

In the Name of Autonomy

(originally untitled)

Paul Lafargue

18 December 1881

Recently, we had a curious exhibition in Paris. The men of the Worker's Party could contemplate the bourgeois toolbox: autonomy, communalism, federalism, and libertarianism⁽¹⁾ lay refurbished and shiny as freshly minted pennies. October 15th's *Le Prolétaire* says these authorities were greatly afraid; the cowards "hid their flag deep in their pocket." All those who were silent as the second *Egalité* raised economic questions and bluntly attacked bourgeois men and ideas, have recovered from their paralysis of the tongue. And by God did they jabber! It was as if the Worker's Party was a bedlam of official economists or petty bourgeois from the Jura. Now, let's show the uses that the bourgeoisie get from this autonomous tinsmithing.

The Hatter's Society, a brave worker's society which does not mechanize its members with libertarian phrases, but which courageously defends its economic interests, had some trouble with Mr. Crespin, a great exploiter of working hatters. In the name of libertarian autonomy, they say Crespin refused to accept the Society's authoritarian tariff. The despotic Society put a ban on its two workshops. Crespin, quick to resort to autonomous tinsmithing, hires ten Saracens, who in the name of their autonomy, demand the liberty to work where they please and to lift the ban imposed on the Crespin workshops. They go further, they drag the authoritarian Ragot and eight of his comrades before the bourgeois courts, and accuse him of attacking their autonomous rights.

The bourgeois press enthused over the autonomist Saracens and libertarians, who dared "confront the despotism of the steering committee... of the Society which claims to yoke working hatters across all France" and which prohibited "its members from earning bread for themselves and their women," which "bashed" those who "revolted against its excommunications." The *Economiste*, the newspaper of libertarian free traders, of November 26th stood out as it devoted four columns to attacking the committee's dictatorship, which "demolished workers' liberty, preventing them from amicably discussing salary figures." There is the mystery. The industrial bourgeoisie wishes their workers autonomous, without organization, without steering committee, as to easily impose long workdays in exchange for a short salary. The bourgeois courts could only condemn Ragot and his comrades for having violated the autonomist Saracens' "right to work and to property."

⁽¹⁾ The French word, *libertairisme*, refers to left-wing libertarianism. It could potentially be translated as "anarchism," "libertarianism," or "libertarian socialism." For simplicity's sake, your translator uses "libertarian" and "liber-

We trap frogs with a piece of red cloth; the bourgeois trap workers with painted phraseology. When the philosophers and the politicians of the bourgeoisie understood that the religious phraseology of God, the Father, and the Blessed Virgin, the mother, could no longer take hold of the modern working class, they replaced the Catholic religion with other nonsense, with the religion of Country, of Liberty, of Fraternity, of Equality, of Autonomy, of Federalism, etc.¹ But today we know that, by Country, the bourgeois mean exploitation of its countrymen; by Liberty and Fraternity, free ruthless exploitation of proletariat men, women, and children; by Equality, abasement of workers to the equal level of misery and degrading work; by Autonomy and Communalism, reconstitution of aristocratic fiefdoms in industrial form (in *Creuzot* for example, the director makes and carries out the law); by Federalism, prohibition of central power to intervene in favor of the workers.

The Slave States of the federal American Republic took up arms to prevent the central government from abolishing slavery. Proudhon, who was one of the theoreticians of Federalism, after having defended the material power of the Pope in the name of the federalist principle, made himself France's champion of the Slave States.

The second *Egalité* began critiquing bourgeois ideas; the third *Egalité* continued. The Worker's Party has no mission to practice bourgeois philosophical, political, economic theories, but to demolish them.

¹ To better appeal to the French, well acquainted with dirty jokes, bourgeois philosophers filled their skies with goddesses "with powerful mammaries"; but unfortunately bourgeois goddesses are deathly boring; they don't party, and don't have the "funny ways" of the Greek goddesses.

tarianism" for *libertaire* and *libertairisme*.

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