

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



# The Anarchist Tradition

Max Nomad

Max Nomad  
The Anarchist Tradition  
1966

Retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023 from [www.ditext.com](http://www.ditext.com)  
Published in *The Revolutionary Internationals 1864–1943*, ed.  
Milorad M. Drachkovitch, 1966.

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

1966

cialist or Communist control of the unions, as a rule became leaders of small separatist unions and were doomed to be ignored by the masses..

And, finally, it was the Bolshevik Revolution whose proletarian mystique and anti-capitalist reality deprived the anarchists of most of their rank and file and of many of their leaders.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the anarchist movement will die without leaving a trace in history. In the opinion of many historians, including the Bolshevik biographer of Bakunin, Yuri Steklov, the methods advocated by Bakunin were “in many points practically an anticipation of Soviet power and a prediction, in general outline, of the course of the great October Revolution of 1917,”<sup>31</sup> and Bakunin’s Secret Alliance was the Third International within the First. It may also be said that basically Leninism is a hybrid of Bakuninist activism and Marxist terminology.

It is beside the point whether the anarchists are particularly proud of this strange sequel to the most romantic chapter of their history.

---

<sup>31</sup> Yuri Steklov, *Mikhail Bakunin* (Moscow, 1926), I, 343.

Proudhonist anarchism, or mutualism, was followed by Bakuninism, whose moving force was the declassé intelligentsia of the underdeveloped countries — precisely that social group which the Proudhonists had opposed because they considered its members aspirants to power and not champions of the working class. It is beside the point that Proudhon's *betes noires* were the Blanquists, who differed from the Bakuninists only in their verbiage, not in their intentions. Unlike the Proudhonists, the Bakuninists were insurrectionists, hoping for an immediate revolution. They disappeared as an organized group when they realized that the masses were not ready to rise at their call and when the further economic and political developments of their respective countries afforded job opportunities for the educated in general and enabled the militant declasses to become gradualist Socialist or trade-union leaders of a growing industrial working class.

These defectors from the camp of anarchism were succeeded by an unorganized motley of ultras — intellectuals, semi-intellectuals, and self-taught workers — who formed a psychological rather than a political or social category. They were a mixture of elements who would accept neither the status quo nor its gradualist opponents, such as the Socialists and the trade unionists. Their irreconcilability found expression in the adoption of a millenarian ideal, in whose immediate realization they did not believe, and in propaganda for violent acts of protest against the existing system. However, neither their faraway ideal nor their violent protests appealed to the non-romantic masses. As a result, the more realistic among them sought contact with the masses by engaging in radical labor-union activities, as anarcho-syndicalists. But in this phase, too, anarchism met with defeat. For labor unions, even if originally controlled by ultraradicals, eventually become moderate as they grow larger, and so do their once fiery officials after they attain a middle-class standard of living. Those few anarcho-syndicalist leaders who preferred to remain true to their principles, or who would not submit to So-

## Contents

The Proudhonists and the "Collectivists" . . . . .	7
Enter Bakunin . . . . .	11
The "Anti-Authoritarian International" . . . . .	19
The Social Revolutionary Congress of London, 1881 . . .	24
The Anarchists and the Second International . . . . .	32
The Anarchist Congress of Amsterdam . . . . .	37
The Impact of Bolshevism and the Anarcho-Syndicalist International . . . . .	42
Conclusion . . . . .	45

anarchists and syndicalists, it included various unions dissatisfied with the moderate Socialist leadership of the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro*. At its height, shortly before being suppressed by the fascists, it had approximately 100,000 members.<sup>30</sup> There were also small anarcho-syndicalist or syndicalist organizations in the Netherlands, where the originally strong pro-anarchist unions had shrunk to insignificance; in the Scandinavian countries, where they were strongest in Sweden, yet still of no importance when compared with the regular, Socialist-led unions; and in Latin America, particularly Mexico and Argentina, where anarcho-syndicalist influence was later greatly reduced by Communist competition.

In 1932 the seat of the anarcho-syndicalist International was transferred to Amsterdam, whence it migrated to Madrid during the Civil War, to find its ultimate asylum in Stockholm. There it has been functioning since 1939 — the central organization of an insignificant movement with branches or twigs in various countries. Hopelessly outbid in radicalism by the sundry varieties of Leninism, it is completely unknown to the general public.

## Conclusion

The eclipse of the anarchist movement as a political force was the result of economic and political circumstances that altered the mode of thinking of those opponents of the status quo who called themselves anarchists. Those opponents were far from constituting a socially homogeneous group. At the outset of the movement, a few years before the founding of the First International, anarchism appealed chiefly to skilled workers, who hoped to attain economic independence without resorting to any illegal, revolutionary methods. These were the Proudhonists. They disappeared because the bootstrap methods they proposed had lost all meaning in the wake of the development of large-scale industry.

---

<sup>30</sup> Lewis L. Lorwin, *Labor and Internationalism* (New York, 1929), p. 573-

many books on anarchism and other subjects. A refugee from German police persecution during the early 1890's, he lived in London until the collapse of the Kaiser's government, when he was able to return to Germany. While in London he was prominently active among the Yiddish-speaking immigrants, whose language he had learned (he himself was not Jewish). Those he helped educate were later to become prominent as leaders and organizers of the needleworkers in New York. After his return to Germany, the policy Rocker and his followers adopted during the three-cornered struggle between Socialists, Communists, and Nazis was the rejection of all violence and refusal to manufacture instruments for killing. This was a rather pathetic comedown after a long revolutionary tradition. During the 1920's, Rocker's German following consisted of the members of the Freie Arbeiter-Union; there were approximately 30,000 of them, mostly secessionists from the Socialist-controlled giant trade unions. The most important section of the Berlin International was beyond question the Spanish Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), which, before its destruction at the end of the Civil War, claimed a membership of about one million. In 1924 it did not exceed 200,000.

The French syndicalists, who had once controlled the unions of their country, had in the meantime been reduced to insignificance. When, as a result of the conflict between the Socialists and the Communists, the Confederation Generale du Travail was split, the anarcho-syndicalists and the syndicalists proper joined the Communist-controlled Confederation Generale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU). A few years later the anarcho-syndicalists broke away from that organization to form their own CGT Syndicaliste Revolutionnaire, which, according to figures published by the Berlin International, had only 7,500 members in 1928. It exerted no influence whatsoever, and disappeared at the outbreak of World War II.

Next to the Spanish CNT, the strongest unit that joined the syndicalist International was the Italian Unione Sindacale. Led by

Anarchism, as a movement directed against the status quo, has shrunk, except in a few Spanish-speaking countries, to the insignificance of a motley of tiny, inoffensive groups. They continue to discuss their ideas, but to most of them even the once dread-inspiring term "propaganda by the deed," with its echoes of the spectacular terrorist acts that were frequent around the turn of the century, has lost all meaning. Yet there was a time, particularly during the 1860's and the early 1870's, when the names of Pierre Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin, the two outstanding apostles of anarchism, were better known to the general public than the name of their contemporary Karl Marx, even after the appearance of *Das Kapital*.

The decline and virtual disappearance of anarchism as a factor in politics is sometimes explained by the alleged superiority of Marxist realism over the utopianism and romanticism of its rivals for the allegiance of the masses. To be sure, there were utopianism and romanticism in the teachings and the activities of the anarchists, but this alone does not explain their defeat. For there were plenty of those ingredients in the teachings of Marx too: the theories of the increasing poverty of the masses, of the disappearance of the middle strata, of the collapse of capitalism, to mention only a few. Despite those theoretical shortcomings and despite Marx's blind spots, those who rightly or wrongly call themselves Marxists are now the masters of a substantial part of the globe, and Socialist parties holding Marx in high esteem, though otherwise ignoring him, are a powerful political factor in most European countries. Hence there must be other, more valid reasons for the eclipse of anarchism, aside from the additional fact that the disreputable label may have been an impediment to the growth of the movement.

However, before that question can be tackled, a distinction must be made between anarchism as a philosophy opposing the principle of authority, and hence the state as its concrete manifestation, and anarchism as one of the branches of the anti-capitalist movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a movement representing

specific class or group interests and changing both its doctrines and tactics according to circumstances.

Anarchism as a philosophy opposing the principle of authority proceeds either from the protest of the *individual* against all kinds of compulsion imposed by society or from the opposition voiced in behalf of the masses against the state and its institutions. Both branches of anarchist philosophy — that label did not come into use until it was coined by Proudhon — have age-old histories. They can be traced back to Greek history, with Aristippus of Cyrene voicing the individualist protest and Zeno the Stoic championing the social protest against the state. Similar ideas can be found in the writings of various mystics, such as the Gnostic Carpocrates, and in *The Net of the Faith* by Peter Chelcicky, who lived during the Hussite period and who may have inspired the Christian anarchism of Leo Tolstoy; in Etienne de la Boetie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, which, as many suspect, was probably written by his friend Michel de Montaigne; in *The Law of Freedom*, written by the "True Leveller" Gerrard Winstanley during the Cromwellian Revolution; in Sylvain Marechal's *Manifeste des egaux*, written at the time of Babeuf's conspiracy; in William Godwin's *Political Justice*; in Edmund Burke's (yes, Burke's) *Vindication of Natural Society*, which, as others have said, is not a satire directed against Bolingbroke, but the actual expression of the youthful Burke's sentiments. In modern times, such ideas occur in the works of Thoreau, Stirner, Spencer, Nietzsche, and Ibsen. One might also add to the list American individualists such as Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, and, finally, Benjamin R. Tucker (who did call himself an anarchist) — champions of a sort of individualist anarchism, which never won a following among the workers.

None of these ideas had any relevance to the anarchist movement that flourished at the time of the First International and during the subsequent decades, even though some Marxists, such as Georgi Plekhanov, who were eager to discredit their critics from the extreme left, disingenuously harped on the "bourgeois individ-

Labor Union International ("Profintern"), which was to include all revolutionary labor unions regardless of their political philosophy. That body was to be altogether independent of the Third International. The syndicalists agreed to participate in 1921 in the first congress of that purportedly independent International. However, most of them balked when they realized that the organization was dominated by the Communist labor unions. The harsh measures the Soviet regime had taken against the Russian anarchists who refused to collaborate, and the extermination of the entire staff of the Ukrainian anarchist guerrilla leader Nestor Makhno after they had helped the Red Army defeat the Whites, likewise contributed to ending the flirtation between anarcho-syndicalists and Communists.

As a result, the anarcho-syndicalists decided to create an International of their own. It was founded at a congress held in Berlin in December 1922, and was called officially the International Workingmen's Association, a name identical with that of the First International of 1864–76. In its early years it was usually referred to as the "Berlin International" because its headquarters were in the German capital prior to the Nazis' seizure of power. It goes without saying that the non-syndicalist anarchists stayed out of the organization. Among them were a small number of pure idealists, who dreamed of revolution but knew or felt that they were powerless in the face of the spiritual subjection of the masses to either their traditional masters or to Socialist or Communist leaders. But most of them were sectarians or cultists of one kind or another, intent on verbally defying the accepted views or scandalizing their fellow men without incurring risks for their bravado. Among them were people interested chiefly in sexual freedom, Tolstoyism, Esperanto, anti-alcoholism, sterilization by the Steinach method, and whatnot. There was nothing revolutionary about them, except the once dread-inspiring label.

The Berlin International was at its outset dominated by the personality of Rudolf Rocker, an ex-bookbinder, who was the author of

tenets, namely, that all forms of government are unworthy of defense. The fact that some of the famous old-timers, including Malatesta, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman, stuck uncompromisingly to their guns, could not offset the disarray created by the fall from grace of the almost deified Kropotkin, whose anarchism, in the opinion of some ultra-radical critics, turned out to be a sort of crypto-democratic gradualism, which viewed the coming Russian Revolution, as he wrote in 1892 in his *Conquest of Bread*, as destined not to go beyond the ideas of the Revolutions of 1789 and 1848.<sup>29</sup>

## The Impact of Bolshevism and the Anarcho-Syndicalist International

The gradual extinction of the anarchist movement, outside the Spanish-speaking orbit, was hastened by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Most of the anarchist rank and file and many of the leaders, including such figures as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, enthusiastically hailed Bolshevism's defiance of the capitalist world. This indicated that anarchism had attracted the most discontented elements prior to 1917 chiefly because they assumed anarchism to be the most rabid enemy of capitalism, and not because it is the "negation of the state," which theoretically is its main feature. Once capitalism was under serious attack, many anarchists were cured of their great aversion to the idea of "proletarian dictatorship," and were ready to forget the main tenet of their faith, the "negation of the state." Consequently the anarcho-syndicalists and syndicalists who did not use the anarchist prefix were invited by the Bolsheviks to participate in the founding Congress of the Third, or Communist, International, to be held in March 1919. To make it easier for those invited to overcome their doctrinaire reservations, the Communists decided to set up what they called the Red

<sup>29</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (New York, 1927), p. 64.

ualism" of Max Stirner as the source of modern anarchism.<sup>1</sup> For the real fountainheads were the writings of Proudhon and Marx, the teachers of Bakunin, who was the actual father of modern revolutionary anarchism.

To be sure, Stirner's super-individualism did play a certain role in the thinking of some French anarcho-bandits of the first two decades of this century, particularly the famous "tragic band" headed by Auguste Bonnot. But their exploits had nothing to do with any aspect of the anarchist movement — whether Proudhonist, Bakuninist, Kropotkinian, or syndicalist. Nor did they contribute a single penny to the war chests of these movements. They believed neither in the class struggle nor in the realizability of any social ideal. Theirs was the philosophy of an illegal parasitism of underdogs tired of their drudgery, a proletarian counterpart, as it were, of the Nietzschean "anarchism" of some ultra-plutocratic opponents of the income tax and the welfare state.

## The Proudhonists and the "Collectivists"

The "anarchist tradition" may be said to have started with Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809–65), not only because Proudhon coined the term — he was the first writer to call himself an anarchist in the original etymological sense of "an-archy," that is, "without government" — but also because during nearly two decades his ideas had numerous adherents among French-speaking workers, and because his following was represented at the congresses of the First International.

Proudhon's books — there are over 50 of them, including 14 volumes of correspondence — are no longer read, not only because there are no longer any Proudhonists, but also because his main ideas are altogether out of tune with the present age, even in the

<sup>1</sup> George Plechanoff (Plekhanov), *Anarchism and Socialism* (Chicago, 1907), p. 52.

opinion of anarchists who hold his name in great esteem. And there is the additional circumstance that, despite the brilliance of his style, he was often hard to understand. His vocabulary is the despair even of specialists in anarchism, such as Max Nettlau, anarchist biographer of Bakunin and historian of anarchist ideas and movements, who devoted more than 50 years of his long life to the study of his subject.

Proudhon wrote on a great variety of subjects, but he is remembered chiefly for his “Property is theft” — a phrase which, by the way, was not original with him, for the Girondist Jacques Pierre Brissot had said essentially the same thing more than 50 years before the appearance of Proudhon’s *What Is Property?*, which contained that answer. His ideas — they are summed up in his last, posthumous work, *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes* — are anything but bloodcurdling appeals to revolt and expropriation, two concepts usually associated with what is commonly called anarchism. To be sure, their point of departure is the rejection of the state and of property (except property acquired by one’s own toil), a rejection based on Proudhon’s fundamental principle, *justice*. For the authority of the state he wanted to substitute a single norm, namely, that agreements must be kept. For the privilege of capital, Proudhon wanted to substitute the principle of *mutuality*. The instrument Proudhon suggested for the realization of this principle he called a “People’s Bank,” which would grant free credit to producers and would facilitate the exchange and distribution of their products. Persuasion, not violence, was to be the tactic for attaining this aim.

Proudhon’s ideas had a certain appeal to skilled workers and to some intellectuals. The basis of that appeal was the realization that all past revolutions had resulted mainly in changing the ruling personnel, but not in overcoming the basic evil of economic inequality. The skilled workers to whom Proudhon appealed — they were engaged mostly in small handicraft industries — saw in the People’s Bank a shortcut to their longed-for freedom as independent, small

nor should it make us lose sight of the only aim worthy of an effort: Anarchy!”<sup>28</sup>

Such questions as anti-militarism, alcoholism, and Esperanto were also discussed at the congress. One of the resolutions adopted declared that an Anarchist International had been formed, with an International Bureau composed of five members. Its task was to keep in touch with the anarchists of the various countries and to maintain international anarchist archives. For two years a monthly bulletin was published by the Bureau, whose seat was in London. Shortage of funds and lack of interest on the part of the various groups affiliated with the International resulted in the discontinuation of the bulletin and finally in the demise of the organization in 1911. It seems that the anarcho-syndicalists were engrossed in the affairs of their respective unions, and not much interested in maintaining contact with the “pure” anarchists, whom they despised as either crackpots or naive romantics. The “pure” anarchists, for their part, saw in their more practical comrades chiefly union bureaucrats on the make.

This view, by the way, was eventually borne out by events. The French unions, the inspiration of anarcho-syndicalists in other countries, eventually reverted to type. As the French unions grew in membership and were able properly to remunerate their officials, their leaders gradually became respectable and lost their enthusiasm for sabotage, direct action, violent demonstrations — in short, for everything that smacked of prison bars. And when World War I broke out in 1914, the great majority of them forgot their anti-patriotism and became staunch supporters of their country’s war effort.

That war proved a blow to the “pure” anarchists as well. Peter Kropotkin, Jean Grave, Charles Malato, Max Nettlau, and other bearers of famous names came out in defense of their respective countries, thus throwing overboard one of the oldest anarchist

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 85.



outcome was the convocation of an international congress in Amsterdam in 1907.

The main subjects discussed at the Congress were “Anarchism and Organization” and “Syndicalism and Anarchism.” Propaganda by the deed, once the core of anarchist “dreadfulness,” was disposed of in a resolution containing the rather noncommittal statement “Such acts, with their causes and motives, should be understood rather than praised or condemned.”<sup>31</sup> The arguments of anarchist opponents of all kinds of organization — they constituted the lunatic fringe of the movement — were torn to shreds by most of the speakers. There was, however, no smooth sailing on the question of syndicalism. The arguments of Pierre Monatte — who after the Bolshevik Revolution was to concoct a sort of combination of syndicalism and Leninism (“all power to the unions”) — were countered by Errico Malatesta. Malatesta was in favor of the anarchists’ participating in the labor movement, for this would give them an opportunity to make contact with the masses. But he objected to the anarchists’ becoming union officials, because then they “would be lost to propaganda, they would be lost to anarchism.”<sup>27</sup> He also attacked what he called “an over-simple concept of the class struggle.” As he put it, “Because of the universal competition under a system of private ownership, the workers, like the bourgeoisie, are subject to the law of universal competition. Hence there are no classes in the proper sense, because there are no class interests.”

Malatesta also criticized the idea of the general strike as the magic weapon of working-class emancipation, for it was no substitute for the violent conflict with the armed forces that would occur as soon as the starving strikers attempted to seize food supplies. (The syndicalists, by the way, were fully aware of that, but they preferred not to expand on it.) Malatesta concluded with the argument: “Syndicalism, an excellent means of action because it places the working masses at our disposal, cannot be our only weapon;

---

<sup>27</sup> Congrès anarchiste, tenu à Amsterdam, Aout 1907 (Paris, 1908), p. 82.

producers operating either individually or through producers’ co-operatives. These workers, as a rule, did not take to the conspirator Auguste Blanqui and his following of malcontent, *declassé* intellectuals, for they saw in these revolutionists merely power-hungry job-seekers. The few intellectuals who joined Proudhon did so apparently because in their opinion only an appeal to the workers’ economic interests, e.g., the remedy of “free credit,” could serve as a basis for a mass struggle against the status quo.

In this connection it may not be amiss to point out that Proudhon’s “negation” of the state was not to be taken literally. He saw the realization of the idea of “an-archy,” that is, “non-government,” as something that was centuries away. For the time being his “negation” went no further than hostility to administrative centralism. The elimination of that evil, he hoped, could be realized by dividing France into 12 autonomous provinces and shearing Paris of its central authority.<sup>2</sup> There was no place in the world of his ideas for either labor unions<sup>3</sup> or strikes for higher wages.<sup>4</sup>

A few months before his death Proudhon hailed the idea of the International Workingmen’s Association (the First International), which at the time of its founding was not controlled by Marx, and which Proudhon hoped might be an instrument for the propagation of his ideas. Therefore a number of his followers, all self-educated skilled workers, joined the new organization.

In the First International the Proudhonist anarchists — they called themselves *mutuellistes* — constituted what might be called the very moderate right wing of that organization. They harped on the panacea of the “People’s Bank” (that is, mutual credit), and consistently rejected such measures as abolition of the right of inheritance, expropriation, nationalization of land, and socialization

---

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Joseph Proudhon, *Correspondance*, XIV (Paris, 1875), 218–19 (April 4, 1862).

<sup>3</sup> Proudhon, *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières* (Paris, 1924), p. 386 (original 1865 edition, p. 421).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

of industries. Their only “radicalism” consisted in their insisting — unsuccessfully, to be sure — that only manual workers be admitted as delegates to the International.\* That proposal was directed primarily against the Blanquists, who had not yet joined the International, and who were, almost without exception, malcontent, de-classe intellectuals, mostly students and journalists, who professed Socialist principles and were known to aspire to a revolutionary dictatorship.

[\* At the turn of the century that ex-horny-handed professional jealousy was to find its counterpart in Gompers’ and later in the syndicalists’ hostility to the socialist politicians, and also in the antagonism of the German social-democratic ex-horny-handed trade-union leaders to their college-bred comrades in charge of the Socialist Party apparatus. Both leaders of the Proudhonists within the International, Henri Tolain and E. E. Fribourg (originally skilled workers), ended their careers as respectable middle-class politicians. Tolain, the one who had insisted on barring intellectuals, became a senator after 1871.]

While the more or less orthodox Proudhonists were opposing all anti-capitalist motions advanced by other members of the International, some of Proudhon’s followers began to move in the direction of what was then called “collectivism.” They included such figures as Cesar De Paepe and Eugene Varlin, who combined Proudhon’s rejection of the state with the idea of expropriation of the capitalists and collective ownership of the means of production.\* They had arrived at these non-Proudhonist heresies when they began to realize that the growth of large-scale industry left the workers little hope of economic independence, and that to defend their interests, the workers would have to organize in labor unions and strike for higher wages, two altogether non-Proudhonist concepts. The ideas of expropriation and collective ownership, which were then shared by many members of the First International, combined with Proudhon’s opposition to government ownership, gave rise to the concept of ownership and management of industries by labor

the union leaders. Syndicalism, without the anarchist prefix, thus eventually became one of the heretical variants of Leninism.

The initial success of the French syndicalists, who at the turn of the century got control of the bulk of their country’s labor unions, stimulated the rise of similar movements in other countries. Soon enough, however, the non-French converts to syndicalism saw themselves faced with a situation that doomed them to failure. Unlike the labor unions in France, those in other countries were under the firm control of unified, centralized Socialist parties, and their officials in the unions lost no time in eliminating anarchists who tried to win the unions over to their views. As a result the anarcho-syndicalists resorted to the formation of their own revolutionary unions.\* This was contrary to the basic principle of authentic — i.e., French — syndicalism, which required that there be no dual unions, that the unions, as such, include all workers regardless of their views, and that no special ideological label be attached to the unions. Otherwise they would become sectarian organizations rather than organizations embracing all workers on the basis of their common class interests. Needless to say, the various “syndicalist” unions created outside of France remained sectarian bodies never succeeding in offering any serious competition to the long-established labor unions.

[\* The defunct IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) of the United States, though professing many ideas similar to those of the French syndicalists, was largely an autochthonous growth, owing its origin less to anarcho-syndicalist influence than to the cleavage between the unskilled and migratory workers on the one hand, and the skilled craftsmen of the AFL on the other.]

The acceptance by a large number of anarchists of the basic tenets of syndicalism, which were more persuasive than Kropotkin’s idea of independent, free groups taking charge of reconstruction after the revolution, gave the anarchist movement a temporary shot in the arm. This encouraged the anarchists to attempt once more to establish an international organization. The

competing Socialist parties, combined to form the Confederation Generale du Travail, a new organization that would be under the political control of no party or sect. Its leaders, some of whom were anarchists, called themselves “revolutionary syndicalists” (the term “anarcho-syndicalists” was adopted chiefly by their non-French emulators).

The basic theory of syndicalism, as evolved by Pelloutier (whom the syndicalist philosopher Georges Sorel credits with originating the idea), is a compound of Proudhon’s hostility to politics and politicians, of Marx’s insistence on the class struggle, and of Bakunin’s revolutionary activism. The labor union was the workers’ basic *groupement d’interets*, that is, the organization for the protection of the material interests of the workers, regardless of their political affiliations. It could, therefore, embrace all workers in a given occupation. Its tactical method was direct action (including sabotage), and its chief weapon the strike — the ordinary strike for the improvement of the workers’ material conditions within the capitalist system, the general strike for the overthrow of that system. The labor union was also the basis for reconstruction after the victorious social revolution, which would follow in the wake of what the syndicalists called “the expropriatory general strike.” Not the individual unions but the national federation of all unions would then take over the management of the socialized industries and of all public affairs, thus eliminating the state. The idea of the general strike and of the role of the labor unions after the social revolution had been aired twenty years earlier by the Jura Federation of Bakunin’s organization. It did not occur to the syndicalists that the capitalist state, “eliminated” by the “expropriatory general strike,” would be replaced by a new state with a new ruling class — the self-taught officials of the labor unions. It was only after the Bolshevik Revolution that most French syndicalists, dropping the last vestiges of anarchist anti-statism, adopted the slogan “*au syndicat le pou-voir*,” i.e., all power to the labor union, which of course meant all power to

unions,<sup>5</sup> an idea which, less than three decades later, was to reappear in modified form as one of the basic tenets of syndicalism.

[\* Cesar De Paepe, the former Proudhonist, who for a while was moving in the same direction, eventually became a Marxist and one of the founders of the Belgian Socialist Party. Eugene Varlin perished during the Paris Commune of 1871. He is venerated by the syndicalists as one of their precursors.]

## Enter Bakunin

From 1868 on, the idea of a revolutionary, “stateless” collectivism, as professed by Varlin, found in the International an inspired spokesman, Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76), a Russian revolutionary exile, who since the 1840’s had been under the ideological influence of both Proudhon’s anti-statism and Marx’s concepts of the class struggle and the materialist interpretation of history. There was also undoubtedly in Bakunin’s thought an echo of Carbonarism and of the Blanquist traditions of conspiracy and insurrection.

Apart from these basic elements of his philosophy, Bakunin’s views were in constant flux. After his escape from Siberia in 1861, he was, until 1863, interested only in Slavic nationalism, which was unrelated to either anarchism or anti-capitalism. It was only in 1864 that Bakunin decided to devote himself exclusively to the radical movement in the West. Yet it was four years before he joined the International. He was apparently repelled by the moderation of the Proudhonists, on the one hand, and, on the other, unwilling to play second fiddle to Marx, whose mind he admired — in a famous letter to Marx in 1868 he declared himself his disciple<sup>6</sup> — but with whom he disagreed chiefly on the question of tempo and on which of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Max Nettlau, *Der Anarchismus von Proudhon zu Kropotkin* (Berlin, 1927), p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Bakunin, *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin, 1921–24), III, pp. 123–25.

two was to be the supreme leader of the European revolution in the making. Moreover, he needed time to elaborate both his own theory of a decentralized form of Socialism and the strategy that would secure him a position of power within the International.

The result of Bakunin's meditations was the *Revolutionary Catechism* (1866),<sup>7</sup> which became the credo of the International Brothers, a secret organization Bakunin founded in Italy, apparently as early as 1864. This may, of course, have been an additional reason for Bakunin's delay in joining the First International. He had a sort of International of his own, composed mostly of devoted Italian followers, though in a letter to Alexander Herzen written in 1866 he claimed that he had followers in practically every country. (This *Revolutionary Catechism* is not to be confused with the notorious document called *Catechism of the Revolutionist*, written several years later, which the anarchists generally attribute to Bakunin's discredited disciple Sergei Nechayev.) The ideas set forth in the *1866 Catechism* show that there was no essential difference between what the Bakuninists planned to do "on the morrow of the revolution" and what the Marxists might do under similar circumstances. There was no hint there of the immediate abolition of all government, which Bakunin advocated in many of his later utterances.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, under Bakunin's post-revolutionary system there were laws, penalties, and prisons, just as there were elected "public, judicial, and civic officials." There is, however, in contrast to the centralism of the Marxists, a far-reaching political decentralization, with the greatest possible autonomy of the provinces within the nation and of the municipalities within the

---

<sup>7</sup> Bakunin, III, 8–63.

<sup>8</sup> Bakunin, III, 88. "The revolution, as we understand it, must on its very first day completely and fundamentally destroy the state and all state institutions." See also Netdau, *Der Anarchismus*, p. 199, where the author quotes a resolution of the Congress of St.-Imier which contains the sentence, "The destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat." That resolution was, according to Nettlau, written by Bakunin.

Another vestige of the anarchist tradition was the adoption of the general strike by many Socialist leaders — both extreme-left-wingers, like Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, and "revisionists," like Eduard Bernstein — not as an instrument of social revolution, to be sure, but as a weapon for obtaining political concessions, such as the extension of the franchise for the Prussian Landtag.

## The Anarchist Congress of Amsterdam

Frustrated in their attempts to present their views at the conventions of the Second International, the anarchists attempted to hold an international congress of their own during the World's Fair in Paris in 1900. The organizing committee had received reports about the movement in the various countries, but at the last moment the gathering was prohibited by a government that, ironically, included both Alexandre Millerand, once a leading Socialist, and General Gaston de Galliffet, the Minister of War, who three decades earlier had headed the military operations that crushed the Paris Commune.

It was seven years before another attempt to hold an international convention succeeded. That congress met in Amsterdam in 1907. Its main feature was the debate between Errico Malatesta, the most romantic representative of post-Bakunin anarchism, and Pierre Monatte, the outstanding spokesman of a new school of anarchism, usually designated as anarcho-syndicalism, which had emerged in the mid-1890's, partly as a revulsion against the wave of terrorist acts, which were often senseless even from the anarchist point of view and which were discrediting the cause of anarchism.

The first champion and originator of the new current had been Fernand Pelloutier, a former Guesdist who, in his "Letter to the Anarchists," had appealed to his comrades to devote themselves to the labor movement. It was due to his efforts that in 1895 the French trade unions, hitherto mere vote-gathering appendages to

Another echo of anarchist propaganda was heard at the Amsterdam Congress of the Socialist International in 1904. On that occasion a right-wing Socialist (Jauresist) member of the French Chamber of Deputies said that a defense of the general strike was necessary to dispel the misconceptions of many French workers who thought that by voting the Socialist ticket they were merely “assisting the careers of wire-pullers and climbers.” For this reason he thought that the Socialist members of parliament should also “endorse the general strike.”

The naive Machiavellianism of that back-bencher must have amused the German Socialists, who were dead set against the general strike because, under the Kaiser, supporting it was not very safe. But they were not amused three years later, when, at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in 1907, Gustave Herve, a French extreme-left Socialist, asked the Congress to endorse the general strike and the military strike as means to prevent war. More than a decade earlier, these same ideas had been preached just as futilely by the anarchists at the International Socialist Congresses. Herve was therefore often called a syndicalist, but he was nothing of the kind. He was an irresponsible half-fanatic and half-mountebank, who enjoyed the plaudits of the ultra-radicals and was ready to suffer imprisonment for the pleasure of posing as a sincere, ultra-revolutionary “insurrectionist.” He eventually became a fascist.

Three years later the idea of the general strike, “above all in the war industries,” was advanced at the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen in 1910. This time the former Blanquist Edouard Vaillant, a prominent leader of the left wing of the French Socialist Party, and Keir Hardie, leader of the Independent Labour Party of England, were the sponsors. It was, no doubt, a concession to the revolutionary mood of many French workers and to the incipient syndicalist movement in Great Britain. The general strike was voted down as it had been on all previous occasions.

provinces. To be sure, this was to be the transitional phase before real stateless “anarchy” could be established. But this was the case, too, in Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” which was to precede what in Marxian parlance was called the “withering away of the state” — in other words anarchism, but without the disreputable and confusing label.

Bakunin’s economic program, as propounded in the *Catechism*, was similar to, only less “radical” than, what 60 years later was to be called the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the Soviet Union. The land was to be given to the peasants, the forests and subsoil were to be socialized, but industry would remain in the hands of its capitalist owners. The transition from this semi-capitalist post-revolutionary system to full “collectivism” would be effected gradually by the abolition of the right of inheritance and the development of producers’ cooperatives. The great difference between Marx’s economic program and that of Bakunin consisted in the fact that under Marx’s “communism,” as it was called at that time, all means of production would be taken over by the government, whereas according to Bakunin they would be controlled by producers’ cooperatives, or, as he called them, “workers’ associations.”

Simultaneously with the *Revolutionary Catechism*, Bakunin offered his International Brothers another document, called *Organization*.<sup>9</sup> In that document he made a distinction between the “International Family,” which was to play the part of the Central Executive Committee, and the “National Families,” which might be compared with the various Communist parties at the time when the Communist International enforced strict discipline over all affiliated parties. The degree to which the “International Family” was to dominate the subordinate bodies is clearly indicated in such sentences as “The National Family of each country is formed in such a way as to be subject to absolute and exclusive control of the International Society” and “All members of the national Junta are

---

<sup>9</sup> Bakunin, III, 97. 10. Nettlau, p. 112.

appointed by the central directorate, to which the national Junta owes absolute obedience in all cases.” *Organization* was an anticipation of Lenin’s and Stalin’s methods under an anarchist guise.

Having laid the groundwork for his future international activities, Bakunin left Italy in 1867 for Switzerland, to be in closer contact with the malcontents of various nationalities who might be receptive to his revolutionary plans. However, the first step in his campaign was an act of great “stupidity,” as he admitted two years later. He joined the League for Peace and Liberty, a society for middle-class pacifists composed of liberal lawyers, politicians, and journalists. This was not a group that an irreconcilable champion of the underdog and preacher of the destruction of the state had any chance of winning over to his ideas. Bakunin left the League when all his radical proposals were rejected by its conventions.

Before retiring from the League in 1868, Bakunin became a member of the Geneva section of the First International. He was joined by a number of International Brothers from various countries, mostly political exiles. To them the aging, romantic rebel was a charismatic figure, the personification not so much of the longing for a faraway “stateless” ideal as of the hope for an immediate revolution in their respective countries — a revolution that would enable them to take over. One of his followers at that time was the Serbian student Nikola Pashich, who four decades later was to become the creator and strong man of pre-Tito Yugoslavia. It goes without saying that, as in all revolutionary movements, the ranks of Bakunin’s followers included, in addition to the common run of job- and power-hungry educated declasses, a number of disinterested idealists, such as the famous French geographer Elisee Reclus and the Italian dreamer Carlo Cafiero, a wealthy aristocrat who had been slated for the diplomatic service.

When Bakunin’s followers joined the First International, they were already members of a secret organization variously referred to as the “Alliance of Social Revolutionists,” the “Secret Alliance of Socialist Democracy,” or, briefly, the “Secret Alliance.” This organi-

At the time, the British trade unions were wholly uncommitted politically, and the Socialists were eager to impress the world with the fact that labor organizations of all countries participated in their congresses. Hitherto they had avoided stating outright that anarchists would not be admitted to their congresses, apparently believing that such a statement would give undeserved publicity to people they despised as cranks and nuisances.

However, the vitality of the anarchists, who had been instrumental in the formation of the French Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT), gave them pause. Anarchism, in its syndicalist version, which used the Marxist class-struggle vocabulary familiar to the Socialist rank and file, threatened to become a really dangerous competitor. Hence the Socialists assembled at the London Congress adopted a decision expressly stating that anarchists would be refused admission, which meant that the doors would be closed to them even if they had credentials from bona-fide labor unions. After that the anarchists no longer attempted to participate in international Socialist congresses.

Though there were no anarchists at the International Socialist Congress in Paris in 1900, a distant echo of the anarchist tradition, as it were, was sounded by — of all persons — Aristide Briand, who defended the general strike as a weapon that would be instrumental in overthrowing the capitalist system.<sup>26</sup> In the early 1890’s, Briand had been closely associated with Fernand Pelloutier, who was then elaborating the theory of syndicalism. Though Briand was never an anarchist or a syndicalist, he saw the endorsement of the general strike as a very practical way to bolster his popularity at the expense of his Marxist rivals (the so-called Guesdists) who opposed that idea. (In 1909, when he became Premier, Briand broke the general strike of the railwaymen by mobilizing them and threatening them with court-martial.)

---

<sup>26</sup> Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Les Socialismes fran<sup>^</sup>ais et allemand et le probleme de la guerre* (Geneva, 1953), p. 321.

The anarchists were not prevented from participating in the first congress (or rather two congresses) held in Paris in 1889. A split in the ranks of the French Socialists had resulted in the simultaneous holding of two international gatherings: one called by the French Marxists (called “Guesdists,” after their leader Jules Guesde, a former anarchist), which was attended by delegates from practically all countries; the other called by the followers of Paul Brousse, also a former anarchist, who had become the leader of the extremely moderate “Possibilists.” The latter gathering was attended by representatives of the British trade unions, among others. The anarchists had delegates at both assemblies. They were not bothered by the Socialists, who were preoccupied with the problem of two rival international Socialist congresses.

However, violent battles were fought at the three subsequent congresses of the Second International. At the Brussels Congress of 1891, only Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, founder of the Socialist Party of Holland, who had become an anarchist, was given an opportunity to speak on two questions of tactics that separated the anarchists from the Socialists: participation in parliamentary elections, which the anarchists rejected, and the general strike to prevent war, which the anarchists advocated but which the Socialists refused to endorse. Two years later, at the 1893 International Socialist Congress in Zurich, the anarchists were forcibly ejected, and a resolution was passed to the effect that in order to be admitted to future congresses, a delegate had to recognize the necessity of using the ballot as a tactical weapon. This, however, did not prevent the anarchists from appearing again at the next congress, which was held in London in 1896. This time they came not as delegates of anarchist groups, but as representatives of the labor unions of France and Holland, which at that time were under anarchist influence.

Their admittance to the Congress through a back door, as it were, was possible because the Socialists had sent an invitation to all Socialist parties and, with no strings attached, to all labor unions.

zation was virtually identical with the Internadonal Brotherhood founded by Bakunin during his stay in Italy, though the International Brothers may have been the inner circle of the Secret Alliance.

So much mystery surrounds Bakunin’s conspiratorial activities that even the most authoritative historians of anarchism — themselves followers and admirers of Bakunin — disagree on a very essential point. Thus the Swiss James Guillaume, who was the Western follower closest to Bakunin, in his voluminous history of the International actually denies the existence of that Secret Alliance. He may have done so because he wanted to clear Bakunin and himself of Marx’s accusation that they were secretly intriguing against the First International in order to gain control of it. On the other hand, Max Nettlau — who was not a contemporary of the First International, to be sure, but was the generally recognized “Herodotus of Anarchy” — in his *Der Anarchismus von Proudhon zu Kropotin*, the second volume of his unfinished history of anarchism, leaves no doubt that the Secret Alliance actually existed.

It goes without saying that with regard to the control of the International, Bakunin harbored the same ambitions as did Marx. Both hoped to use it for the consolidation of their power in the event of the revolution they were anticipating. They differed in only one important respect: Marx was willing to wait for an international conflict that would precipitate a revolution, whereas Bakunin and his followers put their hopes in spontaneous or organized uprisings to be extended and controlled by the International Brothers. Bakunin thought that one hundred Brothers would be sufficient for that task.[10]

As mentioned earlier, these International Brothers — there were never as many as a hundred of them — were the core of the Secret Alliance. Apart from this secret body, which was unknown to the public, Bakunin’s followers formed an open international organization called the “International Alliance of Socialist Democracy.” Bakunin opposed its formation because, it seems, he felt that the

existence of an international organization openly competing with the First International might weaken his “legitimate” opposition to its leaders.<sup>10</sup> He was overruled, however, by his own followers, who shortly after the founding of the open Alliance applied for the admission of their organization to the First International. That application was rejected, but the individual sections of the Alliance were admitted as local organizations.

The existence of the two alliances, the one open and the other secret, placed Bakunin in a peculiar theoretical position. By 1868 his views had evolved beyond the position he had taken in his *Catechism* of 1866. He had become acquainted with former Proudhonists, and had adopted their principle of expropriation and collective ownership, together with the Proudhonist hostility to government ownership. This basic revolutionary idea Bakunin now put before his followers in the *Program and Aim of the Revolutionary Organization of the International Brothers*,<sup>[12]</sup> This work was his true and definitive gospel, to be realized after the successful overthrow of the old regimes. Before this happened, however, he wanted to avoid antagonizing the peasants, who as owners of property were opposed to the idea of expropriation. Hence, in a public statement at the Basel Congress (1869) of the First International, he still advocated the abolition of the right of inheritance — an idea he had propounded in his *Revolutionary Catechism* of 1866 — as a painless, delayed-action, installment-plan expropriation, even though he had abandoned this idea when he was converted to the “collectivism” of the former Proudhonists. At the Basel Congress, these ex-Proudhonists pointed out that after a victorious revolution resulting in the expropriation of the capitalists and the establishment of a collectivist form of production, the abolition of the right of inheritance would be meaningless.<sup>11</sup> Bakunin was, of course, aware

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 108. 12. Bakunin, III, 84–90.

<sup>11</sup> Nettlau, p. 129.

to the conclusion that communist anarchism could be ushered in only after the establishment of a democratic Socialist system, a system that would enable them, through experimentation and example, gradually to persuade the majority that a form of voluntary collective ownership was preferable to a government-owned economy. They were therefore ready to serve as a sort of independent, militant, ultra-left-wing ally of the Socialists and to help them to bring about a democratic Socialist revolution. Malatesta was the best-known representative of this trend. It did not occur to him or to his friends that the enormous majority of the Socialists, despite their lip service to the “inevitable” social revolution, at that time definitely favored a gradual transition from capitalism to Socialism, and that as a result they could do without the assistance of the anarchists.

It may not be amiss to mention here that in his *L’Anarchie: Sa Philosophie, son idéal* (1896), as well as in other works, Kropotkin wrote that every phase in the development of a society is the “resultant” of the various social forces at work. Applied to the concept of the social revolution, this idea could only mean: those whom the anarchists called authoritarian would exert pressure to entrust the state with the organization of production; they would be opposed by the anarchists, who would favor entrusting voluntary organizations with this task. The resultant of these two opposing forces would be midway between these two tendencies, toward a decentralized form of democratic Socialism with much local autonomy and ample scope for producers’ cooperatives. It was a tacit, scientifically camouflaged retreat from Utopia.

It was not the anarchist ideal, then, but the cult of violence that motivated the Socialists’ refusal to admit the anarchists to their congresses. Eager to attract voters, they were unwilling to be associated in the public mind with men whose terrorist acts branded them as assassins or maniacs. They also resented the abstentionist, anti-parliamentarian propaganda, which if successful would threaten their election to the various representative bodies.



behalf of the First International. As a result the first Spanish sections of that body, formed the following year, had a distinct anarchist cast. By relating their propaganda to the wage struggles of the workers, the first Spanish leaders of the International established in their country so firm a tradition of championing working-class interests that no amount of later Marxist competition was able to weaken it. The cruel persecutions by the government and the hopeless economic plight of large sections of the intelligentsia, and of both the industrial workers in the north and the landless peasants in the south, have contributed to perpetuating that mood to the present day.

## The Anarchists and the Second International

Despite their antagonism to the democratic — particularly the Marxian — Socialists, whom they usually referred to as “Authoritarians,” the anarchists repeatedly made strenuous efforts to be heard at the International Socialist Congresses called by the democratic Socialists after the formation of the Second, or Socialist, International in 1889. There were two reasons why the anarchists tenaciously insisted on being admitted to those assemblies despite the unwillingness of the democratic Socialist majority to have anything to do with them. In the first place, the anarchists did and do consider their philosophy as one of the shades of Socialism. For Socialism, in its widest sense, embraces all currents opposing private ownership of the means of production. The anarchists often called themselves “libertarian” or “anti-authoritarian” Socialists, and hence they were unwilling to concede to the democratic Socialists the monopoly of the concept of Socialism.

In the second place, they had tacitly abandoned Bakunin’s idea of an immediate anarchist revolution, which logically would entail the establishment of a dictatorship by the anarchist minority. Hence the more realistic elements among the anarchists had come

of this himself, but he clung to the old formula for the practical reasons I have just mentioned.

Bakunin’s intimate followers must have been aware of this game of two truths, but as practical revolutionists they saw nothing objectionable in anything that would serve the cause of immediate revolution. Similarly, in order to outdo Marx in radicalism, they were ready to call “abolition of the state,” or anarchism, what in fact was merely the replacement of centralized governments by autonomous provincial or local governments.

As against Bakunin’s following of declassé intellectuals from economically backward countries such as Italy and Spain,\* Marx could lean for support chiefly on the less desperate malcontents of the economically more advanced countries, particularly the German-speaking countries. Marx could also depend on the British trade unions, to whom he was a lesser evil than the Bakunist firebrands. Similarly, Marx’s rank-and-file following consisted largely of the better-paid skilled workers, while the Bakuninists appealed chiefly to the generally underpaid or starving workers and peasants of their native countries. Some of the French Proudhonists switched their allegiance to Marx instead of to Bakunin. Marx could also count on the support of the Blanquists, even though temperamentally and sociologically this group of impatient, educated declasses was closer to the Bakuninists. The Blanquists took the Russian’s thunderings against the seizure of power at their face value, not realizing, as Marx did, that behind them was concealed Bakunin’s desire for personal dictatorial power. (Bakunin’s revealing statement about the “invisible dictatorship” his organization would exert after the successful revolution was at that time still unknown to outsiders.)<sup>12</sup>

[\* Bakunin had few followers in Paris, not because the French capital lacked the potentially revolutionary educated declasses, but because the latter had a glamorous leader of their own, Auguste

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 107–8, 148.

Blanqui, who was just as quick on the revolutionary trigger as Bakunin and whose reputation as a rebel was even older.]

With the support of these diverse elements and aided by the disarray in Bakunin's camp — Bakunin's Italian followers had refused to attend the crucial Congress of the International at The Hague in 1872 — Marx succeeded in having Bakunin and his closest associate, James Guillaume, expelled (September 2, 1872) from the International for participation in a secret organization whose activities were harmful to the International. An additional reason for Bakunin's expulsion was his alleged commission of a dishonorable act of "swindling."\* This attempt to rob a famous rebel of his good name, an act of character assassination now condemned, apologetically, by most Marxist historians, was to poison well-nigh forever the anarchists' personal feelings toward Marx.

[\* Bakunin had failed to return 300 rubles which he had received from publisher as an advance on the translation of Marx's *Kapital*.]

In a pamphlet written shortly before Bakunin's expulsion, Marx placed all blame for the conflicts within the International on Bakunin's intrigues and lust for power.<sup>13</sup> He was apparently unwilling to face the fact that for the educated declasses who formed Bakunin's following, immediate revolution, as preached by their leader, was the only alternative to hopeless destitution. To Marx, they were simply the "dregs of the bourgeoisie,"<sup>14</sup> whose plight did not interest him, particularly since the economic situation of his own educated following in the economically more advanced countries, though not quite satisfactory, was at any rate not so desperate as that of their Spanish and Italian counterparts.

The real cause of Bakunin's expulsion and of the subsequent fatal transfer of the International to New York was revealed in 1893,

---

<sup>13</sup> Marx and Engels, *Les Pretendues Scissions dans l'Internationale* (Geneva, 1872). Private circular of the General Council of the IWA.

<sup>14</sup> The equivalent of the expression used in *L'Alliance de la Democratie Socialiste et L'Association Internationale des Travailleurs*, published anonymously but written by Engels, Lafargue, and Marx (London, 1873).

felt that they could publicly repudiate these converts. Some of them took the position that criminals were victims of society, and therefore it did not behoove anarchists to join the chorus of those who attacked them. In one particular case the exploits of two fanatical anarcho-bandits — most of the others were cynics rather than fanatics — who specialized in cop-killing and who ended on the gallows, unwittingly contributed to the destruction of a flourishing pro-anarchist mass movement in Austria during the early 1880's. A robbery during which they murdered an entire family — the children, one of their admirers explained to this writer in 1904, were "too noisy" — generated revulsion among the workers in Vienna, who at that time were receptive to anarchist ideas.

Sporadic acts of violence, which during the last two decades of the nineteenth century were, in the public mind, the main characteristics of anarchism, were not the only anarchist activity. When conscripts reported for military duty, anarchists distributed appeals to the recruits urging them to disobey their officers when ordered to fire on striking workers. And at election time, appeals were published urging the voters to abstain from going to the polls, thus refusing to recognize the state. In actual practice, however, this kind of propaganda could hurt only the Socialists, for the workers whom the abstentionist leaflets or speeches reached were potential Socialist voters. At the turn of the century, a candidate of the anti-Semitic Christian Social Party of Austria running for parliament in Florisdorf, an industrial suburb of Vienna, actually used anarchist-anti-parliamentary leaflets — apparently copied from some anarchist publications — with the intention of discouraging the workers from voting for his Socialist opponent.

Reduced to the insignificance of a noisy, quasi-religious sect, the anarchists showed vitality only in the Spanish-speaking countries, particularly in Spain itself. This was due to a peculiar circumstance: in 1868 an Italian emissary of Bakunin's in Madrid and Barcelona struck almost virgin soil when he began his work on

gether, they constituted a practically unorganized quasi-religious sect, protesters in word or deed against the world's injustices.

The violent defiance of authority implied in individual terrorist acts incidentally resulted in something that had not been envisaged by the romantic champions of post-Bakunin anarchism. The supernatural beauty of their anarchist-communist ideal made it clear to all but the most unsophisticated of the rank and file that a revolution in behalf of that ideal was out of the question during their lifetime. This meant that, aside from immolating themselves, all they could do in defiance of the status quo was attend meetings, distribute leaflets, read anarchist periodicals and pamphlets, and occasionally exchange blows with the police. They would also, as Victor Adler, leader of the Austrian Socialists, put it, hope that "somewhere, sometime, someone would kill some person in power, and feel happy when such a thing happened."

However, not all rank-and-file followers were satisfied with such harmless forms of protest against fate. Some of the malcontents were adventurous types, who, if untouched by propaganda, would simply have joined the criminal underworld as an escape from a life of permanent drudgery. Having heard of a new evangel that extolled revolt against the law, they gladly embraced it as an ideological cloak that enabled them to draw a line between themselves and the common run of crooks with no philosophy.

In many cases it was even simpler than that. Jean Grave, Kropotkin's leading follower in France, once put it this way: "Since the bourgeois press has persistently presented the anarchists as criminals and maniacs, many criminals and maniacs have come to believe that we are their party." The result was a wave of burglaries, robberies, and similar crimes, whose perpetrators posed as, or considered themselves to be, anarchists — in some rare cases making small contributions to the cause. This gave the movement a very black eye, and hence activities of this kind were persistently encouraged by agents provocateurs. The ideologists of anarchism were quite distressed about it, but not all of them

in a statement made by Friedrich Engels at the Zurich Congress of the Second International. Engels said that in 1872 Marx felt that the situation on the Continent was becoming "too dangerous for the old organization to be maintained."<sup>15</sup> The "danger," as the Marxist historian Franz Mehring put it, consisted of the possibility of futile uprisings (*Handstreich*) which, in Engels' opinion, could result in "persecutions" and "unnecessary suffering."<sup>16</sup> These uprisings might have been the work of either the Bakuninists or the Blanquists. Ironically, it was against the Blanquists, who had helped Marx get rid of Bakunin, that the transfer was directed.

## The "Anti-Authoritarian International"

After the expulsion of Bakunin and Guillaume, their followers assembled during the same year (1872) at St.-Imier, Switzerland. The delegates represented Spain, Italy, and the Jura, as well as France, Holland, and Belgium. They did not consider themselves "expelled." On the contrary, they refused to recognize the official General Council of the First International, and looked upon themselves as the continuation of the body virtually liquidated by Marx.

The reunion at St.-Imier led to the formation of what is sometimes called the "Anti-Authoritarian International," which held conventions until 1877. It was not an outright anarchist International; some of the delegates professed views midway between anarchism and democratic socialism, while others were moderate British trade unionists. Not all of them were actually anti-authoritarians; the only "plank" they shared was opposition to the authority exerted by Marx in the General Council of the International. During their struggle against their Marxist rivals, even the ultra-authoritarian

---

<sup>15</sup> E. Belfort Bax, *Reminiscences and Reflections of Mid and Late Victorian* (London, 1918), pp. 32, 151.

<sup>16</sup> Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: Geschichte seines Lebens* (Leipzig, 1918), p. 491. See also Belfort Bax, *Reminiscences*, p. 151.

followers of Ferdinand Lassalle sent delegates to one of the congresses.

In the course of the debates held at the Geneva Congress (1873), the arsenal of anarchist ideas was enriched by the concept of the general strike as a tactic of social revolution.<sup>17</sup> The concept was originally proposed by the Belgian delegates, who stood halfway between anarchism and democratic socialism. It was supported by a number of other delegates; the representatives of the Jura Federation also stressed the necessity of strikes for higher wages, thus emphasizing the importance of labor unions. No definite decision was adopted on this point, but it is now generally believed that this was the first step in the direction of what was later to be called either “anarcho-syndicalism” or “revolutionary syndicalism.”

The last convention of that “Anti-Authoritarian,” or, more precisely, anti-Marxian, International took place in 1877, in the Belgian industrial town of Verviers. It was attended exclusively by anarchists, for most of the other participants at the former congresses of that International had decided to hold in Ghent, Belgium, what they called a “Universal Socialist Congress,” whose aim was to unite all elements of the European radical and labor movements. Possibly it was an attempt to revive the old International, which had officially expired in 1876, with some former middle-of-the-roaders, like the Belgian ex-Proudhonist and near-Bakunist Cesar de Paepe, definitely intent on joining the Social Democratic camp. Some anarchists took part in that congress, too, and voted against the two main planks of democratic Socialism adopted by the majority: government ownership of the means of production, and participation in parliamentary struggles for power. Of the anarchists’ own Congress in Verviers, it can be said that it had a special place in the history of anarchist ideas, for it marked the beginning of the transition from Bakuninism to a new phase of anarchism dominated by the ideas and the personality of Peter Kropotkin.

---

<sup>17</sup> Netdau, p. 212.

that propaganda by the deed is of greater importance in the countryside than in the cities.

Whereas the technical and chemical sciences have rendered services to the revolutionary cause and are bound to render still greater services in the future, the Congress suggests that organizations and individuals affiliated with the International Workingmen’s Association devote themselves to the study of these sciences.[27]

The congress decided to form a new, open International, to establish a correspondence bureau in London, and to hold another congress the following year. However, nothing came of these decisions. It was 26 years before the anarchists held another congress — this one altogether their own.

At the time of the London Congress, Kropotkin believed in the need for two kinds of organizations — an open one and a secret one. The former was to be concerned with the bread-and-butter struggles of the masses, while the latter would consist of very small groups, apparently engaged in direct action.<sup>25</sup> In a letter written in 1902 to Jean Grave, his outstanding French follower, Kropotkin made a similar proposal “for an International of the workers engaged in the class struggle (Alliance Ouvriere Internationale), combined with a more intimate alliance of persons who knew each other within that organization.”[29] However, neither in 1881, nor in 1902, nor during the interval between these years did an international organization of this kind materialize. With the collapse of Bakunin’s camouflaged struggle for power, those malcontents who would not join the camp of gradualist Marxism became preachers of or believers in a faraway ideal, which they could not possibly expect to be realized in their lifetime. With nothing except hatred of the status quo and the vague ideal of “anarchy” to hold them to-

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 227. 29. Ibid.

was obvious.<sup>24</sup> The main ideas animating the participants of the congress were expressed in the following resolution:

Whereas the International Workingmen's Association [those assembled in London assumed the original name of the First International] deems it necessary to add propaganda by the deed to oral and written propaganda; and, furthermore, whereas the moment of a general conflagration is not far distant, and the revolutionary elements of all countries will be called upon to do their utmost — the Congress urges all organizations affiliated with the I.W.A. to head the following proposals:

It is absolutely necessary to exert every effort toward propagating, by deeds, the revolutionary idea and to arouse the spirit of revolt in those sections of the popular masses who still harbor illusions about the effectiveness of legal methods.

Those who no longer believe that legality will bring about the revolution will have to use methods that are in conformity with that aim.

The persecutions directed against the revolutionary press of all countries prove the necessity of organizing an underground press.

Whereas the agricultural workers are still outside the revolutionary movement, it is absolutely necessary to bend every effort toward winning them to our cause, and to keep in mind that a deed performed against the existing institutions appeals to the masses much more than thousands of leaflets and torrents of words, and

---

<sup>24</sup> Nettlau, p. 221. 27. Ibid.

The disintegration of Bakuninism had begun even before Bakunin's death, in 1876. It had started two years earlier, in 1874, when the revered leader covered himself with shame and his movement with ridicule by wasting the entire war chest of the hoped-for revolution on the childish project of improving the villa in which he lived.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after that disaster, Bakunin's followers attempted to start an uprising in Italy; the attempt misfired. Another attempt, in 1877, was equally unsuccessful. The masses, supposed to be potentially revolutionary and always ready to rise, proved as disappointing as the judgment of Bakunin.

Bakunin's closest and most active followers reacted in two different ways. Some of them moved over to the Marxist camp. They had apparently never been taken in by the mystique of the anarchist "abolition of the state," behind which they were able to discern the will to power of their erstwhile teacher — a sentiment in which they heartily concurred in the innermost recesses of their all-too-human souls and hungry stomachs. However, the economic situation in their countries was improving. Industries were springing up, offering prospects for the organization of labor unions and labor parties, with jobs for organizers, lecturers, and journalists. The once-starving and hence fiery Don Quixotes of immediate revolution were turning into sensible Sancho Panzas of law-abiding gradualist socialism, using the vocabulary of Marxism to predict an inevitable revolution in an unpredictable future. Outstanding among them were Jules Guesde and Andrea Costa, the founders of the French and the Italian Marxist parties. The "dregs of the bourgeoisie" became the cream of the proletariat.

However, there were others, idealists and romantics, such as Elisee Reclus, Errico Malatesta, and Carlo Cafiero, who stuck to their anarchist guns and were joined by Prince Peter Kropotkin, who had escaped from a Tsarist dungeon in 1876. These pure-in-

---

<sup>18</sup> Carlo Cafiero had placed his entire fortune at Bakunin's disposal, to be used for revolutionary purposes.

heart dreamers, joined by some implacable haters, rejected any idea of receding from their irreconcilable position. But they also rejected the idea of blindly accepting their departed teacher's views. Sobered by the scandal mentioned above, they may have taken a second look at some of his theories. Apparently in deference to his great prestige among the rank and file, they never publicly criticized his theories; but the ideas they gradually evolved implicitly rejected most of the tactical and theoretical tenets of "collectivist anarchism," as Bakunin's version of anarchism is usually called.

For Bakuninism, they gradually began to realize, was a contradictory combination of libertarian, anti-authoritarian philosophy *in abstracto* and dictatorial, authoritarian practice *in concreto*. They certainly recalled the letter Bakunin had written on February 7, 1870, in which he demanded of his followers absolute submission to his authority.<sup>19</sup> Nor could they forget what he had written about the "invisible dictatorship" that their secret organization would have to exert to keep the revolution on the right path.<sup>20</sup> Even the economic aspect of his "collectivist anarchism" was found wanting. The means of production were to belong to producers' cooperatives, whose members were to receive the full value of their labor. This, however, implied the necessity of statistical or accounting commissions to estimate the worth of a worker's output — bodies that one way or another would smack of government authority.

To eliminate all these "impurities," they decided in favor of a very loose, well-nigh atomized form of organization, with no trace of the hierarchical principle of the International Brothers. They also devised a simon-pure ideal, which they called interchangeably either "communist anarchism" or "anarchist communism." Under that system, they believed, everybody would work voluntarily according to his abilities and consume according to his needs, satisfy-

---

<sup>19</sup> Bakunin, III, 95–97. In this passage Bakunin extols the discipline characterizing the Jesuit order.

<sup>20</sup> See Note 14.

discussed at the Berne Congress of the "Anti-Authoritarian" International (1876), referred to small attempts at local insurrection.<sup>23</sup> Somewhat later — after such actions had proven to be quite ineffectual — the term was applied to individual acts of protest.

Propaganda by the deed occupied a prominent place in the discussions at the London Congress of 1881. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II, which had occurred earlier the same year, had made a great impression on the delegates. There was, of course, a difference between the terrorist acts of the Russian revolutionaries of the *Narodnaya Volya*, who expected to intimidate the Tsarist regime into granting constitutional reforms, and the acts of violence contemplated and later carried out by the anarchists, which were to serve merely as "awakeners" of the masses. Moreover, while Russian terrorist acts were, as a rule, organized affairs, the anarchist "propagandists by the deed" were mostly loners who were intent upon indirect suicide. The chronicle of anarchist terrorism is filled with acts of desperate protest, tragic retaliation (the assassination in 1897 of the Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Canovas del Castillo, who had ordered the torturing of hundreds of innocents), and bestial stupidity (the assassination of the Austrian Empress Elizabeth in 1898). With only two exceptions, when they resulted in the liberation of political prisoners in Spain and Italy, they hurt the movement they were supposed to serve, and blackened its image in the mind of the masses they were supposed to "awaken." Except in Spain, such acts did not occur after the turn of the century, when the anarchist movement took another direction.

No anarchist terrorist acts of any significance had been carried out at the time of the London Congress, yet much time was devoted to discussing the necessity of studying chemistry; the implication

---

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Rocker, Johann Most: Das Leben eines Rebellen (Berlin, 1924), p. 128.

is a strong workers' organization. The revolutionary middle class [Kropotkin obviously had in mind the educated declasses] can overthrow the government; it cannot make the revolution. Only the people can do that ... Hence we have to make every effort to organize the masses of the workers. We, the small revolutionary groups, have to submerge ourselves in the organization of the people; we have to take our inspiration from their hatred and from their hopes, and help them transform these into action. When the masses of the workers are organized, and when we join them in order to arouse in them the spirit of revolt against capital — and there will be many occasions for that — only then will we be justified in expecting that the people will not be cheated out of the next revolution as they have been cheated out of the previous ones, and that this revolution will be the social revolution.<sup>22</sup>

One of the means that, according to Kropotkin and his friends, would “arouse the spirit of revolt” was what the communist anarchists called “propaganda by the deed” — terrorist acts of retaliation or protest against representatives of the existing system. That tactic had not been in the armory of the Bakuninists; they believed that the masses were essentially revolutionary, and hence needed no terrorist fireworks to stimulate their spirit of revolt. All that was necessary, according to Bakunin, was an organization of conspirators, who at the proper moment would capitalize on the revolutionary potential of the masses. That view was no longer shared by Kropotkin and his friends. It was replaced by a sort of revolutionary “education” of the masses through acts of revolt, or “propaganda by the deed.” Originally that sort of “propaganda,” as first

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

ing his requirements out of the well-stocked storehouses. Authorship of that ideal system is usually credited to Kropotkin, who is generally recognized as the theoretician of communist anarchism. The fact is, however, that the idea was “in the air” during the late 1870's, and that Reclus, Cafiero, and Malatesta were as much its fathers as Kropotkin.

Only pure-in-heart idealists like these men could actually believe in the workability of such a system. Being quite naive about economic facts, they were convinced that the capitalist system produced such an abundance of goods that for a long time after the revolution there would be enough for everybody, even in the event of widespread loafing. Eventually, they were sure, everyone would voluntarily adhere to the idea of solidarity. They based their hopes on the inherent goodness of man, and on the principle of mutual aid allegedly governing animals and humans alike. One of their later converts, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, the founder of the Socialist movement in Holland, put it this way: “Why speculate on man's evil passions rather than on his generous sentiments?”

Only the anarchists of Spain and the United States remained for a number of years under the sway of Bakunin's ideas: the Spaniards because, having a mass following among both the workers and the peasants, they still hoped for a revolution in their lifetime, something conceivable only under the slogans of the not-quite-pure anarchism of the old apostle; the Americans, or more exactly the German-American anarchists of New York and Chicago, because, as former Social Democrats, they quite naturally took to Bakunin's ultra-radical crypto-Marxism rather than to the ultra-utopian dreams of Kropotkin.

Some of Bakunin's views were taken up, about two decades after his death, by the Polish-Russian ex-Marxist Waclaw Machajski, author of *The Intellectual Worker* (1898). Apparently taking his cue from a passage of Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy* (1873) about the spurious “proletarian” character of a Marxist dictatorship, he argued that what the Marxist Socialists were aiming at was in real-

ity not the emancipation of the working class, but the rule of a neo-bourgeois class of officeholders and managers — in short, of a non-capitalist middle class. And, just as inconsistent as Bakunin, he postulated a revolutionary dictatorship of his own secret organization. Because of his violent criticism of Socialist gradualism, he was in his time generally classed as an anarchist, though he himself rejected that label. His views are of some interest because they either directly or indirectly inspired those writers who emphasize the “managerial,” i.e., “non-proletarian,” aspect of the various anti-capitalist theories.

## The Social Revolutionary Congress of London, 1881

During the late 1870's and early 1880's the ideas of Kropotkin and his close associates were making gradual headway among opponents of the de-facto gradualism of the growing or budding Marxist parties. On the initiative of some of these groups and of some extreme left-wing Socialists, arrangements were made to hold an international revolutionary — but not strictly anarchist — congress in London in 1881.

The debates at that congress reveal the confusion prevailing in the minds of the participants.<sup>21</sup> In the first place, the congress was honeycombed with agents provocateurs. Their number has never been definitely established, but outstanding among them was a certain Serreaux, editor of *La Revolution Sociale*, a periodical published in Paris with funds supplied by the chief of the Paris police.\* Besides those professing anarchist views, the delegates included German, French, and Belgian left-wing Socialists, whose only bond with the anarchists was the advocacy of immediate revolutionary action. They were essentially Blanquists, even though some of them used a

---

<sup>21</sup> Max Nettlau, *Anarchisten und Sozialrevolutionäre* (Berlin, 1931), pp. 202–31.

Marxian vocabulary. They believed in the seizure of power rather than in the immediate “abolition of the state.” Their views were shared by Johann Most, who was then in prison. A reluctant anarchist, his political philosophy, apart from his super-emphasis on terrorist acts, was a hybrid of Bakuninist, Blanquist, Marxist, and Lassallean (“iron law of wages”) ideas. It seems that he accepted Kropotkin's altogether Utopian communist anarchism only when, thoroughly disenchanted, he no longer cared one way or another.

[\* When at last he was unmasked, he was merely confronted with the evidence of his role, and that was all — even though revolutionary tradition would have expected them to deal with him in the good old fashion of underground revolutionary vendetta. It seems, however, that with the passing of Bakuninism the old-time conspirators were largely succeeded by dreamers or phrasemongers, with a few romantics like Errico Malatesta or Charles Malato trying in vain to maintain the old spirit.]

Of the same Blanquist bent was young Malatesta, in whom the man of action prevailed over the theorist, and who believed in collaborating with extreme left-wing Italian Socialists in order to bring about a political revolution, the establishment of a democratic republic. He expected a social revolution to follow immediately. His opinion was not shared by Kropotkin, who epitomized his views on that subject as follows:

We will become [merely] an army of conspirators if we believe that it suffices to overthrow the government. The next revolution must, from its very start, set about the seizure of the entire social wealth by the workers in order to convert it into common property. Such a revolution can be accomplished only if the industrial and agricultural workers will themselves carry out the seizure. To that end they will also have to carry on their own action during the period before the revolution; this is possible only if there