

# **Some criticism of some current anarchist beliefs**

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The following remarks are probably influenced by the pessimism due to my personal isolation and retirement. Living as I do often far from friends and comrades in reactionary countries where not the slightest signs of freedom and revolt in our sense can be seen, taking little notice of the smaller events of the moment, but following the general course of events with some attention from the bourgeois press, I have little to cheer me up and may see too dark. Still I believe that others who live almost always among comrades, who share all the little joys of momentary success in the movement, read before all the papers written by comrades where all the signs and symptoms of progress are gathered together and who shut their eyes as far as they can against the distressing immense majority of things that happen around us, are likely to take too rosy a view of things. They see something of progress and that is sufficient for them. I may ignore too many of these unquestionably progressive events and tendencies, but they may ignore themselves too much of the fearful pace and force of reaction. As I feel one with them in the fundamental principles, our different views on many things must not necessarily be the result of mere whims and queerness of mine, but our observations taken from different standpoints might sometimes usefully supplement each other and ought to be considered on their own merits.

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## Manuscript

Feeling the immense truth and strength of the idea of freedom, one must needs wonder to see the movements representing freedom today so exceedingly small and powerless. In the English- and German-speaking countries which undoubtedly today rule the globe, anarchism is limited to a few well-meaning friends, nearly unknown and certainly powerless outside their own small circles. In the Slavonic countries anarchism is absent and even the efforts to gain the most elementary civic liberties are until now unsuccessful (Russia), say, where such liberties exist to some extent, the national life almost centers in the strife to hand them over to Russian autocracy (Austrian and Turkish Slaves). Only in the neo-Latin countries anarchism is fairly represented,—in France, Italy and Spain, but here also it rises from the shearest isolation only where the lines of demarcation towards trade unionism, republicanism, free thought, etc. are somewhat fully traced. These are all the movements of any importance.

Which are the chances or possibilities of success or even of something happening at all?—Only the possibility of general revolutionary events in France, Italy and Spain.—As to France, the occasion may be a serious general strike, the defense against a reactionary political attempt or the breakdown after an unsuccessful war. In either case the members of the other advanced parties must largely participate in the struggle and will expect to reap the spoils for themselves as well.

All these parties with their interested leaders and fanat[ic]ised masses, numerous and disciplined, would rival in, say, the new Commune of Paris and the dissensions of 1871 would be repeated with hundredfold bitterness and spite by these parties who fight and execrate each other these last twenty years,—Boulangists, Nationalists, Millerandists, Guesdists, etc., etc. As to anarchists, they would at once be placed before the dilemma: to participate in the new assembly and other political arrangements and to become powerless compromising members of talking bodies,—or to abstain and if they raised their voice, be exterminated by the new authorities, as

none are so intolerant and merciless against those who differ from them, be it only by nuances, than revolutionary authorities (as the history of past revolutions proves).—But even if a serious revolution triumphed in France and spread over to Italy and Spain, the English, German and Russian countries would try to crush it as they tried to crush the Great Revolution and how did France escape from being crushed then except by militarism, beginning with the most patriotic and liberal republicanism, but fatefully ending in Napoleon Bonaparte, just as the English revolution ended in Cromwell and Monk.—I fear there is greater danger of something like that happening than hope of a revolution spreading from country to country like the sparks of a fire as happened in 1848. But even in 1848 the events of the Great Revolution were strangely repeated. Very soon the advanced parties in Paris fought each other,—Austria, Russia and Prussia fought and repressed the German, Italian, Polish and Hungarian revolutions and France handed herself over to another Napoleon—or the Eastern powers would have reduced her by force: so she played the *prevenire*[?] and massacred the socialists and strangled the Roman Republic herself. England stood by silently and she had remained unmoved by the stirring events of the first years after 1789 and so did America on both occasions.—

Today the international apparatus for crushing local revolutions is almost created and to successful social (and even political) revolutions in Spain and Italy would happen what did happen to the risings and attempts in Crete and Macedonia, Cuba and the Philippine Islands, and China. Such a revolution would certainly violate some foreign bondholders' and capitalists' rights and coercion would be applicated by the Anglo-American, German and Russian navies and armies. Republics in Italy and Spain could only live if they threw themselves almost at the mercy of France and Russia to whose political purposes they might momentarily correspond; socialist communes would be stamped out altogether by the ruling capitalist countries.

But would not the people, the workers, of these large countries prevent this? No fear, have they ever done such a thing or, even if examples from past history could be scraped together, does not their present attitude show that they do not dream of any generous quixotism (as they may call it)? They have small sympathy for, little interest in Italians and Spaniards (and little more in French) and would spew with equanimity, indifference, some with patriotic elation, others with protests of the Pontius Pilate kind, the coercion of foreign revolutions,—Just as the American workers look on to see their largest republic crush the Filipinos,—as the British workers stolidly assist two years slow and blundering torture of men, women and children of the two South African republics,—as the German workers did not lift a finger when murder and cruelties against the Chinese rebels were *preconised* [foreseen?] and applauded in their country,—as the Russian educated classes (not to speak of the workers and peasants) suffer Finland to be deprived of her rights, nay even their own sons and daughters to be victimized by autocracy in the Russian universities.—I know very well that courageous campaigns are carried on in all countries against these atrocities, but are they not preaching to deaf ears? If, in England, their agitation has won over *some* to the cause of justice, will their number stand comparison to the number of those who, before the war, were considered the patriotic mob and efface themselves forever from the ranks of decent people? Most of these movements are self-delusions, stage armies; with ninety-nine out of a hundred a rag in patriotic colors weighs still more than all arguments of humanity and common honesty.

Consequently no serious opposition is made against the growing imminence of enormous international wars. They are beginning to be looked upon by everybody as inevitable events. America prepares to absorb the American continent and to make an economic war against Eu-

rope, transforming herself into a military power to carry out this program. England prepares for fighting all round and hands herself over to imperialism and militarism triumphing. Germany (the north before all) is fostering similar imperialist ambitions which are almost forced upon her as she has but the choice to drop out of the world struggle and to become a second rate power, the prey of the others, as Austria has become and as Germany herself was since the 17<sup>th</sup> century—or to strain all nerves to fulfill the requirement of a first class power, thereby renouncing all human feeling. France is in a similar position, holding up her rank with difficulty in face of the absence of an increase in population. Russia, finally, is ready to let loose 100 millions of presents with no will of their own and a primitive level of culture on all surrounding countries, from Sweden, Germany and Austria to Turkey, Persia, India and China.—Any of these disastrous wars have far more prospect to happen, I am afraid, than a successful and large social revolution.

We see the *working classes* remain inert and indolent against all this. Internationalism as proclaimed by resolutions, etc., does not contradict this. Everywhere we see schemes for the protection of native labor, fair trade in labor, correspond much more to the general feeling than solidarity. The competition of capitalists leads to the enmity of the workers—the French hate Italians, English hate Germans, the Germans hate Slavs, etc.—The workers have also themselves imposed new fetters on them whereby spontaneity, generous outbursts are more and more limited; a class of interested officials has been created to regulate mutual support, strikes, their press etc. To win the hearing of well disciplined social democrats has become almost impossible as their organizations provide everything for them and they hardly ever escape or want to escape these new walls built by new prejudice. Workshop talk is nearly the only effective means of agitation left, as everywhere else most workers are shut up within narrow circles or cliques, professing a fixed opinion or proclaiming indifference which is, for many, not an unconscious state but something preferred on purpose as most meeting their desire of personal comfort and advantage.

We also see the *Church* more powerful than it ever was during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The socialist parties from the seventies down neglected to fight it and even, by their advocacy of reforms, permitted the State and the Church to gather new strength by state socialist or Christian socialist reforms of doubtful value, but of fascinating effect on the masses. The church used this new popularity by directing a large mass of discontent into the channels of antisemitism which leads to Clericalism. Only lately a revolt against the church begins to foment in Spain, to some extent also in France and even in Austria. *This* is the most hopeful sign of all I noticed for years. Still the large first rank countries, America, England, Germany, Russia hold quite aloof from this revolt, and religion seemed always curiously compatible with Anglo-Saxon socialism,—also with Russian Tolstoyism; German social democracy, though not fighting religion, is tolerably free from its influence—one of the few good qualities I can see in it!

*Literary and artistic development*, some time ago, seemed to lean towards freedom. They are turning around long since and now represent a refined kind of reaction. Realism was replaced by symbolism, materialism by mysticism, the art of life by that of preraphaelitic asceticism, etc. Real life and beauty are absent again from art and the spirit of revolt which seem to pervade it, is gone again.—The working classes either, as before, take no notice of art and are amused only by the most vulgar displays or some of them follow the fashions just described without raising a serious voice of criticism or independent achievements.

I need not dwell, finally, to any length on the generally admitted *decomposition of the leading working class parties*:—Millerandism in France, Bernsteinism in Germany, the continued indifference of English and American workers to real socialism, the breakdown of the belief in the

Russian peasants whilst the new formed Russian workers go in the steps of the old social democratic parties etc.—All this testifies that force and confidence are taken out of these movements. Socialism of the future is considered utterly utopian and a waste of time to dwell upon; a number of small reforms are obtained by the oldest means of bringing pressure to bear on society without hurting it in the least; quite a new class of leaders and politicians, a new code of labor laws and regulations have sprung up between the workers and the capitalists and governments. There is a place for every combination, every intrigue—only revolutionary means and aims are shamed as if by common consent.—

In this way, wherever I look, I see more signs of reaction then of progress—and not only old prejudice surviving, but new reactionary prejudice arising everywhere not expected! Let others enumerate the manifestations of progress! I know of some of them too but if I considered them stronger and more numerous than those of reaction ten and fifteen years ago, I do no longer so now. They will come again, I hope, but at present they are absent, or nearly so.—State power, priestcraft, militarism, brutality, intolerance, compromise and indifference are on the increase in the often mentioned powerful first rank nations; against this the signs of progress and revolt among their victims, the second class and minor nations, weigh but little in *actual power*.—

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And yet *freedom* keeps the same infinite power and value as I remain firmly convinced. If it is not more predominating the reason must be that it is not sufficiently *known* or not sufficiently *appreciated and wanted* or perhaps *both*. This subject I intend to discuss here.

We see freedom at work in her full glory in modern *scientific research*. Compare the results of so many centuries when research was limited by religious scruples and prohibitions and narrowed in by capricious, unscientific methods to the results of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries free research. Compare also the pitiful position of the alleged “science” as still exhibited by those who want to reconcile science and religion (Catholics or Gladstone, etc.) to the position of real science which gives not a second’s notice to these relics of unscientific dilettantism. Here we see freedom fully won and successfully proceeding, passing by the impotent ragings of religious blockheads still surviving!

How is it that in so many other spheres of life, before all in social and political matters, freedom is so little put in practice and that its firmest adherents, anarchists, remain so comparatively small in numbers and powerless?

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Among the possible reasons the following one suggests itself to me: freedom has become, to anarchists, too much of a theory, a system, too little of the means and method. It is rendered more narrow and less acceptable to many by the particular systems, mostly economic, which are usually considered to be indissolubly connected with it.

Freedom is not, as a rule, fully explain with all its possibilities to the newcomers, leaving them to choose for themselves what form of life they would consider most fully embodying freedom as they feel it,—but it is represented to them in combination with an economic hypothesis as communist or collectivist or individualist anarchism. So the prime and immense truth of freedom is wielded together at once with a hypothesis as to economic and administrative

arrangements—which necessarily limits the success of the propaganda. For whom do we really want better—sincere believers in freedom, rebels against all forms of authority or more or less sectarian adherents of complicated hypotheses?

(I shall explain this fuller *further* below.)

I also consider that the cause of freedom has been too much burdened, loaded with another cause which it has no adequate means to solve quicker than other means might (apparently) solve it, namely *the cause of the improvement of the position of the proletariat*. This statement may convey the impression that I repudiate socialism and though I shall only further below discuss it fuller, I shall explain here my meaning to prevent misunderstandings. Today as always the masses of the people want to improve their position and they are as yet for the greatest part unscrupulous as to how they obtain this. They take what they can get from the State, the Church, charity, politicians, authoritarian socialists, etc. All parties offer them this or that bribe and they do not refuse it. We alone have nothing to give to them but the advice and example of freedom and revolt. Consequently most other factors have more influence on them as they give or promise them something real. With this we cannot, must not and do not want to compete. We should not speak the truth if we told the people that their position cannot be bettered within present society. Yes, it can though *only to a degree* that may appear like heaven to some of them, though it appears a paltry dodge and a miserable fraud to us. But we refuse to do anything except by fair means and of this we can convince but a very small number of people who are powerless to use these means to any practical purpose. At any moment a government or political party or a combination of capitalists may choose to make larger concessions than those acting on our advice could ever obtain and the people would turn away from us. Of late labor matters become more and more entangled with politics and if we seriously shun politics, we had better keep aloof from trade unionism and “labor politics” too, for here again, as with regard to economic systems of the future, we neglect the immense task of the propaganda of freedom in favor of a minor matter. (—See note one)

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I shall now give the reasons why I am skeptical as to the *economic doctrines* generally combined with anarchism. To be sure I myself hold such doctrines and they do not differ sensibly from those held commonly. But I wish it were so clear to all as it is to me that these doctrines are but hypotheses that need not separate for a moment, say, a communist and an individualist. And the anarchist movement ought to be *one*, relegating those economic differences as matters of nearest detail.

Of course many believe anarchism to be impossible without this or that economic basis in which they firmly believe. To this I reply that the purely hypothetical character of these doctrines should prevent exclusionarism from the beginning. Moreover, many misunderstandings are created by discussing the conflicting theories without considering in each case to which epoch of anarchist evolution an author refers. For anarchist society will not be a cast-iron mechanism but necessarily a developing organism to which different means and methods are most conducive at different times. Above all I discern the period of *unsafe* and that of *safe* freedom (relatively) with many interesting links. I mean by this that in the measure as freedom becomes more deep-rooted, its economic basis much change and may safely change. Hence a discussion

of the economic systems of anarchy is a must before all state to which period of development it refers.

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I shall insert here my own idea of economic arrangements in a period of very developed, consequently very safe freedom. From this it follows implicitly that I do not believe that this ought to be or can be the form of arrangements during the very first or an early stage of free society.

All our efforts are directed towards obtaining the greatest possible effect by the means most convenient to the complex of feelings and ideas which we consider and call our well-being. Consequently waste of energy appears absurd; what can be done by small tools is not done by large ones; every task requires different tools, different energy, etc. Collective work, the cooperation of many tools, is genetically at the back of the smallest tool, say a needle. Yet for some work requiring but a single, individual effort, individual action is the right thing wanted—say a needle handled by two hands, whilst for other work collective action is necessary, a combination of forces.—From this it results that in a free society where competition and hurry are factors reduced to a minimum an infinite number of combinations between individual and collective efforts will be formed for all purposes of production and distribution.—

I suppose that by and by all commodities will be divided, by the large majority of people, in *two* large divisions to which is added a *third* division, comprising all related to physical and intellectual recreation (which I call by the short word luxuries.)

The *first* section comprehends all articles which everybody requires in large quantities in the best possible quality, yet with scarcely any other condition of personal taste or predilection. Thus water is required by all fresh, plentiful and wholesome and but very few have an absolute dislike of the local water and these very easily make special arrangements. The same applies to coals, to flour, to rice and to many other raw materials, etc.—

The *second* section comprehends all other necessities of life. Of course it would be possible to produce many of them in a men's quantities and place them at the disposal of all like water—and in the *early* stage of free society such tendencies would exist but by and by as people get more culture and leisure, they would not care for these uniform and machine made goods and would require special work suited to their personal tastes—just as the leisured people of today (who may be considered to live in the state of economic freedom) do not buy their clothes or shoes ready made but have them made to order.—People also are expected to consider work in these times as a sort of exercise and not as a hell; this is possible only if work regains some individual features and is no longer indifferent mass production.

For the production of commodities of the *first* kind,—large societies would be formed, requiring a number of days' work per annum from each member (or group, representing a number of people, say those of the locality) and supplying the respective commodity to all in a communist way. All this work might cost from 30 to 50 days per annum, varying according to districts, harvests, the quantities consumed, etc. This month's work could be replaced by other work or by supplying a substitute, etc., and special arrangements would exist for the infirm etc. Some might work for a number of years at this work and have done with it for life by this, etc. In short every reasonable person can afford to do this and it is not for reasonable persons to be hampered in their purposes by what some unreasonable person may choose to do.



As to the *decentralization* of production, of industry and of agriculture, I believe that at *that* period the necessity for it (which is more of a *defensive* character) will be gone. For after all this decentralization does *not* equalize the conditions in different localities as efforts of different intensity are necessary in each place—more work here, less work there. Also the special facilities for special work existing in certain districts would be wasted if each locality wanted before all to produce *all*. And people would be bare of all aesthetic feelings—which it is hoped, they will develop again,—if they let the factories of a similar character be erected in each village, etc., thus uniformizing the character of the country which to cultural people nothing is more hateful than uniformity.

So, I think, an exchange of products will have to take place between different localities and the fact that everybody is so much interested in this exchange will, to the utmost extent possible, prevent unfair dealings. After all the result could but to be that, probably, in mountainous districts, say, fifty days work were necessary whilst in fertile plains thirty days might suffice. But then to live in mountainous districts is so much more attractive than to live in level plains, that they will be ready to bring this sacrifice—or they may go to the plains themselves, etc. In this way conditions will be equalized as much as feasible at all, a certain equilibrium will exist—which is all we desire: for the other alternative, perfect equilibrium, means stagnation, incompatible with any further development.—

The *second* kind of work would be the personal, skilled work of each individual, working as a member of a productive group or by himself. A hundred days or so per annum ought to be sufficient to obtain, in exchange for one's own work, the personal goods and the luxuries wanted. Here each one will look for himself that he gets the "full result of his labor" by whatever generally, locally or personally applied method this may be ascertained. As the really essential things will be at the unlimited disposal of everybody – in return for thirty or fifty days' work—, personal distress could not exist and the differences in income are of small importance as they cannot become the origin of new monopolies—in face of general cooperation and the absence of poverty.—It is evident that even at that late period of free society people will be of different character: to many the use of the first mentioned commodities will almost suffice and they could care little to work to produce commodities of a more delicate, cultured character—even if they were placed freely at their own use. Consequently the limits between the first and second articles may change in the course of time, but commodities of the second and, much more of the third class will always exist and can only conveniently be obtained by personal efforts.—

The *third* division embraces all arrangements for scientific, artistic, literary, sporting, recreating and similar purposes—circles and societies for such purposes or the necessary implements for individual research or amusement.—

Thus the *first* series of arrangements gives maintenance to all in the most expeditious way, securing independence in the absence of any economic pressure to all who choose to join;—the *second* series gives free scope for individual activity to secure the measure required of personal comfort and the *third* series enables the fullest possible enjoyment of life in all directions.—

These arrangements do not exclude the co-existence of other varieties by these by those who are so minded, e.g. of entirely communist or entirely individualist groups. They would produce all among themselves or make arrangements with other groups to get what they are in want of by doing some work in return—as they would not expect to get things for which they had not worked.—Each of these organisms would show what it is really worth and what accordingly

extend or drop.—Only then individualism and communism would have a fair trial both and would be found to be complements of each other and not opposites—etc.

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To these opinions which I have held for a long time (and here and there alluded to) the opinions of Ricardo Mella, in his report “La Coopération libre” (Paris Congress, 1900) rather correspond.

But I do not disassociate myself from communist anarchism, as usually explained,—only I think, the exact meaning purpose and limits of communist anarchism ought to be closely examined when it will be found that this theory refers in the first place to the very morrow of the revolution and it’s very first period and it is but improperly extended to the later phases of free society.

At least so it seems to me and I have not the necessary papers to hand to make a proper examination of the question. I should have to examine the whole numbers of the *Révolté*, etc., where most of the principal articles on the theory of communist anarchism first appeared,—in connection with the contemporary general history, history of the anarchist and of the socialist movements of the time. By this I could reconstruct to some degree the milieu by which these articles, though a general plan was probably traced, were undoubtedly influenced. The articles were written hardly ten years (and later) after the Commune of 1871 when the French socialist movement took again large dimensions and was still containing both anarchists and socialists, the mere politicians being as yet in the background. At that time the possibility of another commune must have been felt much more than at present and anarchists endeavored to show why the Commune of 1871 failed and why another Commune must do to succeed.

In *this* connection it was established as the most urgent necessity to give the revolution a *social* character from the very beginning, that the people should *immediately* feel to be relieved from misery by the revolution—and [accordingly] *expropriation and communism* (except a few things to be rationed) were immediately to be carried in practice.

The next consequence was the reorganization of production and here the example of isolated Paris in 1871, surrounded by the enemy, pointed to the impracticability of production on a large scale for the period of the struggle—hence the possibility of producing almost everything on the spot was examined and *intensive agriculture, decentralized industry* were proved to be the right remedy in such emergencies. Later on the insular position of England with the possibility of the food supply being cut off further inspired studies in this direction.—

It seems also evident that at this stormy first period all friends of freedom will before all exercise solidarity and be ready to sacrifice their special predilections etc. Thus individualists standing stubbornly by their systems of exchange will place themselves outside of the ordinary solidarity and would scarcely be taken note or hardly in a very friendly way. This led to a reciprocal animosity between both sets of opinion, because communist anarchists who are in midst of the present struggle and persecutions, usually have the period of as yet unsafe freedom in view, which individualist anarchists (who do not care for revolution of this character at all) only think of periods of safe freedom—and thus a discussion is hampered beforehand by misunderstandings.—

To me, then, communist anarchism appears the best possible measure during that period immediately after the revolution and if longer periods of local isolation must be overcome, localized production will have to be tried. By and by, as freedom takes roots, as distress and need disap-

pear, production will probably assume again larger proportions and individual activity will want more scope than all round communism could give it. The epoch of “free competition” (as Mella calls it) will then follow, changes being made slowly or rapidly, personally, locally or generally as the case may be.—

This *temporary* character of all economic systems we can devise, ought to be plainly affirmed in propaganda. Whilst the study of the original publications will (I expect) let everybody see this temporary character, the secondary publications certainly neglect to emphasize it, much more so the general propaganda (which cannot be sufficiently exact and careful in all respects as the first impression it makes is often decisive.)—

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I have shown that I do not essentially disagree from any of the existing theories. If a social revolution happens, communist anarchism would be the right thing for the immediate future.

*But I begin to doubt whether the forces for such a revolution, the revolutionary proletariat, during the germs of a development towards freedom and solidarity, do exist or are likely to exist for anytime I can foresee.*

My *reasons* for this skepticism will be explained next.

I was led to change my opinion on the working classes first, when I was struck by the fact that today they are not held *responsible* for what they do at the order of their employers. This places them in a privileged, unique position, indeed, I cannot help to feel, and whilst before I looked on them with sympathy for their exploited and suffering condition, the moment I noticed this *moral privilege*, which they enjoy, I look at them critically as on all the possessors of a privilege.

I will *no* longer admit *that a poor man can do no wrong*, but he only acts as the tool and victim of his exploiter and is free from all blame. I make no difference between the soldier or gendarme who fires the shot, the officer who orders to fire and the capitalist or statesman who is at the back of the officer and inspires or signs his instructions.—I see workingmen poison the food of their fellows and others sell this food, others enforce the most noxious regulations etc., etc.,—all at the bidding of their employer—and all believing to be very honest people, doing honest work—and no socialist says a word of truth to them, to be ashamed of what they are doing! If their pleas of superior orders and the stress of necessity is accepted, why are soldiers and gendarmes, the police and informers blamed who do exactly the same: dirty work by superior order!

I have explained this fully in the article “Responsibility and Solidarity in the Labor Movement” of which no notice is taken. I am prepared to admit that the positive suggestions made there (to refuse to do work detrimental to their fellows and to go on strike with this program, ensuring the support of the public) are not practicable as demanding too much self-sacrifice, but, as I also said, the recognition of this responsibility is a matter apart from these suggestions and requires (if I am right at all) but some moral courage, nothing else.

Moral courage, yes! Because none of us are so flattered and spoiled by flatterings as the current working class of today and no one speaks plainly to them. Whatever they do—is not their fault; their generosity is a dogma; their political sense and wisdom praised from all sides, cadging for their votes, etc. They cannot do wrong. A man may sell adulterated food to poor workers and women all day long—if in the evening he pays a trade union subscription and subscribes to a strike fund, he is a model workingman. This absence of criticism alone must spoil a class.

And so I do not look *beforehand* on the mass of the people as anything better, more sympathetic, more hopeful than the mass of men in general. I recognize no longer rich and poor as black and white, but I recognize but persons whose character and qualities make me like and respect them as friends and comrades—and a mass of people unknown to me for whom beforehand I feel polite indifference, if I may say so, certainly no enthusiasm.

I believe that this brings me near to real life, to truth. When one, who is not a working man, enters the socialist movement, he is brought into contact with the very flower of the working classes, men like there is one in a thousand and he delights in this society and forgets the painful truth that: if he himself, a bourgeois, is isolated like one in a thousand among the burghers, real and true socialists do not occur in a much larger proportion in the proletariat either. The condition of exploitation and oppression of the proletariat creates discontent, hatred in a large proportion, no doubt, but how many emerge from these feelings to a real desire for freedom? Most would be quite content with a purely personal improvement of their situation,—those who feel some solidarity with their fellows, would for the greater part accept a general improvement from whomsoever, from an autocratic government or authoritarian socialists, etc.;—only *infinitely few* scorn at this and stand up for freedom and human dignity all through, at whatever cost. I believe that this disposition which makes them anarchists is something *quite apart* from their position as wage workers; consequently anarchism and the proletariat are wider separated than is generally believed. The mass of people are by their economic position only driven to desire material improvements, to be got by many ways in which the revolutionary way is but one which is very little attractive to most.

This is the first reason which makes me doubt of the revolutionary possibilities of the proletariat.

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If this reason might be considered of that small importance of resulting but from my personal impressions and the arbitrary claim of responsibility, the reason I am now going to explain is more important and represents in my belief a material, physical fact.

It is this: that the working classes in their bulk, as a mass, are really of relative inferiority and buy this almost hopelessly unable to be the chief factor of a revolution leading to freedom for all.

To prove this I will first reproduce my reasoning which led me to this assertion:

When I remember the children of a class in school, there were some exceptionally gifted, others gifted in a routine way, others moderately, others very little; some were getting on well by diligence, others not owing to lack of care etc., etc. I should like to see statistics on these qualities made in hundreds and thousands of classes, chiefly where the different standards of domestic life affects the children as little as possible. I believe that the average results would be tolerably similar.

If these children belong to the middle classes, they get on in life according to their real qualities (which the teacher not always rightly judged but which were there all the same); chance, accidents, etc., intervene, of course, but in general already one's school fellows, the sharpest critics, can tell who is worth anything and who is going to get on.

These differences in personal disposition and qualities exist equally among the workers when they enter life. A race begins which soon shows a space between many, and finally: winners and

losers. One is used to think of the working class as one compact, solid mass with no prospects at all. In reality this never was the case. There is graduation, high and low, everywhere. A diligent and attentive worker is usually discovered by the employer in whose interest it lies to treat him with consideration, to give him a position of trust by and by, to overlook some of his faults, etc., since he cares to continue to employ him. It is easy to say in the way of agitation that only sneaks and scoundrels get on higher up. Some do, no doubt, as the employer wants watchdogs and spies, but all do not, there are too many of them, and it would not pay. But each employer is on the lookout for intelligent and reliable workers whom he employs permanently, appoints as foreman etc.

By this absolutely natural and inevitable process solidarity among the workers is hard hit. Those who feel that they are active and intelligent really better their position or at least they wait for an occasion to do so and keep quiet. Those who won some advantage are eager to keep it, not to lose their somewhat exceptional situation and chance, and keep quiet too. We all know how hard the position of old workers is on the occasion of strikes—their situation is entirely different from that of young fellows who care not where they work and what they do.—

In this way *a considerable part* of the working classes is really fettered by their position which is a little better than that of the rest: they will either further aspire, perhaps hopelessly but nonetheless eagerly; they will in many cases lean towards the capitalists and think themselves better than their fellows; they will in any case be quiet and circumspect, the enemies of movements. And as a matter of fact these are (with the exception of sneaks) the *intellectually and physically superior* part, the elite, of the workers.

An exception must also be made in the case of those whom their freedom loving temper and disposition prevents from “getting on.” Of these some are lost and crushed, many others become socialists and anarchists, they remain in the ranks of the workers “from principle” or by necessity; they are born rebels and these are our friends and comrades. Still after a lapse of years of activity a part of them also finds more permanent berths and enjoys a well-earned rest.

Their field of agitation then is the mass of the workers, the proletariat in the narrowest sense. Now this mass chiefly consists of those who were unable to get even a little better position,—owing to chance and misfortune in some cases, but certainly in the vast majority of cases owing to real intellectual and physical inferiority. Of this they are dimly or openly aware themselves, but there is no help. They may be told and may accept that they are but victims, but for themselves they feel that it is their fault or that they had no chance. Having seen their fellows rise to positions which they envy, they believe in these ways of advancement. In short they are a dull, impotent mass with envious cravings and the feeling of want of power and energy.

*If all this was not the case*, if the proletariat *really* contained all the intellect and energy that is born into it, an explosion would long since have occurred if the vents remained shut. But the vents, nay, much larger pipes, continually drain the proletariat of its best elements which capitalism assimilates or at least neutralizes in one or the other way. The remaining dull mass is powerless.

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I can prove this from personal observations relating to a particular trade. But as I remember these details so well I shall not write them down here, but can tell them on any occasion. (See Note 3.) It is a trade with very small openings for intelligent and active workers and they succeed

usually more or less, whilst those who are not efficient remain what they were and one hardly knows what becomes of them in later ages.—In very large trades the possibility of personal advancement is exceedingly small, still differentiation takes place every where it is detrimental to solidarity! (See Note 3.)

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Statistics to examine this question *directly* do not exist probably. *Indirectly* all that has been put together to relate the theory of increasing misery (Verelendungstheorie) has some bearing on the question: on one side we hear that the average income and standard of life of the working classes increase and improve—on the other hand we see misery does hardly less than before. These two observations can be reconciled if we recognize the differentiation among the workers into a hopeless mass with starvation wages all along and a rise in class of what Bakounine calls “ouvrières bourgeois.”

But a far more conclusive *indirect* proof is given by *all that has been said and proved in reputation of the theory of the growing concentration of capital*. Marx assumed not only the concentration of capital in the hands of a decreasing number of capitalists, but the creation of an immense and uniform proletariat to whom all possibilities to better this position were barred. If one supposition falls, the other must fall too. If we compare one factory with a thousand hands to twenty factories with fifty hands each, it is evident that the workers of the twenty factories have a greater chance to differentiate their positions: a greater staff for supervision is likely to be required, the better workers may easier come under the notice of the employer, against intolerable conditions here one may change into another place that is better conducted etc., etc. If small industries are continually created, they require, chiefly in the beginning, greater skill, intelligence, inventive faculties even, than old established routine industries and active and energetic workers flock to these industries where there is some slight chance of advancement, etc.

In this way not only the theory of the concentration of capital but *its inseparable consequence, the theory of uniformity of the proletariat* must fall. *This* is quite independent from my observations—and that my particular observations, that by this process the most intelligent and energetic elements are taken from the proletariat and to a certain degree absorbed into the reactionary classes,—that these observations are true, the practical experience of everybody will show, I am sure.—Exceptions will not be so frequent that they disprove my observations and many exceptions will turn out to be none, if closely examined.—

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Is this depreciation of the revolutionary value of the proletariat a personal fancy of mine?

We need but read what Bakounine wrote to his friends on the relation between the International and the Alliance. The International was to unite the workers not under the banner of socialism or anarchism, but merely under that of the international economic solidarity of all workers. The propagation of all other, more advanced ideas he considered as detrimental to the purpose of uniting the masses. He left that to the small and private groups of the Alliance who alone fully understood and accepted the revolutionary ideas. In the masses he presumed the existence of revolutionary spirit which needed but to be roused and this was to be done by the invisible action and example of the Alliance.—After the failures of 1870 to 74 he admitted (in 1875) that he had been mistaken, that the revolutionary spirit did not exist in the masses.—

Again this revolutionary spirit of the masses was searched for with enthusiastic sacrifices by whole generations of Russian revolutionist in the 70s; the masses did not stir and these revolutionists finally limited themselves to personal action alone (terrorism.) This inspired similar actions in the Occident, during the eighties and at one time the mass seemed roused a little. This culminated in the First of May movement of 1890 and ended there; from that time government took some little interest in social reforms, social democracy became something “practicable” and “reasonable” and the masses accept these bribes and remain quiet. A number of generous comrades sacrificed themselves in various countries down to 1894 and later on, but the masses did not care for this, if they were not hostile.—

What their attitude is today, I have sketched in the introductory remarks. It now seems to be quite logical that they should get worse and worse: *tel maitre, tel serviteur*—capitalism is still very solvent and if it breaks not down from reasons independent of them, they will not desert it.—

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I have shown why my belief in the working class revolution is rather weak. I shall now examine—certainly more for my own satisfaction than with the hope or even desire to convince anyone else—in *which other way freedom might be spread*. This is not an advocacy of a new way, rejection of the old way but an examination of possibilities.

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I ask myself: *does the conviction of the soundness of an idea absolutely imply that this idea must be made generally adopted by all? Is it not sufficient that those who wish, act upon this idea without interference from the rest who may go their own way?*

This seems plausible enough in the case of almost everything except social systems. We like to see a good thing appreciated, not interfered with, prospering, etc., but there our interest ends if we are not fanatics. The greatest admirer of music would not care to hear his favorite melodies through every window and in every street. Fanaticism in this respect would create uniformity which is always hateful.

We do not believe that authoritarian socialists will ever be able to impose their system upon all—are we, then, logical to expect that we can make *freedom* acceptable to all, even those who do not care for it?

I know quite well that freedom, rightly understood, is not a system like so many others but simply the natural way to act. But it is easy in comparison to impose an artificial way of action (an authoritarian scheme) to calling people back to simple natural action.

Evidently the propaganda of freedom must go on as so many have not properly heard of freedom and may and will become aware of its possibility and possibilities. But many others are resolutely set against it and can only be removed by force or be expected to become convinced someday by examples.

Under these conditions I believe that too much time and effort are lost on trying to convince everybody of freedom. We cannot hope to convince all nor a large majority nor, probably, even a large minority—nor can we hope to become a decisive factor in the emancipation of the working classes. We can only come forward on all possible locations to explain our ideas by word and by action. The present system remains unchanged, or nearly so, all through.

Would it not be logical to admit this is *a fact, unalterable by us*? We repudiate the present system, our comrades repudiate it, but the great majority of people do *not* repudiate it—*so let them have it!!!* From this standpoint all that is logically required is mutual toleration and let all act for themselves according to their ideas.

Consequently—(if we consider mutual toleration possible, for argument's sake)—social systems must not all follow each other chronologically but might co-exist at the same time. There might exist (1) present society with exploiters and those who work for them (some in the hope to become exploiters themselves); (2) all sorts of undertakings by authoritarian socialists and others; (3) free groups of anarchists and their friends. Then experience would show which of these three or more spheres is the best apt to live and each variety would have a perpetual trial. Before all the waste of effort by propaganda by word—which is like throwing a seed at random in the air—would be replaced by propaganda by example—which is like planting seed into well-prepared ground and reaping the fruits. Neither party would be burdened with impossible tasks—present society would not have the impossible task of repressing freedom, and anarchists would not have the equally impossible task of convincing people of freedom who do not care for it; they would not be hampered by strugglers in their desire to live free lives themselves.—

This method corresponds to the way I like best to arrive at a decision. Some are for majority rule in doubtful cases which I regret as being a purely accidental decision. Others wish for continued discussion until unanimity is obtained. This to me implies waste of energy, leads to compromises and often to the triumph of the most stubborn and narrow-minded who tires the others (like a dissentient English jurymen.) But I am for *free separation* and separate action by all means, if all do not quite willingly agree. *Far da se* is the right way and this implies toleration towards as well as by the rest.—

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The important point, of course, is: *could such mutual toleration ever be obtained, and by what means?*

Looking at history we find immense struggles, carried on by the most barbaric means, to ensure the exclusive existence of a particular religion; we find also that those countries where one religion absolutely triumphed prospered least in course of time (like Spain and Austria), whilst the countries where toleration was first adopted became the leading the centers of civilization. There is certainly an evolution towards toleration going on, relegating so many matters that that were thought important privileges of the monarch or the government, to private decision. Of course this still meets the opposition of those in power, but public opinion on some matters at least secured tolerance.

If besides this we see today a growing interference of the state into personal matters, I believe this to be the result of prevailing reactionary doctrines; all parties, social democrats included, call upon the states to remedy all existing evils—little wonder if the state is only too willing to exercise its blundering interference on an increasing scale. This is the mere outcome of theories which our propaganda has to combat.

Of more importance is the increase of intolerance and brutality which new parties display which have been created under the pretense of social reforms: the nationalist, antisemitic, agrarian, imperialist and other parties which are the coarsest expression of personal egoism and greed. Here human brutality and bestiality shows at its best.—On their subject we can only say that these



sentiments and their representatives must always have been existing among us and that it is good that they found expression at least—this is perhaps the beginning of their end. They are acting as a kind of automatic drainage of other parties from impure and worthless characters. They show the advantage of tolerance and ordinary honesty to large sections of people. They are in fact the involuntary creators of serious tendencies for toleration and freedom. Some years ago tolerance in many matters was an absolute fact that needed no further to be defended; now almost everything is put into question by the surviving representations of bestiality in our midst—hence a new fight for toleration is taking place which it is all important for anarchists to join.—

We may refer to the campaign of the “intellectuals” in France, to the very much smaller, yet commendable anti-war movement in England; in some countries the political persecutions begin to attract the attention of larger spheres: the Montjuich campaign in Spain was a model movement in this respect—it has led to a movement of indignation against priests and government all over Spain.—

Methods to win toleration are various: public agitation on the largest scale like in the movements just described;—resistance in defiance as shown by the anti-vaccinators, the defenders of the public right of ways, the common preservers, etc. In many cases, some antimilitarists (individual cases and some Russian sects), etc.

Another method is that of *the representation of minorities*, worked out practically in the systems of *proportional representation*, securing to minorities of political parties no actual influence, it is true, but a hearing at any rate and abolishing thus the glaring stupidity of silencing minorities altogether.—

This *principle of acknowledging the rights of minorities* would indeed, if seriously carried to its furthest consequences, bring anarchism a good deal further. As anarchists would not interfere with the State (political abstention), the State ought to obtain from interfering with them. Some such minimum of toleration ought some day to be the result of gaining public opinion on the subject.—

The most difficult problem would remain: by what material means can anarchists arrange their own manner of living, when all property and means of production or appropriated by the upholders of the present system:—to obtain these means by gradual cooperative working would place the anarchist undertakings from the beginning at an unfair disadvantage in face of the old established monopolists;—to obtain means by expropriation is impossible for a minority;—to obtain means by a convention with the present state would be detrimental to independence and demoralizing. Hence *this* problem remains insoluble, at least as long as our minority is so very small.—

But in the meanwhile anarchists might live their own lives and speak out their opinions with regard to many other matters as to which they must conquer their right of free recognition and independence. I consider anarchist propaganda to be far too one-sided and monotonous. It is possible even today to act according to freedom in many matters and if action is impossible, to elaborate and proclaim what ought to be done according to freedom, in the matter, is often quite possible. This ought to be done in every case—people ought to see anarchism at work practically with regard to each subject that is of public interest. Anarchism must become a recognized factor of public life.

In this way by showing ourselves what we believe freedom can do (and this practical exercise will be most instructive to ourselves) and by upholding all other movements for toleration, we may finally arrive to a position of full toleration and then begin economic undertakings on a large

scale to secure our full independence. As I said before, other advanced theories would be put in practice also and this general experimentation would lead to the triumph of freedom when the people will choose to prefer freedom to material satisfaction of their wants and interest without regard for human dignity—as they do today.—

Anarchism, for some time past (even more than now!) made itself felt in art and literature, it begins to take up the question of education; it is interested in co-operation; it contributed to the defense of public liberties; it is known to be in thorough sympathy and solidarity with science—all these are hopeful beginnings which cannot be sufficiently strengthened, multiplied, diversified and extended to all other spheres of life.—*All these movements appeal to the most advanced, the most intelligent, and the part most inspired with solidarity and initiative of mankind—and not to the random mass of the proletariat.*

This mass of the people today—unfortunately, but truly and certainly,—cares but little for freedom, *cannot afford to care for it* as they will say. They are a dead weight on freedom. I have tried to prove this above; here I add: this is not a question of feeling hard or having no personal sympathy with the poor people! Any quantity of sympathy cannot alter their disposition such as it exists—*that is the point. Why not admit this actual fact?* We learn from the description of remote tribes and peoples that some sentiments, some ways of thinking which we consider essential and indispensable, are bona fide unknown or hardly developed among them. The same is the case, to some degree, within the same people. No one will deny that art in its high and, to educated people, only real forms is dull and unattractive to the mass of the people who really like what to educated people appears intolerably vulgar; etc. No one will deny the actions which educated people do to each other simply prompted by the desire of mutual help and politeness are done by people below a certain social degree with the deliberate purpose of obtaining tips and that they take certain revenge if their attempt fails. It is equally certain that people of different classes condone affairs which others relentlessly persecute and vice versa. The people are not at all famous for their mercy; when a poor devil is hunted about the streets, who do we see joining the hunt and afterwards, often, boasting of having first felled the man or helped to thrash him but very harsh workingmen? Etc. Etc.

Hence it must be permitted to state the fact that the people, to my best experience, do not care for freedom. They are very much for material advancement, but are as yet entirely unscrupulous as to the means to obtain it—from tips and charity to capitalist exploitation, from reactionary reforms to social democratic methods, etc.; all these unscrupulous methods are more powerful materially than the clean means which anarchists advocate. Anarchism has no business to compete with these methods which still satisfy the people!

*For these reasons I think that anarchists would do good to rely on their own forces alone and not to let the proletariat, a very dull mass, wave them down in their struggle. To fight for obtaining an increasing degree of toleration and to establish the closest relations among themselves for the practice and development of freedom and solidarity, beside—if necessary,—but outside of present society—this seems to me the hopeful task of the future.*

The other way ties us up with the desperately slow programs of the proletariat, hinders us to see something of freedom ourselves and thus *inevitably* diminishes and degrades our own cause for freedom, the best faculty which we have got and which we must not waste. (Note 2.)

Here I can conclude these reflections which seem to myself very imperfect as to their conclusions, but which put forward problems and questions which present themselves to me without their actual solution satisfying me. To task others to work with me to find a satisfactory reply.—

July 24–28, 1901.

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## Summary.

1. S.—After reading over again the preceding pages, I can resume in short words when I tried to show:

The immense principle of freedom seems to me to find but an all together inadequate, little and narrow expression in the existing anarchist movements;—

These movements are burdened:

by economic doctrines (which are but hypotheses and are too little recognized as such),—and:

by incompetent participation in working class movements which claim but material improvements and do not care for freedom.

This narrow character of the anarchist movement is caused by the belief in the proletariat as a revolutionary factor; this belief seems to be unfounded or greatly exaggerated; one reason is the moral inferiority of the proletariat, resulting from the absence of the feeling of responsibility;

The other reason is the intellectual and physical inferiority of the proletariat, resulting from the fact that most of the superior element which it contains, are continuously absorbed or at least something neutralized by the middle class;

This is proved (1) from actual experience; (2) as the necessary complement of the theory which now replaces the refuted theory of the concentration of capital; small industries, etc., also mean the differentiation of the proletariat—just as concentrated capital meant compact, uniform masses of workers.—

How might freedom to be propagated in a more satisfactory way?

By showing what it can do in all domains of life (as it showed this already in science, art, etc.) To be able to do this, it must obtain *toleration*, to which it must reply by mutual toleration. (This means: let those who care not for freedom, remain what they are—exploiters or exploited! If only they leave those who want to be free alone.) Is there any prospects for this?

Practically very little; still tolerance is a *growing* factor in human life; just now the increasing brutality of the brutes in our midst makes tolerance more naked. These movements must be supported and strengthened; the existing theory of the representation of minorities (in politics; proportional representation) must be extended to social and other matters, etc.—By and by anarchists must win acknowledgment and the right to act for themselves, without interfering nor interference, and in all spheres of life. Then more will join and the movement will extend.—

Will this happen? It is a very improbable too, but as in this eventuality the acting forces would be the most freedom inspired, intelligent and energetic men and women of the age—and not the unknown elements of a dull mass, the proletariat,—such a struggle seems a priori more hopeful that the social revolution of the proletariat which, if it ever takes place, will bring into power elements which very imperfectly care for freedom and among whom the friends of freedom would be scarcely less isolated and powerless than they are today.—In any case the more and the sooner anarchists widen and enlarge their sphere of propaganda and action, the better.

July 29.

## Note 1.

We reject the *political struggle* (the struggle for the conquest of political power in the present state and for the erection of the new, socialist power in a state of the future) and claim the *destruction of political power*.

It is logical to say also: we reject the economic struggle which to the mass of people means the conquest of economic power in the present state, that is some slight improvement of their position within the present system, and claim the *destruction of economic power* (the predominance of man over man from economic reasons which is equally hateful than domination from political reasons.)

We try and advocate to destroy political power by the destruction of the political machinery, the state—which corresponds to the destruction of economic power by the destruction of its mechanism, private property permitting exploitation,—by the means of expropriation.—In their place we expect to see political freedom: anarchy—and economic freedom: an equitable system of production and distribution.—

Consequently to take part in labor movements for economic improvements is not much different from taking part in political movements for political reforms. It is quite an arbitrary distinction to say that anarchist must not take part in political struggles and must by all means take part in economic struggles. We are led to this because we usually identify in our minds politics with electioneering, the economic struggle with serious socialist views in the cessation of work for exploitation, or expropriation, in the background. Thus we see things distorted—one movement leaves us cold and indifferent, the other makes us enthusiasts. Yet we are in most cases simply under the fascination of the word “economic” which to those concerned means something quite different than it means to us.

The difference is this: to the man of the people the economic struggle means: the improvement of their situation by any means whatsoever; to us it means: such an improvement *plus* an increase of freedom by means corresponding to freedom only. This position of ours is not intelligible and not welcome to the mass of the people; the factor of freedom or human dignity which is so essential to us, is nothing to most of them—consequently we do not understand each other and satisfactory results are impossible.

If we take part in a *modern* labor struggle (for the period of enthusiastic old struggle with plenty of room for personal initiative, spontaneity, etc. is gone) we must either adopt the entire technical apparatus of modern strikes—which includes pressure by political or governmental influence, etc., etc., all things which we abhor,—or we show ourselves “impracticable” and the people will rightly say that we prefer our own cause to theirs and had therefore better leave them alone altogether.—The same with trade unions. Either we take seriously part in all the *purely economic* movements which thereby exclude all external ideas, *that of freedom also*,—and then: farewell, anarchism!—or we subordinate the importance of these movements to that of our ideas and then: our efforts are useless because the people naturally dislike this way of acting—and direct propaganda would have had far greater effect.—

Perhaps it will be objected: but let us show them that that our methods are more efficient than the other methods in which they believe and they will win confidence in us. To this I reply again:

we cannot show this if we are true to our opinions. Our co-operation would be like that of two armies one of which defends itself to obtain peace by all means whilst the other is determined to accept only an honorable peace; they will co-operate for a certain time, but then their tactics will necessarily differ,—and in the same way strikes would break up in every case or we must do as the others are used to do.—

All this seemed more hopeful five or six years ago when the trade unions current among anarchists began: today it is clear to me that our general propaganda has been weakened by the absorption of some of the best by the trade union movement, whilst not much success is visible on the other hand. The keeping away of many French trade unions from politics and the sympathies of many for the general strike in the advanced character of several French unions will be opposed to my judgment; but those who will, be contented with this; to me the success is not conclusive and I see in it rather some comrades drawn further into *semi-politics* than one would like to see.—

## Note 2.

My impression of what ought to be done, is dim and not clear yet. Rejecting the exaggerated predominance of economic theories and labor movements, I do not at all advocate another exaggeration, anarchist colonies or communities. What I desire is to see anarchist ideas win, so to speak, civic rights in all spheres of life: that means toleration, recognition, not predominance which can only be expected at a later stage.

I am thinking of the memorable Encyclopedists' age of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, preceding the French Revolution when, during the time of the deepest political and economical corruption and degradation the ideas of freedom (*as then understood*) by and by absorbed the minds of all the best men of the period, were fully discussed and became the intellectual property of all long before the real struggle against the existing political and economic system (as far as feudalism was concerned) began.

In such a way anarchism should, I feel, leave at last the secluded rooms where it lingers, weighed down by economic theories and its unique care for the proletariat,—and enter the full sunny daylight of general life. A beginning was made in art and literature in some countries, but this is as yet so little and so much remains to be done. On the subject of anarchism ignorance and prejudice are absolutely triumphing and this gets worse, not better; with the years 1892–94 the public learned something about anarchism which at that time had the advantage of very [a word apparently omitted in ms.] interpreters; what was written in 1900 when attention was once more drawn towards anarchism, was so much more stupid and ignorant that either the public or the press deteriorated since the 90s, or both.

The difficulties of winning the ear of the larger public to some small degree even, are enormous and perhaps increasing. Still our ideas are worth all these efforts. They can but win by being fully discussed and re-examined over and over again. They were formulated in their present shape by small groups of men in the stormy periods of action, persecutions and propaganda—and for some years now they are re-echoed in increasing numbers of publications with too little further examination and study, I fear.—

Perhaps at a later period the working class may become a more hopeful field for propaganda; today they sleep and reaction puts in question whatever trace of freedom that may exist today—

*this* makes those who care for freedom to some extent—to whatever class they belong—eager to defend it and in this frame of mind the propaganda of anarchism might reach them easier than ever before. But such a propaganda must be less one-sided than at present and do *first things first*, that is, first create wide and strong sympathy and desire for freedom in the largest sense. That is of the utmost importance—and economic hypotheses are only to be considered a long way after.—I wish myself that things were so simple as I used to believe: the social revolution and communist anarchism and free society afterwards,—but unfortunately they are not and we had better examine again all parts of the problem.—

### Note 3

The example I referred to was that of a large gardening establishment in a continental city. This establishment (a private garden) engaged a very good reputation; consequently all young gardeners who came to that town would have liked to be employed there. The chief gardener who had no pecuniary interest in the establishment but had to look out for effective workers as work of many kinds had to be done properly, picked out from these young men the very best, judging by his experience; the others, if not finding work in gardens of an equal standard, had to go away to work in inferior gardens (longer hours, monotonous work, small occasion to learn something new, etc.) Now of these picked young men a few showed a real interest in gardening; an experienced gardener can ever discern this real interest; the others would do their work and care for nothing more. The former ones would e.g. on Sundays visit other gardens, would read books and follow classes on gardening, would be eager to learn from more experienced persons, etc.; the others would sleep on Sundays or waste their time otherwise—their interest ended when the clock struck six.

Owners of smaller private gardens who wanted a young gardener of some experience often applied to the chief gardener to recommend to them skilled gardeners for those semi-independent positions where a man may marry and live, toiling hard but had his own time and certainly raised out of the ranks of the workers. The chief gardener of course recommended the most intelligent and reliable whom I have first described, though he was loathe to part with them in many cases—but of what good could be others be in an independent position who could not see farther than their nose and were only proper to do what they were told, nothing of their own?

In this way the intelligent and reliable young gardeners were as a rule provided for after some years and again, in those small independent positions, the same differentiation would take place—some would cease to strive farther (like some who open never a book once their studies and examinations are over); others would try to win farther experience and out of their ranks, of course, would be selected those who were trusted with superior situations later on, etc.

What became of the mass of the inefficient, incompetent gardeners, I know but little. They drudged away in second and third rate gardens, until some very small position, caretaker or so, opens to them,—or they change into other occupations, or disperse in the country,—or, worst of all, become old and gray, working side-by-side with young men and almost boys; such an old man, if he is reliable, may remain all his life at the same place, working at the same wages..... and this position is still enviable in comparison to his position if he has to look out for work: for who will employ an old gardener? Every employer thinks that something must be the matter

with him, to remain an ordinary worker at that age—and though misfortune may sometimes be the cause, incompetence and unreliability usually is.—

Thus the superior elements were absorbed by the middle classes.—

Many other factors determinate the differentiation between the members of the proletariat. Some marry early, or soon burdened with increasing families and break down under the stress; some marry ten years later, often servant girls with some strings and by these means set up as independent shoemakers or tailors or, by being able to depose a sum as caution ( ) get some position of trust otherwise inaccessible to them.—Others achieve the same by themselves by what is called in a deprecatory way “thrift and saving.” Of course no one acquires a cotton mill or cold mine by “thrift in saving,” but many small intermediary situations just a little above the heads of the mass *are* every day obtained in this way. Temperate habits, cleanliness, personal appearance, chance and accidents are so many other factors of differentiation.—And to those really affected by these factors must be added the number of those who cherish illusions as to their faculties and chances and who are quite as much absorbed by their striving to “get on” as those who really succeed.—

I need not be told of the fallacy of “thrift and saving” and all other means to advance, as real remedies. What I maintain and what I never heard discussed by those who refute these alleged “remedies” is, that in this question men must not be counted out statistically but be weighed personally and we shall find that though the numbers of those who succeed to rise out of the proletariat may be relatively small after all, they are—in general—undoubtedly the *most superior* part of that class. Now since every advanced movement appeals certainly before all to the most intelligent, the morally and physically sound and strong of a generation—and since just *this* part of the proletariat is usually absorbed in some way by the middle classes—and since the refutation of the theory of the concentration of capital shows that this evolution (a growing differentiation) is even on the increase,—it follows to me *that the revolutionary value of the working classes is at all times overrated and now perhaps even decreasing.*—

The hopeless, dull and broken mass which remains, will either not stir at all or before in the not intelligent way it has always behaved during revolutions and much more so *after* revolutions? They always fell victims to new authorities. Freedom would have no appropriation? Most things would be done over their heads as before? A crisis would arise and the most plausibly looking authoritarian democratic state. I should praise all these facts which I deplore: I should be glad to see the masses dull as they will the easier submit to the decrees of their superiors, the leaders. As I wish for Anarchy, I cannot but recommend to anarchists to place themselves on a firmer basis than the belief in the proletarian. “Anarchism for anarchists”—this seems to me to be the right basis.—

I believe that we and all socialists have been idealizing the people all along in the most uncritical way. The abhorrent spectacle of those who are rich and in authority and who consider exploitation and oppression solidarity with their victims,—being victims ourselves, deprived of freedom and, in most cases, of well being. But have these feelings ever be returned by the people? One may point out on the side of the people: some interest in immediate material questions as shown by strikes, the support of strikers, providence, co-operation, etc.,—some acts of violence,—and some participation in general revolts under quite exceptional circumstance, it seems,—for so many other revolts met with general indifference. This—and a number of quite individual acts of pluck and determination—is all, I can think of, that was done more or less spontaneously by the people and in a much larger number of cases, I should say, nothing at all was done under quite as

great provocation as it would appear.—Everything else is done by persons who are beforehand under the spell of a theory, of socialism or anarchism and without their initiative much of the before described would not have happened either. Looking critically (as I imagine) at them, all popular movements appear to a great part quite artificial. Almost all is none by conscious socialists, either from previous intention or acting driven by their sentiment at the given moment. The people may fight heroically when the struggle is engaged and fighting is inevitable; they may be practical as to details when a definite course of action is forced upon them—but something revolutionary seldom, if ever, starts from their ranks.—

Hence again: personal conviction, not economic position, is decisive and anarchists must try to make other persons anarchists, personally and individually, and not waste their efforts on a class which is not revolutionary *as a class* how much every one might expect and believe this.

[ ] 1901.

## Postscriptum.

After leaving this subject alone for several weeks, to see whether my reflections did not carry me too far, I am considering it again and this time cannot help but come to some farther pessimistic conclusions. I shall begin by another summary, shorter than the above given.

I find that the anarchist *movement* is not progressing so well as the splendid *idea of freedom* ought to make progress and triumph.

Why is this so?

(1) because the large idea of freedom is rendered narrow and dogmatic by uniting its propaganda with that of economic hypotheses.

(This branch of the subject I leave over for the present.)

(2) chiefly because we rely before all on the working classes as the chief evolutionary factor.

This belief in the working classes is an unchallenged dogma. I undertake to explain why I am not convinced of this dogma.

The chief reason is that the working class is not an homogene class but is constantly deprived by the middle class of its most intelligent and energetic members who are absorbed or at least neutralized by the middle classes. The remaining mass of the workers is, in their great majority, really inferior and cannot become the forfighter of the cause of freedom which requires the very best.

This situation is *not* improving in the case of an increasing equalization of the quality of the working classes—for all segments and people [ ] to the vitality of overall industries, to the non-existence of the Marxian concentration of capital are arguments and proofs for the continuation, if not the increase, of the existing differences between the workers: some chance for the superior, hopeless misery for the rest because each one of them or nearly so, individually, is inferior, is defeated in the struggle for life.—

Hence anarchists must rely on themselves alone.

How this can be done, is the most difficult problem.

I was struck by the reflection that to expect anarchism to come into existence *for all* at the *same time* is—besides expecting an impossible thing—expecting and desiring a uniformity which would be as harmful as every other uniformity is. A state of things in which the *old* exists *besides*



the *new* is more logical and more corresponding to the experience of nature and history, I think. The basis of such a state of things would be: *mutual toleration*.

Today we have fighting and the desire to convince or to exterminate on both sides. (Toleration would only be used towards the hopelessly defeated relicts of capitalists in atavistic cases, considering them as more or less insane, irresponsible fragments of the past.)

I ask: is the chance of victorious expropriation *and* victorious *freedom* greater than the chance of obtaining and granting toleration???

The words "*and freedom*" settle this question to my satisfaction. It is always possible that a mass of people do something coming near to expropriation,—but also to *freedom*??? No.

For freedom is *not* a question of numbers and mechanical force. People who do not feel it themselves, cannot be taught to feel and to use it. For I think that there are no more people capable of freedom in existence in one generation than actually come forward to show this in one or the other way, for they cannot conceal it. They are rebels and act as such and did act thus in history and in private life during all ages and under the most diverse designations. It is possible to make them aware of the fact that capitalists are the least exponents of freedom and to make them join the anarchist movements, but it is not possible to increase their numbers by agitation and propaganda. *Socialism*, being a *doctrine*, can be propagated like the belief in god or in the stock exchange. Anarchism is a matter of physical and psychical disposition—it can be anchored and developed but never created and planted if no predisposition exists.

This fact disappoints myself, because it makes the future look different to me from what it used to do. Still I must say [that] if an increased number of people do not, at present, care for *freedom* in the least (whilst they do care for material improvements, being unscrupulous as to how they are obtained)—it is extremely probable that this proportion will continue and that anarchists will remain the infinite minority which they are and have always been. In this case they could uselessly and hopelessly spend all their efforts on an impossible propaganda.

They might therefore do better by living *side by side* with the existing state of things and possible material improvements in the State socialist [case?] according to the principle of mutual toleration. This principle must be propagated and the other side must be made to accept it—from self-interest, if from no higher motives.—

What brought me to this way of thinking is:

1. my ideas on responsibility, fully explained in "Freedom;" I thought once: *a working man can do no wrong*.—I now think: *the abuse of responsibility for workingmen is a monstrous privilege*.
2. the English workers and the South African war.—

I remember that centuries ago the dogma prevailed: a king can do no wrong—today the principle of responsibility (approval by ministers) is generally recognized. The *same* evolution of opinion must take place with regard to workingmen, or they will be new tyrants like the kings of old were.

Though I am but little following the [advanced] press and literature for some time past, I note a few characteristic incidents and expressions of opinions which seem to show that others too are looking more critically at the general attitude of the workers; I refer

- a. to Mr. Hyndman's retirement from the S. D. F. Knowing neither the exact content of his letter nor the nearer circumstances and the [reasons] of the event, I say that I admire the pluck with which he alone of the English Socialists told the workers plain truths and withdrew with disgust.
- b. I was equally pleased by the appeal of the Journal de Charterers [ ] to the British trade unionists: to come out on strike to make an end to the war. This establishes the right principle that workingmen have not only rights but also duties! (The proposal met with indifference and the Trade Union Congress of 1901 then refused to discuss a very moderate anti-war resolution.)
- c. I also remember some very good remarks (by ..... ) in a leading article in "Freedom," 1900, on the subject of an English socialist conference in which the writer expressed his disappointment with the [ ] evolution of the English working class movement.—

In any case, whatever I say, may easily seem not to apply to the workers and movements of Italy, Spain and perhaps to some extent France,—even if I grant this, it applies—I am certain of it—to the workers of England, America, Germany and the Slavonic peasants who are ready to assist silently at the strangling of all efforts for freedom of the less powerful nations.—

In practice I am as much in sympathy with propaganda and action as ever—because it gives me and others pleasure to express and (some of us) to do what we think right—with no concern as to the ultimate success. But, of course, if the theoretical pessimism is well founded it would be a practical action to reconsider the best ways of propaganda. At present I should like to see my above theoretical arguments examined.

(August 21, 1901)

(September 22, 1901) Since the above was written I have passed some days in a milieu of enthusiastic friends and comrades who were more likely to drive away my pessimism than any other milieu in Europe at present, I believe; after that, I had to observe the effect on so-called public opinion of the personal act of an American Pole in America. So I had some glimpses of the outermost heights and depths of present dispositions and feelings. I resume now my present state of mind on the above discussed questions in these forms:

(the figures used are *quite arbitrary*)

of 1000 persons say 50 may be of independent character and of these, the only one who care not only for material well-being but for well-being + freedom [and some for freedom *almost exclusively*] 40 again think only of freedom for themselves and may be called egoistic or autocratic independents; the 10 others care for freedom in an altruistic, libertarian way. Of these 10 at present 1 or 2 are conscious anarchists and their propaganda may and must sooner or later succeed in convincing the 8 others that one or the other of the various conceptions by which we try to express and formulate our desire for altruistic freedom is the best way for them to realize their unconscious craving for freedom and justice.

But we shall hardly succeed to convincing many of the 40 autocratic independents that the freedom of others is the basis of their freedom and not the subjection and slavery of others as they think. And we shall not be able to convince a sensible proportion of the 950 others, because *our aim: well-being + freedom*, is so much more difficult to obtain, consequently appears so very unpracticable to them—than their *own aim: well-being pure and simple*. With the means to obtain

this we cannot and do not wish to compete; our proof that well-being without freedom is an illusion is conclusive only to us who care for freedom, but is quite inconclusive to *them* who do not know and do not care to know what freedom is. Hence the bulk of our work is lost. Still propaganda is necessary and essential to discover, rouse and rally to us the 8 or 9 unconscious anarchists not yet discovered.

Further success in the way of propaganda of *anarchism* we must not expect. Why? Because it is a matter of personal disposition and not a matter of dry reasoning. The proofs of this? Is this seriously contested at all? Do not almost all comrades remember to have been refractory, rebellious in one way or the other, large or small, before they accepted anarchism? Again do those who pass over to anarchism after having been authoritarian socialists every fully accept anarchism?? I believe, not. I except some who were always in opposition whilst belonging to social democrat organizations—their temper and spirit is of the anarchist kind—but those who were conscious leaders of social democrats can never fully embrace anarchism—with them purely economic tendencies, the desire for mass movements, trade unionism, etc. will predominate and the personal desire for freedom will work in the background. Thus if the most reasoning and intelligent advocates of anarchism from motives of pure reason and intellect cannot fully realize its true meaning—then how about the rest?!

To the outcome of these reflections mere despair and despondency? By no means! Only: natural facts are recognized as such and benevolent illusions are dispelled. The way out of it (mutual toleration) seems pointed out by the following historic parallel:

- in the middle ages the catholic church dominated exclusively and persecuted and exterminated heretics without succeeding in destroying them as they were the indestructible and always re-born rebellious part of the population. [We live in a similar period with regard to anarchism.]

- for a short time mutual toleration seemed to become the next stage—the Renaissance (indifference against religion in limited circles), but this sympathetic evolution was replaced by the intolerant struggle of new sects for absolute domination and the ensuing resistance of the Church—the religious wars of the Reformation. [This would correspond to a period of social revolutions against capitalism, efforts to introduce authoritarian socialism by force just as capitalism is maintained by force.]

- The result of these religious wars were intolerable periods of stagnation, reaction and misery—until in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the voice of toleration was raised again; it had to sound harsh and use the words: *Ecrasez l'infame*, against an illegal and intractable enemy, but the tendency was the same as that of the humanity of the Renaissance: to win personal freedom for those who want to be free—not to make all “free,” against their will even, as the authoritarians of the Reformation wanted to do.

- The result?—Whilst the Reformation led to impossible and unbearable reaction, the libertarian movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century led to the present state of things in religious matters, namely that the absolute mutual toleration among all who can be considered as more or less reasonable people at all. They may affect religious intolerance for purposes of party and clique, but their own thinking is liberated from those fetters which did exist as fetters for the same class of people up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today in all countries people may be acquainted with each other for years without thinking or speaking a word about the religious to which they may belong. Mutual toleration really exists to the fullest extent and exceptions are the result of direct instigation for interested purposes.—

This *parallel* seems to show that (1) it is impossible to maintain uniformity, (2) that [it] is equally impossible to replace *one* uniformity by other uniform system, and (3) that the only way of actual evolution is the *coexistence* of rivaling organisms however contradictory and absurd this may appear. The reason is that the different systems not only correspond to the material and intellectual dispositions of people but also to their temper, their feelings, their inmost nature—hence things can really change only in the slowest way—and all who are impatient and want to go ahead cannot expect to push on this evolution by their efforts and sacrifices but must go ahead themselves and alone and to be able to do this in the most satisfactory way, must convince the others of *mutual toleration*. (Of course some may break away fighting their way and remain set up in self defense—and present intolerance makes this the only feasible way,—but as a natural way and the final means mutual toleration will sooner or later be accepted.)—

.....Thus I can imagine a stage of society when capitalists or their workers, the members of authoritarian socialist undertakings and those of free groups of anarchists live side by side and think no worse of each other than today the average catholic thinks of the average Protestant and of the average freethinker. They are all personally convinced of the truth of their creeds and may consider their neighbor is a fool or a blockhead that he does not see this truth. But in practical life they do not think of this at all and are friendly or indifferent as their personal disposition, etc. leads them to do.—What is considered of all three bad tone is proselytism, bothering each other with the religious subjects. A missionary is considered a nuisance by any of them—still they exist and carry on the propaganda—as priests, parsons and lecturers. In the same way if the three systems coexisted, some propaganda would continue to be made, but not in an offensive way like the missionary-nuisance—but in a representative, quiet way like the ordinary sermons in churches and chapels and lecture rooms.—In the same way as we expect freethought to become universal—by general conviction, not by force or the majority vote etc.—In the same way we expect anarchist ways of production and distribution to become general, by the force of example and results.—

I think my meaning is sufficiently clear and omit further amplifications. It is quite possible that we shall have to pass through a period of intolerance like that of the wars of the Reformation, what an epoch of toleration will follow like that of the humanists and of the Encyclopedists.—

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A comparison of the methods and characters of the Reformists and the Encyclopedists ought to be useful. The Reformists intended to work for all—the Encyclopedists and Humanists only for themselves and their friends and circles, in the first line. The Reformists were fanatic propagandists, the Encyclopedists cool critics and indifferent towards those who did not seem to care for the new ideas. Finally the Encyclopedists won their purpose; the reformists did apparently succeed but really achieved something quite different from their original purpose—a new religious tyranny which alleviated only to the smallest degree the existing miserable state of things. And why? Because the Encyclopedists one and all were convinced of their purpose (freedom of opinion) and fought for it one and all with intelligence and determination—why else the reformers had to deal with the mass of the people who understood them but imperfectly, followed them but indifferently and acted as deadweight preventing a real change to take place.—

Today we see already the social Democratic parties entirely in the awkward position of the reformists. Their blank theories are entirely overruled by their practice which sinks lower and

lower to the level of the indifferent and inert masses. If they succeed, they will succeed as the Reformists succeeded—changing the title of the church and altering very little else.

So much more reason there is for anarchists not to imitate this example but to act *for themselves* alone—then they will be invincible and irrepressible as every opinion which stood boldly up for itself, always was. On the other hand each college which appealed to the indolent masses failed with regard to its true purpose.

This is simply a natural phenomenon which cannot be overcome. Only those who are able to do a thing, can do it. The others simply cannot. At present as before only a small number of people care for freedom—they can get it, if they stand up for it without wasting their efforts on impossible tasks; the rest of the people do not want it and ought to be left alone. If they begin to care for freedom—so much the better, but this development cannot be forced.

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I may be told, perhaps, that I am tolerant towards capitalism and void of sympathy towards its victims.—My reply is: I feel sympathy in solidarity with all who want to be free in the altruistic (not in the autocratic) sense and I fight capitalism as long and as far as it interferes with the freedom of any of those. But I can conceive a state of things when state interference and the interference of capitalist competition ceased with regard to anarchists living among themselves in their own way—just as today a co-operative factory peacefully and quietly works aside of a capitalist factory or just as a co-operative magazine stands beside a grocer's shop (though no love may be lost between them).—The fact that the victims of capitalism are exploited, touches me thus far as any of the workers desires to escape from this hell and to become free—,then no obstacle must be placed in his way and he might join an anarchist producing group just as *today* if he seriously wants it, he might a little improve his position by joining the co-operative movement. The want of capital will be objected here—but co-operative production exists already and existed for long years, why is co-operative *production* so little utilized in companion to co-operative consumption? It is because a greater number of people *care* for the advantage of the one than for those of the other. If greater masses of workers had really cared to establish co-operative production they would have succeeded just as smaller groups have done. But as I said all along—the great mass is too inferior to care for anything out of the way of routine and of the stronger many find advancement within capitalism, etc.—So I may reply to the initial question: whether I or anybody else feels sympathy with *all* the victims of capitalism or not, is not of the slightest importance, because they simply cannot be held by ourselves. To burden the anarchist movement with them means the ruin of the movement by this dead weight. The best way left seems to be: to weaken capitalism by the example of prospering anarchist associations which may in the long run draw all support from capitalism and make it collapse—as the “Abîme” collapse on the side of the “Crêcherie” in Zola's “Travail.” [I am only this very instant reminded of this novel which I have read early in September and I see now that the author also had a feeling of the necessity for mutual toleration which I have so much emphasized. The “Crêcherie” acting only by example (and competition), not by propaganda; the *sous-préfet*, the representative of the State, on his part abstaining from all interference—all this is quite corresponding to the above ideas and such mutual toleration may be possible if seriously explained, advocated and exercised. I believe the process of the victory of free association and the decay of capitalism would be much slower and more complicated than it is described in Zola's book; but this does not matter as long as for

each individual the possibility exists to leave capitalism and to join anarchism or authoritarian socialism—or vice versa if so desired!}

22.9.1901.

The question of sympathy and pity has other outlets than the sacrifice of logics. If I see individual cases of workers' misery, I certainly feel this sympathy and pity and conceive as natural spontaneous consequences acts of protest.....or acts of help and support. If I think of the collective misery of all, I feel indignation—before all against the workers themselves, because they themselves keep up this system by their submission under it. The capitalists profit by it, the workers suffer from it—whose action is more exasperating!!!—Thus far feelings may go—but to renounce logical thinking and to bow before the dogma that the workers cannot be wrong in anything because they are exploited—this I cannot do. Nor can my sympathy for and solidarity with anarchists bring me to recommend anarchism as the immediate remedy for the workers' misery. This will be clear if we consider the case of a particular worker's family with which we are thoroughly acquainted and who may ask our advice to better their position. Surely we shall not tell them to join an anarchist group, etc. But we shall try to find small practical remedies for their immediate needs—better employment, more sanitary lodgings, etc. I suppose, every one will act so who feels some human sympathy with them. Of course we say all that their position cannot be efficiently ameliorated under the existing system, etc., but they will scarcely care to listen to this and be more thankful for the slightest practical advice or help. Now suppose we speak or write to the thousand families in a similar position in a lecture or a paper—then we shall not fail to advocate anarchism or anarchist trade-unionism and shall not care to speak of any of the small practical remedies. This different attitude is illogical. It seems justified by the argument that if *all* bettered their position as little, the capitalists would see that they can live cheaper now and wages would be reduced and the old misery restored. But experience shows that an advice is always taken only by a few and so the advocacy of immediate remedies to large masses would be justified after all. But it is not done, it is felt not to be our business to do it. So the sympathy with the workers' misery practically leads to nothing of use to them for theories are no remedy for misery and misery knows no dignity and self-respect, it cannot afford it.—By all this I want to show (1) that the workers' cause and anarchism have nothing to do with each other, because anarchism is of value only to those who care for freedom, that is to anarchists themselves, and is a strange luxury to the suffering masses who want direct helps; (2) that even the argument of sympathy, solidarity, pity cannot affect this way of reasoning.

A starving man's misery can make *us* anarchists, can strengthen our desire for anarchism, can make others anarchists who are so disposed,—but anarchism is no remedy for this man's misery in preference to so many practical (though in the long run ineffective) remedies which exist.

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Anarchism appeals not to the weak and powerless but to the strong and able. The former cannot afford to be independent and to talk to them is effort wasted. All new ideas appeal to the very best, the most energetic and advanced. In this direction also much effort has been misdirected.

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It may be said that *mutual toleration* means disarming, giving up fighting and that our opponent will consider this as weakness, that it will mean weakening of our strength in fact and that the movement may be crushed altogether.—We are so very free from mutual toleration today that this question is not quite actual. We cannot wonder too much that the feelings of our enemies are composed today of fear, hatred and infinite ignorance. If the fear be allayed, will the hatred grow or decrease? This seems to depend to a considerable extent on the diminution of the existing *ignorance*. *That is the great work to do before all.*

Though the anarchist publications increase in frequency and bulk, they do not go at the root of this ignorance to destroy it. For this purpose they ought to appeal to all and not almost exclusively to the working classes. One man only, Tolstoi, speaks to the whole of mankind and his words (emasculated and religiously distorted though they be) are listened to and have some effect. All other anarchist authors—very few artists excepted—write but for the working classes,—more exactly expressed: for a small part of the working classes who are not under the spell of social democracy, religion or general indifference. If more of them would like Tolstoi deal with *all* problems before the public, make themselves heard,—the great ignorance would be diminished, the stupid fear would vanish and the hatred would be tempered by self-interest and people might get used to anarchist associations as they are used to co-operative establishments, etc.—and the first steps on the way to mutual toleration would be made.—

At a future stage those who are anarchists might claim to withdraw from the State just as freethinkers, if they choose, formally leave the catholic or protestant church (“confessionals”). This was a right which at the time of its origin did appear just as strange and unheard of to the ordinary people of the period than the claim to become a “statolos” (free of the state) appears now. And in a similar way determined groups of persons acting for themselves will obtain more and more independence whilst as the supposed mouthpieces of the mass of the people who do not care for them, their strength and influence will be imaginary only—just as are those of the social democratic parties (leaders and voters), their example ought to be a warning.—

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A great difficulty—if evolution took this way—would be the creation of the material means to guarantee independence, the normal theory provides those means by the word: expropriations. This does not exhaust the question, I fear. Only if the revolution was made in full sympathy with anarchist ideas and blank and if anarchists maintained their prestige during the many critical moments which may have to be passed through, they could expect to arrange things in their way. I doubt that things will pass so smooth away as they never pass in accordance to theories. This is one only out of many possibilities and a theory based on one out of many possibilities has small strength. It seems much more likely that something like a breakdown will happen before anarchist vegetation has reached such proportions as to seriously influence the revolution. A crisis may lead to simple destruction by means of people who care for no theories at all. Afterwards all sorts of projects will be placed before them and we may be sure that the authoritarian projects will have great followings, so too the most selfish projects (capitalism under new masters), etc. Anarchists will be left alone or with a and inexperienced mass of people who would from the beginning compromise their success. They could not dream of imposing their theories upon all. They would either have to continue to fight the new order of things—and be almost exterminated as advanced fractions are by moderate ones at the time of revolution (the Reformists, etc.)—or to

make compromises with the other parties and be included in their failure—or work exclusively for themselves which would be difficult as they could not exclude inexperienced sympathizers of perhaps a little value, etc. All this means that in one the sole instance, that of absolute success, they could put their ideas in practice on a large, or universal scale,—but in all other cases they would have to rely on toleration which, to be genuine, must be mutual—and to expect further progress of their ideas from the effect of their example, etc.

Thus even in the case of a revolution—the single and remote possibility of an exclusively anarchist victory accepted—mutual toleration would be the best way out of the difficulties—ininitely preferable to majority rule and compromise. Therefore to go through this way all along, from now, would not only not interfere with the chance of success at the time of revolution, but would prepare the greatest means obtainable by creating beforehand a strong anarchist position.—(September 23, 1901).

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Practically toleration is the basis and condition of all propaganda. Propaganda stops short before action, it lays the whole problem before the audience, but does not commit the slightest aggressive act. Such an act would at once break the spell of toleration and lead to a clear contest of the respective forces on both sides. Propaganda is related to action as mutual toleration is related to settling a struggle by force.

Now if the struggle between anarchists and past society was to be settled by force *hic et nunc*, this would be a little serviceable to anarchists themselves—an infinitely small number as they are in the face of the reactionary mob above all classes. They constantly claim the right of propagating their views like everybody else—since propaganda is inseparable from toleration and must exclude aggressive action, it is evident that anarchists cannot give too much attention to the problem of toleration.

Toleration must be mutual and does this reciprocity exist on the side of the capitalists want to crush all movements of progress?—How about the endless persecutions of anarchists and socialists?—I may reply that if your enemy uses infamous means against you that is no argument for degrading yourself to use similar means against him—if he throws dirt against you, will you touch dirt to throw it at him?? Therefore reciprocity or parallelism have nothing to do with the question.—If it were all a question of mere force, progressive propaganda would be expressed absolutely as it was in former centuries and still is in some countries—but everywhere else but great feeling has, to a very small degree it is true, accepted the method of toleration and propaganda within more or less narrow lines is tolerated and its suppression is absolutely impossible as almost everybody feels but that suppression would injure and stop the whole intellectual life of that country. On the other hand the slightest attempt of aggressive action destroys all idea of toleration and at once transports the whole problem on the field of mere force—crushing and exterminating the weaker opponent.—

All the shows that the idea of toleration cannot be scorned as something moderate or emasculating as it is the basis of propaganda itself. Our propaganda is evidently hateful to the ruling class;—if they let it go on nevertheless (save persecutions of those who seem or are said to outstep certain limits) is it because they fear us as a material force—or is it because they feel but the disastrous consequences of absolute intolerance would fall with almost equal force upon all, and that therefore a certain amount of toleration is preferable in any case? I'm inclined to think that



the latter is more probable. They would be delighted to exterminate us, but they could only do so by bringing all civilized countries under despotic rule worse than Russian autocracy and this would hurt everybody and is not practical therefore. This proves that a certain amount of toleration is necessarily always guaranteed and safe to us;—toleration is useful and indispensable as the basis of propaganda;—hence it is our interest to maintain, strengthen and extend this existing minimum of toleration which can be done by abstention from aggressive action.

I am not against aggressive action—only such action and propaganda exclude themselves: propaganda is tolerated on the understanding that it steps not forward to aggressive action. If aggressive action takes place, propaganda is likely to be suppressed or hampered—this is inevitable. The words propaganda by deed (*par le fait*) consequently appear illogical to me as far as aggressive action—not passive examples—are concerned.

It is as if in the midst of a discussion you knocked your opponent on the head and replace argument by fighting. If you wanted to fight, why arguing before? If you make propaganda you intend to convince and must to leave the possibility open that the opponent is not convinced. We cannot always shift from the standpoint of toleration (propaganda) to battle force (aggressive action) and back again and forward again, etc.—

Of course all theoretical discussion on such acts is idle as they are the outcome of the personal desire of single individuals who do as they please and who are under nobody's control and influence. The more so it becomes necessary for those who believe in propaganda to explain, exercise and adopt in the fullest sense the principle of toleration—as the only means to counteract the disastrous effects on toleration of many aggressive acts. One may easily be led to think that some of these acts make us really feared and enforce toleration for propaganda—I believe this is a wrong estimation of the consequences of such acts and that it is in all cases only the desire to escape general repression of all intellectual life which prevents an extermination of the advanced parties. (On the part of governments and the individuals most concerned fear certainly is the motive factor and extermination would be gladly tried—but the bulk of the ruling classes dislike to be annoyed and [ ] themselves by such repression and prevent it).—

Hence from the standpoint of propaganda also the problem of toleration draws great attention.—(October 3, 1901).

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And if somebody says: what about the revolution, are we not revolutionaries? ..... Yes, we welcome it, but we cannot make it, and but very indirectly bring it about. Nor can we before all abstain from all other action until the revolution may come. In the meantime those who are impatient and wish to act in an aggressive way, do so—we neither encourage nor hinder them,—it is their affair. We all know by calm reflection that their acts have no sensible material effect (do scarcely alter the balance of power); we also might see that they are not really convincing acts of propaganda—as propaganda implies a fair discussion with the opponent; we have no more (or rather, I have no more) that belief in the revolutionary spirit of the masses which would lead to expect imitation of the example set by enthusiastic means—I fully admit that this may be the effect of well selected acts in decisive moments of popular excitement: these are *acts of initiative* and I fully consider them practical and important.—So the most serious effect of these aggressive acts is, in my opinion, that of calling attention to the existence of this current of opinion, that is, a sort of advertisement—just as if somebody hoists a red flag on the highest tower of the town,

etc. This momentary sensation is really the chief effect and it is very superficial and passing—for the immediate curiosity of the public as to the theories supposed to underlie such action is exclusively satisfied by the ordinary press, etc., who are more infamous and stupid on each consecutive occasion—and the voices of those who might explain our ideas properly, are silenced just on these occasions by the inevitable fits of persecution by governments and mobs. Hence even this affect is to a great extent frustrated.

Still it will be said that attention was drawn towards anarchism by such events to a large extent. Quite true, but the real cause of this is the smallness of the extent of propaganda—a companion to this very real aggressive act looks big. If propaganda was stronger, these acts would be before everybody in their right proportions. I wish not to diminish the importance of such events which also helped to keep the immense gulf between existing institutions and our ideals clear before our eyes, but I wish to get the clearest possible valuation of the relative proportions of things—or we shall always be victims of optical errors, each one overrating or underrating things.—All these questions are worth to be reconsidered from a standpoint of anarchism freed from the particular working class standpoint and embracing toleration in the full sense of the word.—

October 3, 1901

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November 22, 1901. In the interval I noticed blank facts and symptoms which strongly confirm, in my opinion, the above stated sentiments.—

I should mention here some printed remarks by others which strike me.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Max Nettlau  
Some criticism of some current anarchist beliefs  
1901

Retrieved on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023 from [www.libertarian-labyrinth.org](http://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org)

These reflections, transcribed from a handwritten manuscript in the recently digitized Max Nettlau Papers at the IISH, are prefaced by the note “Not for publication but for communication to friends and comrades.” Nettlau wrote a number of similar texts in 1901 and 1902, including a more formally structured French manuscript of 191 pages. Transcription is in-progress. The pages included here are followed by quotations from anarchist authors, amounting to another 14 pages of manuscript. Minor corrections have been made to fix spelling errors and punctuation likely to interfere with readers’ understanding of the text.

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