Notes From Below
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The recent arrest of Alfredo Bonanno on suspicion of an alleged bank robbery in Greece has exposed the risks and reopened the controversy surrounding the tactic of political expropriation. Whilst criminality remains in the arsenal of the movement on the continent, its use in the UK is rare. It is often argued that this is a result of the efficiency of the British state in surveillance and arrest, compared to their European counterparts. The failure of 'illegalism' to generalise in the British movement is not purely tactical, for many its rejection has a moral and political basis. Illegalism is as much a product of historical and geographical contexts as a result of an ideological construction. To explain the development of hostile critiques of illegalism requires a backward glance to the turbulent history of the individualist tendency within the anarchist movement.

The seeds of illegalism developed on the fertile ground of post-commune Paris. The ensuing decades saw witness to increasingly repressive measures enacted by the 'Third Republic' that were to rack up class tension. Political suppression of working class and revolutionary organizations, forced anarchists into the adoption of clandestine and illegal methods

of activity, the result of which was an acceptance and normalization of illegality amongst Parisian anarchists.

The publication of 'The Ego And Its Own' (1844) was also to have a profound influence on illegalism as both a theory and praxis, growing from 'individual or egoist anarchism'. For those unfamiliar with individualism, Stirner advocated that there was no rational ground for a person to recognize any authority above their own or to place any goal before that of their own happiness. As such, egoists (anarchist individualists) reject the concept of morality, viewing principles of conduct as prohibitive to individual freedom. For egoists, the only consistent anarchist is the one who accepts no constraints, be they moral or political. This can be seen to sit in stark contrast to France's contemporary syndicalist (or social anarchist) movement that rationalized that individuals were obligated to each other in a society. Stirnerite 'unions of egoists' became the 'modus operandi' for illegalists, with individuals collaborating to achieve their individual interests and disbanding or leaving once their aims were achieved.

The fashion for all things Stirner in late C19th Paris led to the adoption of individualist trajectories in many of Paris radical journals. The main Journal of individualism and latter illegalism was 'L'anarchie', and it became increasingly hostile to syndicates and unions with each issue.

In his excellent history of the illegalist 'Bonnot Gang' (who where accredited with the development of the 'getaway car'), Richard Parry elaborates on 'L'anarchies' position as proponents of the 'revolution of the self'. Parry's meticulous research shows a paper that viewed unions as reformist and reactionary capitalist organizations, which they argued maintained workers as workers, a relationship that they argued anarchists surely wanted to destroy. For 'L'anarchie' and the individualists around them, syndicalists were wrong to place their efforts in workers, arguing it was wrong for unionists to invest value in the working class, for as long as

of organization. Insurrectionary anarchism, with its close relationships to Stirnerist egoism, has adopted propaganda of the deed. Attempts have recently been made on the lives of policemen claimed in solidarity with the Greek revolt.

Expropriation of capitalist property is also on the rise within the movement. Illegalism is a response expressed by anarchists in certain social contexts and under favourable conditions – when social tensions are declared and recognized. Self-proclaimed individualists are most active and support is widespread when society is in upheaval, this irony does not go unnoticed by social anarchists. Illegalist actions resonate beyond anarchists and into wider society, partly due to their often daring nature, serving to shock and inspire.

For a more in-depth history of illegalism and insurrectionary anarchism:

Parry, R -*The Bonnot Gang* (1987) Rebel Press
Cacucci, P- *Without a Glimmer of Remorse* (2006), Read and Noir
Merriman, J- *The Dynamite Club* (2009), JR Books

they remained workers, this had little to do with their realization as individuals. As such unions were held in contempt, maintaining the world as it was constructed by bourgeois reality, therefore unionists and other working class activists were seen as the unwitting dupes of capitalism. It's not hard to see why such ideas would foster resentment from those inside the labour movement, who also suffered persecution from a hostile bourgeoisie.

While illegalism grew out of a rejection of morality, criminal activity was practiced widely amongst the anarchist movements, including those who would define themselves as morally or socially engaged. The anarchist burglar Clement Duval, who upon capture was denied a voice in court, published his defense in the anarchist journal *Revolte*: "Theft exists only through the exploitation of man by man, that is to say in the existence of all those who parasitically live off the productive class…when society refuses you the right to exist, you must take it… the policeman arrested me in the name of the law, I struck him in the name of liberty". For Duval and others like him, burglary of the bourgeois, *La reprise individual* as it was to become known, was a morally informed act of class revenge. Influenced by Stirner's 'anti-essentialism', later 'illegalists' would abandon any attempts at an ethical framework, proposing and embracing criminality as a lifestyle, hence the beginnings of a recognizably different 'illegalism' to the variants prior.

Despite the rejection of a moral basis, it is hard to separate the open call for a generalized revolt that their actions engendered. With a ban on political organization, acts of class antagonism were to take on a more violent and therefore immediate form. This was expressed in two general themes, bombings and assassinations, and the theft of bourgeois property. Europe of the 1890's was shaken by a wave of *propaganda of the deed* and *la reprise individual.*

The immediate desire for an abolition of the State was expressed in assassinations of members of the political and ruling classes. Across Europe lives were taken of politicians (the Prime Ministers of France and Spain), royalty (the Kings of Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia and Empress of Austria), as well as captains of industry and the bourgeoisie. In France, bosses were targeted with bombings, assassinations and burglaries, regularly enacted by disgruntled workers.

If dynamite and knives characterised the period of *propaganda of the deed*, cunning and ingenuity characterised *la reprise individual*. This practice was born out of the same need for an immediacy of action that the assassins of the ruling elites proposed. Politically informed burglars and thieves demanded the immediate re-apropriation of bourgeois property. This activity was carried out by both individuals and collectives. The most infamous group of the time were known as '*Les Travailleurs de la Nuit'*, *the night workers*, under the organization of the anarchist Marius Jacob. From humble beginnings, this loose association would swell to over 100 members. The group set itself the aim of expropriating wealth from those considered 'social parasites', targeting only bosses, judges, soldiers and the clergy, granting clemency to those they deemed socially useful. A percentage of all money was to be invested back into the anarchist movement; a code of non-violence was adopted, to be broken only in defense of life or liberty. The gang took the addresses of the wealthy through compiled 'who's who' of bourgeois society, obtained uniforms as disguises, practiced and developed safe-breaking and house entry techniques. Burglaries frequently resulted in attacks of arson if the occupier was deemed particularly obnoxious.

Amoralist motivations began to dominate French anarchist criminality and anarcho-communists sought to distance themselves, dismissing illegalist activity as an expression more in keeping with capitalism than communism. In 1913 the *Federation Communiste-Anarchistes* (FCA) publicly condemned

illegalism. The pages of *Freedom* would also lend criticism to the illegalists, a letter attributed to Kropotkin argued that 'the simple-minded young comrades were often led away by the illegalist's apparent anarchist logic; outsiders simply felt disgusted with anarchist ideas and definitely stopped their ears to any propaganda'. Nonetheless, politically motivated expropriation continued to be practiced by individuals who defined themselves as anarchist.

Political expropriation remains controversial because of its attachment and adoption by contested anarchist tendencies. Modern illegalism is commonly associated and championed by proponents of 'insurrectional anarchism' of which Bonnano is seen as a main theoretician. 'Insurrectional anarchism' has its largest social base in Italy and Greece, and opposes organizational structures as a means to achieve communism. Rather, temporary unions of individuals are advocated, to come together around a shared aim before dissipating. They also propose the generalization of insurrectionary moments, such as rioting as a method of disrupting capitalist and state control.

Like 'Egoist anarchists' before them, insurrectionists find themselves at the receiving end of criticism from within the movement. With emphasis on 'attack', it is clear why insurrectionary anarchism has taken hold in Greece, where street riots and insurrections have toppled military juntas within living memory. Detractors of illegalism are quick to condemn its practitioners as individualist adventurists divorced from the class struggle. These criticisms resonate, but we must recognize that different contexts produce different methods of struggles. History does not repeat itself, but does have a tendency to rhyme. It could be argued that the conditions the current Greek movement face mirror those of their 19TH century Parisian counterparts: a failed, yet generalized revolt has led to increased state hostility and repression. Greek anarchist groups have been forced to adopt clandestine models