives to their adversaries.

In spite of all etymology “anarchy” and “disorder” have been considered as synonymous by the partisans of the statu quo and the more or less interested opponents of any change in the existing social order.

Every time the oppressed have claimed their rights from the oppressors, that the robbed have sought to revolt against the robbers, the latter have cried: “Anarchy!”

From this every plaintiff whatsoever—from the mild Bailly, who, however, did not hesitate to massacre the people in the Champ de Mars in 1792; the austere Francois Arago, who made them bite the dust in June, 1848; the great Gambetta, who, in 1880, dreamed of “hunting them to their dens,” to Clemenceau, who, aided by his friend Boulanger, would not hesitate tomorrow to treat the proletaires to grape-shot as did Thiers in 1871—has been treated in turn as an “anarchist” by the conservatives of his age and country.

We can make up our minds as to this. But, be it well understood, there is no comparison to be established between the anarchists with whom we are now occupied and the political mountebanks who, during the last century especially, have had only in view treachery to the revolution for the advantage of their personal ambition.

We must also set aside from the modern anarchists those who, under the better-known name of Hebertists, were guillotined by the grace of M. de Robespierre.

Neither Hebert, nor Anacharsis Kloots, nor Chaumette, nor Rossignol, nor Ronsin, nor the other friends of the revolutionary commune—the modern anarchist will recognize it, I suppose—can be confounded with the latter.

Their ideal was not the same. It is, then, only of the anarchists of our own day, professing to be the sole revolutionists, that we ask: Where are they going?

II.

Their history is of yesterday. Bakounine may be considered, if not as their father, at least as one of their most remarkable apostles.

I think I am not deceiving myself in advancing the idea that modern anarchism, as a special revolutionary conception, had its official birth at the Jurassian International congress, held at Geneva in September, 1873, at which were broken all bonds connecting with the council general of London, whose dictatorial ways, under the influence of Marx, had raised a formidable opposition among the sections remaining faithful to the federalist spirit, which until then had characterized the entire International.

I recall with what entirely southern ardor Comrade Brousse—Le Locle then admired his virtues—ridiculed the partisans of the fourth estate, of which he is today one of the most fervent zealots.

“Dost thou remember it, Brousse, dost thou remember it?”

The anarchists at that time, however, thought it yet wise to shelter themselves behind federalism, which made explanation easy.

Then came the federalist congress of the 18th of March, 1876, at Lausanne. Anarchy came forth from its swaddling clothes.

Comrades Elisee Reclus and Brousse were its god-parents.

In this congress these latter denounced the commune of Paris of 1871 as a type of authoritarian government, especially on account of its reconstitution of public services, the *bête noire* of the anarchists.

Poor commune! Treated as authoritarian!

How well one can see that Reclus, captured on the 4th of April at Chatillon with all the brave comrades-in-arms of the heroic Duval, did not know how things passed! No more than Brousse, who was then tranquilly studying medicine at Montpellier!

At Lausanne, then, in 1876, all organization whatever, federative or otherwise, all delegation necessary to the action of such organization, was declared anti-revolutionary.

Falling back into the errors of the seekers after the quintessence, the anarchists declared that, under penalty of being only a new form of exploitation, the revolution must have no other object than that of creating a medium in which, henceforth, the individual shall do entirely as he pleases, his will acting without limits—not even that due to neighbors, this restriction alone being sufficient to destroy the system at its base.

“Pardon,” here interrupts an anarchist for whom I have a special love and esteem, “like all socialists we believe in solidarity.”

That is understood, my dear friend. We will examine afterward your restrictions, but permit me now to exhibit your “principles.”

III.

When one looks through the anarchist literature—pamphlets, books, journals, manifestoes, and programmes of their various groups—he will see at once that neither in form or matter do any of their economic and political criticisms of the existing social order differ from those expressed for a long time by the socialists preceding them.

Neither shall I insult them by supposing that they imagine themselves to have invented electoral abstention. They are too intelligent, I know, to insist on it.

“No more state, no more individual property, no more parliamentarianism, no more fiscal legalities. War to capitalism, war to privileges of all kinds, war against the exploitation of man by man. No more frontiers; no more wars of people against people. Lastly, war without truce to all authority, elected or not, dynastic or only temporary.”

Such are the various objects pursued constantly, they tell us, by the various anarchist groups that up to the present have taken the trouble to inform us of their existence.

There is more, however.

Several comrades who, without wronging the others, may be considered as among the most intelligent, were brought—on the pretext of being members of a secret society—before the Lyons courts at the beginning of the year 1883. They had an excellent opportunity of exposing the principles of anarchy.

With great dignity and incontestable energy the workmen Bordat and Bernard, the scientist Kropotkin, and the talented writer Emile Gauthier made a close, logical criticism of the social inequities, legitimatizing all revendications whatsoever, whether individual or collective.

There is not a socialist who would not have signed with both hands their just and vehement plea against the existing social and political order.

But where is the anarchy in all this affair? We are yet asking.

Nothing either in their publications, or their talks, or their lectures gives us the idea of a new conception in regard to the social revolution.

As to their negations and criticisms of the present order all socialists are in accord.

Since Proudhon they have been small change for all revolutionists.

It is only as to the means of preventing a return shock on the morrow of the emancipation that it remains for them to come to an understanding; all reserves being made as to the right possessed by those interested of using these means or others according to the circumstances of the case—circumstances which, no doubt, may be foreseen, but not settled precisely in advance.

As to the positive side of their doctrine, or, rather, of their special point of view, the anarchists have as yet made it known only through the two formulae which, according to them, ought to sum up all the law and the prophets for every true revolutionist:

“Do as you please.”

“Take as you please from the common fund of social wealth.”

As, on the other hand, they profess themselves communists, there is room to examine whether these formulae agree with certain social necessities; and, then, whether they are not contradictory, not only of communism, but of the general data which form the common objective of all socialists—that is to say, whether they do not by a round-about road lead us back to the bourgeois state we seek to destroy.

“DO AS YOU PLEASE.”

I.

In the first place, what is the general dictum accepted by all socialists without distinction?

“To create—all reserves being made as to the means—a social medium in which collective and social interests shall be so harmonized that any effort to satisfy the one will redound also to the advantage of the other.”

That is to say, all that increases in social life augments at the same time the individual’s power of developing his faculties, as each increase of the latter contributes to the development of the collective life.

Since the anarchists call themselves communists, let us lay aside all other socialist ideals and see whether they can truthfully claim to be such.

Until the anarchists appeared the communists, authoritarian or otherwise, formulated their idea as follows:

From each according to his abilities—or faculties; to each according to his needs.

This is equivalent to saying that the recognition of the right of each to consume—or, better, to develop himself—necessitates the duty of each to produce, to aid in the development of all to the extent of his natural and acquired powers.

Now, since the anarchists call themselves communists—and no one has the right to doubt their sincerity—how can they reconcile their affirmation with the “Do as you please”?

And if it pleases them to consume without producing?

Do you take us, then, for fools or rogues? cry the anarchists at once.

Neither the one nor the other.

But if you admit, like us, that the right to consume implies the necessity of producing, what becomes of your formula? Or, rather, why this formula for which there is no application?

But, begin the anarchists, we have said a hundred times already that we recognize a higher principle—solidarity.

Very well. In that you are quite right, for this solidarity affirms itself more forcibly every day.

But, for the hundredth time, also, of what good, then, is your ideal formula, “Do as you please,” since you subordinate—no, that word shocks you—you rectify this ideal will by the inexorable law of solidarity, from which less than ever one can withdraw himself without becoming nothing?

As to that, reply the anarchists, admitting even that a few individuals would not think it their duty to contribute toward the creation of that which is necessary to their existence, they must still be regarded as possessing an absolute right to all required for their support—in the first place, since no one could morally oppose them, and, in the second, since, “there will always be more produced than there is need for, and hence no one can be injured.”

Thus, at the beginning, and without suspecting it, the anarchists adopt as theirs the famous and convenient bourgeois theory that certain individuals have a primordial right to live at the expense of others, without troubling themselves in the least about the extra labor thus imposed on the latter.

It seems to us that the working people might protest strongly and with great reason against this, since what they have now in view is putting an end as soon as possible to this “division of functions,” so much praised by those who take up only that of consuming and enjoying.

The simple change of parasites might very well give them no satisfaction.

But do not let us pause a longer over this objection—retrogressive according to the anarchists—and let us even suppose that it could not be raised.

There is, however, another of their affirmations that requires attention.

“There will always be,” say the anarchists, to help out their cause, “more products than can be consumed.”

How then, if you please?

Have we then arrived at the point that we can assure ourselves that the supplies will never be wanting, and that, instead of limiting their use to the satisfaction of real needs, we can use them as we please, even to squandering them?

Well, let us grant that one may say so in earnest. It yet remains to be considered whether—the sought-for social future having for its aim the reduction to the minimum for all of the time and labor necessarily employed in ministering to bodily needs, in order that more time may be given to intellectual cultivation—the working people will consent to create a product in excess of their needs, when they see the entire inutility of this production, merely for the pleasure of producing.

It is much more probable, on the contrary, that individual needs will grow in the same ratio as the possibility of satisfying them, and, hence, that the individual will be very little disposed to work with the sole aim of satisfying the needs of those who find it more agreeable to remain idle.

All reserves are made, it is understood, in favor of the sick and incapable.

The theory of “do as you please” might, therefore, turn out very unpleasantly for those who, bourgeois of a new kind, taking it seriously, should attempt to put it into practice.

II.

Then, if we examine with a little attention the means actually employed in production, we do not need to much of scholars to see that they lend themselves less and less to the fancies and caprices supposed—unless we consider it to have no range—by the formula, “Do as you please,” which logically characterizes anarchy.

If we take the simplest product and analyze its elements we shall be very quickly convinced that this product results from a series of efforts, combined in such a way that if their concordance should fail the product can no longer be realized so as to be within the reach of all.

The simple processes of artisan production left in former times, in appearance at least, more latitude to the producer; but such processes would not suffice to the needs of today. It would be idle to dream of going back to them, however much the anarchists might desire it, and I think they desire it no more than we.

And then, is it true to say that artisanry gave in reality more latitude to the laborers?

Whoever recalls the epoch when artisanry yet flourished in a large number of trades will see that, the elements and kinds of the objects thus fabricated being at least as varied as today, in order to avoid delay in manufacture agreement between the various artisans interested was equally necessary, as much in the interests of the consumers as in their own.

This understanding, although less rigorous than in the great industry, was none the less as contradictory as in our time of the “Do as you please.”

Let us even suppose that the distribution of power should be so successful that each producer might have it at home, as recent experiments seem to foreshadow, and that thus the advantages of the old artisanry were combined with the mechanical requirements of the present system of production, which would free the laborers from the hell of the factories. Would that make the labor of each any the less united, not only with that of his fellows, but even with the motive power placed at his disposal and who use will necessarily be regulated, were it only to give to the distributors the repose to which they also have the right?

To ask these questions, is it not to solve them?

Now, if individual activity cannot be usefully manifested without a previous understanding, however short or even fugitive it may be, what is the value of the formula, “Do as you please”? What becomes of anarchy?

“TAKE AS YOU PLEASE.”

After the first anarchist formula, applying to production, let us examine the relative value of the second, which refers to consumption:

“Take as you please from the common fund of social wealth.”

Se be it.

Let us admit with the anarchist that this common fund, though fed no one knows how, is yet inexhaustible, and that those who have contributed to it to the utmost of their strength are sufficiently good fellows, or well enough satisfied themselves, to all to “take as they please” those who, availing themselves of their right to do nothing, have in no wise co-operated.

But where is this “common fund” to be found, since always in the name of holy anarchy, any organization whatever is regarded as contrary to the “principle,” and that to such a degree that once, in his horror of public service, the ex-anarchist Brousse delivered a lecture in Geneva to show that we could very well dispense with the post office by returning to the system of messages through friends?

Socialists—not anarchists—from whatever standpoint they regard the economy of the future, whether they wish division or exchange, are at least in accord in recognizing the necessity of establishing general stores where products of all kinds, agricultural and manufactured, will be brought for subsequent delivery to the consumers in such a way as to avoid the adulterations to which they are today subjected by parasitic middlemen.

All are equally in accord as to the necessity of preparing general statistics of products, showing their nature, quantity, and origin, in order to assure to consumers the arrival of those they need, and to avoid the useless transportation and gorging, as well as the waste and loss resulting.

Without doubt the processes indicated previously by socialists may appear deserving of criticism, or even valueless. Nevertheless, we must occupy ourselves with the question.

The anarchist, logically rebels against all administrative organization, ought to explain the way in which they suppose (I do not say understand) things could get on without the aid of any administration whatsoever.[note]Le Révolte, which, not a long time ago, sustained this social economic thesis, has abandoned it. But then a large number of anarchists—with reason, it seems

to us—commence to think that that organ is abandoning the cause.[/note] * * * * I hear some comrades murmur: “This man takes us to be entirely too simple.”

I suppose nothing of the kind.

Certainly neither Reclus nor Kropotkin, not to speak of others, can be taxed with simplicity. Their knowledge and intelligence were long ago displayed in their remarkable scientific works.

Elisee Reclus has too well established his competence in his “Nouvelle Géographie,” with a marvelous prescience, the role assigned in the future to each people, as to their general relations, for any one to tax him with ignorance.

But it is precisely on that account that we have the right to ask him as well as all other intelligent anarchists how, in the future he seeks, things can get on without any organization—that is to say, without a previous understanding, without accord among those interested, without a modus vivendi accepted by them and to which they must submit themselves, however short be the contract, but which in spite of all will be a violation of “do as you please.” And then, how is each consumer to put himself in connection with the famous “common fund of social wealth”?

ANARCHY AND PATRIOTISM.

If the anarchists, in regard to the social organization of the future, have, from the double point of view of production and consumption, adopted formulae very acceptable to the bourgeoisie, whose habits of exploitation would be scarcely changed by them, they are strangely precise in the term by which they characterize their opinions on one point.

They call themselves very loudly and on every occasion “anti-patriots.”

The socialists—since there have been any in France—have been always sharply pronounced against jingoism. The odious wars of races, of people against people, based on inept and abominable dynastic calculations or blind questions of economic interests, befogged at will by the tricksters of finance and industrialism, have been the object of incessant and unanimous criticism by socialists, who have never failed to at once execrate and ridicule the famous adage: “I am French; my country before all.”

The communes of Paris of 1871, like that of 1792, honored itself by receiving foreigners into its bosom. The warriors of 1871 died not only crying “Vive la commune!” but more than all: “Vive la république sociale universelle!”

Pierre Dupont’s “Chant des Soldats” (soldier’s song) in 1848 had for its chorus:

“Le peuples sont pour nous des frères.”

(All peoples are to us as brothers.)

It would be rather difficult, therefore, to pose the French revolutionary socialists as ridiculous patriots.

In their anti-jingo ardor the anarchists think they must call themselves “anti-patriots.”

What do they mean by that?

Do they wish simply to affirm that they place justice and humanity above the narrow and selfish interests of the fatherland? We all agree to that. In that case it is merely a repetition.

But do they mean, perchance, that the existence and integrity of France interest them so little that they would think it useless to defend them were they menaced anew?

In this case they would be only the counterpart of Derouledism; the two would be complementary.

The two, in fact, would arrive at the same result.

Let the Derouledists seek to excite—hopelessly, we are happy to say—the brutal passions of another age for the purpose of revenge, since their heads are too thick to comprehend that the military role of France is ended. * * * And it is to be presumed that it will not be long before it is the same with Germany. That explains itself.

Consciously or not, these extreme patriots work solely for the ruin of the revolution and the benefit of militarism, even though France should die of it.

But that the anarchists, France being invaded anew on account of the reverses brought about by the inept or perfidious patriotism of the Derouledists, should, in the name of their anti-patriotism,

affirm that there would be nothing to be done except to cross one's arms and *laissez faire*, this would be truly the climax of disgrace.

Are not France and revolution as synonymous today as yesterday?

Is not this precisely the reason that, in spite of their incessant platitudes, our pretended republican officials are met with an inflexible *non possumus* on the part of the monarchical powers whose alliance they barely solicit?

Let the anarchists consult in regard to this not the French *prolétaires*, whom they might suspect of imbecile jingoism, but the Russian, Polish, German, Spanish, and Italian revolutionists, or even those of the two Americas, who are not yet free from complication with French interests, and they will see what answer they will get.

Derouledism in reverse, or incoherence, such is, from the revolutionary point of view, the anti-patriotism of the anarchists.

PROPAGANDA BY ACTION.

I.

Although the economic affirmations of the anarchists do not appear to us to justify their pretensions of their alone being able to conduct the social revolution toward its ultimate objective point; although, on the contrary, they seem to prepare a new and lamentable abortion of it, yet it is not without interest to study their processes of propaganda, both as to their pretended originality and their intrinsic moral value.

It is not intended, of course, to judge according to bourgeois legality and morality, always so favorable to successful theft.

On that plane, in fact, there is no act, however monstrous, which could not be compared with advantage with those on which the bourgeois prides itself every day, decorating them with the name of "savoir faire" or "skill."

Recognizing no value in the verdicts rendered by the so-called judges of our days, we shall guard ourselves against measuring by their standard any of the acts characterizing the anarchist propaganda.

We shall judge it solely by its fitness to the end proposed.

From this point of view we believe ourselves all the more to have the right of investigation, since the anarchists ask for these acts declarations of solidarity from revolutionary socialists, and the latter cannot respond without having scrutinized the character and bearing of the acts in question.

In conformity with their datum the anarchists affirm that the individual, being sole judge of the importance of his complaints against society or any of its members, remains free to choose the means of obtaining redress.

Of this affirmation "propaganda by action" was born.

In order to establish the exact value of this propaganda, which we have seen work for several years, we think it useful to pass in review its principal historic stages.

The first act was performed about 1878 at Benevento.

An excellent and worth revolutionist, Citizen Cafiero, with some comrades seized the municipality and destroyed the records.

Their victory was of short duration. That very evening Cafiero and his comrades slept in prison.

This attempt was made on the occasion of bitter criticisms by a French socialist journal—criticisms which, in my opinion, exceeded their author's right.

One might, doubtless, reproach the Italian anarchists with having risked their liberty and even their lives in an enterprise having no chance—I will not say of success, but of being understood were it was effected.

But they had the incontestable right of acting as they did, persuaded as they were that this kind of propaganda could be made to create a germ of revolutionary agitation.

The utmost one could do would be to demonstrate to them that the game was not worth the candle.

A little afterward followed in succession the attempts of Passanante and Andre Tomaseo against the kings of Italy and Spain.

The anarchists claimed these acts so loudly as the fruits of their propaganda that their then official journal, the *Avant-Gard*, was brought before the federal court at Neufchatel, which condemned its editor-in-chief, Citizen Brousse, to ten years' banishment from the territory of the Helvetic confederation.

The anarchists, in these affairs, seem to us to have singularly exaggerated the theoretical influence they attributed to themselves.

They seem to make regicide date from the moment of their appearance.

Now, from the every origin of monarchy, which removes the monarch from the reach of the law—even in cases of crimes against the common law, such as murder, rape, and other little things—there always have been found courageous citizens who, either in the name of outraged public conscience or to avenge their personal injuries have, with reason, recognize their own right to punish the authors of those crimes.

They support themselves by the invincible argument that whoever places himself above and outside of humanity cannot appeal to it in order to escape the punishment of his evil-doing.

Regicide, entirely legitimate, is doubtless a manifestation of "propaganda by action." It is par excellence a revolutionary act. But its notorious anteriority places it beyond the claims of the modern anarchists.

It is the same with all the acts of the great and terrible tragedy playing in Russia these ten years.

Since Vera Sassulitch and those who up to that time had risked their lives for the liberation of their country, not one of their acts can be claimed as a result of anarchistic theories, their authors never having recognized themselves as anarchists.

Reinsdorff, in Germany, was the first to declare himself to have acted as an anarchist. The courage with which he braved his judges and gave his head to the executioner—courage to which even the *Revue des Deux-Mondes* rendered homage—makes certainly of Reinsdorff one of the great characters of our time.

The anarchists, who comrade he declared himself, have a right to be proud of it.

His enterprise, however doubtful of success, was worth the risking of life. And he grandly made the sacrifice.

Since then France has seen accomplished several acts of summary justice, such as the Fournier affair at Roanne, the Watrinade at Decazeville, and the Deruytter affair at Paris, which the anarchists place to the credit of their propaganda, although this is very contestable.

Throughout all time also the working people and the mercilessly exploited, exasperated by the repeated and more and more odious exactions on the part of the exploiters, have attempted individually or collectively to do judgment on these exploiters, certain to pay in turn with their heads or their liberty for these executions—that is to say, more than the so-called victims are worth.

But if the anarchists cannot claim in strictness to be the real and only inspirers of these acts, at least they have the merit, it cannot be denied, of approving them frankly and without the least reticence.

They even go so far as declarations of solidarity.

This declaration, which is, besides, entirely platonic, is no more useful to the social revolution than the acts provoking it. these latter have had, up to the present, no other effect than to remove some of the subalterns of the exploiters or, much more rarely, to prematurely open the succession to one of the bigwigs of industrialism, to his heirs' great joy—as a socialist writer has already well expressed it—and without changing the condition of the exploited.

If, nevertheless, the anarchists should persist in claiming the regicides and other summary executions as one of the results of their peculiar propaganda, it would, in our opinion, not be worth while to discuss the matter further, for we are in accord with them in recognizing that every revolutionist should consider these acts legitimate and avowable.

The question of utility alone could be the subject of controversy between them and us.

But among the anarchists “propaganda by action” has arrived at such a state that it has become necessary to inquire not only into the presumed utility of the acts in question, but even into their moral nature, and to see whether they are opposed to the end desired.

II.

All the acts we have just reviews as arising from “propaganda by action,” or at least as being claimed for it by the anarchists, have such a character of devotion in principle and personal abnegation that, from whatever point of view we regard them, whether we approve or condemn, we cannot hinder ourselves from respecting in their authors the sentiments of justice and human dignity that led them to their commission.

They command the esteem of even their most implacable enemies.

The acts of which we have not to speak have, unfortunately, an entirely different character.

The first of the, which created unanimous repulsion, even among revolutionists, was the affair of the Café Bellecour, which occurred at Lyons in 1882.

It was, it will be remembered, the explosion of a dynamite cartridge in a café, which mortally wounded an inoffensive poor devil of a customer.

Some months later a very young man, Cyvoct, suspected of being the author of this nameless act, was brought before the Lyons court.

Cyvoct energetically denied any participation whatever, direct or indirect, in the crime of which he was accused.

He went so far as to declare that he “would regard himself as a monster” were he to have had anything to do with it.

Relying on an article written by him, and in which they professed to find provocation to this murder, the jury, in spite of Cyvoct's formal denials, declared that the latter had in fact neither committed the crime nor taken part in its commission, but that he had provoked it. The court condemned the unfortunate young man to death.

The execrable doctrine of moral complicity, invented by Louis Philippe's infamous attorney-general Hebert, to serve as an arm against the journalist Dupoty in the Quenissel affair in 1840, thus received a new and abominable consecration.

Stirred by the declarations of the accused, whose sincerity none had the right to doubt since the jury themselves recognized it, public opinion was seized with indignation against such a verdict.

Then happened a strange occurrence.

Taking no account of the direct denials of Cyvoct, on the very morrow of the judgment against their comrade the anarchist hastened to glorify him in their meetings for an act which he did not commit.

The act was thus claimed by them as making part of their system of propaganda.

We have, therefore, the right to inquire what they hoped from it.

Let us leave one side all the jeremiads over the violated rights of humanity. We know well enough that the bourgeoisie respects them no better when its interests are in question.

June, 1848, and May, 1871, are sufficient proofs.

Let us look at it purely from the utilitarian point of view.

What profit for the revolution could the anarchists hope to gain by such acts?

Even if the Bellecour café and all the others of like kind were blown up, together with the swells frequenting them, would the social revolution be advanced a single step?

If, taking up and modifying the desire attributed to Nero, the anarchists were to wish that a whole tribe of exploiters had but a single head, so that we might be disembarrassed of them by one blow, no revolutionary socialist would say them nay.

But do fifteen or twenty bourgeois, stricken here and there by the explosions with which the anarchists have declared solidarity, represent the bourgeoisie?

Would their deaths bring about that of the entire band of capitalists? Would the economic order we seek to destroy be at all affected?

The anarchists, then, believe in the stupid theory of "example"?

Since open war has existed between the exploited and the exploiters, have not there been enough of "examples" on both sides during the variations of the combat?

These examples have not been wanting especially on the part of the exploiters, triumphant until now.

Have the exploited, who have been subjected to them, felt their ardor cool?

Life for life remains, then, as the sole justification of such methods of propaganda—without one's troubling himself even to see that perchance he is not killing his own.

It must be admitted that this is not much to brag of.

The useful side of the act not being demonstrable, the odious side alone remains, and one can readily see why, however anarchistic Cyvoct might be, he should energetically deny having had anything to do with it.

The most certain result of the glorification by the anarchists of an act disavowed by the person condemned, without proof of his having committed it, was to stop the movement of public opinion which had begun to declare itself in his favor.

As we cannot believe that this was the result they sought, we are entitled to ask what is the value of such propaganda.

Since this affair several explosions have occurred, especially in the basins of the Loire and the Rhone. But the anarchists have declined all responsibility for them, and charge them to the police, in they are probably not wrong.

They might with much more reason have repelled all solidarity with the affair of the Café Bellecour, for, by a curious coincidence, it has had on the whole no other result than that of serving as a pretext for the arrest and condemnation of Citizens Kropotkin, Bordat, Bernard, Emile Gauthier, and a number of other Lyonnese anarchists, on the charge of belonging to an alleged secret society, whose existence was no more proved than Cyvoct's guilt.

III.

But here is something more serious.

Some time afterward two murders were committed in succession in Austria and Hungary.

Theft was the alleged motive.

The assassins were captured, and they professed to have acted as they did to procure money for starting anarchist journals.

That these men may have been sincere in their declarations is quite possible. The same thing has since happened in Paris—without assassination, it is true—and it is not contested by any (even the most reactionary journals admitted it) that Comrade Duval acted in all sincerity.

All stole and even assassinated honestly—however queer the coupling of these contradictory words may seem to be.

Those stories of murder followed by robbery—for the good cause—were at once glorified by the anarchists as peculiarly propaganda by action. Anarchist journals and meetings teemed with eulogies.

Robbery and murder were accepted by them as essentially revolutionary actions—with reservations as to motives, of course.

Note that if we were to treat them as jesuits they would have a fit of anger.

But by what signs can we tell the pure from the impure in such cases? Who can hinder the latter, one caught, from invoking the loyalty of their intentions?

I heard it said once that certain foreign revolutionists had for a moment the idea of counterfeiting bank-notes in order to ruin the credit of the states guaranteeing them.

The idea was, on the whole, clever. The aim was praiseworthy, and to legitimize their actions in their own eyes they had before them the example of the French emigrants, who during the revolution had no dread of having recourse to counterfeiting to kill the republic, while the bourgeois republicans, on their side, used the counterfeits to buy in at a miserable prince the national property.[note]See the “Relation des Papiers Saisis a Beyreuth,” on the arrest of the duc d’Enghien, afterward shot at Vincennes, and Georges Avene’s “Legendes Revolutionnaires.”[/note]

But the revolutionists of whom we speak soon found it was necessary to give up such methods.

In fact, under pretense of serving the cause, a certain number of professed comrades simply made it a means of satisfying on the largest possible scale their tastes and fancies.

In this way the thieves and swindlers who live only by such exploits might also declare themselves revolutionists.

And how could they be contradicted?

Would not the emptying of the pockets of their neighbors, violently or gently according to circumstances, be an act of revolution?

According to bourgeois morality the only reproach that could be made to them is that they too often lack the necessary skill.

Without doubt they have, on the whole, as much right to appropriate the contents of the strong-box they rifle as had he who owns it to fill it by unscrupulously exploiting the labor of others.

But, once more, what have these mutual strippings to do with the social revolution? In what degree would the condition of the exploited be improved by X’s “anarchizing” Y’s capital, the latter, be it understood, having no right to it himself?

Is it to substitute one brigandage for another that the proletaires have fought and died so many years?

“They below, we above”—such was the formula adopted by the bourgeoisie, according to Danton, at the time of the revolution, in speaking of the aristocracy they were seeking to overthrow.

“Neither above nor below”—such is the formula of the revolutionary socialists.

The methods recommended by the anarchists would simply bring us back to the first of these formulae.

There would be substitution, not revolution—but the workers would, none the less, continue to stay “below.”

IV.

We are among those who reproach the commune of Paris of 1871 with being guilty of lese revolution in not having seized the bank.

But how would the sincere revolutionists today look upon those who in such a seizure would see only a means of making their little affairs, on the pretense, for example, of using their pile afterward for the propaganda?

I can see the face Kropotkin and Reclus would make toward their brothers-in-arms having such a peccadillo on their conscience.

Is not, then, the act formally condemned which is theoretically proclaimed useful to the revolution, since one feels himself lessened in his own estimation on committing it?

There are acts one applauds while regretting that he does not feel either the energy or the abnegation necessary to their accomplishment.

But ought not any method be rejected as unworthy of the end sought which one would blush to use personally? And how, then, recommend the use of it to others?

I do not suppose that the anarchists are aristocratic enough to admit that some men are set apart for vile actions.

Think of the effect that would be produced by the following note published in all the journals:

X. and Y., known to everybody for a long time as being at once most intelligent, and above all most estimable in the true sense of the word, broke last night into Rothschild's offices and forced open the safes in order to get away with the valuables.

The king of the Jews, awakened by the unaccustomed noise, appearing suddenly before them had his throat cut at once to prevent his giving the alarm.

Arrested just as they were leaving the house loaded with their rich booty, they coldly declared that their actions were dictated solely by their desire to obtain the funds necessary for organizing a general uprising of the working classes.

The social standing of these two strange malefactors is in fact such as to make it evident that they had no idea of personally appropriating the fruit of their robbery.

And why should not X. and Y., these entirely honorable men, practice themselves the methods of propaganda they applaud in others?

Certainly from the revolutionary point of view it would be of much greater effect than any of the acts of which we have spoken, the miserable condition of the authors of these latter leaving them open to the charge of acting interestedly.

Well, no; neither X. nor Y. will give this example. They know very well that they would do more than lose the good opinion of the public—about which, indeed, they trouble themselves but little—or their own esteem, which they are capable of sacrificing to the superior interests of a great idea. They would lose even the regard for the cause for which they battle so courageously.

Now any cause they cannot esteem is dead to its defenders.

Such acts are too deeply marked with the seal of bourgeois morality, which for a long time has been that of the jesuits, in spite of the contempt that the bourgeois affects toward them. The social revolution cannot adopt them as its own.

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CONCLUSION.

Neither in economic desiderata nor in the method of propaganda “by action” can the modern anarchists justify their pretension to head the social revolutionary army, for in reality they turn their backs on the aim towards which the latter directs its efforts.

Doubtless, even if we had the power, it would be puerile to try to constrain them to change their ways and means if they like to hold fast to them. Not one of us wishes to be a gendarme, and much less to be a judge.

But if they have the right to persist in a line of conduct that we consider not only false but dangerous, the revolutionary socialists have in turn not only the right but the duty to decline for the future all solidarity with theories which have nothing socialistic but the brand, and the methods of propagating which are none other than those used by the bourgeoisie itself, the sole difference being that the latter long ago replaced forcible robbery by legal and financial trickery.

The main aim of the social-revolutionist is to suppress forever the one and the other.

[FINIS]

NOTES.

“Do as you please.”

“Take as you please.”

As implied in my introductory note, I have little more love for these formulae than has Lefrancais himself. The second I reject completely as does he, and this rejection involves a limitation on the first. In fact, take as a rule for the guidance of all, it becomes self-contradictory and absurd, unless it be at the same time assumed that each will choose to do right, for each can do as he pleases only on condition that he pleases to do that which does not interfere with the like right of his neighbor. Liberty for all is possible only where equality exists. Were I to use the first formula as an expression of my [] it would only mean that I claim the right to act as I please at my [], that is, the right to act as I please as long as I do not infringe on others. It would be not the negation of all contract, but merely the assertion of the right of private contract, a right which is denied by all not anarchists or federalists, and denied, too, by such of the former, it seems to me, as accept the second formula. Lefrancais, unless I have much misunderstood him, is opposed to authority—that is, to the imposition by a part of the people of their arbitrary will upon the rest, and it is only as a protest against that imposition that I would use the first formula, did I use it at all.

The section of the essay treating of the relations between anarchy and patriotism is so local in its nature that I would pass it over in silence, were it not that the author appeals to the judgment of non-French revolutionists. Of course, it will be noticed at once that his argument is based on France being par excellence the revolutionary country of Europe. It is, in fact, conceived much in the spirit of Chenier’s “Chant des Victoires”:

“Glory to France! Vengeance for wrong she brings!
Live the republic! Perish all earth’s kings!”

with the military notion left out. Socialists are expected to take part in the defense of France because the defeat of France would be the triumph of autocracy. From this point of view it becomes a mere question of expediency, and socialists no doubt would rally to France’s and when attacked with any such view, unless they saw their way to upsetting both the foreign and home governments. But, also, from this point of view the question of patriotism disappears, for the duty of a French socialist in such a contingency would be no different from that of one of any other nationality.

As to the sections treating of propaganda by action I need to say but little, as I am in substantial accord with the author. In the first section, however, in treating of those acts of which he approves, but whose utility he doubts, he fails to state the whole case in their favor. Propaganda by deed is not looked upon by its most intelligent defenders as a substitute for or rival of propaganda by word, but as a most effective aid to the latter. For instance, the chief advantage of John Brown’s blow at Harper’s Ferry was not in the direct loss to the slaveholders, nor even in the

example given to other opponents of slavery, but in riveting the attention of the people upon the institution of slavery, and thus giving to the anti-slavery advocates the hearing they had pleaded for in vain.

Another point. While it may be true that none of the authors of the various revolutionary attempts in Russia acted as anarchists, if it be meant to imply that none of the Russian revolutionaries are or were anarchists, or influenced by anarchistic ideas, the facts will not warrant the implication, even though the word anarchist be used in the restricted sense given by Lefrançais.

John F. Kelly.

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Gustave Lefrançais
Where Are the Anarchists Going?
A Keen and Biting Criticism of the School of Communistic Anarchists as Represented by
Kropotkin, Reclus, and Others.
1877-1878

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Gustave Lefrançais and John F. Kelly (translator), “Where Are the Anarchists Going?” *The Alarm*, second series, 1 no 4 (December 17, 1887): 3; 1 no 5 (December 31, 1887): 4; 1 no. 6 (January 14, 1888): 3; 1 no. 7 (January 28, 1888): 4.

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