

Civil War & Civil Peace: Libertarian Aragon 1936-37

Graham Kelsey

On 12 April 1931 the people of Spain went to the polls. The political upheaval which followed constituted the Spanish bourgeois revolution. The inability of the victors to translate it into social and economic terms alienated their working class support completely. In this failure to effect genuine social and economic reform lay the seeds of the resulting civil war. That conflict, however, was to offer those who did have the necessary energy and courage the opportunity of promoting real change. In the region of Aragon, in particular, village trade unionists succeeded in laying the foundations of a new truly democratic society, creating civil peace even in the midst of civil war.

The national elections to the Cortes, held at the start of 1936, had constituted for liberal-republicans and their socialist political allies an opportunity to put the clock back some five years when the Spanish Second Republic had been created upon a wave of widespread support and popular enthusiasm. Certainly the aspirations and expectations first aroused at the Republic's birth in April 1931 were in large part reborn with the Popular front's victory in the February 1936 elections. Now, however, the Republicans' room for manoeuvre was considerably smaller, far too small in fact as events were to show. Already by May opposition to the new government from among its working class supporters, beginning to appreciate as Vicente Ballester had insisted in Zaragoza in January that they could expect nothing from such politicians, (1) had begun to develop quite markedly. Moreover, working class awareness and thus demands for social and economic improvement, which had in 1931 been primarily urban in context, was in 1936 increasingly rural as well. This reflected firstly, the degree to which the political polarisation effected by the February elections had awoken Spain's rural populace, and secondly, in the particular case of Aragon at least, the

Spain: Aragon.

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The Anarchist Encyclopædia

Anarchism is a concrete political and social philosophy with its own history, indeed, its own precise geography, with a defined outlook that has influenced a great many other political theories, with its adherents, past and present, ranging from those known by virtue of their anarchist ideas to those famous in other fields because of their contribution to science, art, literature, industrial organisation or militancy.

It has attracted a great many thinkers and philosophers, those who have accepted it and those who have dismissed it. Its influence on the working class, though nowadays less than it once was, has always provided a hard clear cut alternative to marxism, state socialism and parliamentary democracy, and still provides a vigorous attack as an unquashable minority.

Though authoritarian ideas have triumphed generally in economic matters, and centralism has dominated political thinking, the anti-authoritarian, anti-centralist ideas of anarchism have come to the fore in social life and are

becomingly increasingly influential - albeit distorted in a meritocratic way by being subordinated to authoritarian capitalist systems - in organisation theory, co-operative ventures, industrial project teams, teamwork in social services, educational theory, and indeed, most ironically, in military units such as the SAS.

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socialists and us socialist democrats.

But, I have heard it said - and this is the argument most frequently raised against us and an argument which the dogmatists of every shade regard as irrefutable - it is impossible that the whole of mankind should devote itself to learning, for we should all die of starvation. Consequently, while some study others must labour so that they can produce what we need to live - not just producing for their own needs, but also for those men who devote themselves exclusively to intellectual pursuits; aside from expanding the horizons of human knowledge, the discoveries of these intellectuals improve the condition of all human beings, without exception, when applied to industry, agriculture and, generally, to political and social life; agreed? And do not their artistic creations enhance the lives of every one of us?

No, not at all. And the greatest reproach which we can level against science and the arts is precisely that they do not distribute their favours and do not exercise their influence, except upon a tiny fragment of society, to the exclusion and, thus, to the detriment of the vast majority. Today one might say of the advances of science and of the arts, just what has already and so properly been said of the prodigious progress of industry, trade, credit, and, in a word, of the wealth of society in the most civilised countries of the modern world. That wealth is quite exclusive, and the tendency is for it to become more so each day, as it becomes concentrated into an ever shrinking number of hands, shunning the lower echelons of the middle class and the petite bourgeoisie, depressing them into the proletariat, so that the growth of this wealth is

the direct cause behind the growing misery of the labouring masses. Thus the outcome is that the gulf which yawns between the privileged, contented minority and millions of workers who earn their keep by the strength of their arms, yawns ever wider and that the happier the contented - who exploit the people's labour-become, the more unhappy the workers become. One has only to look at the fabulous opulence of the aristocratic, financier, commercial and industrial clique in England and compare it with the miserable condition of the workers of the same country; one has only to re-read the so naive and heartrending letter lately penned by an intelligent and upright goldsmith of London, one Walter Dugan, who has just voluntarily taken poison along with his wife and their six children, simply as a means of escape from the degradations of poverty and the torments of hunger (1) - and one will find oneself obliged to concede that the much vaunted civilisation means, in material terms, to the people, only oppression and ruination.

And the same holds true for the modern advances of science and the arts. Huge strides, indeed, it is true! But the greater the advances, the more they foster intellectual servitude and thus, in material terms, foster misery and inferiority as the lot of the people; for these advances merely widen the gulf which already separates the people's level of understanding from the levels of the privileged classes. From the point of view of natural capacity, the intelligence of the former is, today, obviously less stunted, less exercised, less sophisticated and less corrupted by the need to defend unjust interests, and is, consequently, naturally of greater potency than the brain

power of the bourgeoisie: but, then again, the brain power of the bourgeois does have at its disposal the complete arsenal of science filled with weapons that are indeed formidable. It is very often the case that a highly intelligent worker is obliged to hold his tongue when confronted by a learned fool who defeats him, not by dint of intellect (of which he has none) but by dint of his education, an education denied the workingman but granted the fool because, while the fool was able to develop his foolishness scientifically in schools, the working man's labours were clothing, housing, feeding him and supplying his every need, his teachers and his books, everything necessary to his education.

Even within the bourgeois class, as we know only too well, the degree of learning imparted to each individual is not the same. There, too, there is a scale which is determined, not by the potential of the individual but by the amount of wealth of the social stratum to which he belongs by birth; for example, the instruction made available to the children of the lower petite bourgeoisie, whilst itself scarcely superior to that which workers manage to obtain for themselves, is next to nothing by comparison with the education that society makes readily available to the upper and middle bourgeoisie. What, then, do we find? The petite bourgeoisie, whose only attachment to the middle class is through a ridiculous vanity on the one hand, and its dependence upon the big capitalists on the other, finds itself most often in circumstances even more miserable and even more humiliating than those which afflict the proletariat. So when we talk of privileged classes, we never have in mind this poor petite bourgeoisie

which, if it did but have a little more spirit and gumption, would not delay in joining forces with us to combat the big and medium bourgeoisie who crush it today no less than they crush the proletariat. And should society's current economic trends continue in the same direction for a further ten years (which we do, however, regard as impossible) we may yet see the bulk of the medium bourgeoisie tumble first of all into the current circumstances of the petite bourgeoisie only to slip a little later into the proletariat - as a result, of course, of this inevitable concentration of ownership into an ever smaller number of hands - the ineluctable consequences of which would be to partition society once and for all into a tiny, overweeningly opulent, educated, ruling minority and a vast majority of impoverished, ignorant, enslaved proletarians.

There is one fact which should make an impression upon every person of conscience, upon all who have at heart a concern for human dignity and justice; that is, for the liberty of each individual amid and through a setting of equality for all. That is the fact that all of the contrivances of the intelligentsia, all of the great applications of science to the purpose of industry, trade and to the life of society in general have thus far profited no one, save the privileged classes and the power of the State, that timeless champion of all political and social iniquity. Never, not once, have they brought any benefit to the masses of the people. We need only list the machines and every workingman and honest advocate of the emancipation of labour would accept the justice of what we say. By what power do the privileged classes

maintain themselves today, with all their insolent smugness and iniquitous pleasures, in defiance of the all too legitimate outrage felt by the masses of the people? Is it by some power inherent in their persons? No - it is solely through the power of the State, in whose apparatus today their offspring hold, always, every key position (and even every lower and middle range position) excepting that of soldier and worker. And in this day and age what is it that constitutes the principle underlying the power of the State? Why, it is science.

Yes, science - Science of government, science of administration and financial science; the science of fleecing the flocks of the people without their bleating too loudly and, when they start to bleat, the science of urging silence, patience and obedience upon them by means of a scientifically organised force: the science of deceiving and dividing the masses of the people and keeping them always in a salutary ignorance lest they ever become able, by helping one another and pooling their efforts, to conjure up a power capable of overturning States; and, above all, military science with all its tried and tested weaponry, these formidable instruments of destruction which 'work wonders' (2): and lastly, the science of genius which has conjured up steamships, railways and telegraphy which, by turning every government into a hundred armed, a thousand armed Briareos (3), giving it the power to be, act and arrest everywhere at once - has brought about the most formidable political centralisation the world has ever witnessed.

Who, then, will deny that, without exception, all of the advances made by science have thus far brought nothing, save

a boosting of the wealth of the privileged classes and of the power of the State, to the detriment of the well-being and liberty of the masses of the people, of the proletariat? But, we will hear the objection, do not the masses of the people profit by this also? Are they not much more civilised in this society of ours than they were in the societies of bygone centuries?

We shall reply to that with an observation borrowed from the noted German socialist, Lassalle. In measuring the progress made by the working masses, in terms of their political and social emancipation, one should not compare their intellectual state in this century with what it may have been in centuries gone by. Instead, one ought to consider whether, by comparison with some given time, the gap which then existed between the working masses and the privileged classes having been noted, the masses have progressed to the same extent as these privileged classes. For, if the progress made by both has been roughly equivalent, the intellectual gap which separates the masses from the privileged in today's world will be the same as it ever was; but if the proletariat has progressed further and more rapidly than the privileged, then the gap must necessarily have narrowed; but if, on the other hand, the worker's rate of progress has been slower and, consequently, less than that of a representative of the ruling classes over the same period, then that gap will have grown. The gulf which separates them will have increased and the man of privilege grown more powerful and the worker's circumstances more abject, more slave like than at the date one chose as the point of departure. If the two of us set off from two different

points at the same time and you have a lead of one hundred paces over me and you move at a rate of sixty paces per minute, and I at only thirty paces per minute, then after one hour the distance which separates us will not be just over one hundred paces, but just over one thousand nine hundred paces.

That example gives a roughly accurate notion of the respective advances made by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Thus far the bourgeoisie has raced along the track of civilisation at a quicker rate than the proletariat, not because they are intellectually more powerful than the latter - indeed one might properly argue the contrary case - but because the political and economic organisation of society has been such that, hitherto, the bourgeoisie alone have enjoyed access to learning and science has existed only for them, and the proletariat has found itself doomed to a forced ignorance, so that if the proletariat has, nevertheless, made progress (and there is no denying it has) then that progress was made not thanks to society, but rather in spite of it.

To sum up. In society as presently constituted, the advances of science have been at the root of the relative ignorance of the proletariat, just as the progress of industry and commerce have been at the root of its relative impoverishment. Thus, intellectual progress and material progress have contributed in equal measure towards the exacerbation of the slavery of the proletariat. Meaning what? Meaning that we have a duty to reject and resist that bourgeois science, just as we have a duty to reject and resist bourgeois wealth. And reject and resist them in this sense - that

in destroying the social order which turns it into the preserve of one or of several classes, we must lay claim to it as the common inheritance of all the world.

Egalite, 31 July 1869

II

We have shown how, as long as there are two or more degrees of instruction for the various strata of society, there must, of necessity, be classes, that is, economic and political privilege for a small number of the contented and slavery and misery for the lot of the generality of men.

As members of the International Working Men's Association (IWMA/AIT), we seek equality and, because we seek it, we must also seek integral education, the same education for everyone.

But if everyone is schooled who will want to work? we hear someone ask. Our answer to that is a simple one: everyone must work and everyone must receive education. To this, it is very often objected that this mixing of industrial with intellectual labour cannot be, except one or the other suffer by it. The manual workers will make poor scholars, and the scholars will never be more than quite pathetic workers. True, in the society of today where manual labour and intellectual labour are equally distorted by the quite artificial isolation in which both are kept! But we are quite persuaded that in the rounded human being, each of these pursuits, the muscular and the nervous, must be developed in equal measure and that far from being inimical each must lean upon, enhance and reinforce the other. The science of the sage will become more fruitful, more useful and more expansive when the sage is no longer a stranger to manual labour, and the labours of the

workmen, when he is educated, will be more intelligent and thus more productive than those of an ignorant workman.

From which it follows that, for work's sake as much as for the sake of science, there must no longer be this division into workers and scholars and henceforth there must be only men.

The result of this is that those men who are today, on account of their superior intellects, caught up in the ivory towers of science and who, once they have established themselves in this world, yield to the need for a thoroughly bourgeois position and bend their every invention to the exclusive use of the privileged class to which they themselves belong. These men, I say, once they become truly the fellows of everyone, fellows not just in their imagination nor just in their speech but in fact, in their work, will just as necessarily convert their inventions and applications of their learning to the benefit of all, and especially apply themselves to the task of making work (the basis, the only real and rightful basis of human society) lighter and more dignified.

It is quite possible and, indeed, likely that during the period of fairly lengthy transition which will, naturally, succeed the great crisis of society, the loftiest sciences will fall considerably below their current levels. Equally, it is not to be doubted that luxury and everything constituting the refinements of life will have to disappear from the social scene for quite a long time and will not be able to reappear as the exclusive amusements of a few, but will have to return as ways of dignifying life for everybody, and then only once society has conquered need in all of us. But would this temporary eclipse of the lofty

sciences be such a misfortune? Whatever science may lose in terms of sublime elevation, will it not win through the extension of its base? Doubtless there will be fewer illustrious sages, but at the same time there will be fewer ignoramus too. There will be no more of these men who can touch the skies, but, on the other hand, millions of men who may be degraded and crushed today will be able to tread the earth as human beings: no demigods, but no slaves either. Both the slave and the demigods will achieve human-ness, the one by rising a lot, the other by stooping a little. Thus no longer will there be a place for deification, nor for contumely. Everyone will shake hands with his neighbour and, once reunited, we shall all march with a new spring in our steps, onwards to new conquests, in the realm of science as in the realm of life itself.

So, far from having any misgivings about that eclipse of science - which will be in any case only a fleeting one - we ought to call for it with all our powers since its effect will be to humanise both scholar and manual labourer and to reconcile science and life. And we are convinced that, once we have achieved this new foundation, the progress of mankind, in the realm of science as elsewhere in life, will very quickly outstrip everything that we have seen and everything we might conjure up in our imaginations today.

But here another question crops up: will every individual have an equal capacity for absorbing education to the same degree? Let us imagine a society organised along the most egalitarian lines, a society in which children will, from birth onwards, start out with the same circumstances economically, socially and politically, which is to say

the same upkeep, the same education, the same instruction: among these thousands of tiny individuals will there not be an infinite variety of enthusiasms, natural inclinations and aptitudes?

Such is the big argument advanced by our adversaries, the bourgeois pure and simple, and the bourgeois socialists as well. They imagine it to be unanswerable. So let us try to prove the opposite. Well, to begin with, by what right do they make their stand for the principle of individual capabilities? Is there room for the development of capabilities in society as at present constituted? Can there be room for that development in a society which continues to have the right of inheritance as its foundation? Self-evidently not; for, from the moment that the right of inheritance applies, the career of children will never be determined by their individual gifts and application: it will be determined primarily by their economic circumstances, by the wealth or poverty of their families. Wealthy but emptyheaded heirs will receive a superior education; the most intelligent children of the proletariat will receive ignorance as their inheritance, just as happens at present. So, is it not hypocritical, when speaking not only of society as it is today but even of a reformed society which would still have as its fundamentals private property ownership and the right of inheritance - is it not sordid sophistry to talk about individual rights based on individual capabilities?

There is such a lot of talk today of individual liberty, yet what prevails is not the individual person, nor the individual in general, but the individual upon whom privilege is conferred by his social position. Thus what

counts is position and class. Just let one intelligent individual from the ranks of the bourgeoisie dare to take a stand against the economic privileges of that respectable class and you will see how much these good bourgeois, forever prattling about individual liberty today, respect his liberty as an individual! Don't talk to us about individual abilities! Is it not an everyday thing for us to see the greatest abilities of working men and bourgeois forced to give way and even to kowtow before the crass stupidity of the heirs to the golden calf? Individual liberty - not privileged liberty but human liberty, and the real potential of individuals - will only be able to enjoy full expansion in a regime of complete equality. When there exists an equality of origins for all men on this earth then, and only then (with safeguards, of course, for the superior calls of fellowship or solidarity, which is and ever shall remain the greatest producer of all social phenomena, from human intelligence to material wealth) only then will one be able to say, with more reason than one can today, that every individual is a self-made man. Hence our conclusion is that, if individual talents are to prosper and no longer be thwarted in bringing forth their full fruits, the first precondition is that all individual privileges, economic as well as political, must disappear, which is to say that all class distinctions must be abolished. That requires that private property rights and the rights of inheritance must go, and equality must triumph economically, politically and socially.

But once equality has triumphed and is well established, will there be no longer any difference in the

talents and degree of application of the various individuals? There will be a difference, not so many as exist today, perhaps, but there will always be differences. Of that there can be no doubt. This is a proverbial truth which will probably never cease to be true - that no tree ever brings forth two leaves that are exactly identical. How much more will this be true of men, men being much more complicated creatures than leaves. But such diversity, far from constituting an affliction is, as the German philosopher Feuerbach has forcefully noted, one of the assets of mankind. Thanks to it, the human race is a collective whole wherein each human being complements the rest and has need of them; so that this infinite variation in human beings is the very cause and chief basis of their solidarity - an important argument in favour of equality.

Basically, even in today's society, if one excepts two categories of men - men of genius and idiots - and provided one abstracts differences conjured up artificially through the influence of a thousand social factors such as education, instruction, economic and political status which create differences not merely within each social stratum, but in almost every family unit, one will concede that from the point of view of intellectual gifts and moral energy the vast majority of men are very much alike or, at least, are worth about the same - weakness in one regard being almost always counterbalanced by an equivalent strength in another, so that it becomes impossible to say whether one man chosen from this mass is much the superior or the inferior of his neighbour. The vast majority of men are not identical but equivalent and thus equal.

Which means that the line of argument pursued by our adversaries is left with nothing but the geniuses and the idiots.

As we know, idiocy is a psychological and social affliction. Thus, it should be treated not in the schools but in the hospitals and one is entitled to expect that a more rational system of social hygiene - above all, one that cares more for the physical and moral well-being of the individual than the current system - will some day be introduced and that together with a new society organised along egalitarian lines it will eventually eradicate from the surface of the earth this affliction of idiocy, such a humiliation to the human race. As for the men of genius, one should note first of all that, happily or unhappily, according to one's main point of view, such men have not featured in the history of mankind except as the extremely rare exceptions to all of the rules known to us and one cannot organise to cater for exceptions. Even so, it is our hope that the society of the future will be able to discover, through a truly practical popular organisation of its collective assets the means by which to render such geniuses less necessary, less intimidating and more truly the benefactors of us all. For we must never lose sight of Voltaire's great dictum: 'There is someone with more wit than the greatest geniuses, and that is everyone'. So it is merely a question of organising this everyone for the sake of the fullest liberty rooted in the most complete economic, political and social equality, and one need no longer fear the dictatorial ambitions and despotic inclinations of the men of genius.

As for turning out such men of genius through education,

one ought to banish the thought from one's mind. Moreover, of all the men of genius we have known thus far, none or almost none ever displayed their genius while yet in their childhood, nor in their adolescence nor yet in their early youth. Only in their mature years did they ever reveal themselves geniuses and several were not recognised as such until after their death whereas many supposedly great men having had their praises sung while youths by better men have finished their careers in the most absolute obscurity. So it is never in the childhood years, nor even in the adolescent years that one can discern and determine the comparative excellences and shortcomings of men, nor the extent of their talents, nor their inborn aptitudes. All of these things only become obvious and are governed by the development of the individual person and, just as there are some natures precocious and some very slow - although the latter are by no means inferior and, indeed, are often superior - so no schoolmaster will ever be in a position to specify in advance the career or nature of the occupations which his charges will choose once they attain the age when they have the freedom to choose.

From which it follows that society, disregarding any real or imagined differences in aptitudes or abilities and possessed of no means of determining these in any event and of no right to allot the future career of children owes them all, without a single exception, an absolutely equal education and instruction.

Egalite, 14 August 1869

III

At every level there must be equal instruction for all; consequently that instruction must be integrated, which is to

say that it should prepare each child, of whichever sex, as much for a life of brainwork as for a life of labour so that each of them may, in equal measure, become rounded human beings.

Positive philosophy (4), having dethroned religious fable and the reveries of metaphysics from their Lordship over the mind, allows us an insight into what scientific instruction must be in the time to come. It will have as its basis the knowledge of nature and its crowning glory will be sociology. The ideal, ceasing to be the lord, the ravisher of life as it is in every metaphysical and religious system, will henceforth be nothin other than the ultimate and most beautiful expression of the real world. Ceasing to be a dream, it will itself become a reality.

Since no mind, however powerful, is capable of encompassing all of the specialisations of all of the sciences and since a general familiarity with all of the sciences is absolutely vital to a thorough development of the mind, teaching will naturally be divided into two parts: the general part which will impart the basic principles of all of the sciences without exception as well as a familiarity - real rather than superficial - with the sciences as a whole; and the specialised part, which will, of necessity, be divided into several groups of faculties, each one specialising in a certain number of the branches of learning which are by their very nature reciprocally complementary in a special way.

The first, or general part will be compulsory for all children: it will, if we may use the expression, constitute the humane education of their spirit, taking over entirely from metaphysics and theology whilst at the same time placing

the children at a sufficiently advanced point so that once they reach adolescence they will be in a position to select knowledgeably the specialisation which best suits their individual dispositions and tastes.

It will no doubt come to pass that in selecting their specialised area of study adolescents, influenced by some secondary consideration, internal or external, will occasionally make mistakes and that they may at first opt for a speciality and for a career which may well not be those best matched to their aptitudes. But, since we are all unhypercritical and honest advocates of the freedom of the individual and since, in the name of that freedom we abhor with all our hearts the principle of authority as well as all possible manifestations of that divine and anti-human principle; and since we despise and condemn, from the very depths of love we bear freedom, the authority of the father as well as of the schoolmaster - finding the one every whit as depraving and degrading in that our everyday experience proves that the pater familias and the schoolmaster, despite their obligatory and proverbial wisdom - and indeed because of it - err regarding the abilities of their children even more so than the children themselves, and in view of the thoroughly human, irrefutable and inescapable law which says that every man in a position of power never lets slip the chance to abuse his power; and since, in determining arbitrarily (these pater familias and schoolmasters) what their children's future is to be, they give greater credence to their own inclinations than to any natural aptitudes on the part of their charges. In short, since mistakes made by despots are always more noxious and

harder to repair than those made by free men, we hold unflinchingly and without question, despite all official, officious, paternal and pedantic overseers in the world, that the children must be free to select and determine their own careers.

Should they make a mistake, the very mistake which they will have made will prove an effective education for them in subsequent times, and the broad-based education which they will already have received will have enlightened them, so that they will find it easy to redirect along lines dictated by their own natures.

Like full grown men, children too learn only from personal experience and never by the mistakes of others.

In a system of integrated education, scientific and theoretical instruction must necessarily go hand in hand with industrial or practical training, only thus will the rounded human being be arrived at; a rounded human being who understand and knows.

Parallel with scientific training, this industrial training will be divided into two stages; a broadbased training, which should give children a broad sample and introductory practical experience of all manner of industries, excepting none, as well as an overall notion of what underpins civilisation materially and of the range of human labour; and, the second phase, the specialised, when the students are split up into more specialised inter-related groups.

The broadbased training should equip adolescents to make free choice of the specialised area of industry and, within this the specific industry which they feel most attracted to. Once they have moved on to the second phase of industrial training they can begin their first serious

apprenticeship experiences under the supervision of their instructors.

Side by side with such training in the sciences and industries there will also be a need for practical training, or rather a succession of experiences of a morality which is not divine but human. Divine morality is founded upon two immoral principles - respect for authority and contempt for mankind. By contrast, human morality is rooted only in the contempt for authority and respect for freedom and humanity. Divine morality deems work a degradation, a punishment; human morality sees in work the supreme condition of human happiness and human dignity. Of necessity, divine morality culminates in a politics which recognises rights only for those who, by virtue of their economic, their privileged economic circumstances, can live without having to work. Human morality concedes rights only to those who live by working: it recognises the fact that it is through work that man becomes human. The education of children which is founded upon authority must henceforth yield to education based on the fullest freedom. Positively speaking, what we mean by freedom is the full development of all of the faculties of which man is possessed and, in a negative sense, the complete independence of the will of the individual vis a vis his fellows. Man is not and never shall be free of the laws of nature vis a vis the laws of society: laws, which for the purposes of science are thus divided into two types, belong in reality to only one and the same type for they are all equally nature's laws, inescapable laws which represent the foundation and condition of all life, so much

so that one could only defy them by taking one's own life.

But it is important to distinguish between these natural laws and the authoritarian, arbitrary, political, religious, criminal and civil laws which privileged classes throughout history have laid down - always in the interests in their exploitation of the labouring masses, their sole aim having been to restrict the freedom of these masses. Such laws, behind the pretext of an alleged morality, have always been the sirens of the most thorough-going immorality. Thus, we advocate, reluctant but ineluctable obedience to all the laws which constitute, independently of any man's will, the very lifeblood of nature and of society: but the most absolute independence possible for each individual with regard to all pretensions to command on the part of all human wills, collective or individual, who would foist upon others not any natural influence but their ordinance, their despotism.

As for the natural influence which men wield over one another, this is yet another of those features of life in a society against which all revolt would be as futile as it would be impossible. Such influence is the very material, intellectual and moral foundation of human solidarity. The individual human being, a product of solidarity, which is to say a product of a society, while he is unable to evade thralldom to nature's laws, can, under the influence of feelings emanating from outside himself, especially from others' company, react against it to a degree but will not be able to escape them without moving immediately to a different solidaristic milieu and exposing himself to new influences. For, where man is

concerned, life removed from all society and every human influence (in other words absolute isolation) mean death intellectually, morally and materially also. Solidarity is not the product but the sire of individuality and the human personality cannot be conceived and cannot develop except in a society of human beings.

The sum of prevailing social influences as expressed by the solidaristic or overall consciousness of a human group of whatever size, we call public opinion. And which of us does not know the all powerful effects of public opinion upon every individual? The impact of even the most draconian restrictive legislation is as nothing beside it. So, it is public opinion which is, par excellence, the educator of men; from which it follows that if one is to inject morality into individuals one has to inject it first of all into society itself - one has to humanise its public opinion, its public conscience.

Egalite, 14 August 1869

IV

To make men moral, we said, one has to make their social context moral. Socialism, which has as its poundation positive science, rejects out of hand the doctrine of free will and holds that what, in men, we may call vice or virtue, is wholly the result of the combined influences of nature and society. Nature, in the form of ethnographic, physiological and pathological factors, conjures up the faculties and dispositions which we term natural, and the manner in which society's organised can either develop these, arrest their development or distort it. Every individual, without exception, is, at every instant of his life what nature and

society, between them, have made of him.

It is only because of this natural ineluctability (and social ineluctability, too) that statistical science is possible. Statistical science is not content merely to note and enumerate social phenomena; it also seeks to discover their bearing upon and correlation with the manner in which society is organised. Criminal statistics, for instance, record that in a single country or a single town over a period of 10, 20, or 30 years (and sometimes longer, unless some political or social crisis intervenes to alter the tenor of the society), the very same crimes or offences will reappear year after year after year on roughly the same scale. And - this is even more remarkable - the manner in which they are committed will be repeated almost as often in one year as in another. For instance, the number of deaths by poison, knife or firearm, as well as the number of suicides by this method or that, are almost constant. Which leads the renowned Belgian statistician Quetelet to make this memorable pronouncement: 'Society fosters crimes; individuals merely carry them out'.

This regular repetition of the same social phenomena would not take place if men's intellectual and moral dispositions as well as their acts of will were founded upon free choice. To put it another way, all this talk of free will is nonsense. Either that or it means that the individual determines his own course spontaneously and by himself, removed from all outside influences, be they natural or social. But if such were the case with all men suiting themselves, the world would be over-run by the most unmitigated anarchy: all solidarity between man and man

would become impossible, and all these millions of wills, thoroughly independent one from another, some running counter to others, would naturally tend to destroy one another and might even end by doing just that, unless there was, above them, the despotic will of divine Providence who 'shows them the way whilst they seethe' and who, by obliterating them all at once, foists divine order upon their human confusion. We also find all the partisans of the principle of free will inevitably driven by the force of logic into granting the existence and impact of a divine Providence. This underpins every theological and metaphysical doctrine, a magnificent system which has long held human conscience in thrall and one which, seen from a distance in abstract meditation or in the light of a religious and poetic imagination, does indeed seem to be resplendent in harmony and grandeur. It is just fortunate that the historic reality which has corresponded to this system has always been horrific and that the system itself cannot stand up to scientific criticism.

Indeed, we know that for as long as divine law has held sway on earth the vast majority of men have been brutally and pitilessly exploited, and tormented, and oppressed and decimated: we know that even today the name of theological or metaphysical divinity is still cited by those who seek to maintain the masses in their slavish condition: and it could not be otherwise, for the instant it is admitted that a divine will holds sway in the world and governs nature and society, one effectively makes a nonsense of man's freedom. Of necessity, man's wishes avail nothing against the divine will. What does that imply? It implies that in attempting to defend the

abstract, metaphysical or fictitious freedom of man and free will, one is forced to deny his real freedom. Against a background of divine omnipotence and divine omnipresence, man is but a slave. The freedom of everyman having been dispelled by divine providence, all that remains is privilege, which is to say, special entitlements awarded by the grace of God to this or that individual, this or that hierarchy (5), this or that dynasty, this or that class.

Similarly, divine providence makes all science impossible, which means that divine providence is, quite simply, the negation of human reason, or rather, before one can acknowledge divine providence one has to abdicate one's common sense. The moment one accepts that the world is governed by divine will, one need no longer look for any natural interrelationship between phenomena, but look instead for a series of displays of that supreme will whose decrees are and forever must remain, as Holy Scripture says, inaccessible to human reason lest they lose their divine nature. Divine providence is not just the negation of all human logic, it is a negation of logic as such, for all logic holds implicit a natural necessity, and this necessity would be contrary to divine liberty: so it is, from the human point of view, the triumph of nonsense. So, those who would be believers must renounce both liberty and science and allow themselves to be exploited and lashed by those upon whom God has bestowed privilege: and one has to say with Tertullian - I believe because of its absurdity, adding this (which is as logical as the foregoing) And I desire iniquity.

For ourselves, who freely renounce all the joys of the

next world and demand the complete triumph of mankind upon this earth, we humbly admit that we understand nothing of divine logic and that we shall content ourselves with human logic, founded as it is upon experience and knowledge of interrelationships of natural as well as of social phenomena.

The accumulated, correlated and considered experience which we know as science, shows us that sovereign will is an impossible invention which flies in the face of the very nature of things; what is called the will is merely the product of the exercise of a nervous faculty, just as physical strength is only the product of the exercise of our muscles; consequently both are in equal measure the product of social and natural life, i.e., of the physical and social conditions into which each individual is born and against which background they develop. And let us say it again - every man, at every instant of his life, is the product of the combined impact of nature and society, from which it clearly follows that what we stated in our preceding article is quite true: to make men moral first make their surroundings moral.

And there is only one way to make those surroundings moral - to effect the triumph of justice, i.e., the fullest liberty (6) for each in the context of the most flawless equality for all. Inequality of circumstances and rights (and by the absence of liberty for each which is its necessary by-product) - THAT is the vast collective iniquity which gives rise to all individual iniquities. Do but establish the one and all the others will vanish.

In view of the tardiness of the men of privilege in allowing themselves to be made moral or (and it amounts to the

same thing), to be made equal, we very much fear that justice will see no triumph lest it be by means of social revolution. This is outside our brief today, but we shall assume the task of announcing this truth, which is, moreover, all too obvious - that until such time as his social environment becomes moral, morality in the individual will be impossible.

Three things are necessary if men are to be made moral, which is to say, are to be complete men in the fullest sense of the word - a healthy birth, a rational and integrated education accompanied by an upbringing based on respect for work, reason, equality and liberty; and a social environment wherein each individual in enjoying complete liberty will really be the equal of all others both by right and in fact.

Does such an environment exist? No. Consequently, its foundations must be laid. If, in the environment which does not exist one were to manage to find schools which would offer their pupils instruction and education so perfect as to defy our imagination to conceive of better, would those schools succeed in creating men who were just, free and moral? Again no, because when they left the school they would enter into a social environment governed by altogether contrary principles, and since society is always stronger than individuals, it would soon overwhelm and demoralise them. Furthermore, the very foundation of such schools is impossible in today's circumstances. For social life embraces everything and permeates the schools as well as family life and the lives of all the individuals who compose the society.

Teachers, tutors and parents are all members of the same society and are all more or less brutalised or demoralised

by it. How could they impart to their charges that which they are lacking in themselves? The proper way, the only proper way to teach morality is by example and since socialist morality is the very opposite of current morality, the teachers, who are more or less in the grip of the latter, would practice before their pupils the very opposite of what they would be preaching. So, socialist education is impossible through the schools just as it is impossible through the family of today.

But integrated education is similarly impossible: the bourgeois cannot understand that their children should become workers, and the workers are bereft of the wherewithal that would give their children a scientific education.

I am amused by those fine bourgeois Socialists who are always telling us: 'Let us first educate the people, then we shall emancipate them'. Instead, we say: Let the people emancipate themselves first, and then they will look after their own education. Who is to educate the people? You, perhaps? But you do not teach them, you just poison them by attempting to inculcate them with all the religious, historical, political, juridical and economic prejudices which guarantee your existence, but which at the same time destroy their intelligence and emasculate their righteous indignation and drain them of all resolve. You let the people be crushed by their daily work and by their misery and then you say to them: 'Educate yourselves!' We should like to see you and your children educate yourselves after thirteen, fourteen or sixteen hours of brutalising toil with misery and an uncertain tomorrow as your only reward.

No, gentlemen, for all our reverence for the lofty issue

of integral education, we declare that at this moment it is not the most important issue for the people. The primary issue is that of economic emancipation, which necessarily brings with it an immediate concomitant political emancipation - and only following that comes the intellectual and moral emancipation of the people.

This being so, we fully subscribe to the resolution adopted by the Brussels Congress of 1867:

'Recognising that for the moment it is not possible to organise a rational system of education, the Congress urges its various sections to organise study courses which would follow a programme of scientific, professional, and industrial education, that is a programme of integral education, in order to redress, as far as is possible, the inadequacy of present-day education among workers. It is, of course, understood that a reduction in working hours is

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to be considered an indispensable prerequisite.'

Yes. Of course the workers will do all within their power to provide themselves with the education in the present situation. But, without letting themselves be led astray by the siren songs of the bourgeois and bourgeois Socialists, they should above all concentrate their efforts upon the solving of the great problem of economic emancipation which must be the mother of all other emancipations.

Egalite, 21 August 1869

Notes:

- (1) The letter in question had been printed in the preceding issue of Egalite.
- (2) A reference to the statement by General De Failly on the day after the battle of Mentana (3 November 1867): 'The chassepots have worked wonders' a quote which appears in all of the memoirs.
- (3) Briareus. In classic

legend a huge monster with 100 arms and 50 heads.

(4) In referring to 'positive philosophy' Bakunin was not thinking of Positivism or Comtism, the flaws of which he thoroughly exposed in the Appendix published in Volume III of Guillaume's Oeuvres (Considerations philosophiques sur le fantome divin, sur le monde real et sur l'homme).

he has in mind scientific philosophy generally which relies upon observation and experience.

(5) Bakunin seems to be employing the word hierarchy in its etymological sense of 'priestly government'.

(6) We stated earlier that we understand liberty to be, on the one hand, the fullest possible development of all the natural faculties of each individual and, on the other, his independence vis_a_vis, not the laws of nature and society, but all the laws imposed by other human wills be they collective or individual. (Bakunin's note)