

Anarchists and Unions

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Precursors of Syndicalism III

After discussing the rise of syndicalist ideas in the First International (*Precursors of Syndicalism I*) and then in the Chicago-based International Working People's Association (*Precursors of Syndicalism II*), we now turn to debates within the European anarchist movement before the rise of revolutionary syndicalism in France. In other words, communist-anarchism in the form of its most famous thinker, Peter Kropotkin. To do so shows that the standard narrative on anarchism and syndicalism is wrong.

This narrative is simple and can be found in most Marxist diatribes against anarchism. With the embrace and failure of "propaganda by the deed" (acts of individual violence against members of the ruling class) by the early 1890s, many anarchist turned towards working within the labour movement. This narrative is reflected in George Woodcock's influential history of Anarchism:

"French anarchism [...] climbed out of the depths of 1894, when its press was destroyed, its leaders were standing trial, and its structure of autonomous groups was almost completely dispersed, toward the highest point of its influence [...] The period from 1881 to 1894 had been a time of isolation, when the anarchists wandered in a wilderness of marginal social groups and sought the way to a millennium in desperate acts on the one hand and idyllic visions on the other. The period from 1894 to 1914 saw a fruitful equilibrium between the visionary and the practical [...] Anarcho-syndicalism [...] showed anarchism seeking constructive solutions." (*Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* [Penguin Books, 1986], 260)

This resulted in the rise of syndicalism after 1895, a development often portrayed as inconsistent, or fundamentally incompatible, with anarchism (as individual acts are asserted to be the quintessential anarchist tactic). This is often combined with a suggestion that come 1917 most syndicalists turned to Leninism, thus implying that syndicalism itself is quasi-Marxist or a step towards Marxism. Likewise, and as noted in our second instalment, Marxists often seek to proclaim – against all logic and evidence – the IWPA Marxist.

Yet even Woodcock had to admit that "Varlin and the French Bakuninists had also recognised before the Paris Commune the role of the trade unions in the social struggle, and the general strike had been supported by the non-Marxist collectivists within the International" before immediately contradicting himself by noting the syndicalist "emphasis on the syndicate rather than the commune as the basic social unit, and on industrial action as opposed to conspiratorial or insurrectional action, were the two points on which the anarcho-syndicalists principally differed from the anarchist communists and the collectivists." (263) We need not dwell too long on this, other than to note that the latter anarchists argued that industrial action was not enough and so also advocated insurrection – so it is not quite a matter of "emphasis."

Even if we ignore Woodcock's own undermining of this narrative, it is easy to refute and we will do so by focusing on the thinker most associated with anarchist-communism, Peter Kropotkin. A Russian aristocrat, he rejected his position in light of the horrors of the regime he benefited from. Initially becoming a socially aware official seeking reforms, he embraced the revolutionary anarchism of the Federalist-wing within the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) when visiting Western Europe in 1872. He then returned to Russia, the following year joining the Populist ("to the people") movement to argue for libertarian ideas and tactics.

The group he joined – the Chaikovsky Circle – was discussing whether their direction would be further socialist propaganda among the educated youth or to make contact with the workers and peasants. Kropotkin advocated the latter for propaganda must be made "unquestionably among

the peasantry and urban workers” for “the insurrection must proceed among the peasantry and urban workers themselves” if it were to succeed. Revolutionaries “must not stand outside the people but among them, must serve not as a champion of some alien opinions worked out in isolation, but only as a more distinct, more complete expression of the demands of the people themselves.” Moreover, a strike “trains the participants for a common management of affairs and for distribution of responsibilities, distinguishes the people most talented and devoted to a common cause, and finally, forces the others to get to know these people and strengthens their influence.” (“Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution* [Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1970], 85–6, 113)

Arrested for his activities, he was imprisoned in a Tsarist jail and after a daring escape from his hospital in 1876, he returned to Western Europe and four decades of exile. During this time he went from being one comrade amongst many to the most famous advocate of anarchism in the world. He, along with the likes of Carlo Cafiero, Errico Malatesta and Élisée Reclus, played a key role in the rise of anarchist-communism. This primarily focused on the best method of distributing goods after the revolution, rejecting the earlier distribution according to product created (i.e., according to deeds) advocated by mutualists and collectivists with free distribution (i.e., according to needs). Echoing the conclusions drawn by Joseph Déjacques in the 1850s they proclaimed “from each according to their abilities, to each according to needs.”

In terms of tactics, communist-anarchism initially saw no major change and it advocated the “Bakuninist” tactics of labour struggle and insurrection. This is reflected in Kropotkin’s first major theoretical contribution “The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of its Practical Realisation” (*Le Révolté*, 1 November 1879) which saw him argue that “the best method of shaking this edifice [of the State] would be to stir up the economic struggle” while also taking “advantage of every favourable opportunity to point out the incapacity, hypocrisy and class egoism of present governments.” The aim would be “the transformation of the property system by the expropriation pure and simple of the present holders of the large landed estates, of the instruments of labour, and of capital of every kind, and by the seizure of all such capital by the cultivators, the workers’ organisations, and the agricultural and municipal communes.”

However, the advocacy of “propaganda of the deed” – in the sense of individual acts of terror – by some anarchists around the same time saw many conflate communist-anarchism with this. Significantly, Kropotkin never embraced the term (coining “the spirit of revolt” to contrast his ideas with it) and continued to urge anarchist involvement in the labour movement:

“We have to organise the workers’ forces — not to make them into a fourth party in Parliament, but in order to make them a formidable MACHINE OF STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITAL. We have to group workers of all trades under this single purpose: ‘War on capitalist exploitation!’ And we must prosecute that war relentlessly, day by day, by the strike, by agitation, *by every revolutionary means*. [...] once the workers of every land have seen that organisation at work, taking the workers’ interests into its hands, waging unrelenting war on capital [...] once the workers from every trade, from village and city alike, are united into a single union [...] crush[ing] the tyranny of Capital and State for good (“Enemies of the People,” *Le Révolté*, 5 February 1881)

This meant rejecting calls by Marxists to take part in elections for this would mean “abandon[ing] the terrain of the economic struggle, of the worker against the capitalist, in order to become compliant tools in the hands of the politicians.” Unlike parliamentarianism, this direct struggle against Capital and State had a radicalising effect:

“however moderate the battle-cry may be – provided that it is in the domain of the relations between capital and labour – as soon as it is put into practice by revolutionary means, it will eventually deepen and inevitably lead to demanding the overthrow of the regime of property. Whereas a party which confines itself within parliamentary politics ends up abandoning its programme, however advanced it was in the beginning: it ends up merged with the parties of bourgeois opportunism.” (“The League and the Trade Unions,” *Le Révolté*, 1 October 1881)

As an alternative, he pointed to the Spanish anarchists as remaining “[f]aithful to the anarchist traditions of the International, clever, active, energetic men are not about to set up a group to pursue *their* petty ends: they remain within the working class, they struggle with it, for it. They bring the contribution of their energy to the workers’ organisation and work to build up a force that will crush capital, come the day of revolution: the revolutionary trades association.” (“The Workers’ Movement in Spain,” *Le Révolté*, 11 November 1881). He explained his ideas in a two part article which is worth quoting at length:

“it is against the holders of capital, be they blue, red or white, that they wish to declare war. It is not a political party that they seek to form either: it is a party *of economic struggle*. It is no longer democratic reform that they demand: it is a complete *economic* revolution, the *social* revolution” [...] they must engage in the struggle against capital. [...] If we wish to prepare for the day of the battle [and] our victory over capital, we must, from this day onward begin to skirmish, to harass the enemy at every opportunity, to make them seethe and rage, to exhaust them with the struggle, to demoralise them. [...]

“The enemy on whom we declare war is capital, and it is against capital that we will direct all our efforts, taking care not to become distracted from our goal by the phony campaigns and arguments of the political parties. The great struggle that we are preparing for is essentially *economic*, and so it is on the economic terrain that we should focus our activities.

“If we place ourselves on this terrain, we will see that the great mass of workers will come and join our ranks, and that they will assemble under the flag of the League of Workers. Thus we will become a powerful force which will, on the day of the revolution, impose its will upon exploiters of every sort. [...] In order to be able to make revolution, the mass of workers must organise themselves, and resistance and the strike are excellent means by which workers can organise. Indeed, they have a great advantage over the tactics that are being proposed at the moment (workers’ representatives, constitution of a workers’ political party, etc.) which do not actually derail the movement but serve to keep it perpetually in thrall to its principal enemy, the capitalist. [...] What is required is to build resistance associations for each trade in each town, to create resistance funds and fight against the exploiters, to unify the workers’ organisations of each town and trade and to put them in contact with those of other towns, to federate across France, to federate across borders, internationally [...] It is through the organisation of resistance to the boss that the International managed to gather together more than two million workers and to create a powerful force before which both bourgeoisie and governments trembled.” (“Workers’ Organisation,” *Le Révolté*, 10 and 24 December 1881)

In short, the early 1880s saw him write numerous articles on the subject of the labour movement in an attempt to counter the ultra-revolutionary posturing which had overtaken the French anarchist movement at the time. This was cut short with his arrest and subsequent imprisonment after the famous Lyon trial of 1883, although he later noted that his efforts were without much success when he recounted asking a prosecution witness at the Lyon trial whether he had succeeded in having “the International reconstituted” and received the reply: “No. They did not find

it revolutionary enough.” (*Memoirs of a Revolutionist* [Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1989], 420).

Released in 1886, he felt France for Britain. There he helped found *Freedom* in London and argued that workers “will not wait for orders from above before taking possession of land and capital. They will take them first, and *then* – already in possession of land and capital – they will organise their work.” (“Act for Yourselves,” *Freedom*, January 1887). He saw in the 1889 London Dock Strike an example to show anarchists the importance of involvement in the labour movement (see “The London Dock Strike of 1889,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 63 [Winter 2015]). He noted how anarchists had “often spoken of the general strike” and the dock strike showed its validity for the workers “are the masters. And the day when those anarchists who exhaust themselves in empty discussions [...] will *work* amongst the workers to prepare the stopping of work in the trades that supply all the others, they will have done more to prepare the social, economic, Revolution, than all the writers, journalists, and orators of the socialist party.” (“What a strike is,” *La Révolte*, 7 September 1889)

In Britain, he likewise urged that anarchists “spread the light in every corner of the land, infusing the spirit of Revolution into every mine, factory and workshop. By so doing, we shall soon have the workers of England no longer asking for trifling increases of wages, but demanding in sturdy tones a cessation of the system of robbery which obtains today.” (“The Use of the Strike,” *Freedom* April 1890) He pointed to the example of the IWPA: “Were not our Chicago Comrades right in despising politics, and saying the struggle against robbery must be carried on in the workshop and the street, by deeds not words?” (“The Chicago Anniversary,” *Freedom*, December 1891) The unions were not only good weapons in the struggle but also the means to replace capitalism:

“I should say that the chief point to be achieved now is to make the Anarchist ideas permeate the great labour movement which is so rapidly growing in Europe and America; and to do so by all those means, and only by such means, which are in strict accordance with our own principles [...]

“No one can underrate the importance of this labour movement for the coming revolution. It will be those agglomerations of wealth producers which will have to reorganise production on new social bases. They will have to organise the life of the nation and the use which it will make of the hitherto accumulated riches and means of production. They – the labourers, grouped together – not the politicians.” (“Commemoration of the Chicago Martyrs,” *Freedom*, December 1892)

The need was for anarchists “to bring our ideas into that movement, to spread them, by all means, among those masses which hold in their hands the future issue of the revolution” and to “propagate among the masses the ideas which we consider as the bases of the coming development” for “it is only in the great working masses – supported by their energies, applied by them to real life – that our ideas will attain their full development.”

So by 1892, the leading thinker of communist-anarchism had been advocating anarchist involvement in the labour movement for twenty years, since 1872 in fact. The spate of assassinations and bombings of the early 1890s occurred *after* the turn to syndicalist tactics not before as is usually claimed – return would be better, as Kropotkin indicated in his justly famous article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

“Accordingly, since the foundation of the International Working Men’s Association in 1864–1866, [anarchists] have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith

in parliamentary legislation.” (“Anarchism,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* [AK Press, 2014], 165)

This is the theoretical context of the rise of syndicalism in France, the product of many decades of anarchist participation within the labour movement and which reflected the ideas advocated by its leading lights, not least Kropotkin. As can be seen, all the essential aspects of syndicalism – direct economic struggle, unions as a means to both fight and replace capitalism, the general strike – was advocated by Kropotkin and other anarchist-communists. They linked their ideas to both the Federalist-wing of the IWMA and the IWPA, recognising – like Bakunin before them – that they had not invented these ideas but rather championed tactics developed by workers themselves.

Thus, for Kropotkin, “struggle, the war against the exploiter always remains the only weapon of the exploited” and that “struggle, by the strike, the war with the machines, the war against the landlord (which takes a thousand different aspects according to the localities), and the revolt against the State *unites* workers.” (“Co-operation and Socialism,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 27 July 1895) The pressing need was the creation of an “international union of labour organisations” for “Capital is its enemy. Direct warfare against it – its weapons.” (“The Trade Union Congress,” *Freedom*, October 1896). This would create the framework of libertarian socialism as it would “build up a force capable of imposing better working conditions on the bosses, but also — indeed primarily – to create among the working classes the union structures that might some day replace the bosses and take into their own hands the production and management of every industry.” (“Trade Unionism and Parliamentarianism,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 13 October 1906). As he summarised in 1913:

“what means can the State provide to abolish this [capitalist] monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? [...] Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these [capitalist] privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in *their* unions, *their* federations, completely outside the State?” (*Modern Science and Anarchy* [AK Press, 2018], 164)

This anti-Statist alternative was raised in opposition to Marxism which “talked of the *conquest of power*, but it knew only how to show us *its conquest by power*, the conquest of socialism by the bourgeoisie.” (“The Conquest of Socialists by Power,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 21 April 1900) A new path was needed and so Kropotkin, following Proudhon, saw the need to identify tendencies that had developed within capitalism which pointed beyond it, those elements which would be the means of creating and running a post-capitalist society. Thus the future was appearing in the present, not least by the actions of workers in their struggles. Hence Kropotkin from an article on the 1913 Dublin lockout and workers’ solidarity actions across Britain:

“It is only like that – *by building while we destroy* – will the workers arrive at their liberation. It is necessary that it is seen that the bourgeois is worse than harmful: that it is useless.” (“Solidarité Ouvrière”, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 11 October 1913)

The class struggle, the labour movement of both towns and countryside, was the means by which a new world was created, in its struggle against the old to resist exploitation and oppression. This was primarily seen in terms of unions, but Kropotkin also saw the potential of the workers’ councils created during the 1905 Revolution which “very much reminds us of the Central Committee which preceded the Paris Commune of 1871, and it is certain that workers across the country should organise on this model [...] these councils represent the revolution-

ary strength of the working class.” (“Direct Action and the General Strike in Russia,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 December 1905)

In the aftermath of that Revolution, Kropotkin stressed to his Russian comrades to learn its lessons and those of their comrades elsewhere, arguing that anarchists had to work in the labour movement to ensure it “wages a *direct*, unmediated battle of labour against capital” but also that “anarchists look to the workers’ unions as cells of the future social order and as a powerful means for the preparation of the social revolution, which is not confined to a change of political regime but also transforms the current forms of economic life, e.g. the distribution of the manufactured riches and their means of production.” In short, “the workers’ unions” are “*natural organs for the direct struggle with capital and for the organisation of the future order* — organs that are *inherently necessary* to achieve the workers’ own goals.” The general strike “has proved to be a powerful weapon in the struggle” and “a means of producing a revolution.” (“The Russian Revolution and Anarchism,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 466–7, 476–7)

Given that the final issue of *Les Temps Nouveaux* in 1914 proclaimed itself – as it had for many years – “Ex-Journal ‘*La Révolte*” in a sub-title and Kropotkin in 1899 stated that the journal he founded in 1879 “still continues, at Paris, under the title of ‘*Temps Nouveaux*’.” (*Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 390), a complete understanding of his ideas can only be gained by consulting its various incarnations over three decades along with his contributions to *Freedom* and other journals. Kropotkin’s books do not include the articles written on tactics and strategy which should be pursued by the movement which, while they do appear in the more general and introductory works, are usually passing comments rather than the detailed discussions which appear in newspapers. Sadly, no equivalent of *Words of a Rebel* or *The Conquest of Bread* appeared on the key question of how communist-anarchism would come about (many, but not all, of these articles are included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*). Without this, the obvious conclusions would be that he considered revolution just appearing out-of-the-blue, a position he explicitly and repeated warned anarchists against while arguing for anarchist participation in working class movements.

The notion, popularised by Murray Bookchin (when he still considered himself an anarchist), that communist-anarchism focused on the community and lamented syndicalism’s reduction of libertarian critique and struggle to just the economic terrain is inadequate. For Kropotkin – like Bakunin and many syndicalists – there was no conflict between advocating community struggle and organisation *as well as* industrial struggle and organisation. While he did object to certain aspects of French revolutionary syndicalism, he did not reject the need for anarchists to work within the labour movement for libertarian goals (we will address communist-anarchist criticisms of syndicalism in the next instalment of this series).

Nor is this to say that *all* communist-anarchists supported involvement in the labour movement. Italian anti-organisationalists – most notably Luigi Galleani – rejected it as reformist, a position echoed by some in Spain and, as noted above, Kropotkin himself lamented during the Lyons trial of 1883 that many French anarchists had no interest in reforming the International. However, these positions were either short-lived or very much in the minority and so communist-anarchism is just as much a precursor of syndicalism as the Federalist-wing of the IWMA and the IWPA. Indeed, Tom Mann praised Kropotkin in “the name of the Syndicalists in Britain” on his seventieth birthday, noting that while before the “mass of the [British] working class have hitherto failed to learn one of the principal lessons the old teacher has been striving to in part, i. e., the absurdity, the wrongfulness and economic unsoundness of relying upon State Action to bring about the economic changes essential for well-being,” they “are learning that great lesson

now and very rapidly [...] rely[ing] upon their own powers of Direct Action to achieve” the “Conquest of Bread.” (“In Appreciation,” *Mother Earth*, December 1912) It was no coincidence that he was asked to contribute a preface to the 1913 English translation of *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution* (*Comment nous ferons la Révolution*, 1909) by Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget, two leading French revolutionary syndicalists (included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*).

Kropotkin repeated noted that the need for revolutionary unions and anarchist participation within the labour movement were born within the IWMA in the early 1870s and he held to these positions throughout his life. He advocated them in the late 1870s and early 1880s, before imprisonment stopped his activities (the best account of this remains Caroline Cahm’s excellent *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]). He returned to these themes in the late 1880s and early 1890s, after their dramatic confirmation in the London Dock Strike of 1889, and continued to advocate them until his dying breath – indeed, he reiterated this position in one of his last letters:

“the trade-union movement [...] will become a great power for laying the foundations of an anti-State communist society. If I were in France, where at this moment lies the centre of the industrial movement, and if I were in better health, I would be the first to rush headlong into this movement in favour of the First International – not the Second or the Third, which only represent the usurpation of the idea of the *workers’* International for the benefit of a party which is not half composed of workers.” (quoted by G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: a biographical study of Peter Kropotkin* [London: Boardman, 1950], 419)

We end with an article in which Kropotkin summarises his position on the labour movement. Originally published in *Les Temps Nouveaux* in May 1907, it was considered important enough to be translated for *Freedom* the following month (June 1907) as “Anarchism and Trade Unions.” As far as we are aware, it was first reprinted in *Direct Struggle Against Capital* and here we present a new translation. This is for two reasons. First, the original translation differed slightly from the original French text and, second, it is to modern eyes somewhat dated (“workingmen” and such like). It should also be noted that Kropotkin uses the term *syndicalisme* (or trade unionism) rather than *syndicalisme révolutionnaire* (revolutionary trade unionism) but it is clear he is referring to the latter (writing from Britain, he seems to be utilising the commonplace use of the former to mean the latter in the radical circles he lived in). As a good summary of the mainstream communist-anarchist position on syndicalism and how it advocated syndicalist ideas before the word, it is worth re-translating for a new generation.

Anarchists and Unions

My dear friend,

I had no intention of intervening in the debate between Pierrot and Lagardelle, especially since Pierrot conducts it very well, and I have so many other things to do. But since Lagardelle felt obliged to muddle the debate by using my name and by insinuating that there exists a mysterious letter in my name against syndicalism, which Pierrot will not go so far as to publish – I leave it to the reader to assess this method [of debate] – I am forced to talk about this letter.

Fortunately, I have found the rough draft, or rather the original, and I send it to you. Generally, I do not write a rough draft – at least, until now, I did not take this precaution – but after writing this letter I added, as you can see, some passages and it was necessary to copy it. This done, I put

the original in a box, to consult one day for a work which I was preparing on socialism and the development of the workers movement.

Pierrot is quite right; I refused to write the foreword to the pamphlet of the Socialist Students not because I disapproved of the substance but because I disapproved of the form, the shape of the first draft. Moreover, if anyone is interested, here is what I said:

“Dear Comrades

“I had agreed to write a preface to our pamphlet *Les Anarchistes et les Syndicats* [*Anarchists and Unions*], before having read it. Now, after reading it, I see that I should have to write, not a preface, but a critique, and even a quite trenchant one in some places.

“Instead of simply limiting themselves to highlighting arguments that can be made in favour of taking a more active part in the struggles of the unions, the authors have proposed general ideas on anarchy, which I do not share, and in passing they subject those who think differently to them to petty attacks with which I cannot associate myself.

“The conception of Anarchy that dominated in the collectivist and federalist International is certainly not that of comrades today and nor is it mine (p. 10). There has been a whole evolution accomplished during these 30 years – backwards, perhaps some will say – forward, in my opinion. Between the *Idée[s] sur l’organisation sociale* of the Jura Federation and *La Société Nouvelle, La Société au lendemain ...*, *The Conquest of Bread*, etc., there is a whole generation which, in my view, has neither stayed in the same place nor gone backwards, and which would have been welcomed by Bakunin himself, if he were alive today.¹

“The notion ‘Anarchist because Communist’ is yours. Fine. It has, perhaps, the advantage of emphasising the importance of communism; but at least admit that it is not shared by a great number of anarchists; that for many liberty is as cherished as bread (I am amongst those);² — that many call themselves anarchists *although* communists, and that absolutely sincere comrades think that communism and anarchy are incompatible (which does not prevent many of them from discovering that there is much to be done in the unions).

“In the third part of your pamphlet you allow yourself to be led by your thesis to the point of making several assertions which you would be hard pressed to justify. Certainly, when entering a union, the anarchist makes a concession — just as he does by going to register the title of his newspaper, asking for permission for a meeting in Trafalgar Square, even signing the lease of his housing or his co-operative farm, or by letting himself be handcuffed without responding with punches. To treat as ideologues those who demonstrate that there is a concession is neither just nor justifiable. Without these ‘ideologues’ they would still flog you in prison, as they do in England.

¹ Today we better understand the necessity of *immediate expropriation* and the necessity of *Communism*. (A note which I have added)

² I will just point out the countless strikes for the workers’ *human rights*; in general, they are the most bitter. A fact that I often mentioned in my articles on the labour movement. (A note which I have added)

“By entering a union, we make a concession, and when you say that the concession is less than is generally believed, that is simply correct. But let us not deny it. It is one of those concessions which, like the rest (the authorisation, the lease, the handcuffs), make us hate the present system more.

“When entering Union Life, we certainly can get carried away by our surroundings, as in Parliament.³

“Only the difference between a union and parliament is that one is an organisation for *fighting* Capital, while the other (parliament, of course) is an organisation for *maintaining* the State, Authority. One sometimes becomes revolutionary, the other never does. One (parliament) represents centralisation, the other (the union) represents autonomy, etc., etc. One (parliament) is repugnant to us on *principle*, the other is only a modifiable and modified aspect of a struggle that most of us approve of.

“If unions give themselves a social-democratic hierarchy, we could not enter them until it has been demolished.

In short, there is enough to say on the usefulness, for anarchists, to try to wrest unions from the politicians and to inspire them with broader and more revolutionary ideas, without seeking in this to limit this possibility of action to those who conceive of anarchy in a certain special way. I know anarchists of *all* shades who have taken part in workers unions. Once I work in some trade, it is only natural that I associate with my comrades in the factory, without asking them to understand socialism or anarchy in such a way or another. That has nothing to do with it.”

On that my original [letter] ends, on the eighth page. Probably I would not have added much [to it]. As for the date, I wrote on this draft: “Unions and Anarchists. April 1898.”

Now that I have answered M. Lagardelle’s little insinuation, I shall allow myself to ask him a question: Was there nothing more interesting to say about syndicalism than to gossip about this letter? Is he reduced to this? Supposing I had been a rabid enemy of syndicalism, would that have changed the relationship between anarchy and the union movement in any way? Are these just *personal* relationships? And would this not be the duty of someone who claims to be scientific, specifically to disentangle the *ideas* of Anarchy and those of the Union Movement?

Finally, if M. Lagardelle absolutely wished to speak of my ideas on the union movement, had he not, if it really interested him, my articles in *Le Révolté*, *La Révolte*, and *Les Temps Nouveaux*. (as I am not French, they can easily be recognised by their style). Leafing through these collections for the years 1886–1898, I find during certain times of workers’ struggles one or two articles in each issue (feature and social movement articles) wherein I always return to the same ideas: Workers organisations are the real force capable of accomplishing the social revolution, after the awakening of the proletariat has been achieved, first, by individual actions, then by collective actions of strikes, revolts which are increasingly widened; and where workers organisations have not let themselves to be captured by the “conquest of power” gentlemen and have continued to walk hand in hand with the anarchists — as they did in Spain — they obtained, on the one hand,

³ Observe England. 40 years ago, the English trade unions were fighting organisations. Becoming rich, protected by the government, flattered by the royal family, they lost their combativeness. Workers often complain of the bourgeois-ism of their immense clique of officials, like the German social democratic workers. (A note which I have added)

immediate results (the eight-hour day in [certain] trades in Catalonia), and on the other made good propaganda for the Social Revolution – that which will come, not by these lofty gentlemen, but from below, from workers organisations.

I have perhaps annoyed my readers by returning too often to this subject, but now I wonder if it would not be useful to make a selection of these articles to publish them in a volume.

What is most important is, that if we consult the collection of anarchist newspapers which have followed the *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne* and *L'Avant-Garde* until *Les Temps Nouveaux*, we see that those anarchists who have always thought that the labour movement, organised by occupation, for *the direct struggle* against Capital – today in France it is called syndicalism and “direct action” – constitutes real strength, capable of *bringing about* and *achieving* the social revolution, by the egalitarian transformation of consumption and production, those of us who have thought in this way for the last thirty-five years have simply remained faithful to the guiding idea of the International, as conceived by the French in 1864 (*against* Marx and Engels), and such as it was always applied in Catalonia, in the Bernese Jura, in the valley of Vesdre and partly in Italy. The International was a great syndicalist movement which accordingly posed everything that these gentlemen claim to have discovered in syndicalism.

We anarchists do not pretend to have discovered a new idea or a new religion. We say that we simply remained faithful to the practical idea that inspired the third awakening of the French proletariat and of the Latin proletariat in general. We refused to associate ourselves with the hiding away of this idea, which was done by the Germans and a few French Jacobins at the Hague Congress in 1872, when taking advantage of the defeat of the French proletariat, they tried to divert the International from its economic struggle to launch it into the conquest of power in the bourgeois State. And now that the proletariat, disgusted with parliamentary social-democracy, returns to the old idea of direct international struggle against Capital, and that there are again gentlemen who are seeking to divert this movement to make it a political stepping-stone, well, we will fight against them, as we fought against their forerunners, to always uphold the same idea of *the liberation of the proletariat by the direct and aggressive struggle against its exploiters*.

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Pëtr Kropotkin
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