

"We are profoundly convinced that no revolution is possible if the need for it is not felt among the people themselves. No handful of individuals, however energetic and talented, can arouse a popular insurrection if the people themselves through their best representatives do not come to the realisation that they have no other way out of the situation they are dissatisfied with except insurrection. Therefore the task of any revolutionary party is not to call for insurrection but only to prepare the way for the success of the approaching insurrection — that is, to unite the dissatisfied elements, to increase the knowledge of individual units or groups about the aspirations and actions of other such groups, to help the people in defining more clearly the real causes of dissatisfaction, to help them in identifying more clearly their real enemies, stripping the mask from enemies who hide behind some respectable disguise, and, finally, to contribute to the illumination of both the immediate practical ends and the means of putting them into practice. . . ."

**Peter Kropotkin**  
*(from Anarchism and Revolution)*

"I do not wish to defend myself, I do not wish to be defended. I belong completely to the social revolution, and I declare that I accept complete responsibility for all my actions. . . . Do you want to know who are really guilty? It is the politicians. . . . If you let me live, I shall never stop crying for revenge, and I shall avenge my brothers by denouncing the murderers in the Commission for Pardons. . . . I have finished. If you are not cowards, kill me."

**Louise Michel**  
*(at her trial following the suppression  
of the Paris Commune)*

## 2 Fighting the Revolution



**PETER  
KROPOTKIN**



**LOUISE  
MICHEL**

**AND THE  
PARIS  
COMMUNE**

November 1989.

First published in 1971  
Reprinted in 1982 by Freedom Press  
84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1

# Fighting the Revolution

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KROPOTKIN MICHEL PARIS COMMUNE

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The articles printed in this pamphlet were originally published in the early 1970s as part of a series of FREEDOM PRESS anarchist pamphlets. The pieces from *Words of a Rebel* (Paroles d'un Revolte) come from Peter Kropotkin's first political book — a collection of articles from *Le Revolte*, the paper he had founded in Geneva in 1979, and were published in France in 1885 while he was serving a five year prison sentence. The preface by Elisee Reclus was also originally published in October 1885. These articles were translated by Nicholas Walter, who also supplied the notes. The articles by Kropotkin on Anarchism and Revolution are passages from a 20,000 word memorandum which Kropotkin drew up in November 1873 for his comrades in the Russian populist movement.

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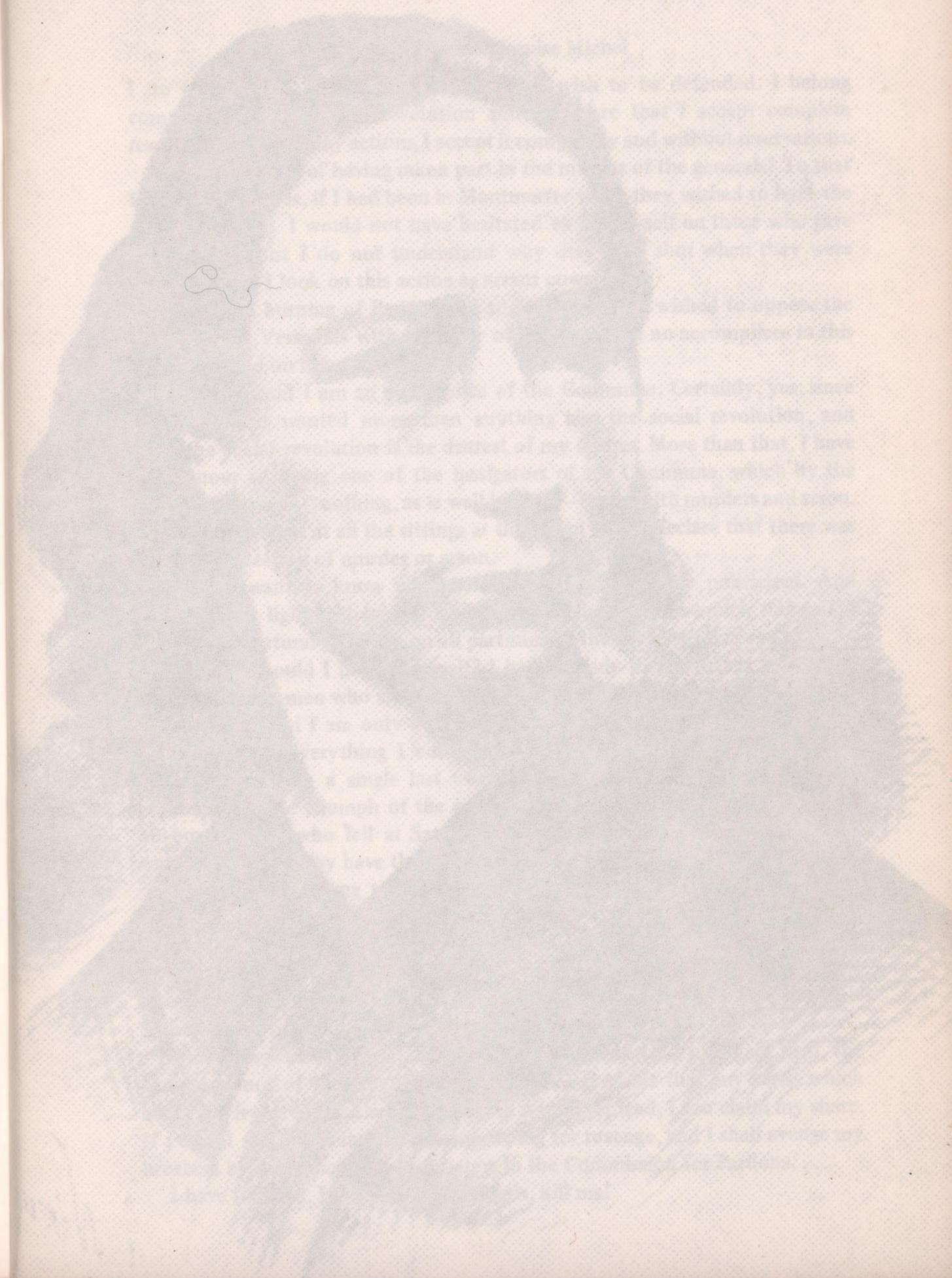
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### The Defence of Louise Michel

I do not wish to defend myself, I do not wish to be defended. I belong completely to the social revolution and I declare that I accept complete responsibility for all my actions. I accept it completely and without reservations.

You accuse me of having taken part in the murder of the generals? To that I would reply Yes, if I had been in Montmartre when they wished to have the people fired on. I would not have hesitated to fire myself on those who gave such orders. But I do not understand why they were shot when they were prisoners, and I look on this action as arrant cowardice.

As for the burning of Paris, yes, I took part in it. I wished to oppose the invader from Versailles with a barrier of flames. I had no accomplices in this action. I acted on my own initiative.

I am told that I am an accomplice of the Commune. Certainly, yes, since the Commune wanted more than anything else the social revolution, and since the social revolution is the dearest of my desires. More than that, I have the honour of being one of the instigators of the Commune, which by the way had nothing — nothing, as is well known — to do with murders and arson. I who was present at all the sittings at the Town Hall, I declare that there was never any question of murder or arson.

Do you want to know who are really guilty? It is the politicians. And perhaps later light will be brought on to all these events which today it is found quite natural to blame on all partisans of the social revolution. . . .

But why should I defend myself? I have already declared that I refuse to do so. You are men who are going to judge me. You sit before me unmasked. You are men and I am only a woman, and yet I look you in the eye. I know quite well that everything I could say will not make the least difference to your sentence. So a single last word before I sit down. We never wanted anything but the triumph of the great principles of the revolution. I swear it on our martyrs who fell at Satory, by our martyrs whom I acclaim loudly, and who will one day have their revenge.

Once more I belong to you. Do with me as you please. Take my life if you wish. I am not the woman to argue with you for a moment. . . .

What I claim from you, you who call yourselves a Council of War, who sit as my judges, who do not disguise yourselves as a Commission of Pardons, you who are military men and deliver your judgement in the sight of all, is Satory where our brothers have already fallen.

I must be cut off from society. You have been told to do so. Well, the Commissioner of the Republic is right. Since it seems that any heart which beats for freedom has the right only to a lump of lead, I too claim my share. If you let me live, I shall never stop crying for revenge, and I shall avenge my brothers by denouncing the murderers in the Commission for Pardons. . . .

I have finished. If you are not cowards, kill me!

# The Paris Commune

The Paris Commune is seldom thought of as having much connection with the anarchist movement. Its connection with the Marxist movement is well known, from Marx's own address *The Civil War in France* written immediately after its fall, through the writings of such figures as Lenin and Trotsky, right down to the work of Marxist scholars and propagandists today. But the Commune was at the time an inspiration for the whole revolutionary socialist movement, and the annual commemoration of the rising of March 18 used to be one occasion in the year when all the groups of the far left were united. Moreover, there are certain aspects of the crisis of 1870-1871 which are open to a specifically anarchist interpretation, though this is scarcely mentioned in the enormous literature on the subject, and there have been important links between the Commune and the anarchist movement from the very beginning.

The closest personal link is represented by Louise Michel, who was not just one of the most active women in the Commune but was also one of the bravest of all its leaders. After agitating in the groups which prepared for the rising of March and fighting on the barricades in the struggle of May, she gave herself up to the authorities to secure the release of her mother, who had been taken as a hostage. At her trial on December 16, 1871, soon after the execution of Ferre, Rossel and Bourgeois at Satory, she caused a sensation by not only not denying her part in the Commune, as so many others did, but deliberately glorying in it, in the speech which opens this FREEDOM Pamphlet — for which Victor Hugo wrote her a poem, *Viro Major* ('Greater than a Man').

Instead of being sentenced to death, as she had demanded, she was transported to New Caledonia in the South Pacific for life. But she never gave up her convictions, as so many others did, and remained active in her exile.

And from her return to France under the amnesty of 1880 to her death in 1905 she remained ceaselessly active in the revolutionary socialist movement, moving rapidly towards anarchism and becoming the most energetic anarchist propagandist of the late nineteenth century — being arrested over and over again (she was imprisoned in 1883-1886, in 1886 and in 1890), even being shot and wounded in 1888 by a lunatic (whom she characteristically not only refused to prosecute but actually tried to save), and finally dying in Marseille in the middle of one of her vast speaking tours and receiving a gigantic funeral in Paris (said to have been the largest since Victor Hugo's in 1885). Her grave next to her mother's in the Levallois-Perret cemetery is still a place of pilgrimage, and there are still anarchist groups in France who take the name of the woman who literally devoted her whole life to the cause of the social revolution — which she identified first with the Paris Commune and then with the anarchist movement. (A full account of her life — *Louise Michel*, by Edith Thomas — has recently been published in English by Black Rose).

A link which is personally more tenuous but politically more significant is that with Bakunin. He was not in Paris at all during the crisis, but he was active in the commune movement of southern France, and took a crucial part in the events at Lyon and Marseille in the autumn of 1870. Moreover, during and immediately after the Paris Commune he wrote the first anarchist attempt to analyse its meaning — especially in *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State* (the first English edition of which was published by CIRA and appeared in *Anarchy* no 5, 1st series).

Thus Bakunin played a small but significant part in the movement which culminated in the Paris Commune; and the Paris Commune played a small but significant part in the final elaboration of his thought. Following the line in the Russian revolutionary tradition laid down by the populists from the 1840s, Bakunin saw the Russian peasant commune (*obshchina*) as the basis of a socialist society, to be realised by a movement involving peasants as well as urban workers. No such movement came into full existence in Russia in his lifetime; but the revolutionary insurrections which broke out in France during 1870-1871 took the form of independent communes in dozens of towns — including Lyon and Marseille where he was himself involved, and above all Paris itself. So it is not surprising that the last stage of Bakuninism (overlying the insurrectionism which ran through it from the barricades of Paris and Dresden in 1848-1849 to the abortive rising of Bologna in 1874) was based on a combination of the Russian peasant commune and the French urban commune — of populism and communalism. And after Bakunin's death in 1876 this position was developed further — especially in Switzerland by refugees from the Paris Commune such as Elisee Reclus, working with refugees from the Russian, Italian and Spanish revolutionary movements — into the theory of anarchist communism, in which the commune played (and a century later still plays) an important part.

There are also personal links with other tendencies in the anarchist movement. One is represented by such Communards as Benoit Malon, Gustav Lefrançais and Jean-Louis Pindy, also refugees in Switzerland who were for a time active as anarchists or near-anarchists, but who later became reformist socialists, especially after returning to France. The same is true of Paul Brousse, a French radical who moved to the left and went into exile as a result of the commune movement and its repression, and became an extremist anarchist — one of the first exponents of the theory of propaganda by deed during the

1870s — but who similarly turned to reformist socialism after 1880 and led the moderate Possibilists in the French socialist movement. (A full account of his political career — *From Anarchism to Reformism* by David Stafford was published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson).

There are even personal links with the terrorist wing of the anarchist movement, which is frequently but mistakenly supposed to have no connection with the wider social movement. Emile Henry, the most intelligent and impressive of the anarchist propagandists by deed in the 1890s — the one who deliberately set out in 1894 to kill people at random, commenting that 'no bourgeois can be innocent' — was the son of a Communard: Fortune Henry, a member of the International who represented the 10th arrondissement on the Commune Council and managed to escape to Spain, being condemned to death in his absence. It seems likely that one of the motives behind this wave of revolutionary terrorism in late nineteenth-century France (which caused about 20 deaths) was the bitter personal memory of the counter-revolutionary terrorism at the end of the Paris Commune (which caused more than 20,000 deaths).

But perhaps the most significant single case is that of someone who did not actually take part in the Paris Commune but who was deeply influenced by it and who mediated its influence on the whole anarchist movement: Peter Kropotkin. In 1871 he was a clever young geographer in Russia, but he became a socialist that year in the shadow of the Commune, and began to turn away from a promising scientific career towards a dangerous political career. In the spring of 1872 he travelled for the first time to Western Europe, and joined the International in Switzerland. At the masonic Temple Unique which was the headquarters of the International in Geneva, he decided to devote his life to the socialist movement; and the circumstances of that decision are particularly significant in the present context. In his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Kropotkin describes the event as follows:

... every revolutionist has had a moment in his life when some circumstance, maybe unimportant in itself, has brought him to pronounce his oath of giving himself to the cause of revolution. I know that moment; I lived through it after one of the meetings at the Temple Unique, when I felt more acutely than ever before how cowardly are the educated men who hesitate to put their education, their knowledge, their energy, at the service of those who are so much in need of that education and that energy. . . .

This is vague enough; but in the material which Kropotkin later added to his *Memoirs* and which has been printed only in the Russian editions published since his death, he gives the date of the meeting as March 18 and the occasion as the celebration of the Paris Commune — so it was in fact at the first anniversary commemoration of the Commune that Kropotkin began the political career which was to last for almost half a century.

When he went on to the Jura and met James Guillaume at Neuchatal in April 1872, he tells us that he also met 'a French communard, who was a compositor', and who described the fall of the Commune while he was setting the type for a novel; Guillaume identified him in his history of the International as Andre Bastelica — a Corsican who was the leading Bakuninist in Marseille and who took part in the risings in both Lyon and Paris. Kropotkin also met Malon, then still close to anarchism. It was in the Jura, of course, that Kropotkin became specifically an anarchist, and when he returned to Russia in May 1872

he began anarchist activity in the Chaikovski Circle, the leading group in the populist movement at that time.

Kropotkin's chief activity in Russia from 1872 to 1874 was as a speaker at meetings of peasants and workers in St Petersburg and Moscow, and the two main subjects of his lectures were the International and the Paris Commune. When he was arrested in St Petersburg in March 1874 his lodgings were searched by the police, and the great majority of the books and pamphlets which they seized were about the Commune (a list, preserved in the state archives, was printed in the edition of his *Diary* published in Russia in 1923). Kropotkin was held in prison without trial from 1874 to 1876, first in the Peter-Paul Fortress, then after March 1876 in the St Petersburg House of Detention where, as he tells us again in his *Memoirs*, by the traditional method of tapping on the walls he was able, among other things, 'to relate to a young neighbour the history of the Paris Commune from the beginning to the end. It took, however, a whole week's tapping'.

In 1876 Kropotkin managed to escape from the St Petersburg prison hospital, and left Russia to live in exile for forty years. In 1877 he went to Switzerland to work in the Jura Federation, and met more Communards, especially Pindy, Lefrancais and Elisee Reclus. There he joined in developing the theory of anarchist communism, which as we have seen derived to a large extent from the experiences and implications of the Commune. In 1877-1878 he was active for a time in Paris, trying to revive the socialist movement there after the eclipse following the destruction of the Commune, and in his *Memoirs* he mentions 'the first commemoration of the Commune in March 1878', when 'we surely were not two hundred'. (According to Jean Maitron, the historian of French anarchism, the Commune had in fact been commemorated in March 1877, but only by private meetings).

In 1879 Kropotkin, who had been contributing to various anarchist papers, began to publish his own, *Le Revolte*; it was then that he started the series of essays which established his reputation as the leading theorist of anarchism, including several on the Paris Commune. Every March he wrote an anniversary article, and the three for 1880, 1881 and 1882 were put together to form a single chapter in his book *Paroles d'un Revolte*, which was made up of essays from *Le Revolte* and published in 1885 while he was in prison in France. (A translation of this chapter is included in this pamphlet).

Other chapters in *Paroles d'un Revolte* include an essay on the modern commune, as distinct from the medieval commune (and, it is now necessary to add, as distinct from the more recent sense too), making use of the experience of the Paris Commune; and also essays on representative and revolutionary government, both emphasising the Commune's error of relying on elected representatives to carry out the work of the social revolution which the people should have carried out themselves. And in the essay on order he took the Paris Commune as the final example of both order and disorder:

Order is the Paris Commune drowned in blood. It is the death of 30,000 men, women and children, cut to pieces by shells, shot down, buried in quicklime beneath the streets of Paris. . . .

Disorder . . . is the people of Paris fighting for a new idea and, when they die in the massacres, leaving to humanity the idea of the free commune, and opening the way for the revolution which we can feel approaching and which will be the Social Revolution.

After he was released from prison in France in 1886, Kropotkin settled in England, where he lived for thirty years. As he says in his *Memoirs*, 'the socialist movement in England was in full swing', and he took an active part in the growing agitation, writing for FREEDOM (which he helped to found in October 1886) and other papers, and speaking at meetings all over the country. One of his particular subjects was still the Paris Commune, and he produced anniversary articles and speeches every March. Thus William Morris, writing about the Commune meeting at South Place on 18 March, 1886, described it as 'a great success, and the place crowded. Kropotkin, new come from prison, spoke, and I made his acquaintance there' (Letter to John Carruthers, 25 March, 1886); and a year later he similarly described the Commune meeting at South Place on March 17 1887: 'We had a fine meeting last night to celebrate the Commune — crowded. Kropotkin spoke in English and very well' (Letter to Bruce Glasier, March 18, 1887). (The latter speech was published in the seventh issue of FREEDOM, April 1887, and would be well worth reprinting.)

At the same time Kropotkin continued to write in the French anarchist press, especially in his old paper, which was now published in Paris and had changed its name to *La Revolte*. Once more his most important essays were collected in a book, *La Conquete du Pain*, a sequel to *Paroles d'un Revolte*, which was published in 1892 and later translated into English as *The Conquest of Bread* (1906). This time there was no chapter specifically about the Paris Commune, but the whole conception of the future society expounded in the book is based on it. As Kropotkin put it in his preface to the second English edition of 1913:

[The Commune] was too short-lived to give any positive result. . . . But the working-classes of the old International saw at once its historical significance. They understood that the free commune would be henceforth the medium in which the ideas of modern socialism may come to realization. . . . These are the ideas to which I have endeavoured to give a more or less definitive expression in this book.

And the same point was made in the prefaces to the Russian editions of *The Conquest of Bread*, and also in the postscript to the last Russian edition of *Paroles d'un Revolte*:

I had in view above all a large urban commune getting rid of the capitalist yoke, especially in Paris, with its working population full of intelligence and possessing, thanks to the lessons of the past, great organising capability.

Kropotkin maintained his interest in the Paris Commune for many years more. In 1892 he wrote a preface for the Russian pamphlet edition of Bakunin's essay on the Commune, which was also included in the French pamphlet edition of the essay in 1899. Then in 1899 he included several references to the Commune in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, repeating the criticisms of the Communards for wasting time and energy on elections and debates in the Commune Council and not for expropriating private property — ie, because they were not anarchist or communist: 'The Commune of Paris was a terrible example of an outbreak with insufficiently determined ideals'.

He returned to the same theme in *Modern Science and Anarchism* (first published in Russian in 1901; an American translation was published in 1903, and an enlarged English translation was published by Freedom Press in 1912). The Paris Commune and other similar risings in France and Spain during

1870-1873 showed 'what the *political* aspect of a Social Revolution ought to be: *the free, independent Communist Commune*'. But once more the anarchist and communist morals were drawn: 'If no central government was needed to rule the independent communes, if the national government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central *municipal* government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the commune'. And at the same time the failure of the communalist risings 'proved once more that the triumph of a popular commune was materially possible without the parallel triumph of the people in the economic field'.

Then in his letters to Max Nettlau of 1901-1902, refuting the claims of individualism and the argument that anarchists should seek allies among bourgeois sympathisers, Kropotkin insisted that it is the masses of the people who fight for liberty and equality against, not with, the bourgeoisie — above all in Paris in 1871. In his preface to the Italian edition of *Paroles d'un Revolte*, he suggested that the defeat of France in 1870 and the fall of the Commune in 1871 together led to the eclipse of revolutionary France and the triumph of militarist Germany in Europe; and in his letter to Gustav Steffen about the First World War (published in FREEDOM, October 1914) he went so far as to suggest that the failure of the Commune had led to the war.

In his writings for the Russian anarchist movement, Kropotkin frequently returned to the subject of the Paris Commune, notably in a series of articles on it in his paper *Listki 'Khleb i Volya'* during 1907 which were immediately reprinted as a pamphlet — *Parizhskaya Kommuna* (1907). This was quite separate from the pamphlet reprinted from *Paroles d'un Revolte*, though they are often confused, but the message was still the same. After the 1917 Revolution, however, Kropotkin seldom mentioned the Paris Commune again, and referred much more often to the Great French Revolution of 1789-1794 during the last years of his life.

But it was in the month after Kropotkin's death — in March 1921 — that Kronstadt rose and fell, and that Alexander Berkman pointed out the irony of the Bolsheviks celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Paris Commune the day after they had destroyed the Kronstadt Commune. By that time the idea of the commune had deeply penetrated the consciousness of the anarchist movement and scarcely needed to be mentioned to be understood. Yet there are times when it should be mentioned. This year (1971) we have commemorated at the same time the hundredth anniversary of the destruction of the Paris Commune by French liberals and the destruction of the Kronstadt Commune by the Russian communists. However many times it is destroyed, and whoever destroys it, the idea of the free city which rises in revolution and abolishes authority and property together cannot be destroyed, and remains one of the basic components of political anarchism. Following the consistent anarchist critique of the Paris Commune over a century, we would not do everything the Communards did or leave undone everything they left undone; but we do feel that we are closer to what they tried to do than either the liberals or the communists who have patronised and misinterpreted them with false praise. For us at least, in the words of the old song, 'the Commune is not dead!'.

# Kropotkin:

## The theory of the State and the practice of the Commune

On March 18, 1871, the people of Paris rose against a despised and detested government, and proclaimed the city independent, free, belonging to itself.

This overthrow of the central power took place without the usual stage effects of revolution, without the firing of guns, without the shedding of blood upon barricades. When the armed people came out into the streets, the rulers fled away, the troops evacuated the town, the civil servants hurriedly retreated to Versailles carrying everything they could with them. The government evaporated like a pond of stagnant water in the spring breeze, and on March 19 the great city of Paris found herself free from the impurity which had defiled her, with the loss of scarcely a drop of her children's blood.

Yet the change thus accomplished began a new era in that long series of revolutions by which the peoples are marching from slavery to freedom. Under the name of the *Paris Commune* a new idea was born, to become the starting point for future revolutions.

As is always the case, this fruitful idea was not the product of some individual's brain, of the conceptions of some philosopher; it was born of the collective spirit, it sprang from the heart of a whole community. But at first it was vague, and many of those who acted upon and gave their lives for it did not look at it in the light in which we see it today; they did not realize the full extent of the revolution they were inaugurating of the fertility of the new principle they were trying to put into practice. It was only after they had begun to apply it that its future significance slowly dawned upon them; it was only afterwards, when the new principle came to be thought out, that it grew definite and precise and was seen in all its clearness, in all its beauty, its justice, and the importance of its results.

From the time that socialism had taken a new leap forward during the five or six years which preceded the Commune, one question above all preoccupied the theoreticians of the approaching social revolution. This was the question of knowing what would be the form of political organization of society most favourable for that great economic revolution which the present development of industry is forcing upon our generation, and which must bring about the abolition of individual property and the taking into common of all the capital accumulated by previous generations.

The International Working Men's Association gave this reply. The organization, it said, must not be confined to a single nation; it must extend over artificial frontiers. And soon this great idea sank into the hearts of the people and took fast hold of their minds. Though it has been hunted down ever since by the united efforts of every kind of reactionary, it is alive nevertheless, and when the voice of the rebellious peoples destroys the obstacles to its development, it will reappear stronger than ever before.

But it still remained to know what should be the component parts of this vast association.

To this question two answers were given, each the expression of a distinct current of thought: one said the *people's state*; the other said *anarchy*.

The German socialists advocated that the state should take possession of all accumulated wealth and give it to workers' associations and, further, should organize production and exchange, and generally watch over the life and activities of society.

To which the socialists of the Latin race, strong in revolutionary experience, replied that it would be a miracle if such a state could ever exist; but if it could, it would surely be the worst of tyrannies. This ideal of the omnipotent and beneficent state is merely a copy from the past, they said; and they opposed it with a new ideal — *an-archy*: that is, the total abolition of the state and social organization from the simple to the complex by means of the free federation of popular forces, of producers and consumers.

It was soon admitted, even by a few 'statists' less imbued with governmental prejudices, that anarchy certainly represents a much better sort of organization than that aimed at by the people's state; but, they said, the anarchist ideal is so far off that just now we cannot trouble about it. On the other hand the anarchist theory lacked a concrete and at the same time simple formula to show plainly its point of departure, to embody its conceptions, and to indicate that it was supported by a tendency actually existing among the people. The federation of workers' unions and consumers' groups extending over frontiers and independent of existing states still seemed too vague; and at the same time it was easy to see that it could not take in the whole diversity of human requirements. A clearer formula was needed, one more easily grasped, one which had a firm foundation in the realities of life.

If the question had merely been how best to elaborate a theory, we should have said that theories, as theories, are not of so much importance. But so long as a new idea has not found a clear, precise form of statement, growing naturally out of things as they actually exist, it does not take hold of men's minds, does not inspire them to enter upon a decisive struggle. The people do not fling themselves into the unknown without some positive and clearly formulated idea to serve them, so to speak, as a springboard at the starting-point.

As for this starting-point, they must be led up to it by life itself.

For five months Paris, isolated by the siege, had drawn on its own livelihood, and had learnt to know the immense economic, intellectual, and moral resources it disposes of; it had caught a glimpse of its strength of initiative and understood what it meant. At the same time it had seen that the chattering gang which had seized power had no idea how to organize either the defence of France or its internal development. It had seen the central government at cross purposes with every manifestation of the intelligence of the great city. It had understood more than that: the powerlessness of any government to guard against great disasters or to smooth the path of rapid revolution. During the siege it had suffered frightful privations, privations of the workers and defenders of the city, alongside the insolent luxury of the idlers, and thanks to the central government it had seen the failure of every attempt to put an end to this scandalous system. Each time that the people wished to take a free leap forward, the government added weight to their chains and tied on a ball, and naturally the idea was born that Paris should set itself up as an independent commune, able to put into practice within its walls what was dictated by the will of the people!

This word, the *Commune*, then came from all lips.

The Commune of 1871 could be nothing but a first attempt. Beginning at the close of a war, hemmed in between two armies ready to join hands and crush the people, it dared not unhesitatingly set forth upon the path of economic revolution; it neither boldly declared itself socialist, nor proceeded with the expropriation of capital or the organization of labour; nor did it even take stock of the general resources of the city. Neither did it break with the tradition of the state, of representative government, and it did not seek to establish within the Commune that organization from the simple to the complex which it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the communes. Yet it is certain that if the Paris Commune had lived a few months longer it would inevitably have been driven by the force of circumstances towards both these revolutions. Let us not forget that the bourgeoisie took four years of a revolutionary period to change a limited monarchy into a bourgeois republic, and we should not be astonished that the people of Paris did not cross with a single bound the space between the anarchist commune and the government of robbers. But let us also bear in mind that the next revolution, which in France and certainly in Spain as well will be communalist, will take up the work of the Paris Commune where it was checked by the massacres of the Versailles army.

The Commune was defeated, and we know how the bourgeoisie avenged itself for the fright the people had given it in shaking off the yoke of their rulers. It proved that there really are two classes in modern society: on one side, the man who works and gives up to the capitalist more than half of what he produces, and passes too easily over the crimes of his masters; on the other, the idler, the well-fed, animated by the instincts of a wild beast, hating his slave, ready to massacre him like game.

After shutting the people of Paris in and blocking up all the exits, they let loose the soldiers, brutalized by barrack life and drink, and told them publicly: 'Kill these wolves and their young!' And they said to the people:

Whatever you do, you shall perish! If you are caught with arms in your hands — *death!* If you lay down your arms — *death!* If you use them —

*death!* If you beg for mercy — *death!* Whichever way you turn, right, left, forward, back, up, down — *death!* You are not merely outside the law, but outside mankind. Neither age nor sex shall save you or yours. You shall die, but first you shall taste the agony of your wife, your sister, your mother, your daughters, your sons, even in the cradle! Before your eyes the wounded man shall be taken out of the ambulance and hacked with bayonets or beaten with rifle-butts. He shall be dragged alive by his broken leg or bleeding arm and flung into the gutter as a groaning, suffering bundle of rubbish.

Death! Death! Death!

And then after this insane orgy over the piles of corpses, after this mass extermination, came the petty yet atrocious vengeance which is still going on — the cat-o'-nine-tails, the thumbscrews, the irons in the ship's hold, the whips and truncheons of the warders, insults, hunger, all the refinements of cruelty.

Will the people forget this hangman's work?

Overthrown, but not conquered, the Commune is reborn today. It is no longer only a dream of the vanquished, caressing in their imagination the lovely mirage of hope; no! the 'Commune' is today becoming the visible and definite aim of the revolution rumbling beneath our feet. The idea is sinking into the masses, it is giving them a rallying cry, and we firmly count on the present generation to bring about *the social revolution within the commune*, to put an end to the ignoble bourgeois exploitation, to rid the people of the tutelage of the state, and to inaugurate in the evolution of the human race a new era of liberty, equality, and solidarity.

## Popular aspirations and popular prejudices in the Commune

Ten years already separate us from the day when the people of Paris, overthrowing the traitor government which had seized power at the downfall of the Empire, set themselves up as a Commune and proclaimed their absolute independence.<sup>2</sup> And yet it is still towards that date of March 18, 1871, that we turn our gaze, it is to it that our best memories are attached; it is the anniversary of that memorable day that the proletariat of both hemispheres intends to celebrate solemnly, and tomorrow night hundreds of thousands of workers' hearts will beat in unison, fraternizing across frontiers and oceans, in Europe, in the United States, in South America, in memory of the rebellion of the Paris proletariat.

The fact is that the idea for which the French proletariat spilt its blood in Paris, and for which it suffered in the swamps of New Caledonia, is one of those ideas which contain a whole revolution in themselves, a broad idea which can cover with the folds of its flag all the revolutionary tendencies of the peoples marching towards their emancipation.

To be sure, if we confined ourselves to observing only the concrete and palpable deeds achieved by the Paris Commune, we would have to say that this idea was not wide enough, that it covered only a very small part of the revolutionary programme. But if on the contrary we observe the spirit which inspired the masses of the people at the time of the movement of March 18, the tendencies which were trying to come to the surface and didn't have time

to enter the realm of reality because, before coming into the open, they were already smothered under the piles of corpses — we shall then understand the whole significance of the movement and the sympathy it arouses within the masses of both hemispheres. The Commune enraptures hearts not by what it did but by what it intended to do one day.

What was the origin of this irresistible force which draws towards the movement of 1871 the sympathy of all the oppressed masses? What idea does the Paris Commune represent? And why is this idea so attractive to the workers of every land, of every nationality?

The answer is easy. The revolution of 1871 was above all a popular one. It was made by the people themselves, it sprang spontaneously from within the masses, and it was among the great mass of the people that it found its defenders, its heroes, its martyrs — and it is exactly for this 'mob' character that the bourgeoisie will never forgive it. And at the same time the moving idea of this revolution — vague, it is true, unconscious perhaps, but nevertheless pronounced and running through all its actions — is the idea of the social revolution, trying at last to establish after so many centuries of struggle real liberty and real equality for all.

It was the revolution of 'the mob' marching forward to conquer its rights.

Attempts have been made, it is true, and are still being made to change the real direction of this revolution and to represent it as a simple attempt to regain the independence of Paris and thus to constitute a little state within France. But nothing can be less true. Paris did not try to isolate itself from France, any more than to conquer it by force of arms; it did not try to shut itself up within its walls like a monk in a cloister; it was not inspired by a narrow parochial spirit. If it claimed its independence, if it wished to prevent the interference of the central power in its affairs, it was because it saw in that independence a means of quietly working out the bases of future organization and bringing about within itself a social revolution — a revolution which would have completely transformed the whole system of production and exchange by basing them on justice, which would have completely modified human relations by putting them on a footing of equality, and which would have remade the morality of our society by giving it a basis in the principles of equity and solidarity.

Communal independence was then but a means for the people of Paris, and the social revolution was their end.

This end would have certainly been attained if the revolution of March 18 had been able to take its natural course, if the people of Paris had not been slashed, stabbed, shot and disembowelled by the murderers of Versailles. To find a clear and precise idea, comprehensible to everyone and summing up in a few words what had to be done to bring about the revolution — such was indeed the preoccupation of the people of Paris from the earliest days of their independence. But a great idea does not germinate in a day, however rapid the elaboration and propagation of ideas during revolutionary periods. It always needs a certain time to develop, to spread throughout the masses, and to translate itself into action, and the Paris Commune lacked this time.

It lacked more than this, because ten years ago the ideas of modern socialism were themselves passing through a period of transition. The Commune was born so to speak between two eras in the development of

modern socialism. In 1871 the authoritarian, governmental, and more or less religious communism of 1848 no longer had any hold over the practical and libertarian minds of our era. Where could you find today a Parisian who would agree to shut himself up in a Phalansterian barracks? On the other hand the collectivism which wished to yoke together the wage system and collective property remained incomprehensible, unattractive, and bristling with difficulties in its practical application. And free communism, anarchist communism, was scarcely dawning; it scarcely ventured to provoke the attacks of the worshippers of governmentalism.

Minds were undecided, and the socialists themselves didn't feel bold enough to begin the demolition of individual property, having no definite end in view. Then they let themselves be fooled by the argument which humbugs have repeated for centuries: 'Let us first make sure of victory; after that we shall see what can be done.'

First make sure of victory! As if there were any way of forming a free commune so long as you don't touch property! As if there were any way of defeating the enemy so long as the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, by seeing that it will bring material, intellectual, and moral well-being for everyone! They tried to consolidate the Commune first and put off the social revolution until later, whereas the only way to proceed was *to consolidate the Commune by means of the social revolution!*

The same thing happened with the principle of government. By proclaiming the free commune, the people of Paris were proclaiming an essentially anarchist principle; but, since the idea of anarchism had at that time only faintly dawned in men's minds, it was checked half-way, and within the Commune people decided in favour of the old principle of authority, giving themselves a Commune Council, copied from the municipal councils.

If indeed we admit that a central government is absolutely useless to regulate the relations of communes between themselves, why should we admit its necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups which make up the commune? And if we leave to the free initiative of the communes the business of coming to a common understanding with regard to enterprises concerning several cities at once, why refuse this same initiative to the groups composing a commune? There is no more reason for a government inside a commune than for a government above the commune.

But in 1871 the people of Paris, who have overthrown so many governments, were making only their first attempt to rebel against the governmental system itself; so they let themselves be carried away by governmental fetishism and gave themselves a government. The consequences of that are known. The people sent their devoted sons to the town hall. There, immobilized, in the midst of paperwork, forced to rule when their instincts prompted them to be and to move among the people, forced to discuss when it was necessary to act, and losing the inspiration which comes from continual contact with the masses, they found themselves reduced to impotence. Paralysed by their removal from the revolutionary source, the people, they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.

Born during a period of transition, at a time when the ideas of socialism and authority were undergoing a profound modification; emerging from a

war, in an isolated centre, under the guns of the Prussians, the Paris Commune was bound to perish.

But by its eminently popular character it began a new era in the series of revolutions, and through its ideas it was the precursor of a great social revolution. The unheard of, cowardly, and ferocious massacres with which the bourgeoisie celebrated its fall, the mean vengeance which the torturers have perpetrated on their prisoners for nine years, these cannibalistic orgies have opened up between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat a chasm which will never be filled. At the time of the next revolution, the people will know what has to be done; they will know what awaits them if they don't gain a decisive victory, and they will act accordingly.

Indeed we now know that on the day when France bristles with insurgent communes, the people must no longer give themselves a government and expect that government to initiate revolutionary measures. When they have made a clean sweep of the parasites who devour them, they will themselves take possession of all social wealth so as to put it into common according to the principles of anarchist communism. And when they have entirely abolished property, government, and the state, they will form themselves freely according to the necessities dictated to them by life itself. Breaking its chains and overthrowing its idols, mankind will march towards a better future, no longer knowing either masters or slaves, keeping its veneration only for the noble martyrs who paid with their blood and sufferings for those first attempts at emancipation which have lighted our way in our march towards the conquest of freedom.

### From the Paris Commune to anarchist communism

The celebrations and public meetings organized on March 18 in all the towns where there are socialist groups deserve all our attention, not merely because they are a demonstration of the army of the proletariat, but more as an expression of the feelings which inspire the socialists of both hemispheres. They are 'polled' in this way better than by all imaginable methods of voting, and they formulate their aspirations in full freedom, without letting themselves be influenced by electoral tactics.

Indeed the proletarians meeting on this day no longer confine themselves to praising the heroism of the Paris proletariat, or to calling for vengeance for the May massacres. While refreshing themselves with the memory of the heroic struggle in Paris, they have gone further. They are discussing what lessons for the next revolution must be drawn from the Commune of 1871; they are asking what the mistakes of the Commune were, not to criticize the men who made them, but to bring out how the prejudices about property and authority, which were at that time prevalent in the workers' organizations, prevented the revolutionary idea from coming to light, being developed, and illuminating the whole world with its life-giving light.

The lesson of 1871 has benefited the proletariat of the whole world, and, breaking with their old prejudices, the proletarians have said clearly and simply what they understand *their* revolution to be.

It is certain from now on that the next rising of communes will not be merely a *communalist* movement. Those who still think that it is necessary to establish the independent commune and then within this commune attempt to carry out economic reforms are being left behind by the development of the popular mind. It is through revolutionary socialist actions, abolishing individual property, that the communes of the next revolution will assert and establish their independence.

On the day when, as a result of the development of the revolutionary situation, governments are swept away by the people, and the camp of the bourgeoisie, which is maintained only by the protection of the state, is thrown into disorder — on that day (and it is not far off), the insurgent people will not wait until some government decrees in its amazing wisdom some economic reforms. They will themselves abolish individual property by a violent expropriation, taking possession in the name of the whole people of all the social wealth accumulated by the labour of the previous generations. They will not confine themselves to expropriating the holders of social capital by a decree which would remain a dead letter; they will take possession of it on the spot and will establish their rights by making use of it without delay. They will organize themselves in the factories to keep them working; they will exchange their hovels for salubrious dwellings in the houses of the bourgeoisie; they will organize themselves to make immediate use of all the wealth stored up in the towns; they will take possession of it as if it had never been stolen from them by the bourgeoisie. Once the industrial baron who deducts profits from the worker has been evicted, production will continue, shaking off the restraints which obstruct it, abolishing the speculations which kill it and the muddle which disorganizes it, and transforming itself according to the needs of the moment under the impulse which will be given to it by free labour. 'People never worked in France as they did in 1793, after the land was snatched from the hands of the nobles,' says Michelet. People have never worked as they will on the day when work has become free, when every advance by the worker will be a source of well-being for the whole commune.

On the subject of social wealth, an attempt has been made to establish a distinction between two kinds, and has even managed to divide the socialist party over this distinction. The school which today is called *collectivist*, substituting for the collectivism of the old International (which was only anti-authoritarian communism) a sort of doctrinaire collectivism, has tried to establish a distinction between capital which is used for production and wealth which is used to supply the necessities of life. Machinery, factories, raw materials, means of communication, and land on one side; and homes, manufactured goods, clothing, foodstuffs on the other. The former becoming collective property; the latter intended, according to the learned representatives of this school, to remain individual property.

An attempt has been made to establish this distinction. But the good sense of the people has quickly got the better of it. They have realized that this distinction is illusory and impossible to establish. Unsound in theory, it fails before the reality of life. The workers have realized that the house which shelters us, the coal and gas which we burn, the nourishment which the human machine burns to maintain life, the clothing which man covers himself with to protect his existence, the book which he reads for instruction,

even the pleasure which he gets, are so many integral parts of his existence, are just as necessary for the success of production and for the progressive development of mankind as machines, factories, raw materials and other media of production. They have realized that to maintain individual property for this kind of wealth would be to maintain inequality, oppression, exploitation, to paralyse in advance the results of partial expropriation. Leaping the hurdles put in their way by theoretical collectivism, they are going straight for the simplest and most practical form of anti-authoritarian communism.

In fact in their meetings the proletarians are clearly asserting their right to all social wealth and the necessity of abolishing individual property as much in consumer goods as in those for further production. 'On the day of the revolution, we shall seize *all* wealth, *all* goods stored up in the towns, and we shall put them in common,' say the spokesmen of the working masses, and the audiences confirm this by their unanimous approval.

'Let each person take from the store what he needs, and we may be sure that in the warehouses of our towns there will be enough food to feed everyone until the day when free production makes a new start. In the shops of our towns there are enough clothes to clothe everyone, stored there unsold, next to general poverty. There are even enough luxury goods for everyone to choose according to taste.'

That — judging by what is said at the meetings — is how the proletarian mass imagines the revolution: the immediate introduction of anarchist communism, and the free organization of production. These two points are settled, and in this respect the communes of the revolution which is knocking on the door will no longer repeat the errors of their forerunners which by shedding their blood so generously have cleared the way for the future.

The same agreement has not yet been reached — though it is not far away — on another point, no less important, on the question of *government*.

It is known that there are two schools of thought face to face, completely divided on this question. 'It is necessary,' says one, 'on the very day of the revolution to set up a government to take power. This strong, powerful and resolute government will *make* the revolution by decreeing this and that and by imposing obedience to its decrees.'

'A sad delusion!' says the other. 'Every central government, taking it on itself to rule a nation, being formed inevitably from disparate elements and being conservative by virtue of its governmental essence, would only be a hindrance to the revolution. It would only obstruct the revolution in the communes ready to go ahead, without being able to inspire backward communes with the spirit of revolution. The same within a commune in revolt. Either the commune government will only sanction things already done, and then it will be a useless and dangerous mechanism; or else it will want to take the lead: it will make rules for what has still to be worked out freely by the people themselves if it is to be viable; it will apply theories where the whole of society must work out new forms of common life with that creative force which arises in the social organism when it breaks its chains and sees new and wider horizons opening up in front of it. The men in power will obstruct this enthusiasm, without carrying out any of the things which they would have been capable of themselves if they had remained within the people, working out the new organization with them instead of

shutting themselves up in government ministries and wearing themselves out in idle debates. A government will be a hindrance and a danger; powerless to do good, full of strength to do evil; so what is the point of it?'

However natural and correct this argument is, it nevertheless runs up against age-old prejudices stored up and given credit by those who have had an interest in maintaining the religion of government side by side with the religion of property and the religion of god.

This prejudice — the last of the series, God, Property, Government — still exists and is a danger to the next revolution. But it can already be stated that it is in decline. 'We shall manage our business ourselves, without waiting for orders from a government, and we shall take no notice of those who try to force themselves on us as priests, proprietors, or government,' the proletarians are already saying. So it is to be hoped that if the anarchist party continues to struggle vigorously against the religion of governmentalism, and if it does not itself stray from the path by letting itself be drawn into struggles for power — it is to be hoped, we say, that in the few years which still remain to us before the revolution the governmental prejudice will be shaken sufficiently not to be able any more to draw the proletarian masses into a false road.

There is however a regrettable omission in the popular meetings which we want to point out. This is that nothing, or almost nothing, is done about the countryside. Everything is confined to the towns. The countryside might not exist for the workers in the towns. Even the speakers who talk about the character of the next revolution avoid mentioning the countryside and the land. They do not know the peasant or his desires, and they don't venture to speak in his name. Is it necessary to insist at length on the danger arising from this? The emancipation of the proletariat will not be even possible so long as the revolutionary movement does not include the villages. The insurgent communes will not be able to hold out for even a year if the insurrection is not at the same time spread in the villages. When taxes, mortgages and rents are abolished, when the institutions which levy them are scattered to the four winds, it is certain that the villages will understand the advantages of this revolution. But in any case it would be unwise to count on the diffusion of the revolutionary idea from the towns into the countryside without preparing ideas in advance. It is necessary to know here and now what the peasant wants, how the revolution in the villages is to be understood, how the thorny question of property in land is to be resolved. It is necessary to say to the peasant in advance what the town proletarian and his allies propose to do, that he has nothing to fear from the measures which will be harmful to the landowner. It is necessary that on his side the town worker gets used to respecting the peasant and to working in agreement with him.

But for this the workers must take on *the task of spreading propaganda in the villages*. It is important that in each town there should be a small special organization, a branch of the Land League, for propaganda among the peasants. It is necessary that this kind of propaganda should be considered as a duty under the same heading as propaganda in the industrial centres.

The beginning will be difficult; but let us remember that the success of the revolution is at stake. It will only be victorious on the day when the factory worker and the field labourer proceed hand in hand to the conquest of equality for all, bringing happiness to the country cottage as well as to the building of the large industrial areas.



# From Words of a Rebel

## Preface

For two and a half years Peter Kropotkin has been in prison, cut off from the society of his fellow-men. His punishment is hard, but the silence imposed on him concerning the things he cares about most is much harder: his imprisonment would be less oppressive if he were not gagged. Months and years may perhaps pass before the use of speech is restored to him and he can resume interrupted conversations with his comrades.

The period of forced seclusion which our friend has to undergo will certainly not be wasted, but it seems very long to us! Life quickly goes by, and we sadly watch the weeks and months running out when this voice — so proud and honest among the rest — cannot be heard at all. In its place, how many common-places will be repeated to us, how many lying words will afflict us, how many biased half-truths will ring about our ears! We long to hear one of those sincere and forthright tongues which boldly proclaim the truth.

But if the prisoner of Clairvaux no longer has the freedom to speak to his comrades from the depths of his cell, they can at least remember their friend and recall the words he spoke before. This is a task which I am able to perform, and I have devoted myself to it with pleasure. The articles which Kropotkin wrote from 1879 to 1882 in the 'anarchist' paper *Le Revolte* seemed to me ideal for publication in book form, especially because they did not run after chance events but followed a logical order. The vigour of the thought gave them the necessary unity. Faithful to the scientific method, the author first explains the general situations of society, with its scandals and defects, its elements of discord and war; he studies the evidence of collapse shown by the states, and shows us the cracks opening in their ruins. Then he pushes the experience offered by contemporary history in the direction of anarchic

evolution, indicates its exact significance, and draws the lessons which it teaches. Finally in the chapter 'Expropriation', he sums up his ideas, which derive from both observation and experience, and appeals to men of good will who want not just to know, but also to act.

I do not wish to sing the author's praises here. He is my friend, and if I said all the nice things I think about him I might be suspected of blindness or accused of partiality. It would be enough for me to report the opinion of his judges, even his jailers. Among those who have observed his life, from far or near, there is no one who does not respect him, who does not bear witness to his high intelligence and to his heart which overflows with kindness, no one who does not acknowledge him to be truly noble and pure. Anyway, is it not because of these very qualities that he has known exile and imprisonment? His crime is to love the poor and weak; his offence is to have pleaded their cause. Public opinion is unanimous in respecting this man, and yet it is not at all surprised to see the prison gates closing remorselessly on him, so that it seems natural that superiority has to be paid for and devotion has to be accompanied by suffering. It is impossible to see Kropotkin in the prison yard and to exchange greetings with him without wondering: 'And what about me, why am I free? Could it be perhaps because I am not good enough?'

However, the readers of this book should pay less attention to the personality of the author than to the value of the ideas he expresses. These ideas I recommend with confidence to honest people who do not make up their minds about a work before opening it, or about an opinion before hearing it. Clear away all your prejudices, try to stand aside temporarily from your interests, and read these pages simply looking for the truth without bothering for the time being about its application. The author asks only one thing of you — to share for a moment his ideal, the happiness of all, not just of a few privileged people. If this desire, however fleeting it may be, is really sincere, and not just a mere whim of your fancy, an image passing before your eyes, it is probable that you will soon agree with the writer. If you share his yearnings you will understand his words. But you know in advance that these ideas will bring you no honour; they will never be rewarded with a well-paid position; they may well bring you instead the distrust of your former friends or some cruel blow from your superiors. If you seek justice, you can expect to suffer injustice.

At the time when this work is being published, France is in the middle of an electoral crisis. I am not so naive as to recommend the candidates to read this book — they have other 'duties' to perform — but I do invite the electors to take a look at *Words of a Rebel*, and I would particularly draw their attention to the chapter called 'Representative Government'. There they will see how far their confidence will be justified in these men who are springing up on all sides to solicit the honour of representing their fellow-citizens in Parliament. At the moment all is well. The candidates are omniscient and infallible — but what about the deputies? When they at last receive their share of the kingdom, will they not be fatally afflicted by the dizziness of power and, like kings, be deprived of all wisdom and all virtue? If they decided to keep all those promises which they made so lavishly, how would they maintain their dignity in the midst of a crowd of petitioners and advisers? Even supposing that they went into Parliament with good intentions, how could they emerge without being corrupted? Under the influence of that atmosphere of intrigue, they can be seen turning from left to right, as if they

were impelled by an automatic mechanism — clockwork figures who come out looking proud and strike noisily in front of the clock face, then soon afterwards go round and disappear pathetically into the works.

Choosing new masters is no solution at all. It is we anarchists, enemies of Christianity, who have to remind a whole society which claims to be Christian of these words of the man whom they have made a God: 'Call no man Master, Master'. Let each man remain his own master. Do not go to the offices of bureaucrats, or the noisy chambers of parliaments, in the vain hope for the words of freedom. Listen rather to the voices which come from below, even if they come through the bars of the prison cell.

*Elisee Reclus 1885*

## Peter Kropotkin

### On Order

We are often reproached for accepting as a label this word *anarchy*, which frightens many people so much. 'Your ideas are excellent', we are told, 'but you must admit that the name of your party is an unfortunate choice. Anarchy in common language is synonymous with disorder and chaos; the word brings to mind the idea of interests clashing, of individuals struggling, which cannot lead to the establishment of harmony'.

Let us begin by pointing out that a party devoted to action, a party representing a new tendency, seldom has the opportunity of choosing a name for itself. It was not the *Beggars* of Brabant who made up their name, which later became so popular. But, beginning as a nickname — and a well-chosen one — it was taken up by the party, accepted generally, and soon became its proud title. It will also be seen that this word summed up a whole idea.

And the *Sans-culottes* of 1793? It was the enemies of the popular revolution who coined this name; but it too summed up a whole idea — that of the rebellion of the people, dressed in rage, tired of poverty, opposed to all those royalists, the so-called patriots and Jacobins, the well-dressed and the smart, those who, despite their pompous speeches and the homage paid to them by bourgeois historians, were the real enemies of the people, profoundly despising them for their poverty, for their libertarian and egalitarian spirit, and for their revolutionary enthusiasm.

It was the same with the name of the *Nihilists*, which puzzled journalists so much and led to so much playing with words, good and bad, until it was understood to refer not to a peculiar — almost religious — sect, but to a real revolutionary force. Coined by Turgenev in his novel *Fathers and Sons*, it was adopted by the 'fathers', who used the nickname to take revenge for the disobedience of the 'sons'. But the sons accepted it and, when they later realised that it gave rise to misunderstanding and tried to get rid of it, this was impossible. The press and the public would not describe the Russian revolutionaries by any other name. Anyway the name was by no means badly chosen, for again it summed up an idea; it expresses the negation of the whole of the activity of present civilisation, based on the oppression of one class by another — the negation of the present economic system, the negation of government and power, of bourgeois politics, of routine knowledge, of bourgeois morality, of art for the sake of the exploiters, of fashions and manners which are grotesque or revoltingly hypocritical, of all that present society has inherited from past centuries: in a word, the negation of everything which bourgeois civilisation today treats with reverence.

It was the same with the anarchists. When a party emerged within the International which denied authority in the Association and also rebelled against authority in all its forms, this party at first called itself *federalist*, then *anti-statist* or *anti-authoritarian*. At that period they actually avoided using the name *anarchist*. The word *an-archy* (that is how it was written then) seemed to identify the party too closely with the Proudhonists, whose ideas about economic reform were at that time opposed by the International. But it was precisely because of this — to cause confusion — that its enemies decided to make use of this name; after all, it made it possible to say that the very name of the anarchist proved that their only ambition was to create disorder and chaos without caring about the result.

The anarchist party quickly accepted the name it had been given. At first it insisted on the hyphen between *an* and *archy*, explaining that in this form the word *an-archy* — which comes from the Greek — means 'no authority' and not 'disorder'; but it soon accepted the word as it was, and stopped giving extra work to proof readers and Greek lessons to the public.

So the word returned to its basic, normal, common meaning, as expressed in 1816 by the English philosopher Bentham, in the following terms: 'The philosopher who wishes to reform a bad law', he said, 'does not preach insurrection against it. . . . The character of the anarchist is quite different. He denies the existence of the law, he rejects its validity, he incites men to refuse to recognise it as law and to rise up against its execution'. The sense of the word has become wider today: the anarchist denies not just existing laws, but all established power, all authority; however its essence has remained the same: it rebels — and this is what it starts from — against power and authority in any form.

But, we are told, this word brings to mind the negation of order, and consequently the idea of disorder, of chaos.

Let us however make sure we understand one another — what order are we talking about? Is it the harmony which we anarchists dream of, the harmony in human relations which will be established freely when humanity ceases to be divided into two classes, of which one is sacrificed for the benefit of the other, the harmony which will emerge spontaneously from the unity of interests when all men belong to one and the same family, when each

works for the good of all and all for the good of each? Obviously not! Those who accuse anarchy of being the negation of order are not talking about this harmony of the future; they are talking about order as it is thought of in our present society. So let us see what this order in which anarchy wishes to destroy.

Order today — what *they* mean by order — is nine-tenths of mankind working to provide luxury, pleasure and the satisfaction of the most disgusting passions for a handful of idlers.

Order is nine-tenths being deprived of everything which is a necessary condition for a decent life, for the reasonable development of intellectual faculties. To reduce nine-tenths of mankind to the state of beast of burden living from day to day, without ever daring to think of the pleasures provided for man by scientific study and artistic creation — that is order!

Order is poverty and famine become the normal state of society. It is the Irish peasant dying of starvation; it is the peasants of a third of Russia dying of diphtheria and typhus, and of hunger following scarcity — at a time when stored grain is sent abroad. It is the people of Italy reduced to abandoning their fertile countryside and wandering across Europe looking for tunnels to dig, where they risk being buried after existing for only a few months or so. It is the land taken away from the peasant to raise animals to feed the rich; it is the land left fallow rather than being restored to those who ask nothing more than to cultivate it.

Order is the woman selling herself to feed her children, it is the child reduced to being shut up in a factory or to dying of starvation, it is the worker reduced to the state of a machine. It is the spectre of the worker rising against the rich, the spectre of the people rising against the government.

Order is an infinitesimal minority raised to positions of power, which for this reason imposes itself on the majority and which raises children to occupy the same positions later so as to maintain the same privileges by trickery, corruption, violence and butchery.

Order is the continuous warfare of man against man, trade against trade, class against class, country against country. It is the cannon whose roar never ceases in Europe, it is the countryside laid waste, the sacrifice of whole generations on the battlefield, the destruction in a single year of the wealth built up by centuries of hard work.

Order is slavery, thought in chains, the degradation of the human race maintained by sword and lash. It is the sudden death by explosion or the slow death by suffocation of hundreds of miners who are blown up or buried every year by the greed of the bosses — and shot or bayoneted as soon as they dare complain.

Finally, order is the Paris Commune drowned in blood. It is the death of thirty thousand men, women and children, cut to pieces by shells, shot down, buried in quicklime beneath the streets of Paris. It is the face of the youth of Russia, locked in the prisons, buried in the snows of Siberia, and — in the case of the best, the purest, and the most devoted — strangled in the hangman's noose.

*That is order!*

And disorder — what *they* call disorder?

It is the rising of the people against this shameful order, bursting their bonds, shattering their fetters and moving towards a better future. It is the most glorious deeds in the history of humanity.

It is the rebellion of thought on the eve of revolution; it is the upsetting of hypotheses sanctioned by unchanging centuries; it is the breaking of a flood of new ideas, of daring inventions, it is the solution of scientific problems.

Disorder is the abolition of ancient slavery, it is the rise of the communes, the abolition of feudal serfdom, the attempts at the abolition of economic serfdom.

Disorder is peasant revolts against priests and landowners, burning castles to make room for cottages, leaving the hovels to take their place in the sun. It is France abolishing the monarchy and dealing a mortal blow at serfdom in the whole of Western Europe.

Disorder is 1848 making kings tremble, and proclaiming the right to work. It is the people of Paris fighting for a new idea and, when they die in the massacres, leaving to humanity the idea of the free commune, and opening the way towards this revolution which we can feel approaching and which will be the Social Revolution.

Disorder — what *they* call disorder — is periods during which whole generations keep up a ceaseless struggle and sacrifice themselves to prepare humanity for a better existence, in getting rid of past slavery. It is periods during which the popular genius takes free flight and in a few years makes gigantic advances without which man would have remained in the state of an ancient slave, a creeping thing, degraded by poverty.

Disorder is the breaking out of the finest passions and the greatest sacrifices, it is the epic of the supreme love of humanity!

The word *anarchy*, implying the negation of this order and invoking the memory of the finest moments in the lives of peoples — is it not well chosen for a party which is moving towards the conquest of a better future?

## The Situation

It is certain that we are marching with great strides towards revolution, towards an upheaval which, breaking out in one country, will spread as in 1848 into all the neighbouring countries and, shaking present society to its foundations, will end by renewing the sources of life.

To be confirmed in this idea we do not even need to invoke the testimony of a celebrated German historian or of a well known Italian philosopher, both of whom, after investigating modern history, have come to the conclusion of the inevitability of a great revolution towards the end of this century. We only need to observe the picture which has been unfolded before our eyes during the last twenty years; we need only to look at what is happening around us.

We can state then that two dominant facts emerge from the gloomy background of the canvas: the awakening of the peoples, alongside the moral, intellectual and economic bankruptcy of the leisured classes to prevent this awakening. Yes, the awakening of the peoples.

In the stifling factory, as in the dark kitchen, in the storehouse, as in the dripping mine-shaft, a whole new world is today being worked out. Among those dark masses — whom the bourgeoisie despises as much as it fears them,

but from whom has always come the breath which inspired the great reformers — among them the most difficult problems of political economy and of social organisation have been posed, have been discussed, and have received new solutions dictated by the feeling of justice. The wounds of present society are being lanced to the quick. New aspirations are being produced, new conceptions being sketched out.

Opinions intersect and diverge to infinity; but two main ideas are already sounding more and more distinctly through the clamour of voices: the abolition of personal property, or communism, on one hand; and on the other, the abolition of the state, the free commune, the international union of working people. The two paths converge towards the same goal — *equality*. Not that hypothetical formula for equality inscribed by the bourgeoisie on its banners and in its codes so as to enslave the producer more effectively; but real equality — land, capital, and work for all.

The ruling classes have tried to stifle these aspirations in vain. In vain they have imprisoned men and suppressed writings. The new idea is penetrating men's minds and filling men's hearts, as once the dream of a free rich land in the East filled the hearts of the serfs when they flocked to the ranks of the Crusaders. The idea may slumber for a time; if it is prevented from reaching the surface it can burrow underground; but this will be in order to reappear soon, more vigorous than ever. Look only at the reawakening of socialism in France, this second awakening in the short space of fifteen years. The wave which falls one moment rises yet higher the next. And from the time that the first attempt to put the new idea into practice was made, the idea arose in the sight of everyone in all its simplicity, with all its virtues. Only a single successful attempt — and the consciousness of their strength will give the people a heroic inspiration.

That moment cannot be delayed for long. Everything is bringing it nearer: poverty itself, which forces the unfortunate to consider their situation, and even unemployment, which tears thinking people from the narrow confines of the workshop and throws them into the streets, where they learn to know the vices and at the same time the weaknesses of the ruling classes.

And in the meantime what are they doing, these ruling classes? While the natural sciences are taking a leap forward which is reminiscent of the last century at the approach of the great revolution; while daring inventors every day are opening up new horizons in man's struggle against the hostile forces of nature — bourgeois social science remains silent: it is chewing over its old theories.

Are they perhaps progressing, these ruling classes, in practical life? Far from it. They are obstinately determined to wave their tattered flags, to defend egoistic individualism, the competition of man with man and of nation with nation, the omnipotence of the centralising state.

They move from protectionism to free trade, and from free trade to protectionism, from reaction to liberalism and from liberalism to reaction; from atheism to superstition and from superstition to atheism. Always fearful, always looking backwards at the past, always more and more incapable of putting into practice anything that can last.

Everything that they have done has been a flat contradiction of what they had promised.

They had promised, these ruling classes, to guarantee freedom of work — and they have made us slaves of the factory, the boss, the overseer. They undertook

to organise industry and guarantee our standard of living — and they have given us endless crises and poverty; they promised us education — and have made it impossible for us to educate ourselves; they promised us political liberty — and have dragged us from reaction; they promised us peace — and have brought war, war without end. They have broken all their promises.

But the people are sick and tired; they are wondering what has become of them, after letting themselves be fooled and ruled by the bourgeoisie for so long.

The answer is to be found in the present economic situation of Europe.

The crisis, previously a temporary disaster, had become chronic. Crisis in cotton, crisis in metal, crisis in watchmaking — all the crisis are now breaking out at the same time, and are becoming a permanent feature.

One can count in millions the number of people without work at the present time in Europe; and in tens of thousands the number of those who tramp from town to town begging, or rioting to demand with threats 'Work or bread!' Just as the peasants of 1787 tramped the roads in thousands without being able to find in the rich land of France, which has been monopolised by the aristocrats, a patch to cultivate or a tool to till it with — so today the worker is empty handed and cannot get hold of the raw material or the instruments of labour which are necessary to work it but which are monopolised by a handful of idlers.

Great industries are killed stone dead, great towns like Sheffield are depopulated. Poverty in England — England above all, for it is there that the 'economists' have put their principles into practice most completely; poverty in Alsace; famine in Spain and Italy. Unemployment everywhere; and with unemployment comes need, or rather poverty — pale-faced children, women aged another five years by the end of a single winter; disease cutting down the workers in great sweeps — that is what has become of us under the present system.

And then they talk to us of overproduction! Overproduction? When the miner who piles up mountains of coal cannot treat himself to a fire in the harshest winter? When the weaver who weaves miles of cloth has to refuse his ragged children a shirt? When the bricklayer who builds a palace lives in a hovel, and the seamstress who makes the finest dressed dolls has only a worn shawl to protect her against the elements?

Is that what is called the organisation of industry? It would be better to call it the secret alliance of the capitalists to subdue the workers by hunger.

Capital, this product of the labour of the human species, accumulated in the hands of a few, runs away from agriculture and industry — we are told — for lack of security.

But where then is it to go when it emerges from the safes? Good Heavens! there are more profitable investments! It will go to furnish the Sultan's harems; it will go to foment wars, to support Russian against Turk and, at the same time, Turk against Russian.

Or yet again, it will go one day to found a company of shareholders, not to produce anything in particular, but simply to lead in two years to a scandalous liquidation, as soon as the big shots who promoted the company have retired, taking with them the millions which count as a fair return for floating the scheme.

Or perhaps this capital will go to build useless railways, at St Gotthard, in Japan — in the Sahara if necessary — provided that the Rothschild backers,

the chief engineer and the contractor each get a few million out of it.

But above all, capital will be thrown into speculation — the great game on the stock exchange. The capitalist will speculate on an artificial rise in the price of corn or cotton; he will speculate on politics, on the rise produced as a consequence of some rumour of a reform or some diplomatic note; and very often — as we see every day — it will be members of the government itself who will plunge into these speculations.

Speculation killing industry — that is what they call intelligent management of business! That is why — as they tell us — we must maintain them!

In short the economic chaos is at its peak. However, this chaos cannot last much longer. The people are sick and tired of suffering these crisis, provoked by the greed of the ruling classes: they would like to live by their work, and not by the suffering years of poverty, seasoned with humiliating charity, for two or three years of exhausting work, sometimes more or less secure, but always very badly rewarded.

The worker notices the incapacity of the ruling classes — the incapacity of understanding new aspirations; the incapacity of managing industry; the incapacity of organising production and exchange.

The people will soon proclaim the downfall of the bourgeoisie. They will take matters into their own hands, as soon as the right moment appears.

This moment will not be long delayed, because of the very disease which consumes industry, and its arrival will be hastened by the decomposition of the states, the galloping decomposition which is taking place in our time.

## Politics and Socialism

It was in 1871 — immediately after the defeat of France by the Germans, and of the Paris proletarians by the French middle classes — that a conference of the International Working Men's Association, secretly convoked by Marx and Engels, instead of the usual Congress, and the composition of which had been cleverly manipulated for the purpose, met in London. This conference decided that the Working Men's Association, which had hitherto been a revolutionary association for the International organisation of the struggle of labour against capitalism, should become henceforward a series of national organisations for running Social-Democratic candidates in the different Parliaments.

Thirty years have passed since this step was taken. And we can fully appreciate by this time the results of the new tactics.

The main argument in favour of it was that the working men were not prepared to accept the ideas of Socialism: that consequently a long preparatory period was required in order to spread these ideas; and that — to say nothing of the prestige of Members of Parliament — periods of elections, when everyone's interest in public affairs is awakened, are the best moments for spreading Socialist ideas.

To this the working men, especially those of France and Spain, replied that the International Working Men's Association, such as it was, had already been excellent for the propaganda of Socialism. In less than three years it had awakened the conscience of the workers' interests all over Europe; it had

done more for the theoretical elaboration of the principles of Socialism, and for the practical application of Socialistic principles, than fifty years of theoretical discussions. It had immensely contributed to the spreading of the idea of *international* solidarity of interest among the workers of all nations, and of an international support of their strikes; of International Labour opposed to International Capitalism. Besides, the strikes, especially when they attain great dimensions and are supported internationally, awake general attention, and are infinitely better opportunities for spreading broadcast Socialist ideas than electoral meetings, in which, for the very success of the election, Socialists will often be compelled to compromise with the middle classes — to parliament, and to practise with them. In the struggle for political power Socialism would soon be forgotten — it was foretold — for some spurious teachings in which radical political reforms would be mixed up with some palliative laws (hours of labour, compensation for accidents, and so on) might be enforced upon the Parliaments in a much more effective form if the labour unions took everywhere the great extension which an International propaganda in this direction could give them.

It is for this reason that we are here re-stating these arguments at such length. Every one of them has had, within the last thirty years, its full confirmation.

See what has become of theoretical socialism — not only in this country, but in Germany and Belgium as well, amidst those who take part in the elections under the etiquette of Socialism. There is less of it left than there ever was in a Fabian pamphlet. Who speaks now of socialism, with the exception of the anarchists, who precisely therefore are described as Utopians, if not as fools! In 1869-71 you could not open one single socialist paper without finding on its very first page this discussion:— Whether we must, and if we must — how shall we expropriate the owners of the factories, the mines, the land? Then — and this was especially important — every legislative measure, every political event was discussed from the point of view, whether it was leading to, or leading away from, the aim in view — the Social Revolution. Of course, everyone was extremely interested in obtaining shorter hours and better wages for every branch of trade; everyone passionately took the part of strikers all over the world; the International was indeed a permanent international strike — an international conspiracy, if you like, for reducing hours, increasing wages, obtaining respect for the workers' freedom, and limiting the powers of Capital in every direction. Of course, everyone was passionately interested, too, in widening political liberties, and this was why the International was frankly anti-Imperialist. But it was also something else. It undertook, as its own speciality, the spreading of those ideas, and the conquest of those rights, which neither the old type trade unions nor the political radicals sufficiently cared for. The Labour Party, thirty years ago, had its own special functions, in addition to trade unionism and radicalism, and these were socialism — the preparation of the Social Revolution. But where is it now? All gone! What is now described as socialism — all of them are socialists now! — is the most incoherent mixture of trade unionism, which trusts no more to itself, and looks for John Gorst to make its business with Toryism — the paternal State to whom you must look for every improvement of your conditions — with State capitalism (State monopoly of railways, of banks, of the sale of spirits, of education, etc, is preached and fought for by the Socialist Party of free Switzerland) with Fabianism, nay, even occasionally

with imperialism, when socialists declare in the German Reichstag that let the State only declare war, they will all fight as well as the Junkers! Add to this all sorts of theories built up with bits of metaphysics for persuading the workers that Social Revolution is bosh; that socialism is only good for a hundred years hence, and those who talk about it now are dangerous Utopians; that all capitals must first be concentrated in a few hands — which every intelligent man sees they never will — and that the peasant owners must disappear, and all become even more miserable than they are now, before socialism becomes possible. This is what has now taken the place of the distinctly expressed idea: 'The land, the mines, the factories, everything that is wanted for living, must return to the community, which by local action and free agreement, must organise free communistic life and free communistic production' — is this progress?

If the working men of Europe and America had only the so-called Socialist and Socialist-Democratic Parties to rely upon for the triumph of the socialist idea, the general position would be really desperate. We certainly are the first to recognise that the Social-Democratic Party in Germany is doing excellent Republican propaganda, and that, as a Republican Party, it splendidly undermines the authority of the petulant William. We gladly acknowledge that the Parliamentary Socialists in France are thorough radicals, and at least they do excellent work for the support of radical legislation, thus continuing the work of Clemenceau and Rank, with the addition of some genuine interest in the working classes; they are radicals, sympathetic to the workers. But who is doing work in the Socialist direction? Who is working for bringing the masses nearer and nearer to the day when they will be able to take hold of all that is needed for living and producing? Who contributes to the spreading of the spirit of revolt among the workers? Surely not the parliamentarian!

The only one possible reply to this question is this: It is the Labour movement in France, in Spain, in America, in England, in Belgium, and its beginnings in Germany, and the anarchists everywhere, who, despite all the above mentioned dampers, despite all the confusion that is being sown in the ranks of Labour by clever bourgeois, despite all the propaganda of quietness and all the advices of deserting their fighting brothers, continue the old, good, direct fight against the exploiters. The great desperate colliers' strike in America has done more to shake the authority of trusts, and to show the way to fight them, than all the talk in the talking assemblies. The attempts at general strikes in Belgium (despite the opposition of the politicians), at Milan (despite the treason of the leaders), at Barcelona, and at Geneva, have done infinitely more for spreading conviction in the necessity of a complete expropriation of the exploiters than anything that has ever been said in or out of a parliament by a parliamentary leader. The refusal of 400 Geneva militia soldiers to join the ranks, and the attitude of those fifteen who have been bold enough to tell the martial court that they would never join the ranks of their battalions for fighting against their brother workers — such facts of revolt are doing infinitely more for the spreading of true socialism than anything that has been, or ever will be said by those socialists who seek their inspiration in the speeches and the review articles of a John Gorst. Of course, it is those anarchists whom the would-be socialists hate so much for not having followed them in the middle class 'evolution'; of course, it is those blessed anarchists who have their hand in these movements, and go to prison like Bertoni in Geneva and scores of our brothers in France and Spain. Yes,

it is true they have a hand in these movements, and 8,000 workers on strike in Madrid shouted, the other day: *Long Live Anarchism!* This is true. But they are proud to see the workers trust them more than they trust their gloved 'representatives'.

. . . Socialism has been circumscribed and minimised since it became the watchword of a political party, instead of, as formerly, the popular Labour movement. Now, when socialism is spoken of, all that is meant is: State monopoly of banks and spirits, perhaps, in a remote future, State mines, and plenty of legislation intended to slightly protect labour — without doing the slightest harm to capitalism — and at the same time bringing labour as much as possible into a complex submission to the present middle class government of the State. State arbitration, State control of the trade unions, State armies for working the railways and the bakeries in the case of strikes, and like measures in favour of the capitalists, are, as is known, necessary aspects of 'Labour legislation', in accordance with the well known programme of Disraeli, John Gorst, 'The People' and like Tory Democrat swindlers.

To understand socialism, as it was understood thirty years ago — that is, as a deep revolution which would free man by reconstructing the distribution of wealth, consumption and production on a new basis — is now described by the 'Neo-Socialists' as sheer nonsense. We have now 'scientific socialism', and if you would know all about it, read a few 'authorised version' pamphlets, in which the guessings which Fourierists, Owenites and Saint-Simonians used to make sixty years ago concerning the concentration of capital, the coming self-annihilation of capitalism, and like naive predictions — retold in a far less comprehensible language by Engels and Marx — are represented as so many scientific discoveries of the German mind. Only alas, owing to these would-be discoveries, the teaching which formerly, by its Communistic aspirations, inspired the masses and attracted the best minds of the nineteenth century, has become nothing but a mitigated middle-class State capitalism.

To speak now of the Social Revolution is considered by the 'scientific' socialist a crime. Vote and wait! Don't trouble about the revolution; revolutions are mere inventions of idle spirits! Only criminal anarchists talk of them now. Be quiet and vote as you are told to. Don't believe these criminals who tell you that owing to the facilities of exploitation of the backward races all over the world, the numbers of capitalists who climb on the necks of the European working man are steadily growing. Trust to the neo-socialists, who have proved that the middle-classes are going to destroy themselves, in virtue of a 'Law of self-annihilation' discovered by their great thinkers. Vote! Greater men than you will tell you the moment when the self-annihilation of capital has been accomplished. They will then expropriate the few usurpers left, who will own everything, and you will be freed without ever having taken any more trouble than that of writing on a bit of paper the name of the man whom the heads of your fraction of the party told you to vote for!

To such shameful nonsense the politician socialists have tried to reduce the Great Revolution which calls for the energies of all the lovers of freedom and equality.

And in the meantime reaction tries to take the fullest advantage of these suicidal preachings. It concentrates its forces all over the world. Why should it not? Where is the revolutionary party which might be capable of appealing to the people against its oppressors? And so it takes hold of all the channels of power which the present State provides for ruling the middle classes.

Look at education! They destroy with a sure and clever hand all that has been done in 1860-1875 for wresting instruction out of the hands of the clergy. Why should they not, when it was the once redoubtable but now tamed socialist politicians who have helped at the last election the conservatives to be so powerful in Parliament? The School Board teacher has ceased to tell the poor, 'Suffer, it's the will of the creator that you should be poor'. On the contrary, he told them, 'Hope: try yourselves to shake off your misery!' The slum mother began to get into the habit of going to the School Board teacher to tell her needs and sorrows, instead of going to the parson, as she formerly did. Down, then, with the School Boards! And why not? Why should they not dare anything when they know that it was the socialists, the politicians who had helped them to win such a power in parliament! Even in France, where they ostensibly fight to free the schools from the clergy, the best and largest colleges are in the hands of the Jesuits — within a stone's throw of the Chamber of Deputies. Everywhere the middle class return to religion, everywhere they work to bring the clergyman, with his ignorance and his eternal fire, back to the school — and the working men are told to take no interest in these matters, to *laissez faire* and to study John Gorst's programme of paternal State legislation.

There was in the years 1860-1875 a powerfully destructive force at work — the materialistic philosophy. It produced the wonderful revival of sciences and led to the wonderful discoveries of the last quarter of a century. It induced men to think. It freed the minds of the workers . . . 'Down, then, with materialism', is now the outcry of the middle classes. 'Long live metaphysics, long live Hegel, Kant and the Dialectic method!' Why not? They know that in this direction, too, the reaction will find no opposition from the neo-socialists. They are also dialecticians, Heglians, they also worship economic metaphysics, as has been so well shown by Tcherkesoff in his 'Pages of Socialist History'.

Happily enough, there is one element in the present life of Europe and America which has not yet yielded to political corruption. It is the labour movement, so far as it has hitherto remained strange to the race for seats in parliament. It may be that here and there the workers belonging to this movement give support to this or that candidate for a seat in a parliament or in a municipality — but there are already scores of thousands of working men in Spain, in Italy, in France, in Holland, and probably in England too, who quite consciously refuse to take any part, even in fun, in the political struggle. Their main work lies in quite another direction. With an admirable tenacity they organise their unions, within each nation and internationally, and with a still more admirable ardour they prepare the great coming struggle of labour against capital: the coming of the international general strike.

One may judge of the terror which this movement, unostensibly prepared by the workers, inspires in the middle classes, by the terrible persecutions — which have not stopped even at torture — which they have carried on against the revolutionary trade unions in Spain. One may judge of that terror by the infamous repression of the Milan insurrection which was ordered by King Umberto, or by the measures which were going to be taken against railway strikers in Holland. These measures, as is known, were prevented by the splendid act of international solidarity accomplished by the British Dock Labourers' Union, and immediately followed by the menacing declarations of the General Union of the French Syndicates. It hardly need be said that all

the Parliamentary Socialists of France, Germany, Spain, etc, headed by the famous Millerand and Jaures (one year ago this last was for the general strike — now he writes long articles against it) bitterly opposes this idea of a general strike. But the movement spreads every month and every month it gains new support and wins new sympathies.

Our first intention was to conclude by a general review of the so-called labour-protecting legislation in different countries, and to show how far this legislation is due to the socialist politicians on the one side, and to the direct pressure exercised by the labour agitation on the other.

Such a study would have been deeply interesting. Not that we should attribute to this legislation more importance than it deserves. We have often proved that any such law, even if it introduces some partial improvement, always lays upon the worker some new chain, forged by the middle class State. We prefer the ameliorations which have been imposed by the workers upon their masters in a direct struggle; they are less spurious. However, it is also easy to prove that even those little and always poisoned concessions which have been made by the middle classes to the workers, and which are now represented as the very essence of 'practical, scientific' socialism, stand in no relation to the numerical forces of the political socialist parties. Such concessions as the limitation of the hours of labour, or of child labour, whenever they represent something real, have always been achieved by the action of the trade unions — by strikes, by labour revolts, or by menaces of a labour war. They are labour victories — not political victories.

If there was a work in which the conditions of labour and the recent labour legislation were given for each country, it would have been easy to prove the above assertion by a crushing evidence of data. But no such work exists, and consequently we have to mention but a few striking facts.

Our readers will have seen what a substantial reduction of the hours of labour in the mines was achieved by the great miners' strike of Pennsylvania, and, by the way, the effect which the strike has had upon other branches of American industry. That such long hours as twelve, every day of the week (including Sundays), should have existed in Pennsylvania, we need not wonder when we are reminded that every year the Eastern States receive thousands of fresh immigrant miners from Germany and Austria, where, notwithstanding the presence of so many Democrat-socialists in Parliament, the hours of labour are outrageously long. But precisely because there are no such political go-betweens in the United States and the Pennsylvania strike could last long enough to end in a substantial victory for the labourers. The twelve hours' day exists no more in the mines of Pennsylvania.

The same applies to Britain. All the little victories which the working men have won for the last fifty years, were won by the force of their trade unions, and not of socialist politicians. Of course, it would not be fair to compare the conditions of labour in Britain and in Germany; two countries, one of which has no Social-democrat party in its parliament, but has a number of strongly-organised trade unions, while the other has no less than fifty three Social-democratic representatives in the Reichstag, and boasts of two million Social-democratic electors, but is only just beginning to develop (in opposition to the politicians) its trade union movement.

it would not be fair to insist upon the incomparably better conditions of labour in this country, because the labour movement and industry itself are so much older in England. But still, we can ask, what results have the numerous

Social-democratic deputies obtained from parliament for the protection and personal emancipation of the labourer in Germany. The nullity of such results is simply striking, especially in comparison with the promises which have been made, and the hopes which were cherished by many sincere working men.

Everyone remembers the Eight Hours' Day movement which was started in Europe in 1889-1890. Beginning at Chicago in 1887, where it cost the lives of five of our best anarchist brothers, it came to Europe in the shape of the First of May demonstration — a sort of one-day general strike of all working men, which had to be made for the propaganda of an eight hours' day. The enthusiasm of the first demonstration in Hyde Park on May 1, 1890, must be fresh in the minds of many, and by this time we surely would have been in a fair way towards the realisation of that demand, were it not for the political socialists who saw in the eight hours' movement a plank to step on for getting into Parliament, and did their best to nip the movement in the bud.

The attitude of the German socialist politicians at the time was most typical. They were in mortal fear lest the eight hours' movement should become a labour movement, over which they would have no control; they hated the very idea of a general strike for the purpose of reducing the hours of labour, and they hammered into the workers' heads, 'legal eight hours! legal eight hours' They said, 'only vote for us, and for those whom we shall recommend to you! Discipline! And then you will see. In 1891 you will have the eleven hours' day, in such a year a ten hours' day, then a nine hours' day, and in 1903 you will have the eight hours' day, without having all the troubles and the sufferings of the strikes'. This is what Engels and Liebknecht promised them and printed plainly in their papers.

Well, up to now they have not yet got even the nine hours' day and the weekly half-holiday! . . . In Russia, the despotic government of the Tsar, under the pressure of strikes, has passed directly from a thirteen and fourteen hours' working day to one of eleven hours, even though it still treats strikes as rebellions. . . . But where is the eight hours' law in Germany? As distant in the future as it is in Russia! Much more distant, at any rate, than it is in Spain, which has only a handful of impotent social-democrats in Madrid, but has, in return, powerful labour organisations in all its leading industries.

Spain is especially instructive on this account. Since the times of the foundation of the International, it has had strong labour organisations in Catalonia, keeping in close touch with the anarchists, and always ready to support their demands by strikes, and sometimes by revolts. Everyone remembers, of course, the continual strikes — labour wars would even be more correct — which took place so many times at Barcelona, the desperate measures to which the government resorted against the Catalonian working men during the Montjuich tortures, and the latest attempts at a general strike.

Now, the result of all this is that the eight hours' day has been fought for long since (more than ten years ago) and introduced in all the building trades in Barcelona, and although it was lost during the Montjuich prosecutions, it was recovered again two years ago, and is now in these and several other trades. Moreover we have read during the past few days in the daily telegrams that in Arragonia the nine hours' day, now in force there, is to undergo a further reduction. Does it not compare favourably with the promised *legal* nine hours' day in Germany?

Happily enough, the German workers began to lose faith in the promises of the politicians. Their trade unions, which were formerly so bitterly opposed by the Marxists, are meekly courted by them now, since they number over 1,000,000 men (this is the figure given by the *Reformer's Year Book*), and they seem to be so little under the influence of the Social-democratic leaders that, after all they have heard from them about the uselessness of strikes and the wickedness of a general strike, they sent the other day their hearty congratulations and promises of support to their Dutch brothers who had proclaimed the general strike in Holland. As to the intellectual and social movement which is going on in connection with the more advanced trade unions in Germany, it seems to be a subject of great interest.

Striking facts could be mentioned from the labour history of France to show how the young labour organisations, the strikes, and the labour revolts were instrumental in wresting from the middle class rulers a number of concessions; but space forbids us to mention more than one fact.

Up to 1883 trade unions and all sorts of associations of more than nineteen persons were strictly forbidden in France. Only in 1883, the restriction was abolished by the law of the syndicates, and from that time began the present labour movement, the agricultural syndicates (1,500,000 members now), the Labour Exchanges and the rest. And if you ask any politician what induced, in 1883, the Opportunist Ministry to take this far-reaching step you will be told that it was the anarchist movement at Lyons (for which fifty of us were imprisoned in 1882), the unemployed processions in Paris under the black flag, during one of which Louise Michel 'pillaged' a baker's shop, and perhaps above all that, the secret labour organisations which sprang up and rapidly spread among the miners of Montceau-les-Mines and in all the mining basin, and resulted in a series of explosions. . . . Guesde and his friends, at that time, were still most hopelessly putting forward their candidates after each strike.

The conclusion is self-evident. We saw what results socialist politics have given for the theoretical propaganda. Just as the name of 'Republic', which formerly meant social equality, taken up by middle class politicians, was gradually deprived by them of its social meaning, and was shaped into a sort of middle class rule, so also the word 'socialism' has become in the hands of the socialist politicians a sort of mitigated middle class exploitation. They are all socialists now, but socialism is gone, and the most confused ideas prevail now among the Social-democrats concerning the sense of this great war-cry of the workers.

And now we find that although parliamentary action is represented as necessary for obtaining small concessions to the advantage of the worker, these concessions, however insignificant they may be, have been won, all of them, by strikes (such as the match girls', the miners', the dock labourers', and so on) and by the standing menace of still more serious labour wars. The presence of a number of more or less socialistic deputies in the parliaments does not, it appears now, dispense the working man in the least maintaining his trade organisation in full mental and material readiness for war. On the contrary, it is only by the constant menace of a war declaration, and by real war — and in proportion to this readiness — that the workers have won any victories; while the tactics of the politicians have always been to weaken the anti-capitalist labour organisations, under the pretext of political discipline. As to this country, by their abominable tactics, prompted by Engels and Marx, of arraying at election times all their forces against the radicals and the

liberals, which was equal to supporting the conservatives, they have done their best to pave the way for the present imperialism, and they have got their heavy share of responsibility for the heavy blows which the Conservative Party has struck lately at the security of the labour organisations. It is never too late to mend; but it takes time to mend the harm that has been done by mistaken politicians.

#### Notes

##### Kropotkin on order

A few points of detail are worth explaining. The Beggars were the Dutch rebels against the Spanish regime in the late sixteenth century. The Sans-culottes were the most radical republicans in the French Revolution. The Nihilists were the Russian populists of the 1860s and 1870s. Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* was first published in Russia in 1862. The International referred to is the First International — the 'International Working Men's Association'. The tunnels referred to are the railway tunnels of the late nineteenth century — the Mont Cenis tunnel through the Alps was opened in 1871, and the St Gotthard tunnel in 1882. There were risings throughout Europe in 1848. The Paris Commune rose and fell in 1871. The assassins of Tsar Alexander II — some of whom were old friends of Kropotkin — were hanged in April, 1881.

##### The situation

The French Revolution in February 1848 was followed by risings in most of the countries of Europe. Georg Gottfried Gervinus (1805-1871) was a German historian who suffered persecution for his liberal views; his *Einleitung in die Geschichte der neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* was published in 1853 (a new edition appeared in 1967). Guisepppe Ferrari (1811-1876) was an Italian philosopher who suffered exile for his liberal views; his *Histoire de la raison d'état* was published in Paris in 1860. The French socialist movement, which was suppressed after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, revived in the late 1870s and the early 1880s. Increasing distress among the landless peasants of France was one of the causes of the revolutionary movement which began with the economic crisis and the Assembly of Notables in 1787. The last Russo-Turk war was fought from 1876 to 1878. The St Gotthard Railway through the Alps was built from 1872 to 1882.

##### Politics and Socialism

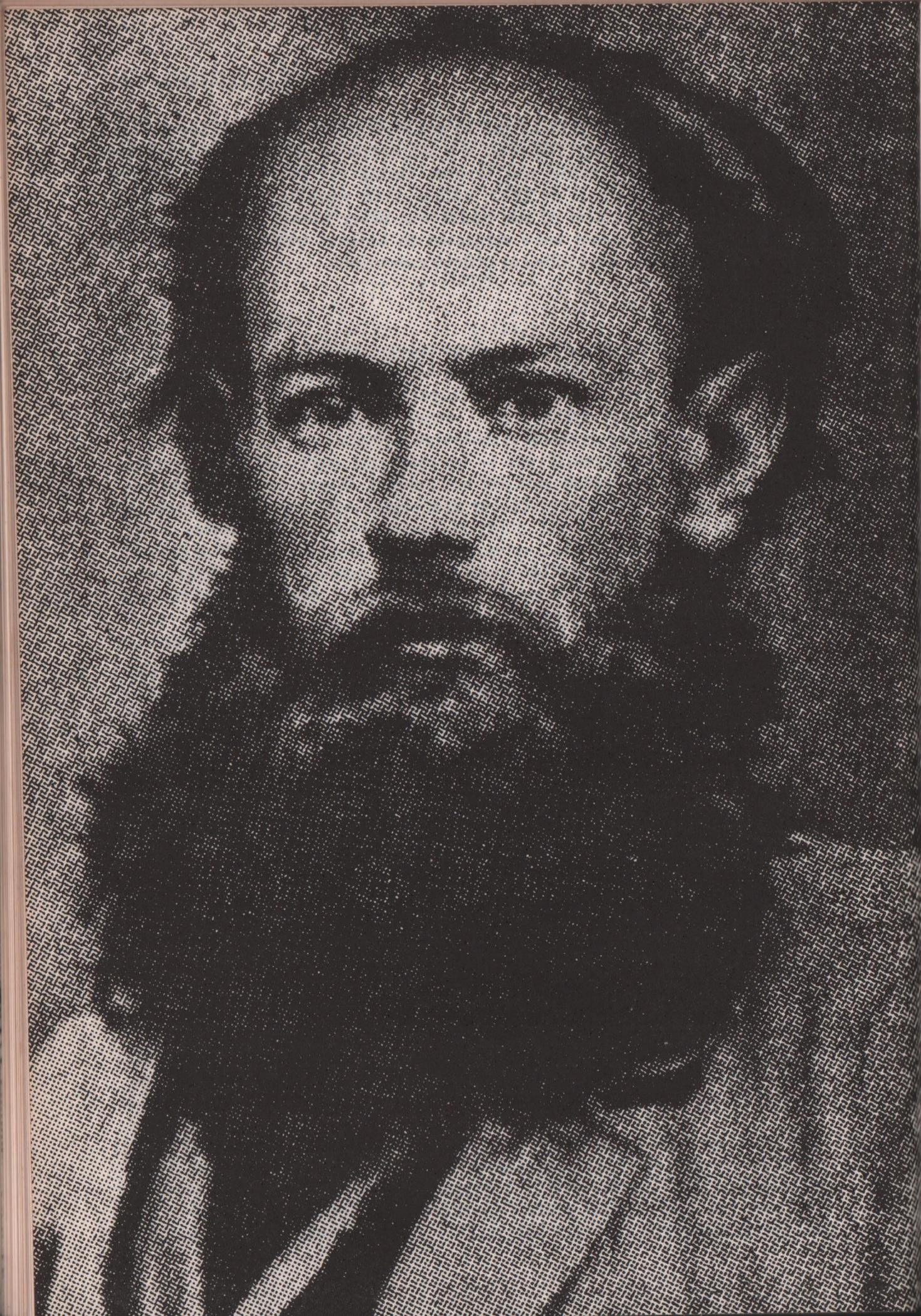
John Gorst was Minister of Education from 1895 to 1902.

The 'petulant William' referred to was Kaiser Wilhelm II.

In Holland in March 1903 transport workers, and all other workers in State owned industries, having come out in support of a dockers' strike after winning all their demands, were subsequently threatened with anti-strike legislation.

The Pennsylvania strike was described in the supplement to *FREEDOM*, May 1903: 'Clarence Darrow calls it "a victory unparalleled in the history of strike settlements", and "a practical recognition of the union".' The strike lasted five months with 147,000 men involved. Victory brought an eight hour day for pumpmen and firemen and a 10% pay increase. The strike also ended the

employment of little girls of 12 and 13 and even 10 and 11 in the mines. The Montjuich tortures followed the wholesale arrests of anarchists and anti-clericals after a bomb was thrown during the procession on Corpus Christi Day in Barcelona in 1892, killing seven working class people and a soldier. The real thrower of the bomb was never found. In the Montjuich dungeons those arrested were subjected to hideous treatment from which several died. Others were killed at official executions.



## Anarchism & Revolution

If each member of society is to have the opportunity of earning his living by his own labour — without as a result enslaving himself to anyone else, either to a private individual, or to a company, or to a union — he must obviously always have the opportunity of acquiring that spade with which he wishes to dig, that cotton from which he wishes to spin thread or weave cloth, that bread, those clothes, that room to live in, that place to work in, before he can manufacture anything having an exchange value for society. It is apparent that in previous times production was so simple that all this did not require a vast accumulation of the initial products of personal labour, that anyone, though working only with the instruments of labour available in his family, only on those raw materials which he took free of charge from nature, could produce useful exchange values. But now — and the progress of society consists of this — the preliminary accumulation of the products of labour for the creating of instruments of labour and the storing of raw material must be so great that it can no longer be the business of a private individual or a group of individuals.

It is therefore clear that if it is desirable that a person setting to work should not enslave himself, should not give up part of his labour, his strength, his independence, either temporarily or permanently, to private individuals whose arbitrary power will always determine how great that part shall be, then it is necessary that private individuals should control neither the instruments of labour (tools, machines, factories), nor the places of cultivation of raw materials (the earth), nor the raw materials previously stored up, nor the means of storing and transporting them to particular places (the means of communication, warehouses, and so on), nor the means of existence during work (the supplies of the means of subsistence and housing).

So we arrive at the elimination in that future system whose realisation we desire, of any property of individuals, of any property of an incorporated company, a union, and so on.

Those writers of previous times who came to this conclusion saw no other way out than the transfer of all the capital of society to the state — that is, to a powerful organisation representing in itself the interests of society and managing all affairs which concern the whole of society.

It was left to it to guarantee each member of society the opportunity of obtaining the necessary instruments of labour, and so on; it was also left to it to distribute among the members of society those goods made by them. But precisely because of this, the brilliant dreams of the followers of these thinkers did not find enough adherents among those people who would have to put these dreams into practice. In the ideal of these thinkers only one aspect of life is considered — the economic. Those who were used to thinking in a concrete way understood very well that no matter what combination of conditions was worked out so that this government should express the views of the majority, that no matter how mobile, flexible and susceptible to change its composition might be, the group of individuals to whom society gives up its rights would always be a power separate from society, trying to widen its influence, its interference in the affairs of each separate individual. And the wider the sphere of activity of this government, the greater the danger of the enslavement of society, the greater the probability that the government would stop being the expression of the interests and desires of the majority.

So both the masses and many individual thinkers long ago realised that the transfer of this most essential element of the life of society into the hands of any elected government at all would be the source of the most crucial inconvenience, if not the actual suicide of society. . . .

### Social Revolution

In our opinion the realisation of our ideal must be brought about through a social revolution. Here we do not flatter ourselves at all with the hope that the ideal will be put completely into effect in the first revolution; indeed we are convinced that for the realisation of the equality we have sketched, many years are still needed, and so many limited — perhaps even general — outbursts. But we are also convinced that the more completely, the more widely the demands of the masses are set out from the very first revolution, the more clearly and concretely these demands are expressed — then the more the first step will destroy those cultural forms which hinder the realisation of the socialist system, the more disorganised those forces and attitudes which present social and state life cling to; then the successive upheavals will be more

peaceful and successively large-scale improvements in the attitude of the people will follow.

So our goals must be to apply our strength to hastening this outburst, so as to illuminate those hopes and aspirations which exist in the great majority in vague forms, so that in time we shall be able to take advantage of the circumstances in which an outburst may have the most favourable outcome, so that in the end the outburst itself will occur in the name of clearly expressed demands, and exactly in the name of those we have stated. . . .

### Prepare the way

We are profoundly convinced that no revolution is possible if the need for it is not felt among the people themselves. No handful of individuals, however energetic and talented, can arouse a popular insurrection if the people themselves through their best representatives do not come to the realisation that they have no other way out of the situation they are dissatisfied with except insurrection. Therefore the task of any revolutionary party is not to call for insurrection but only to prepare the way for the success of the approaching insurrection — that is, to unite the dissatisfied elements, to increase the knowledge of individual units or groups about the aspirations and actions of other such groups, to help the people in defining more clearly the real causes of dissatisfaction, to help them in identifying more clearly their real enemies, stripping the mask from enemies who hide behind some respectable disguise, and, finally, to contribute to the illumination of both the immediate practical ends and the means of putting them into practice. . . .

### Peasants and workers

Where should our activity be directed, where should we mainly spread our ideas and look for like-minded people — among the student youth and upper classes, or among the peasants and workers?

We can answer this question categorically, and we consider this answer to be the fundamental position in our practical programme: undoubtedly among the peasants and workers. Here we must spread our ideas, here we must look for comrades who will help in the further dissemination of these ideas; with these comrades we must enter into a friendly and closely united organisation. We do not wish to break off relations with the educated section of society, and especially not with the section of student youth; but refusing to take on the permanent role of instructing this youth in a given direction, we shall enter into close relations only with those groups or individuals who immediately inspire the confidence or the almost certain hope that they will direct their future activity among the peasants and workers. For the mass of educated youth we are prepared to do only one thing: to disseminate, and — if the cause cannot be spread without our assistance, and also if we have enough energy to spare — to prepare those books which directly assist the explanation of our ideals and our ends, which make available those facts which show the complete inevitability of the social upheaval and the necessity to unite, to organise the awakened strength of the people. . . .

**Demands of the people**

The insurrection must take place among the peasants and workers themselves. Only then can it count on success. But no less necessary for the success of the insurrection is the existence among the insurrectionists themselves of a strong, friendly, active group of people who, acting as a link between the various areas, and having clearly worked out how to express the demands of the people, how to avoid the various traps, how to bring about their victory, are agreed on the means of action. It is moreover clear that such a party must not stand outside the people, but among them, but act not as the champion of outside ideas elaborated in isolation, but merely as a more distinct, more complete expression of the demands of the people themselves; in short, it is clear that such a party cannot be a group of people outside the peasants and workers, but must be the focus of the most conscious and decisive forces of the peasants and workers. Any party standing outside the people — especially one that come from the upper class — however much it is inspired with a wish for the welfare of the people, however well it expresses the demands of the people, will inevitably be doomed to failure, like all the rest, as soon as the insurgent people with their first actions open up the gulf between the upper and lower classes. And we can see in this a completely deserved retribution for the fact that the members of this party were previously unable to become the comrades of the people, but instead remained superior leaders. Only those whose previous way of life and previous actions are entirely of a kind which deserves the faith of the peasants and workers will be listened to; and these will be only the activists among the peasants themselves, and those who wholeheartedly give themselves up to the people's cause, and prove themselves not with heroic deeds in a moment of enthusiasm but with the whole previous ordinary life; those who, discarding any tinge of the upper class, enter into close relations with the peasants and workers, linked by personal friendship and confidence. . . .

**Words and deeds**

We consider it to be a crucial mistake to set up as an end the creation of agitators among the people who keep themselves at a distance from the people and move in the sphere of their colleagues of the intelligentsia. It is impossible suddenly to cross at a given moment from the sphere of the intelligentsia to the environment of the people, just as one pleases. The sphere of the intelligentsia permanently leaves a characteristic stamp on those who have moved in it, and it is necessary to renounce this first to have success among the people. It is impossible to become a populist agitator in a few days; it is necessary to be trained in this work. For this reason, we consider that the best means for the achievement of our aim is to proceed immediately to activity among the people, no matter how small the circle of individuals who have come to this conclusion. We are also convinced that it is impossible to rally the people in the name of future activity, or at least extremely difficult, and that it is much easier to rally the people in the name of an activity whose feasibility and appropriateness everyone can believe in now, and in which one can engage immediately. By showing results which have been achieved, and by acting on people not only through words, but through both words and deeds, it is considerably easier to convert them of the things one is oneself convinced of. . . .