



Expedients

Victor Serge

January 18, 1912

A collaborator of the “Dépêche de Toulouse,” M. Eugène Fournière, recently commented on the prose of M. Ernest La Jeunesse and the article in response to it that appeared here. M. Eugene Fournière, analyzing my defense of the “bandits” writes that “the murder of a messenger carrying receipts or the violation of a grave” will not “put a stop to the culpable regime.” He adds that if, like me, his sympathies are for “those who fights” he distinguishes between those who fight to satisfy their hunger, like a wolf, and “capital’s oppressed and exploited, who are uniting and learning in order to attain to collective leadership.”

This is more or less how they answer us every time we legitimize the rebellion of the criminal, that economic rebel.

And M. Eugene Fournière exclaims in conclusion: “And I’m too afraid that the wolves will have babies... and that they will devour each other. I prefer to re-read the admirable ‘Mutual Aid’ of the anarcho-socialist Kropotkin.”

I understand all this. I too would have preferred, instead of writing in praise of the implacable rebels, instead of justifying anti-social crime against a society based on crime, instead of calling for violent, often cruel and always painful rebellion, to

Victor Serge
Expedients
January 18, 1912

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1912/01/expedients.htm>

theanarchistlibrary.org

reveal all the good things I think about “Mutual Aid.” But no; I don’t have the time to talk about it, for there is a fight going on all around me. I am with the wolves – the wolves they are hunting, that they starve, that they are tracking down, and which bite.

And I am with the outsiders and the bandits precisely because I love mutual aid. And these wolves live on the edges of society, precisely because, loving mutual aid, the free life, the free collaboration of generous forces, they detest the production line, the factory, wage labor. M. Eugène Fournière must nevertheless know this: what makes we anarchists rebels is not our laziness, our cruel instincts or our anti-social dreams. Society furnishes the lazy, the cruel and the brutal the means to use their strange aptitudes in the colonies – or in the metropolis – in various uniforms. What makes us rebels is our firm determination to be neither masters nor slaves; it’s our aspiration for free labor that leads us to refuse the infamous salaried task; it’s our desire for true fraternity that leads us to detest hypocritical and misleading social conventions. But above all we are wolves because, thinking perhaps in the same way as M. Eugène Fournière, who for his part is an honest man, we want to live in accordance with our ideas.

We have no illusions about the social scope of our revolts; it’s only that we remain logical. For every obstacle met there must correspond an appropriate method of struggle. In order to transform the social milieu we have confidence only in an education that renovates minds.

We know that force alone is useful in forcing us to respect arrogant masters. In order to conquer our place among the living, in order not to vegetate until the end alongside the sorrowful enslaved, we know that sometimes force is still necessary.

Our objective is twofold. We have often repeated that waiting for the future wastes the present. Well then, without waiting any longer, we intend to profit from the passing moment. Only then will we worry about transforming the social milieu.

Living in the present: what is that? For the anarchist it is, M. Eugène Fournière, working freely, loving freely, every day being able to come to know the beauties of life; to be a man, i.e., to be healthy, strong, good: to work, think, be artistic. As you see, we demand everything of life. And do you know what is offered us?

Eleven, twelve, thirteen hours of labor a day so as to obtain the daily pittance. And what labor for such a pittance! Robotic labor under authoritarian direction in humiliating and filthy conditions, through which life is permitted us in the gloom of poor housing tracts.

And so, M. Eugène Fournière, we have to choose: will we be slaves or rebels? Wolves, as you call it.

Allow me to be indiscreet and ask you what you'd choose?

In principle, we always choose revolt. And yet, in keeping with our possibilities we are wage earners or bandits. We can't do much about this. We find the two things equally unpleasant, equally disagreeable. We don't want to be wolves, as I told you, but men. Alas.

Obviously, if we are workers or thieves, we will not, by this fact, transform the social milieu. We know that if leagued together in a union we were to seek to improve the conditions of our subjection, or that if through our daring we were to wrest a few advantages, the social effect of our gestures would be minimal. Nevertheless, individually we would have profited, which is enough.

In order to transform society – if this is possible – we know that something else is needed besides reformist collective movements or acts of banditry. But in order to do these other things one must live; and in order to live one must be a wage earner or a bandit.

Individual education, the popularization of scientific knowledge, the diffusion of the critical spirit and the spirit of revolt, these, in our opinion, are the surest methods of seeing individuals evolve and, through this, to transform society. We have

never failed to say this. Wage labor and banditry are for us nothing but deplorable expedients we are forced to resort to in order to survive and fulfill our task in an abominable world.