

# **Anarchism and the First International**

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## **Abstract**

The International Workingmen's Association (the so-called First International, 1864–1880) marked a watershed moment in the history of anarchist movements and ideas. For it was through the debates and struggles within the International regarding the proper direction of working-class movements that the principles of modern anarchism were first clearly articulated. Anarchists were at the forefront of the debates within the International regarding collective property, the family and education, the roles of the state, trade unions, cooperatives and mutual aid societies, political participation and the structure and purpose of the International itself as an organisation dedicated to the emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves. The anarchists articulated a revolutionary socialist alternative to both social democratic parliamentary politics and revolutionary dictatorship, rejecting the state as a transitional or permanent institution. After the International was split in two with the expulsion of Bakunin at the Hague Congress in 1872, the debates within the anti-authoritarian wing of the International gave expression to virtually every anarchist tendency that was to follow—from anarcho-syndicalism, to anarchist communism, communalism, insurrectionism, anti-organisationalism and illegalism—as anarchism emerged as a distinct force on the revolutionary left.

## **Introduction**

The International Workingmen's Association (the so-called First International), which lasted from 1864 until around 1880, marked a watershed moment in the history of anarchist movements and ideas. For it was through the debates and struggles within the International regarding the proper direction of working-class movements that the first anarchist movements emerged in Europe. But it was also through these debates and struggles that the principles of modern anarchism were first clearly articulated. This chapter will describe this emergence, with an emphasis on the development of anarchist ideas.

Anarchists were at the forefront of the debates within the International regarding collective property, the family and education, the role of the state, trade unions, cooperatives and mutual aid societies, political participation and the structure and purpose of the International itself as an organisation dedicated to the emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves. The anarchists articulated a revolutionary socialist alternative to both the social democratic supporters of participation in parliamentary politics, and the advocates of revolutionary dictatorship, rejecting the use of the state and its institutions either on a transitional or more permanent basis.

Although the struggles between the various currents within the International are often reduced to a personal conflict between Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin, the real debate was over the internal structure of the International, its role in the revolutionary struggle and the ends that the International was meant to achieve. After the International was split in two by Marx's orchestration of the expulsion of Bakunin at the Hague Congress in 1872, the debates within the anti-authoritarian wing of the International gave expression to virtually every anarchist tendency that was to follow, as anarchism emerged as a distinct force on the revolutionary left, from anarcho-syndicalism, to anarchist communism, communalism, insurrectionism, anti-organisationalism, platformism and illegalism.

## Anarchism at the Founding of the International

Before the founding of the International Workingmen's Association in London in September 1864, there were no anarchist movements to speak of in Europe or elsewhere, but there were individuals and groups that embraced anarchy as their ultimate goal. For them, 'anarchy' was broadly conceived as a society without the state, domination or exploitation, based on voluntary association, freedom and equality.

The French anarchist exiles who had taken refuge in England and the United States from the dictatorship of Louis Bonaparte (Napoleon III) comprised the most noteworthy anarchist group. Based on their experiences of the 1848 Revolution, they developed a critique of bourgeois republicanism and parliamentary reformism. They pointed to the June massacre of working-class insurgents in Paris in 1848 as proof of the counter-revolutionary role of the republicans. One of their more prominent members, Joseph Déjacque, summed up their views when he wrote that their 'common enemy' was 'all who, in London and Paris, dream of governing to better guarantee their social privileges against proletarian demands, one in the name of Empire, the other in the name of the Republic'.<sup>1</sup>

The best known and most influential anarchist at the time of the founding of the International was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Although Proudhon had proclaimed himself an anarchist back in 1840, by 1864 he was promoting a conception of economic and political organisation that he called 'federalism'. It was this aspect of Proudhon's later thought that was to have the most influence within the International and the anarchist movements that sprang from that organisation.

At the heart of Proudhon's conception of federalism was a notion of direct democracy, organised from 'the bottom upward'. In the economic sphere, people would freely associate into functional groups for production, distribution and consumption, with each group being organised on a directly democratic basis. These groups would then form larger groups that would coordinate the activities of the base units and liaise with other federated groups. But instead of electing 'representatives' to act on their behalf at the different levels of federation, each group would mandate delegates to communicate its positions to the other federal groups, with these delegates being subject to recall if they did not honour their mandates.

Working alongside and with the federated functional groups would be political federations based on geographical units, such as municipalities and communes, federated into regional, national and, ultimately, international organisations. The role of these more 'political' federations was to coordinate and facilitate relations between the functional and geographical units at the base of the federations and between the federations themselves. The highest levels of political organisation would be the 'federated state', and above that, an international federation of federal states. The federated 'state' would supervise compliance with federative principles and adherence to the various agreements between and within the federated groups.<sup>2</sup>

The two main groups behind the founding of the International were English and French workers. The English workers were most interested in creating an international trade union federation to coordinate working-class solidarity across national borders to better their economic conditions. The largest group of French delegates at the founding of the International were Proudhon-

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Déjacque, in Hartman and Lause (Eds), *In the Sphere of Humanity: Joseph Déjacque, Slavery and the Struggle for Freedom* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Libraries, 2012), 13.

<sup>2</sup> P.-J. Proudhon, 'On Federalism,' in R. Graham (Ed), *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), Vol. 1, 74.

nian federalists, not anarchists. But their commitment to Proudhon's federalist principles was one of the main roots from which the anarchist tendencies in the International were to grow. From the outset, the Proudhonian federalists insisted that the International should be a federation of workers' organisations that would send mandated and recallable delegates to the International's congresses in order to debate and determine the policies and role of the organisation.

The other main root of anarchism in the International was Proudhon's critique of participation in parliamentary politics and his advocacy of 'abstentionism'. Proudhon argued that French workers should neither run their own candidates in parliamentary elections nor vote for so-called representatives, but should instead create their own autonomous working-class organisations. These organisations would facilitate the 'equivalent exchange' of products and services between individuals and larger productive units, creating the basis for a kind of market socialism, or workers' self-management, something which Proudhon called 'mutualism'.

Proudhon recapitulated his mutualist and federalist ideas in his book, *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes*. Published in 1865, a few months after his death, this book added an important clarification to Proudhon's federalist ideas, insisting that for federations to be truly voluntary organisations, each member of a federation, whether at the individual or group level, must be free both to join and to leave the organisation.<sup>3</sup> This was later to become a central component of anarchist conceptions of federalism.

## Roots of Anarchism in the International

The 1866 Geneva Congress of the International was the first at which policy issues were the subject of debate by delegates from the International's various sections. In their presentation, the French delegates cited several passages from Proudhon's 1851 publication, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, one of his most explicitly anarchist books. The most important, from an anarchist perspective, were the passages calling for a worker-controlled education system and those rejecting the state being given the role of a 'superior authority'.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the French delegates proposed a mutualist form of federalism based on contracts freely entered into by individuals and federated groups. However, the French Internationalists did not openly call for the abolition of the state, and had they have done so the International likely would have been banned by the French authorities.

A more radical minority of the French delegates challenged the majority's position that the patriarchal family should be primarily responsible for deciding on their children's education, arguing that education was a social responsibility to be undertaken by 'truly democratic' communes.<sup>5</sup> One of the authors of the minority memorandum, Eugène Varlin, was later to adopt a position very close to that of the anarchists in the International, something he described as 'non-authoritarian communism'.<sup>6</sup> That education should be provided freely to children of both sexes was a position shared by Bakunin and other people later associated with the anarchist tendencies in the International, such as the Belgian, Eugène Hins, and the libertarian educator, Paul Robin.

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<sup>3</sup> Proudhon, 'On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes,' *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Freymond et al. (Eds), *La première internationale: recueil de documents* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962), Vol. 1, 89–92 & 99.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–98.

<sup>6</sup> James Guillaume, *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs (1864–1878)*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Stock, 1905), 258, fn. 1.

Varlin, along with several other French Internationalists, was active in the nascent French trade union movement, which looked to the International to help coordinate financial and political support for striking, locked out, precariously employed and unemployed workers. To alleviate the economic hardship faced by French workers, Internationalists such as Varlin, and many of the Proudhonists, also participated in the French cooperative movement, which they hoped would provide the basis for an economy managed by the workers themselves, with each cooperative being organised on a directly democratic basis, federating with other cooperatives.

Debates about education raised the issue of the role of women in society, an issue that received more attention at the next congress of the International, held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1867. Hins and Robin, on behalf of a minority of the Belgian delegates, argued that women were entitled to the same independence and dignity as male workers, a position shared by Bakunin.<sup>7</sup>

Other noteworthy issues debated at the Lausanne Congress included whether the workers should create their own financial institutions to provide credit and a means of exchange of goods and services between the workers themselves without any capitalist intermediaries. Although Marx's ally, J.G. Eccarius, argued that the workers would have to achieve state power in order to successfully implement such a scheme, he proposed a compromise resolution that the workers pool their money to create credit unions that would provide funding for cooperative enterprises, which was passed unanimously.<sup>8</sup>

The French delegates were alert to the risk of successful cooperatives ultimately functioning more like capitalist enterprises, with the original members forming a 'fourth estate' of cooperative shareholders who would exploit the labour of other workers hired as employees of the cooperative, unable to afford shares in the cooperative or simply excluded from membership.<sup>9</sup> The issues of social stratification and divisions within the working class itself were to assume greater importance during the subsequent debates regarding the composition, and the role, of the International.

It was at the Lausanne Congress that issues regarding individual and collective property were first debated. There was general agreement, even among the more conservative Proudhonists, that larger enterprises, such as railways and mines, should be considered common or collective property. The only real disagreement was over whether land should be included as collective property, or whether it should belong to the people who worked it. No consensus emerged on this issue, with further debate deferred until the next congress.<sup>10</sup>

Bakunin joined the Geneva section of the International in July 1868. A written statement was presented on his behalf at the Brussels Congress in September 1868. He called for equal rights for women and men, for an end to the right of inheritance and the legal and religious institution of marriage, and for the free federation of agricultural and industrial associations of peasants and workers. On the question of land, Bakunin took the position that the land should be worked by free associations of agricultural workers while being considered the collective property of all.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Freymond, *Première Internationale*, Vol. 1, 215–221.

<sup>8</sup> Henryk Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Archer, *The First International in France 1864–1872: Its Origins, Theories and Impact* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), 100.

<sup>10</sup> Freymond, *Première Internationale*, Vol. 1, 151–155.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 252, 391.

One of the Belgian delegates, César De Paepe, argued not only for collective ownership of land but that the workers' 'resistance societies', or trade unions, in organising the struggle against the capitalists, formed the 'embryo' of those 'great companies of workers' that would replace 'the companies of the capitalists'. Through the International, the workers of the world would ultimately create the 'universal organisation of work and exchange'.<sup>12</sup> This was essentially an anarcho-syndicalist conception of the role of the International that was to be endorsed by the delegates to the Basel Congress the following year.

Also noteworthy at the Brussels Congress was the debate and resolution regarding war. De Paepe and Henri Tolain, although one of the more conservative of the Proudhonists, argued that war was the product of class-divided societies, pitting worker against worker. In Tolain's words, war was 'nothing other than a means, employed by the privileged classes or the governments that represent them, to subordinate the people'.<sup>13</sup> In the short term, the workers could help prevent wars through a general strike. In the long term, the Brussels Congress delegates resolved, they could put an end to all wars only by way of 'the emancipation of the working class and its liberation from the power and influence of capital' and through 'the formation of a confederation of free states across all of Europe'.<sup>14</sup>

## Enter Bakunin

It was therefore an opportune time for Bakunin to take a more active part in the International. Bakunin himself was only then beginning to identify himself as an anarchist. After the Brussels Congress, a group that Bakunin had been instrumental in organising, the Alliance of Socialist Democracy, applied for membership of the International. The Alliance was a public organisation, and probably only a few of its members could be considered anarchists. But its programme was fairly widely distributed, and in fact formed one of the founding documents, together with the Statutes of the International, of the Spanish Federation of the International, which in turn formed the basis of the Spanish anarchist movement.

The Alliance was supposed to work in tandem with the International, providing a 'really revolutionary direction' to the working masses.<sup>15</sup> The Alliance supported the positions of the more radical members of the International, including collective ownership of the land and other means of production, to be managed by the workers themselves, equality of the sexes, opposition to national rivalries and war, and the reduction of the state's functions 'to the simple administration of the public services', with the state ultimately being absorbed 'into the universal union of free Associations, both agricultural and industrial'.<sup>16</sup>

Bakunin took a more radical approach in his correspondence with potential allies across Europe, whom he hoped to recruit into a loose knit 'International Brotherhood' of socialist revolutionaries that would act as a kind of 'revolutionary general staff'. The Brotherhood would guide the insurgent people through 'the thick of popular anarchy which will constitute the very life

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 283–284.

<sup>13</sup> M. Musto (Ed), *Workers Unite! The International 150 Years Later* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 232.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>15</sup> Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchism*, S. Dolgoff (Ed) (Montreal: Black Rose, 1980), 157.

<sup>16</sup> Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, A. Lehning (Ed) (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 174–175.

and all the energy of the revolution', acting 'as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the popular instinct' for freedom and equality.<sup>17</sup>

Noteworthy here are Bakunin's conception of 'anarchy' and the role of radical minorities in the revolutionary process. Bakunin conceived of anarchy in both negative and positive forms. The destructive force of anarchy would sweep away existing institutions based on exploitation and domination. The creative force of anarchy, the now 'unrestricted manifestation of the liberated life of the people', would result in a free federation of workers and peasants organised 'from the bottom up'.<sup>18</sup>

With respect to the role of revolutionary minorities, Bakunin advocated 'dual organisation', or 'organisational dualism' (now associated with the platformist tradition in anarchist thought).<sup>19</sup> In order to ensure that any revolutionary upheaval achieved the liberation of the people, without any new 'revolutionary' authority asserting control from above, Bakunin thought it was necessary for anarchists to organise their own groups, dedicated to the anarchist cause.

These groups of committed revolutionaries would coordinate their actions in order to incite rebellion, to encourage the workers and peasants through their own organisations and direct action to expropriate the capitalists and to abolish the state, creating a federation of industrial, agricultural and communal associations in their place, and to prevent the state from being reconstituted by any political party, from either the left or the right. Bakunin argued that the reconstitution of the state in any form would mark the end of the social revolution and the triumph of reaction. Consequently, Bakunin denounced the Blanquists and other like-minded revolutionaries who dreamt of 'a powerfully centralised revolutionary State', for this 'would inevitably result in military dictatorship and a new master', condemning the masses 'to slavery and exploitation by a new pseudo-revolutionary aristocracy'.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, when Bakunin joined the International in 1868, he was already beginning to develop an anarchist conception of state power and revolutionary change wary of a 'new class' of party functionaries using popular unrest to achieve power. He was later to level this charge against Marx and his allies. But his conception of 'dual organisation' raised its own concerns regarding the role of revolutionary minorities.

Bakunin also sketched out his ideas regarding the 'revolutionary communes' that would provide the real impetus for the social revolution. At the municipal or communal level, revolutionaries would incite the people to 'destroy the State and all State institutions', replacing them with revolutionary communal (or municipal) councils composed of delegates from each barricade or neighbourhood 'with plenary but accountable and removable mandates'.<sup>21</sup> The means of production would be managed by the workers' associations for the benefit of all. The revolutionary communes would federate with each other as the revolution spread, sending emissaries into the countryside to win over farmers and peasants to the revolutionary cause.

In 1869, Bakunin took a more active role in the International. In articles for various publications associated with the International, he dealt with such issues as the usefulness and limits of the cooperative movement, the role of trade unions, the general strike, patriotism, education,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>18</sup> Bakunin, 'Program of the International Brotherhood,' in Graham, *Anarchism*, 86.

<sup>19</sup> M. Schmidt and L. van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism (Counter-Power Vol. 1)* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 252.

<sup>20</sup> Bakunin, 'Program of the International Brotherhood,' in Graham, *Anarchism*, 85–86.

<sup>21</sup> Bakunin in Lehning, *Selected Writings*, 170.



political action, bourgeois republicanism, the alliance between the church and state, and the organisation and role of the International itself.

From Bakunin's perspective, the bourgeoisie, even among its 'reddest' republicans, had exhausted itself as a revolutionary class. Having achieved economic ascendancy, the bourgeoisie's interests were now inalterably opposed to those of the working masses. As the experience of 1848 had demonstrated, in order to protect its wealth, the bourgeoisie was willing to sacrifice its own political liberties (and the liberties of others), abandoning its support for parliamentary democracy and submitting itself 'to military protectors' and dictators, like Napoleon III.<sup>22</sup> Bakunin was one of the first to highlight the tendency of capitalist democracies to degenerate into fascism in order to suppress class conflict.

Bakunin's response was to advocate taking class conflict to a higher level through the associations of workers, under the umbrella of the International, which would seek the 'radical transformation of society', resulting 'in the abolition of classes from the political as well as the economic standpoint'.<sup>23</sup> Bakunin believed that classes could not be conceived purely as economic categories arising from capitalist social relationships. Classes also have a political component, such that one could abolish capitalism without achieving the abolition of classes.

In an address to the Swiss members of the International, Bakunin affirmed that the 'State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class: the priesthood, the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and finally, after every other class has been exhausted, the bureaucratic class'.<sup>24</sup> Bakunin was therefore opposed to government by so-called 'experts'. Instead, he advocated equal education for all, regardless of sex, so that 'the masses, ceasing to be flocks led and shorn by privileged priests, may take into their own hands the direction of their destinies'.<sup>25</sup> Within the International, Bakunin argued that every effort should be made to prevent it from being 'divided into two groups—one comprising the vast majority and composed of members whose only knowledge will be a blind faith in the theoretical and practical wisdom of their commanders, and the other composed only of a few score individual directors'.<sup>26</sup>

Rejecting participation in bourgeois politics, Bakunin instead argued that the associated workers should seek their emancipation through their own direct action. By forming 'as many cooperatives for consumption, mutual credit, and production' as they could, the workers would 'prepare the precious seeds for the organization of the future', accustoming the workers 'to handling their own affairs', without political intermediaries. The workers would continue to use strikes to improve their situation, fighting for things like shorter work days, but as strikes spread and multiplied, through the International they could be turned into 'into a general strike', resulting 'in a great cataclysm which' would force 'society to shed its old skin'.<sup>27</sup>

The International was therefore the workers' greatest weapon, organising '*the might of the workers*' through 'the unification of the proletariat of the entire world across State frontiers'.<sup>28</sup> The workers' trade union organisations would necessarily be at the forefront of the struggle to

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<sup>22</sup> Bakunin, 'Open Letter to Swiss Comrades of the International,' in R. Cutler (Ed), *From Out of the Dustbin: Bakunin's Basic Writings 1869–1871* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985), 173.

<sup>23</sup> Bakunin, 'Geneva's Double Strike,' in *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>24</sup> Bakunin, 'Open Letter to Swiss Comrades of the International,' *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>25</sup> Bakunin, 'On Science and Authority,' in Graham, *Anarchism*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Bakunin, 'The Organization of the International,' *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Bakunin, 'Geneva's Double Strike,' in Cutler, *From out of the Dustbin*, 149–150.

<sup>28</sup> Bakunin, 'La Montagne and Mr. Coullery,' *Ibid.*, 93.

abolish capitalism and the state, creating in their place an international socialist federation based on workers' self-management.

## The Syndicalist Consensus

That the International and the workers' organisations that comprised it would provide not only the means for the emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves but the basis for the society of the future was an idea championed by the Belgian section of the International prior to the 1869 Basel Congress. Cooperatives, credit unions and trade union organisations would become responsible for coordinating production and distribution between self-managed enterprises, while the workers' mutual aid societies would provide sickness, disability and pension benefits. Federal councils of recallable delegates would coordinate the activities of the federated groups, at the local, regional, national and, ultimately, international levels.<sup>29</sup>

This essentially anarcho-syndicalist programme was adopted by the delegates to the Basel Congress. One of the French delegates, Jean-Louis Pindy, argued that federal councils of the workers' trade organisations, together with federations of towns or communes, would supplant existing governments, replacing 'wage slavery ... by the free federation of free producers'. The workers' current organisations, such as trade unions and mutual aid and resistance societies, should therefore be organised with this end in mind. A resolution to this effect was adopted by the delegates to the Congress.<sup>30</sup>

Bakunin attended the Basel Congress, where he called for the abolition of the state on the ground that its primary purpose was to provide 'the sanction and guarantee of the means by which a small number of men appropriate to themselves the product of the work of all the others'. If the state were not abolished, one group of exploiters would use that power to take the place of the former exploiters.<sup>31</sup> With the abolition of the state, private property would no longer have any legal sanction or protection, leaving the workers free to take over the means of production that they had created through their own labour, and to bring to fruition the federalist system of workers' self-management for which they had been striving through their own organisations, including the International.

## The Revolutionary Commune

The Franco-Prussian War in 1870 caused Bakunin to return to his idea of the revolutionary commune as the starting point for the social revolution. Bakunin argued that the workers should seek to transform the War from an inter-imperialist conflict into a social revolution by establishing revolutionary communes throughout France, with the hope that the revolution would spread from there to the countryside and from there to other countries. He attempted to put his ideas into action in Lyon in September 1870 but was unsuccessful.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement* (Oakland: AK Press, 2015), 109–111.

<sup>30</sup> J. L. Pindy, in D. Guérin (Ed), *No Gods No Masters, Book One* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1998), 184.

<sup>31</sup> Freymond, *Première Internationale*, Vol. 2, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 142–143.

Reflecting on the failure of the Lyon uprising, Bakunin argued that it was essential that agricultural workers be won over to the revolutionary cause by providing them with immediate benefits, such as the abolition of debts and land rents. The last thing revolutionaries should do is to try to impose revolutionary change in the countryside 'by official decree or by force of arms'.<sup>33</sup>

Bakunin saw peasants and landless agricultural workers as crucial for the success of a revolution. He was concerned that 'the urban and industrial workers', through their political parties, would dominate 'the rural proletariat'. At the time, the urban proletariat formed only a minority of the labouring classes. Consequently, Bakunin did not advocate a purely proletarian revolution but the revolt of the masses. For Bakunin, the *flower of the proletariat* that 'alone [was] powerful enough ... to inaugurate and bring to triumph the Social Revolution' was not the 'upper layer' of workers 'unfortunately only too deeply saturated with all the political and social prejudices and all the narrow aspirations and pretensions of the bourgeoisie'. Rather, it was 'that great mass, those millions of the uncultivated, the disinherited, the miserable, the illiterates ... that eternal "meat" (on which governments thrive), that great *rabble of the people*'.<sup>34</sup>

The Spanish Internationalists generally agreed with this perspective and sought to organise both agricultural and urban workers. At the founding congress of the Spanish Regional Federation in June 1870, Farga Pellicer summed up the position of the majority of the Spanish Internationalists when he said that they wanted 'the end to the domination of capital, the state, and the church. Upon their ruins we will construct anarchy, and the free federation of free associations of workers'.<sup>35</sup>

Many Internationalists participated in the creation of neighbourhood 'vigilance' committees during the Prussian siege of Paris, and then in the Paris Commune when it was proclaimed in March 1871. The vigilance committees came close to an anarchist position when, on the eve of the Commune, they called for the creation of 'revolutionary Communes' throughout France and the abolition of classes.<sup>36</sup> After the proclamation of the Commune, Parisian Internationalists went a step further, proclaiming the negation of the 'principle of authority'.<sup>37</sup>

Observing the events from Switzerland, Bakunin's associate, James Guillaume, regarded the Commune as a positive form of '*anarchy* (in the proper sense of the word)' because there was no longer a 'centralised state'. Instead, the Communards had called for a free federation of autonomous communes.<sup>38</sup>

The bloody suppression of the Commune by French military forces at the end of May 1871 decimated the ranks of the French Internationalists, with Varlin, among others, summarily executed. This led some Internationalists to reject a pacifist approach, and any compromise with the bourgeois republicans, as many Internationalists continued moving towards a revolutionary anarchist position.

Bakunin gave expression to their views, criticising the Jacobin and Blanquist majority in the Commune for putting all their efforts into creating a 'revolutionary government' when what was required for the revolution to be successful was to give 'back their complete freedom to the

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<sup>33</sup> Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, ed. G. P. Maximoff (New York: Free Press, 1953), 404–405.

<sup>34</sup> Bakunin, in Dolgoff, *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 294.

<sup>35</sup> Temma Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868–1903* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 75.

<sup>36</sup> E. Schulkind (Ed), *The Paris Commune: The View From the Left* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 90–91.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

masses, groups, communes, associations, individuals even', which would then be able to create federalist socialism through their own initiative, from 'the bottom upwards'.<sup>39</sup>

## The Split in the International

Whether the workers themselves should make the 'social revolution' by means of various forms of direct action, or whether they should form political parties with the aim of achieving state power, was an issue that came to a head in September 1871, when Marx pushed through a resolution at the London Conference of the International calling for the creation of working-class political parties. In addition, 'sects' and 'separatist bodies' were banned, the General Council of the International was given the power 'to refuse the admittance of any new group or section', and any proposal for the Council to be composed of delegates from the national federations was rejected.<sup>40</sup>

In Switzerland, the newly created Jura Federation adopted articles of association in marked contrast to the General Council's approach. The Jura Federation would have a 'Federal Commission', rather than a General Council, that would be 'invested with no authority', acting merely as 'an information, correspondence and statistical bureau'. Each section of the Federation would 'retain their absolute autonomy', with 'every latitude' to 'enter into local or special federations with one another', without having to seek the Commission's approval.<sup>41</sup> Federation congresses would be attended by recallable delegates subject to imperative mandates. This became a model for other sections and federations of the International that supported federalist, or anti-authoritarian, socialism, and later for the anti-authoritarian wing of the International itself and the anarchist movements that emerged from it.

The Jura Federation issued the *Sonvillier Circular*, denouncing the General Council for introducing at the London Conference 'the authority principle into the International', and for making 'the conquest of political power by the working class' a mandatory policy. The *Circular* called for the 'free federation of autonomous groups', rejecting 'centralisation and dictatorship' because it is impossible for 'an egalitarian and free society to emerge from an authoritarian organization'. Echoing the positions advocated by Bakunin and the Belgian Internationalists adopted at the Basel Congress, the *Circular* argued that 'the society of the future should be nothing other than the universalization of the organization with which the International will have endowed itself'. Therefore, the International, 'as the embryo of the human society of the future, is required in the here and now to faithfully mirror our principles of freedom and federation and shun any principle leaning towards authority and dictatorship'.<sup>42</sup>

The *Sonvillier Circular* reflected the views of not only the Jura Federation, Bakunin and the Belgian Federation but the Italian sections of the International, many of the surviving French Internationalists and the largest Internationalist group, the Spanish Federation. When Marx engineered the expulsion of Bakunin and Guillaume from the International at the 1872 Hague Congress, a majority of the International's member groups repudiated the Marxist dominated Congress and the General Council, reconstituting the International along anti-authoritarian lines.

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<sup>39</sup> Bakunin, in Lehning, *Selected Writings*, 198–202.

<sup>40</sup> Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 170–172.

<sup>41</sup> Guillaume, *L'Internationale*, Vol. 2, 236–237.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Sonvillier Circular,' in Graham, *Anarchism*, 97–98.

Guillaume attended the Hague Congress, where he was given limited opportunity to defend the approach of the Jura Federation. He said that within the International ‘two great ideas run side by side ... that of centralization of power in the hands of a few, and that of the free federation of those whom the homogeneity of the economic conditions in each country has united behind the idea of common interests in all countries’.<sup>43</sup>

Guillaume clarified that when the anti-authoritarians advocated ‘abstentionism’, which he described as ‘an ill-chosen phrase of Proudhon’s’, what they meant was rejection of participation in parliamentary elections, not the rejection of political struggle by other means. For the anti-authoritarians, the political struggle was to be conducted outside of parliaments, by means of ‘social revolution’ and ‘the destruction of bourgeois politics, of the state’. In contrast, the Marxist policy of creating political parties with the object of conquering political power would result, at most, in state socialism, but not the emancipation of the proletariat.<sup>44</sup>

Guillaume agreed with Bakunin that Marx’s conception of proletarian political power was a ‘sham’. As Bakunin put it, the urban proletariat, consisting of ‘tens or hundreds of thousands of men’, would never be able ‘to wield [political] power effectively’. Instead, power would be wielded over them by ‘a group of men elected to represent and govern them’, leaving the workers the ‘slaves, puppets and victims of a new group of ambitious men’.<sup>45</sup>

## The Anti-Authoritarian International

In response to the Hague Congress, International delegates from Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland held a congress in St. Imier in Switzerland. They adopted an explicitly federalist structure for the reconstituted International, declaring that ‘nobody has the right to deprive autonomous federations and sections of their incontrovertible right to decide for themselves and to follow whatever line of political conduct they deem best’. But they made clear that their ultimate goal was an anarchist one: ‘the establishment of an absolutely free economic organization and federation, founded upon the labour and equality of all and absolutely independent of all political government’. Consequently, they argued that ‘the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat’.<sup>46</sup>

At this time, the focus was on maintaining the International as a functioning federation of regional and national groups whose goal remained the ‘emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves’. Consequently, the anti-authoritarian International continued to support strikes ‘as a product of the antagonism between labour and capital, the necessary consequence of which is to make workers more and more alive to the gulf that exists between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat’, while preparing the workers ‘for the great and final revolutionary contest which, destroying all privilege and class difference, will bestow upon the worker a right to the enjoyment of the gross product of his labours’.<sup>47</sup>

After the St. Imier Congress, the anti-authoritarian International received additional support from the Belgian Federation, English-speaking sections of the International in the United States,

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<sup>43</sup> H. Gerth (Ed), *The First International: Minutes of the Hague Congress of 1872* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1958), 207.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>45</sup> Bakunin, in Lehning, *Selected Writings*, 255.

<sup>46</sup> ‘The St. Imier Congress,’ in Graham, *Anarchism*, 98–99.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

most of the surviving French sections, the recently constituted Slav section based in Zurich, a majority of the Dutch sections and even some of the English sections.<sup>48</sup> Only some of these groups that affirmed their affiliation with the anti-authoritarian International could be considered anarchist in orientation, but the two largest federations, the Spanish and the Italian, many of the surviving French sections, the Jura Federation, the Slav section and a significant number of the Belgian Internationalists followed an anarchist approach, rejecting participation in parliamentary politics and advocating that the workers achieve their emancipation through their own organisations, creating the ‘free federation of the free producers’, a positive form of anarchy.

Respect for the autonomy of the anti-authoritarian International’s sections and federations was a founding principle of the organisation. But on other issues, even the more anarchist-oriented groups in the anti-authoritarian International had different ideas regarding the approaches they should take. One of the ongoing debates in the anti-authoritarian International was whether to maintain an anarcho-syndicalist approach, with the International helping to coordinate and to support the actions of the various workers’ organisations, with a view to mounting a general strike by which the workers would seize control of the means of production and abolish the state. The Belgian Internationalists regarded the general strike ‘as *the* means to the social Revolution’.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the Spanish Internationalists shared this view, but some were also in favour of a more insurrectionary approach. In practice, the two often went hand in hand. In 1873, in the Spanish town of Alcoy, a general strike turned into a communal uprising when the local mayor ordered guards to fire on protesting workers.<sup>50</sup> The workers took up arms in response and seized the town hall. Although the insurrection was soon put down, in another Spanish town, Sanlúcar, the local council of the Spanish Federation took control and was able to resist government troops for about a month.<sup>51</sup>

At the next congress of the anti-authoritarian International in Geneva in September 1873, there was a lengthy debate on the merits of the general strike. The delegates from the more anarchist-oriented federations continued to support the general strike to one degree or another while disagreeing on the efficacy of more limited strike activity. Guillaume, echoing the views that Bakunin had put forward in 1869, argued that more limited strike activity nevertheless constituted ‘an effective weapon during the prerevolutionary stages of the struggle’, giving the workers practical experience in the class struggle.<sup>52</sup>

With respect to the internal organisation of the International, the delegates debated whether it should have any central coordinating body. Some of the delegates feared that a central agency would be transformed into a governing body, much like had happened with the General Council (those anarchists who rejected any formal structures later came to be known as ‘anti-organisationalists’). The delegates ultimately adopted the ‘Jura model’, with a ‘federal bureau’ being established only for the purpose of ‘collecting statistics and maintaining international correspondence’. As a further safeguard against the federal bureau usurping power, it was to

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<sup>48</sup> Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 199.

<sup>49</sup> David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism: A Study of the political activities of Paul Brousse, 1870–90* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 290, fn. 14.

<sup>50</sup> G. Esenwien, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 46.

<sup>51</sup> Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia*, 105–107.

<sup>52</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: Meridian, 1962), 250.

be 'shifted each year to the country where the next International Congress would be held'.<sup>53</sup> In addition, resolutions adopted at International congresses would only be binding on those federations and sections that chose to adopt them.

At the Brussels Congress in 1874, some of the Belgian Internationalists started to move away from an anarcho-syndicalist position. De Paepe argued that a 'non-authoritarian' government would be necessary to establish and maintain public services.<sup>54</sup> Reversing his earlier syndicalist position, he even went so far as to suggest that 'the reconstitution of society upon the foundation of the industrial group' would only be possible after 'the proletariat of the large towns' established 'a collective dictatorship over the rest of the population, and this for a sufficiently long period to sweep away whatever obstacles there may be to the emancipation of the working class', a view virtually indistinguishable from that of the Marxists.<sup>55</sup>

However, another Belgian delegate, Laurent Verrycken, rejected De Paepe's position, arguing that public services would be organised by a 'free federation of communes', with day-to-day operations being run by the workers.<sup>56</sup> The Spanish delegates opposed 'any reorganization of public services that would lead to the reconstitution of the state'.<sup>57</sup> One of the Jura delegates, Adhemar Schwitzguébel, argued that the workers, having 'banded together freely for revolutionary action', would continue to rely on 'such free association when it comes to the organization' of public services.<sup>58</sup>

The next area of debate that emerged among the anti-authoritarian Internationalists was with regard to the kind of economic relations that would be established in a post-revolutionary society. Guillaume helped spur the debate by suggesting that, after the revolution, when 'production comes to outstrip consumption', it would 'no longer be necessary to stingily dole out each workers' share of goods'. Instead, each person would 'draw what he needs from the abundant social reserve of commodities', realising the communist principle of 'from each according to ability, to each according to need'.<sup>59</sup>

In the first months of 1876, French members of the International in Switzerland, including François Dumartheray and Elisée Reclus, began promoting 'anarchist communism'. By the fall of 1876, the Italian Federation had also adopted an anarchist communist position—capitalism and the state would be abolished, social and economic life would be organised on the basis of freely federated voluntary associations, and goods and services would be made freely available to those who needed them.<sup>60</sup>

Another idea that began to gain currency among the anarchists in the International was the concept of 'propaganda by the deed'. As early as 1873, exiled French Internationalists in Spain were describing 'revolutionary action' as the most advanced form of 'revolutionary propaganda'. Even when unsuccessful, revolutionary uprisings like the Paris Commune and Sanlúcar were more effective in spreading revolutionary ideas than the spoken or written word.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>54</sup> Guérin, *No Gods No Masters*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 252.

<sup>56</sup> Guillaume, *L'Internationale*, Vol. 3, 222.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>58</sup> Guérin, *No Gods No Masters*, 198–199.

<sup>59</sup> Guillaume, in Dolgoff, *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 361.

<sup>60</sup> Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 216–217.

<sup>61</sup> Stafford, *From Anarchism*, 39–40.

Paul Brousse, one of the early advocates of anarchist communism in the anti-authoritarian International, came to conceive of propaganda of the deed as exemplary forms of direct action designed to provoke and to inspire the masses to revolutionary action. In 1877 he helped organise a demonstration in Bern, Switzerland, that included carrying the banned red flag of socialism. The police seized one of the flags, street fighting ensued, and some of the demonstrators were arrested, showing to the Swiss workers that, as Brousse put it, 'they do not, as they thought they did, enjoy freedom'.<sup>62</sup>

A few months later, the Italian Internationalists 'went one better' than the Bern demonstrators, Brousse wrote, by attempting to provoke a peasant uprising in Benevento, Italy. According to Brousse, they 'did not bother to demonstrate just one self-evident fact to the people', as had the Bern demonstrators; instead, 'by burning the archives' in two villages, 'they showed the people how much respect they should have for property'. By returning to the villagers their taxes and 'the weapons that had been confiscated from them' by the authorities, they had 'showed the people the sort of contempt they should have for government'. Even though the Benevento uprising was easily put down by Italian government troops, the 'idea' had 'sprung to life', and would now 'march, in flesh and blood, at the head of the people'.<sup>63</sup>

The anarchists in the International continued to debate the merits of anarchist communism at the 1877 Verviers Congress in Belgium, which was the last international congress of the anti-authoritarians. Guillaume argued that each group must be free to determine its own solutions.<sup>64</sup> This position became known, particularly in Spain, as 'anarchism without adjectives', in order to avoid conflict between the advocates of anarchist communism and the majority of the Spanish anarchists, who advocated distribution based on one's labour ('collectivism').

Although the Jura Federation suffered a serious decline in members, due to blacklisting by employers, precarious employment and Guillaume's departure for France, from 1878 to 1880 the Federation remained at the centre of the debates that defined modern anarchism as a revolutionary socialist movement.

By 1878, the remaining anti-authoritarian Internationalists were explicitly identifying themselves as anarchists. As Elisée Reclus argued, since anarchy was their goal, and both their friends and enemies called them anarchists, they might as well embrace the label. In openly identifying themselves as anarchists, they would 'have the advantage of deceiving no one, and especially of not deceiving ourselves'.<sup>65</sup>

The debate regarding anarchist communism continued at the Jura Federation's 1878 congress in Fribourg, but differences were beginning to emerge even among those in favour of it. Brousse now argued that communism was a long-term goal, not something that could be immediately achieved. He still saw the Commune as the primary means for transforming society, but suggested that anarchists participate in communal elections as a form of 'propaganda'. This position was rejected by most of the delegates, with the Russian exile, Peter Kropotkin, arguing that anar-

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<sup>62</sup> P. Brousse, 'Propaganda by the Deed,' in Graham, *Anarchism*, 151.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>64</sup> Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), 140.

<sup>65</sup> Marie Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism: Elisée Reclus and Nineteenth-Century European Anarchism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 130.



chists must reject 'any tactic which could lead to the strengthening of the already tottering idea of the state'.<sup>66</sup>

Most of the Belgian Internationalists had by then opted for the path of parliamentary socialism, as had some of the Italian Internationalists. The Spanish Federation remained committed to an anarchist approach, as did many of the French, most of the Italians, and a minority of the Belgian Internationalists. Kropotkin summed up their position in a paper that he presented at the Jura Federation's 1879 congress. The means of production were to be taken over by the urban and agricultural workers themselves. The role of the anarchists was to 'awaken the spirit of independence and revolt' among the workers by escalating 'the economic struggle' and by spreading anarchist propaganda. The ultimate goal remained the creation of revolutionary communes, 'independent of the State, abolishing the representative system from within [their] ranks and effecting expropriation of raw materials, instruments of labor and capital for the benefit of the community'.<sup>67</sup>

The last major event of the anti-authoritarian International was the Jura Federation's October 1880 congress. It was here that the Italian Internationalist, Carlo Cafiero, persuaded the delegates to endorse anarchist communism. An attempt to revive the International the following year, at the London congress of 'social revolutionaries', was unsuccessful.<sup>68</sup>

The anarchists were subject to harassment and persecution by the authorities, forcing many of them underground. This led to debates regarding how best to respond to state repression. Cafiero, among others, became disillusioned with public organisations like the International, which made the anarchists easy targets for the police. Cafiero argued that anarchists should follow the example of the Russian revolutionaries of forming secret revolutionary cells that would use any means necessary to overthrow capitalism and the state, whether 'by word, by writing, by dagger, by gun, by dynamite, sometimes even by the ballot when it is a case of voting for an ineligible candidate'. This doctrine later came to be identified as anarchist 'illegalism'.<sup>69</sup> His comrade, Errico Malatesta, argued to the contrary that it was important that anarchists maintain a public presence, supporting the workers in their daily struggles, in order to avoid isolation and to garner public support.

## The International and Modern Anarchism

While the anarchists regarded the International as the 'embryo' of the future libertarian socialist society, a goal it failed to achieve, the anti-authoritarian International carried within itself in embryonic form virtually every anarchist tendency that was to follow, from anarcho-syndicalism, to anarchist communism, insurrectionary anarchism, anti-organisationalism, illegalism, platformism and communalism. Unfortunately, as Malatesta later remarked, this rapid ideological evolution was not 'reflective of any actual and simultaneous evolution in the vast majority' of the International's members.<sup>70</sup> The danger was that instead of striding ahead with

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<sup>66</sup> Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 48.

<sup>67</sup> Kropotkin, 'The Anarchist Idea,' in Guérin, *No Gods No Masters*, 234–235.

<sup>68</sup> Graham, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy*, 241–243.

<sup>69</sup> Cafiero, 'Action,' in Graham, *Anarchism*, 152.

<sup>70</sup> Malatesta, 'The Workers' New International,' in D. Turcato (Ed), *The Method of Freedom: an Errico Malatesta Reader* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014), 328–329.

the people, the anarchists were striding ahead alone under ‘the illusion that the masses understood and [were] following them’.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, as Kropotkin observed, it was as a result of this rapid ideological evolution within the International that ‘developed now what may be described as *modern anarchism*,’ which began to spread across the globe.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>72</sup> Kropotkin, ‘Anarchism in the International Workingmen’s Association,’ in I. McKay (Ed), *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014), 170.

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