Max Nettlau, Federica Montseny

Authoritarian Communism and Libertarian Communism

1928

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Preface: Max Nettlau, or The Choice of Modesty – Federica Montseny

Blessed are those whose souls are transparent, whose lives are honest, and whose hearts are pure; for theirs is the kingdom of the earth.

Blessed are those who believe in human goodness, those who preserve their illusions intact and nourish the hope that for them the doors of life will open.

Blessed are those who offer the world their fraternal right hand and friendly visage, those who go with a smile on their lips and cast a light before them.

And blessed, too, are those who can love those who can believe, those who can discover within the human wasteland, a tree under which their anxieties concerning their ideal, and their human desires for trust and affection, can take shelter.

Without goals to aim for and without any figures on the horizon in whom we can crystallize our life and our need for encouragement and for example, what would our lives be?

Iconoclasts! We are all iconoclasts. We have overthrown all the idols of clay, the barbarous gods imagined by human barbarism; we have abolished all faiths, which exalted hidden forces and ineluctable destinies. We have killed the thirst for submission within us, just as we have killed the thirst for domination. We feel a powerful urge to throw down the pedestals that are currently being built, to prevent the rise of new idols, of a new kind and of a new character.

Iconoclasts! Yes, iconoclasts with regard to all the icons, irreverent towards all worship, heretics against all orthodoxies, demolition agents, perpetual revolutionaries against all the bastions of received ideas. When we see a man who speaks to us as if we are schoolchildren, who attempts to lead us, who assumes priestly mannerisms and a prophetic tone, we cry out with all the power of our voices and all the energy of our spirits.

Down with the schoolmasters and down with the priests, down with the redeemers and down with sterile icons! Down with the era of messiahs and saviors, of shepherds put at the head of human herds! Down with the icons, the personifications in wood or in flesh of human ignorance and powerlessness; down with the icons which, dead or alive, attempt to assume the role of the directors of our lives, the depositories of eternal verities, the representatives of absolute ideas, the holders of religious or moral power over men.

But once all the idols are cast down, and our belief in ourselves, in our will and our confidence, has been firmly established, would it be humanly possible, esthetically and ethically correct, to also uproot from ourselves that need for

moral devotion, for a manifestation of what is admirable, a spur to improvement that leads us to those outstanding figures of human thought and labor, who instill us with that mixture of fraternal affection, personal pride and elective affinity that we feel in the presence of those rare lives that crystallize, in flesh and blood and heart and soul, the ideal of human perfection?

A man has come among us, into the circle of our lives. A man with grey hair and the expression of a child. A man of clear soul and pure heart and broad spirit and a life lived well. A man who has left his mark on every one of us, a man who seemed to concentrate what is best in us, what we were before and what we want to become. A man who is frank, yes, and simple, as wise as he is modest, as modest as a sage who unconsciously and unpretentiously possesses the highest degree of the wisdom of humility.

And this captivating, profound and supreme modesty is the modesty that is born from the ignorance of his own worth. The modesty based on the unconsciousness of oneself, open like a violet to the face of the world.

A human being before whom one feels no idolatrous servility, or the moral mendicancy of the disciple, or the annihilation of the simple personality overwhelmed by the dominating personality, or the impulse of repulsion and rebellion that the free spirit feels when faced with the stern expression of the conceited intellectual. A man whom one must necessarily admire, whom one must contemplate as a model and whom one must consider as a living encouragement, a mute invitation to improvement, to emulation, to the gradual ascent on the purifying path towards the human ideal.

An ideal that sometimes seems to come nearer, and comes within the reach of our lives, of our sight, of our existence. An ideal without a categorical imperative, without self-consciousness, and precisely for these reasons ideal and desired.

Faced with the men of the icons, the men who address us from a priestly position, and the classical gesture of the shepherd among the mob, our personality rebels and we feel the compulsion of iconoclasm.

Faced with the man of courage, the spiritual man, the man of life, the simple, spontaneous, candid, tranquil man, the real-life actualization of a human ideal, an ideal that can only be felt by those who believe in goodness, those who have preserved their illusions intact and have kept hope alive, an ideal that is only enjoyed by those whose souls are clear, those who live an upright life, those of pure heart, we feel the need to love, and for attentive admiration, the passionate desire to attain to what is simplest and best which can only be approached via simplicity, a will to self-sacrifice, and an inconspicuous and unknown life of work and sacrifice.

We know the Max Nettlau who was one of the representative figures of international anarchism. We know that he was a dedicated and silent worker who,

without calling attention to himself, and almost singlehandedly, without any support, assumed the colossal task of providing a historical personality to libertarian ideas.

But this man who devoted his life to chronicling the life of other men and the collective life of an idea, without ever ceasing to be a revolutionary and always open to new contributions, remained a stranger to us. Discreet, extremely discreet, he has disappeared behind the enormous figures who were magnified into giants by his labors, by his insatiable and tireless love for knowledge and the ideal. Extremely discreet, so discreet that he threw a veil over his own life, so rich in moral lessons, so replete with ethical and esthetic elements, and so full of exemplary aspects worthy of admiration and emulation. Quietly, voluntarily isolated and voluntarily unknown, he has slowly and surely elaborated his life's formidable work, a hard and tedious labor, which only a great idealism and a strong spiritual constitution could ever bring to a victorious conclusion.

During this long month that he lived among us we were able to get to know him better, to acquire a genuine appreciation for him, to esteem the magnitude of the labors he has already completed and those which he has yet to complete, to the honor and glory of our ideas and of the cultural heritage of humanity.

During this month, whose days were long but not long enough in our eyes to satisfy our desires and our affections, we have come to understand Max Nettlau, what a resource for emulation we have in him, a man who is tall in stature and even more elevated in spirit, who hid himself—he could not hide himself both because we had never seen him and because we had never thought about how tall he was—behind the figures of Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Couerduroy, DeJacque, La Boetie, Mackay, Tucker, Warren, Morris and Reclus, and the whole impressive assembly of the great men who elaborated and gave shape to the acratic ideal and its further uninterrupted development.

Nettlau, so simple and so discreet, who constantly fled from all forms of praise, taking refuge behind his prepossessing irony with regard to anything that involved him as a person, may not be pleased with this article. But he can and must know how sincere it is, how it comes from the heart and how much it ineffably expresses our affection for him and the lasting impression he made on us.

Nettlau will know all of this and our readers should know it as well. They should also know that an ideal that has the support of men like Nettlau is not a dead or static ideal; and that this ideal which has attracted the world's greatest minds and most noble spirits is a living ideal, rooted in the very core of humanity, an ideal that we must always be ready to express verbally and in every direction, as the greatest honor and the highest glory.

An ideal that must be linked to our lives, with which our feelings must identify, which we must love with all the force of our being and all the enthusiasm of our healthy souls, souls who have not succumbed to premature senility.

A person who personifies this ideal, who puts it within the range of our perception, of our feelings, of our very existence, embodies in a smile all these dazzling and luminous lives; in those rare lives chosen to represent the human species to the eyes of history; lives that are devoted, quietly and simply, to the service of humanity, of its individuals who are developing, and their struggles. Those lives that are nameless because we inevitably forgot some of them, but which sometimes come back to us and tell us that one can still believe in human goodness, keep our illusions intact and keep hope alive.

When Nettlau left us, he made a commitment that he wished would be publically announced: he promised to come back to Spain next year. He left behind him here in Spain material for study and many close friends. And for his part, he left with the positive impression that Spain, or at least the region that he got to know a little, Catalonia, is a youthful people, full of vitality, and that, despite the current stagnation, great things can be expected of us. We have to do everything in our power to do honor to this very kind assessment on the part of Nettlau.

Many other incidents that took place during Nettlau's visit and clearly reflected his personality come to mind now. But I am afraid I would be definitively lost, I would earn the eternal displeasure of Nettlau if I follow this road. I put him through enough trouble and enough bitterness, if he were capable of such a feeling, he would remind me, with reference to the delicacies I made him consume! To him it was a form of "tyranny" exercised as a "benevolent despotism" over his person, which was only endurable because it was well intentioned.

For us young people, who are so much in need of perspective, and most in need of the expression of moral devotion for a figure who expressly synthesizes and worthily represents the ideal, Nettlau's visit to Spain has been useful and salutary. Without words, merely by the mute example of his personality and his life, he has given us the most profound and generous of lessons: he has taught us to be good, to be modest, to be simple, to be discreet, to labor in silence and with assiduousness but also dynamically, and he brought us closer, in the living idea and in the imagination, to the never attained and always distant ideal.

Federica Montseny

1928

Chapter 1

The attempt to address the "origin and development of the two communisms, libertarian and authoritarian, by calling attention to the fundamental differences that distinguish them", is certainly an interesting theme that has been suggested to me and which I shall gladly undertake, without burdening myself too much on this occasion with quotations and documentation that inevitably transform articles into essays and essays into books.

The two terms, libertarian communism and authoritarian communism, express for us libertarians two currents, one static and one anarchist, but this manner of expression is purely conventional, that is, it merely corresponds to our preconceptions. If by communism one understands the community of goods, this implies its accessibility to everyone, and any authority whatsoever can only restrict or prevent this common access. If by communism one understands: "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs", this also requires the maximum of freedom in production and consumption, and authority can only destroy this freedom. As a result, authoritarian communism is a contradiction in terms and libertarian communism is a tautology. The two terms also possess an acutely polemical character, which is acceptable only for the supporters of the latter; it is as if you were to say: the true and the false communism, or the good and the bad communism, since nobody—apart from the fanatics of authority, both the old and the new varieties, who in spite of everything, have no interest in bringing about any kind of communism—will admit that their own communism is not "free" in some way or another.

Regardless of the logical consistency of these two terms, they admirably summarize the uncertainty that is hanging over all of us, regarding the future of the world, in which everyone—with the exception of those fanatics mentioned above who are intellectual troglodytes, purely pathological specimens of a degraded and backward humanity—believes they can see a process leading towards greater freedom and a more highly developed sociality, but a sociality where responsibility, will, desire, a broad-minded openness to new ideas, etc., are so diversely distributed among men, who are also distinguished from each other by other concepts, that a real uniformity of thought and action for humanity can never arise. Minority factions were able to form within parties and to influence the majority via diverse means that, in every period of history, have created that so-called general consensus, or public opinion, but we know that this intellectual isolation on the part of individuals was not really capable of a serious and profound overcoming of their different personal outlooks. This is why we have constantly seen the so-called collective will produce only decorative, shallow and

partial changes, whether this collective will takes the form of parliaments, organizations or revolutions. Rarely has a powerful general will capable of a higher, radical and enduring goal arisen, and however much you pore over the historical record you will hardly find anything besides temporary impulses, brief moments of enthusiasm, appearing as so many outbursts that suddenly deflate, as the most noble cause once again falls into the grasp of a handful of people who were loyal conservatives yesterday, just as revolutions fall into the power of those steadfast men, devoted from the first hour, who, isolated and decimated, are soon reduced to the status of victims, or like those revolutions that become the prisoners of new masters who take advantage of the renunciation and the tireless devotion of the masses in order to continue to oppress and exploit them.

This differentiation among men in itself represents a step forward towards freedom, as it liberates them from the herd status of less highly developed animals. For this same reason deliberative collective action, truly desired and fully understood, can only arise at the conclusion of a new future development of the spontaneous association of harmonized wills, whereas currently, it is almost always the case that the more collective an action is, the less advanced, progressive and intelligent it is, except for certain moments of generalized rupture and unselfishness. What other result could one expect from such different component parts, than that they should give different results? From their cooperation like keys on a piano, a harmonious accord could result, a common impulse, but one minute later the keys of the piano only look after their own sound, the accord no longer resonates in them, and the same thing happens with men when the torpor of the individual gives way to the most collective outburst. It is therefore the collective progress that is susceptible to improvement—and it is always necessary to work for this goal—and individual, individualized progress, which must be the concern of and the business of those who, rising above the routine indifference and fatalism of the majority of men, want to work for the benefit of humanity.

But just as the minds of men are more or less simple or more or less complicated and their knowledge and experience are different, they live in diverse eras, countries and environments, their feelings and passions also differ; they are young, or mature or elderly, not to speak of their variable moral qualities, etc., and it is in these conditions that, by way of history, ideas about a free and happy life have been and continue to be formulated. How could one then expect clear, precise and definitive results from such men, why be surprised by their differences, how can one not be indulgent towards their defects which so many pre-existing causes have made inevitable and how can one blindly plunge into one of their systems, only to quickly despise everyone else and launch polemics, if not incessant war, against them?

Such, however, are the habits of the majority of men and this is not without its natural cause; from love they pass to partisanship, to protection, to defense, to attack, and the more they love the more they hate and so there are only rarely feelings of peace and tolerance among those who want to bring about peace and universal harmony. Cooperation for the common good—such as scientists engage in, who, save for rare exceptions, have abandoned all contemptuous and bitter attitudes which characterized the men of knowledge of past centuries—is something that the socialists of the various tendencies have yet to adopt, and our literature presents a fatal similarity to the controversies of the erudite theologians, philosophers and pedagogues of the 16th and 18th centuries. It is most annoying to witness that this atavistic psychological phenomenon coincides with an era like these last hundred years when men have triumphed in the attainment of great things in pure and applied science, in technology and labor, in the organization of technical cooperation, in free thought, in art, in morality, etc. These last one hundred years have also seen the appearance of the magnificent social ideas of Fourier and Owen, Proudhon, Bakunin, Reclus and Kropotkin and so many others. But the men who conceived and embraced these ideas, including Marx, were rarely capable of liberating them from the passions and the lack of harmony and balance that determines and often follows in the wake of a too-powerful specialization, although this implies a dazzling improvement in one field, a superabundance that almost always leaves empty spaces in other fields. And the disciples, followers and more or less strict sectarians, have been even less interested in finding this balance and this opened up a great chasm between them and the mass of men who saw them as fervent believers that the common run of mortals can respect, but, not being capable of attaining such a pitch of spirit, do not try to imitate and do not embrace their beliefs.

Just as, in the presence of a monk, the majority of believers shrug their shoulders and take care not to imitate him, the self-sacrificing socialist and the martyred anarchist are eccentric oddities to those men who admit that they do not have the spirit of martyrs and do not feel capable of an extraordinary passion.

These causes and others of a similar nature have always driven a wedge between the true socialists and the mass of the people, and just as the monasteries have filled up with novices in every era, so have youthful adherents flocked, aware of their isolation and with a sense of mission, to socialism, but the great masses of the people have remained unmoved by its appeal, which is what happened during those long centuries when religion was a real and tangible truth for the ignorant imagination of almost all men, and the immense majority of them nonetheless failed to follow the straight and narrow road towards paradise which, according to popular belief, was guaranteed to those who led the pious life of hermits and monks. This leaves the earthly paradise of the future to the socialists, just

as the heavenly paradise was previously reserved for the specialists of the life of piety. We have to take these psychological dispositions into consideration rather than belittling or ignoring them, which gets us nowhere. Socialists of all stripes have failed to discover the most effective way to address the people, they have been incapable of making their own attitudes resonate with those of the masses, in whom discontent and rebellion, inertia, insecurity and mistrust have created a complicated spiritual condition, a great sea that no creative revolutionary has yet been able to agitate into a decisive, precise and long-lasting state of perturbation; they have been unable to bring these two attitudes, their own and those of the masses, into a powerful and harmonious agreement that, once its time has come, will sound the requiem for the system of oppression and exploitation. There have been a few moments, a few hours, days and weeks during which the reverberations of this great concordance could be heard, in February and June of 1848, in March 1871 and on various dates in 1917 in Russia and also in other places, in local episodes of short duration, but this has been all until now. Instead there is dissonant noise, false tones lacking any harmony, in an increasingly more overwhelming pandemonium.

This separation of the masses from men of a particular specialization is a striking feature of the course of historical development. Such a thing would not have been possible in primitive eras, when there were no specialists. It became especially accentuated on the intellectual terrain once the priestly and governing castes established their monopoly, and was consolidated on the fatal foundation of the bureaucratic military castes. It developed more slowly on the terrain of the arts and trades, but there too it was eventually established by the luxury of the owning classes. This system was based on the frugality and the ignorance of the exploited and dominated masses and whereas science, however, was capable of further development—due to its usefulness in applications for the benefit of the owning classes—the masses were necessarily rendered incapable of taking direct advantage of its advancements and remained separated from it, just as, for their part, the educated persons were themselves habitually imprisoned within a single branch of knowledge (to the benefit of some and the disadvantage of others) and often remained unaware of all the experiences that the people acquire in their work and more generally in their struggle against the hardships of life. In the future, a new historical trend will bring the people and the intellectuals closer together, and will make a clean slate of the specialists in obsolete ideas, military massacres, bureaucratic entanglements, insipid luxury, etc.

Thus, in our era, what is old, infinitely old, what has no knowledge of the future, no perspective, no clue, and is taken for granted by a diverse array of intellectual tools, necessarily seen under a thousand different forms, clashes with a technological scientific perfection that is increasing daily, which places

absolutely all the resources and wealth of the globe at the service of the owners and managers of an increasingly more perfect productive and distributive apparatus. This stimulates and accentuates in the powerful the desire to enjoy their constantly increasing power and wealth and cements their alliance with the sinister powers of the past, causing a sudden and dizzying resurgence of the means of domination characteristic of the dark ages, superstition and tyranny, pogroms and diabolical brutality. The masses, oppressed and terrorized like never before, undoubtedly discontented, but always for the most part inert, accessible to stimulants and flattery (sports, patriotism), were never as mistrustful as they are now of the different socialisms, the authoritarian and the libertarian, which only touch them indirectly, attracting a few and leaving almost all the others unmoved. Even syndicalism is only well understood as a method and a goal by a few, and for the masses—where there are no more moderate rivals which then attract the majority—it is an organizational means like any other which they do not know how to direct towards serious struggles and achievements. Under these conditions, rapidly and incompletely sketched here and alongside so many other trends and tendencies that have occupied and often absorbed the attention of the people, the different varieties of socialism were elaborated over a period extending for a century and a half, some of which spread and others were extinguished or modified. I said a century and a half because—despite the occurrence of similar events in some previous centuries—since the declaration of independence of the United States in 1776, the world saw that the will of man, if it really wanted to do so, was capable of transforming an established state of affairs that had been declared to be ineffable, sacred and permanent. At the beginning of this era this will set to work and those who proclaimed ancient ideals, because they were ancient, were openly called utopians of immorality, a certain kind of powerful and ubiquitous person, but considered as a series of good fossils to be set up as bogeymen, balloons that were inflated only to be deflated and the history of these one hundred and fifty years is, more or less, that of this terrorizing and deflating, a very coarse work at times which left neither the time nor the energy to completely cleanse the terrain and lay the foundations of a new society. Many thick layers that had accumulated over the centuries therefore had to be eliminated so that a creative labor could begin again and looked at from the perspective of our time one can state—or at least I can do so—that this labor of simple liberation, democratization, secularization, education, etc., has not absorbed a great deal of energy, that its proponents failed to proceed to socialism and that they could have given it a more experienced leadership, a more practical one than that of the theoreticians, economists, philosophers, moralists, passionate rebels and men of the people and others who have occupied themselves with these tasks, they

would have been able to confer upon it something else besides their writings, their speeches, their votes, and often their own lives and their personal sacrifices.

These men, liberals and radicals of all stripes, were therefore not just the tools that the capitalists used to create bourgeois political power. They were, at first, fighters who fought to overthrow the feudal and ecclesiastical powers and potentates that originated in antiquity and the middle ages and that constituted an extension of oriental and even pre-historical despotism. If, during that era, that of the French Revolution, the people, the workers and the peasants, were as capable of fighting as resolutely for their own rights as the bourgeois democrats fought for their liberation, the surface of the world would be different today, the factory system, then in its inception, would not have spread physical destruction among the workers who, incapable of fighting for the future, were reduced during that period to a defensive struggle for the present in order to at least preserve their bare physical existence. But the people were still asleep even during the French Revolution and its awakened elements merely became the foot-soldiers of the bourgeois political revolution while the peasants sought no other way to save themselves and to emancipate themselves from serfdom than to break up the large estates into individual small-holdings, and to engage in an intensive form of individual ownership rather than association, solidarity and the common ownership of all the land.

Thus, in that decisive era when the old regime was overthrown and when it was possible that not only politics, but also social economy could have really created a new regime based on equality and solidarity, this did not take place thanks to the absolute lack of a conscious socialist force. If at that time, some voices made themselves heard in France, when compared to the immense number of political and reformist voices they were reduced to near insignificance, and the works published by William Godwin during the first few months of 1793 when he was in London, which proclaimed the socialist and even the anarchist principle of its time, were not read in France.

Socialism was absent from the councils of the French Revolution, although everyone in the New World had already read Morelly and Mably, and although the power of money, speculation and the monopolization of land, housing, gold, public provisions, etc., was a constantly suppurating open wound, denounced and vainly combated with ineffective stopgap measures. When the impulse of the revolution was already aflame and the most ardent spirits had been sacrificed or fell by the wayside exhausted or discouraged, socialism raised its voice through the mouths of Babeuf and Buonarrotti, who were supported only by a small number of radicals, while they were confronted by a new bourgeois state that crushed them and which, in turn, was captured by the fascist coup d'état of 18th Brumaire and the first Mussolini since the times of the Borgias. Whereas the Mussolini of

our time has not yet managed to establish his "Third Rome", Napoleon created an ersatz New Rome, a truly immense continental power that demonstrated, even more effectively than the American war of independence could ever have done, to what extent the most ancient monarchies and empires are often unstable. England, this time favored by its geographical location—which, due to its great distance from North America, had caused it to lose its colonies there—was able to take advantage of the situation, developing its factory system, surpassing the continent, founding major monopolies, amassing immense fortunes and also keeping the masses of workers in check who, despite their discontent and their agitation, were suppressed by the physical suffering imposed by the industrial system, long hours of work, poverty, exhaustion and the fear of lockouts.

So it was that, from this great awakening of humanity in the 18th century, prepared by philosophy, generous and humanitarian freethinkers and the good will of so many good men—following a brief period of democratic and egalitarian hopes—great states and militarism emerged victorious on the European continent, and the exploitative factory system, a flourishing commercial and colonial imperialism, and an aristocracy that had exercised its rule since the Norman invasion of 1066, emerged victorious in Great Britain. Liberalism survived on the continent, forced into a defensive position, and fought constantly, brilliantly in 1830 and in 1848 . . . . But it could not conquer a long lasting secure or stable position, because its bourgeois supporters often became conservatives and are now largely fascists, while its working class supporters have become socialists or at least social democrats. In England the entire working class found itself on the defensive, since it was pushed against the wall by the stifling industrial system, a situation that was also faced by the workers of those continental countries where the industrial system was established, such as Belgium and parts of France and Germany. The peasants were forced to fight tenaciously against the remnants of feudalism and, as in France, the defense of small-scale property, a profoundly anti-socialist system, rather than association, became its rallying cry.

It was in such a situation, one that was naturally only propitious for the amassing of great bourgeois fortunes, for the perpetuation of the agrarian monopoly of the aristocracy and for condemning the people to endless labor and limitless poverty, in this cruel and unendurable situation, which had to be radically transformed for the good of humanity, thinkers, broad-minded and humanitarian thinkers, well educated but necessarily the offspring of their time, turned to the socialist ideas of the 18th century. They did what every era must do for its socialism, they modernized its ideas to fit their mentality under the influence of their own experience. This was the right way, for every era has its own form of socialism; there is nothing permanent in science, as everyone knows: why should there be anything permanent about something that, at all times, must be the sum

of the best social perception in the conception of a free and happy human life on this little world, which is to say socialism? I insist on this aspect because, as we shall see, it is due to the fact that it is so often forgotten that much evil has been done to socialism, and not even anarchism is exempt from it and its consequences.

Chapter 2

Prior to this great period that lasted from 1775 to 1815—forty years of wars and revolutions, of immense political, territorial and social changes and of growth with respect to the scale and intensity of industrial, commercial and financial life—socialism only enjoyed a nominal, partial and spasmodic existence, since the old regime, which had formed a solid authoritarian bloc over the centuries, although moth-eaten and dulled by its increasing ineffectiveness, and although undermined by criticism and science which laid the foundations for a less servile way of life, was nonetheless because of its very inertia kept on its feet despite having been assaulted in vain on several occasions by revolts that were planned or provoked by desperation. Just as in our time, whereas prior to 1917 the socialist world had become accustomed to consider the overthrow of a modern state as something that was almost impossible, and was left bewildered by the relatively easy, almost automatic overthrow of Czarism after the first few blows of the axe, so also, prior to 1775, at the time of the start of the American war of independence, no one expected such a rapid and total collapse of the old system; and it was just as difficult to conceive of a socialism that would be the result of the conscious will of a large part of the population.

There were, at that time, only dispersed fragments of socialism in the hope and the imagination linked to the idea of a compensatory justice of life beyond the grave: paradise, the Elysian Fields, the heaven of the Houris of the Mohammedans, the heaven of the Valkyries of the Germanic peoples of the North, just as there was also the resigned memory of the golden age of a distant past, the legend of the happy peoples without property or laws in some mythical Scythia, an Eldorado or a floating island. Since there were really so few social revolts, and since everything depended in the world of that time on the will of the rulers and since, in addition, there was so much respect for what little science and education there was, the idea arose—expressed in numerous utopias—that socialism, or any other similar kind of equitable system, had to be the product of the wisdom and goodness of a legislator, a magnanimous king or an assembly of wise and benevolent elders who would arrange everything. If a state of absolute liberty was sometimes imagined, it was situated in a country in which nature or some entirely fantastic process was supposed to have created an equally absolute abundance and rendered any work or other efforts to organize society utterly superfluous. The experiments that were carried out undoubtedly did not fail to produce a cooperative socialism that involved far-sighted and necessary measures against pauperism—I am referring to the industrial college of Bellers in the 17th century, etc.—but reformist projects and long-term socialist aspirations seldom mixed, so that such reform measures

constituted, so to speak, the Protestant counterpart of the charity for the poor practiced by monasteries in the Catholic countries.

Since it was the case that, alongside long-term socialist aspirations, which were seldom expressed clearly and which generally only inspired a shrug of the shoulders, vague and inconsistent attempts to pursue them or an insipid joke, the social problem was a permanent fixture of the world, discontent was manifested by what one could call all the means of the trade union struggle and sometimes in large-scale revolts of workers and peasants, but authority always was restored by means of the most cruel and bloody repression, by a suffocating officialdom of the mandatory estates and the band-aids of primitive charity administered on a shoe-string by monasteries or work-houses; or else resistance, still in its infancy, was barely represented here and there by fellowships and was non-existent between peasants and craft workers. The relative absence of international complications for trade, localized production, a simple life, high mortality (poor hygiene) which kept population growth at a low level, all of these things made it possible for the old regime to divide men into the privileged and the common people, to keep order by way of the gallows, torture and the lash, and to fill stomachs that were too empty at the doors of the monasteries or work-houses, where the absence of health care workers or doctors eliminated the least hardy. Against such a system, which claimed to be and believed it was eternal, what emerged more than anything else was a destructive rebellion and the most energetic spirits contributed to this trend; to dream of socialism in such a hell was then truly the undertaking of a few generous dreamers who would continue to dream for several more centuries, but it was not these individuals who would be the first to put the torch to old regime, but instead became its first victims, aware of the material slavery, the intellectual oppression and the increasing ineffectiveness of the old authoritarian mechanism when faced with modern life and its requirements.

There was, then, a large number of men who sought more or less advanced immediate political and social reforms, and a small number of men with socialist aspirations, who had not yet established any serious link between the distant dream and the immediate action upon which the revolutionary democrats placed the highest priority. There were undoubtedly many more socialists at that time than we are aware of now, since we have to include not just the authors of the socialist books of the time, but also their readers, although in practice most of them associated with the democrats and participated in the immediate struggle.

It is a well-established fact that during the French Revolution the custom often prevailed—by proclamation of the assemblies or the committees (which assumed the reins of the real secular authority)—whereby an attempt was made to regulate economic life from above, sometimes with a real desire for social justice, sometimes for the benefit of a rising and ambitious bourgeoisie, but more often for

the purpose of establishing a strong tax-based State, but with regard to socialism there was not a trace outside of the equally authoritarian ideas of Babeuf and Bounarotti who wanted to draft a series of decrees in advance that would impose communism by force and to conspire, with a handful of disgruntled democrats, to impose with their help a dictatorship that would proclaim this new regime, a scheme that was nipped in the bud by betrayal and repressed with a cynical display of force and ferocious cruelty, without so much as one finger or one voice being raised by the people on behalf of the victims of this repression.

So when Saint-Simon and Fourier were active around 1804–1805 in France and Robert Owen was fulminating in 1815 against the effects of the industrial system, there was no socialist public in Europe; at most there were a few supporters of Babeuf in secret societies on the continent, a few followers of Godwin in English-speaking regions, and only two men spoke openly of advanced socialist ideas, Thomas Spence, the first popular propagandist whose sectarianism and decidedly narrow and extravagant mannerisms nonetheless isolated him, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, the young socialist and atheist poet who was fascinated by Godwin and whose poems were saturated with so much of his socialist passion, but whose real poetic genius was inevitably isolated from any practical propaganda.

Nonetheless, these few men, even less numerous than the many dilettantes of utopian socialism during the 18th century, but rich in experience due to their having been eyewitnesses or contemporary observers of the events of 1775–1815—revolutionary wars, industrial expansion and the collapse of the entire old world—conceived of socialist systems on an ambitious scale or propagated their ideas with enthusiasm and energy in the public arena, which was now expanding, although restricted and enclosed within the salons and literary cafes. World federations, wide-ranging experiments, intensive collective education, vast organizations and their mutual relations spanning the globe, everything seemed to be possible and realizable for these first great socialists, and it was inevitable that the transcendent events of those forty years imprinted their rhythm, their spirited methods and their proportions on their ideas. In short, the socialism of the past, which was, to one degree or another, educational, regulatory, managerial and partaking of the clearly ultra-authoritarian character of the events of 1775–1815, gave birth to socialist ideas that were to one degree or another authoritarian-pedagogical, which neither scorned nor ignored freedom, but relegated it to a higher stage of perfection, instead focusing on, to start with, the counsels of the wise, the authority of teaching, and faithfulness to the doctrines elaborated by the great masters.

This socialism was voluntarist and associationist, and its proponents put their faith in the spontaneous cooperation of progressive men who would gradually recognize the good sense and the utility of their plans so they could obtain the

necessary support to realize them gradually. The fact that they did not succeed was more due to the general inertia than to direct obstacles. In my view they committed the terrible blunder of not expressing their solidarity from the very beginning with all socialist efforts of every kind, and instead put all their store by their belief in the infallibility of their own systems and the absurdity of all the others: thus, the multitude of socialisms that could have and should have been a glorious advantage was, from the very beginning, its greatest curse; they could all count barely a few dozen or a few hundred followers, and already the good Fourier could cry out against "the deceptions and the charlatanism" of "the two sects of Saint-Simon and Owen" in 1831, etc.

Even before having been divided into authoritarians and libertarians, the socialists were already entrenched in intolerant schools, proclaiming the true and the false, the white and the black, the good and the evil, the reasonable and the absurd, according to the dictates of each school. It was this unfortunate mental habit inherited from religious sectarianism, from the pedantic mannerisms of the schoolmasters, from the megalomania of inspired prophets, which poisoned socialism; this is the effective equivalent of nationalism as opposed to internationalism, egoism against altruism, individual ownership versus collectivism, the embodiment of narrowness and pettiness as opposed to generosity and open-mindedness; it is, to summarize, the dog in the manger among the noble aspirations of the future—general solidarity, integral humanism, complete freedom—and the monopolist, proprietarian, and dominating qualities that men have dragged along with them as an accursed legacy of an authoritarian, fanatical, ignorant, narrow-minded and cruel past.

It is obvious that a socialism that has not been carefully elaborated cannot be victorious, but it would have received from the very beginning a more solid foundation if the socialists of every variety had tried to help each other instead of seeking to refute one another and engaging in a free-for all of mutual destruction. Alongside the age-old inertia there was also the recently emerging eagerness of the bourgeoisie to enjoy the benefits of the new industrial development, the new means of transport that extended the scope of their trade that had previously been restricted to certain localities.

But this expansion of production and trade could only be carried out at the expense of the workers of that era, who suffered terribly, which led them to think exclusively of their personal defense against the industrial system that was crushing them and as a result they did not think about a far-off socialism, but of their immediate affairs, which they defended by directly violent means (destruction of machines)—a movement that was quickly suppressed—or else by way of trade unionism—which was forced to operate in a clandestine manner in its early days, and which often practiced sabotage for defensive purposes—or else

they wanted to conquer political power in the existing State (electoral suffrage movements; Chartism). This took place for the most part in England, and in Catalonia a trade unionism emerged that was very much influenced by English socialism. In France, the workers were absorbed by republicanism, and only to a much lesser degree by the Babeuvism that Buonarotti publicized with his great book in 1828, which was widely distributed in France after 1830. From Babeuvism, three great distinct currents emerged: Blanquism, the direct heir of the coup d'état and the communist dictatorship of Babeuf; the system of Louis Blanc, a communism organized and imposed by a State, through the agency of the workers and with the workers at the helm of the State (for example, as a result of elections held after a revolution): this is therefore a legalistic Blanquism, the State dictatorship; and the system of Cabet, who, to begin with, proposed the foundation of a communist Icaria in America, but who would have also, had he been able to do so, imposed his system throughout France by authoritarian means.

There are, then, these four variations—Babeuf-Buonarotti, Blanqui, Louis Blanc and Cabet—who represented the communism that demands the seizure of supreme power in order to impose its egalitarian system on the entire community. And in this respect the question of any undesired authoritarian qualities of these systems hardly arises: each believes in good faith that his system represents the maximum degree of liberty that can be prudently granted to a society, whether a large one like that of Louis Blanc, or a small one like Cabet's experimental Icaria. But every one of them claims the absolute right to employ violent force either directly or indirectly, through legal means, and every one of them proclaims the dictatorship of his will to impose his system on society as a whole. And they held these views at a time when, between 1828 and 1848—not to mention the extremely rare anarchist critique that was offered by a man of the stature of Proudhon—they had before their eyes the examples of Considerant's *La Destinée Sociale* and the works of Constantin Pecqueur (true classics of a federative associationism and the integral commune, which could have served to lay the foundations of a large scale autonomous federated cooperative socialism, whose counterparts in England were the similar plans of William Thompson and Robert Owen) as well as Fourierist associationism and English individualist mutualism, all of which comprised the incipient nuclei of an international socialist production and distribution, if they cared to read these works. During these same years, between 1830 and 1848, cooperatives first began to take shape, the products of very modest initial experiments—and see what they have become today! During the same period railroads, steamships, the telegraph, and an enormous number of factories, workshops, and credit institutions, etc., all of which originated from very modest beginnings, have multiplied, and behold how far they have come today. It seems

incredible to me that, during those days and right up to our time, not even a little real socialism has been achieved; it is true that since then millions of socialists have been organized and millions of voters have been trained, but what have they achieved? Their powerlessness persists from one year to the next, regardless of the increase in their sheer numbers. I will be told that they have seized power in Russia and in Siberia, which is even larger than Russia: that may be true, but right now thousands of their followers are being massacred in Canton. I will be told that they are government ministers and that they have formed cabinets in various countries, or that they control large cities: this may also be true, but these ministers, like all the other ministers, prepare for and initiate wars and poverty prevails in many cities, whether or not they have socialist administrations. The forces of working class socialism, which were not interested in founding a creative socialism during an era when the world was undergoing a historical turning point (modern capitalism was then in its beginnings), have focused on activities oriented towards the conquest of political power and are still mesmerized by this endless, dead end project: thus, while it is true that they have grown over the last century, the forces of capitalism have grown larger still. It suffices to compare the quantity of elements that were at the disposal of a social revolution in England and the development of English capitalism during the 19th century with the enormous proportions of capitalism and the tenuous hold of revolutionary ideas in the United States today.

Is it so hard to understand how a century of the stubborn pursuit of political power has separated the worker from socialism? For the communist of a hundred years ago socialism was labor of direct solidarity in harmony and freedom with his comrades; for today's communist, such labor does not exist in Russia: between him and labor there is an immense hierarchy, bureaucracy and red tape, and he is a nullity compelled to passive obedience alongside his equally powerless comrades in the vast workshops that ostensibly belong to the nation, which as far as he is concerned is no different than if they belonged to a corporation owned by any person whatsoever or some individual capitalist. Such a situation cannot lead to advances in efficient production and conscientious work, and to the abundance of products that we expect from a real socialism and that would make a communism worthy of the name possible and enduring, which implies free labor and free products. To the contrary, such a state communism results in indifference and scarcity, which is why it is constantly necessary to shore it up with expedients until one day it will collapse and give way, perhaps, to a ferocious individualist reaction. A people that has to endure this socialism imposed from above, is therefore not nourished by the pleasure of a social ideal that it is realizing and is making increasingly more tangible, but feels uprooted, separated from this ideal and, as a result, from any other ideal or hope: it falls from the Scylla of

capitalism into the Charybdis of statism at any price, it remains suffused with a silent mistrust, it suffers at the hands of an ineluctable fate and seldom attempts to seek protection in revolt and the search for true liberty but, generally, succumbs to the individualist and egotistical idea of 'every man for himself!', which is what we have seen happen to the enormous masses of Russian peasants, while the workers silently grit their teeth and develop a mute and passive skepticism that will one day have to paralyze the economic organism to such an extent that the entire communist bureaucracy, however numerous and powerful it may be, will be unable to make it operate with a minimum of effectiveness: then the end will come.

What authoritarian communism has been able to achieve is, therefore, a state of affairs that is entirely unsatisfactory and, we believe, one that is not viable over the long term: it is necessary to admit that if all of this were to be reproduced on a very large scale, it is doubtful that it would achieve its goals: as opposed to such an extensive catastrophe everyone would prefer a less extreme catastrophe, or absolutely no catastrophe at all. How did the small groups inspired by Buonarotti, Blanqui, Cabet and Louis Blanc of 1830–1840, develop into the millions of people who are today mobilized by such ideas? Buonarotti always stayed in the shadows, Blanqui spent his time hatching conspiracies and came out into the streets four or five times to engage in open struggle, Cabet was a zealous propagandist, a bitter polemicist and the founder of a tiny and scarcely viable community in the United States, and Louis Blanc was a journalist and historian, and in 1848 they were all politicians of the least successful variety, quickly defeated by other politicians who were more clever, and they afterwards became respected figureheads to the people who, as they became more moderate, failed to support these men whom they saw in action and occasionally applauded, but whom they abandoned to their persecutors, allowing Buonarotti to die in obscurity, letting Blanqui spend more than thirty years in prison, leaving Cabet to waste his last resources in the internecine squabbles and poverty of his distant little Icaria, and watching Louis Blanc go into exile in the spring of 1848, even before June, and then to spend the rest of his days in London as a republican and socialist celebrity. This communism, despite the selfless efforts of so many of its supporters, never took root in the people.

What did the people do during these years?

Thanks to the popular wave of 1775 to 1815 referred to above, there was neither a relapse nor stagnation in Europe, however powerful the reactionaries that remained in power or who returned to power in 1814–1815 were. English industrial development drove the workers to defend themselves, in a way that was half political and half economic, concerning which I have spoken, and the reaction on

the continent only encouraged the spread of liberalism, democracy and republicanism (I shall leave aside the emergence of nationalism, which I have discussed in other articles published in the past). Large parties dedicated to political reform and vast organizations and movements for social reform therefore arose, all of which were devoted to the defensive and offensive means to achieve immediate improvements, to the protection of the conquest of political liberties, to the defense of the workers' standard of living and to social reforms. Chartism was a movement of this kind, and so were trade unionism, the struggle for free trade (against tariffs on imported wheat), the movements to reduce the length of the working day and to improve health and safety in the workplace, etc., in England; and so were the struggles for universal suffrage, for constitutional government, for the emancipation of the peasantry, and against feudalism, etc., in continental Europe. All these movements had already set hundreds of thousands, if not millions of working people in motion around the midpoint of the 19th century, along with the progressive elements of the middle classes. Thus, in England, that great body of organized labor came to be formed, the Trades Union Congress, a body of very moderate spirit, strictly interested in the immediate needs of the working class, but which defends this restricted and limited cause with an incomparable tenacity. In France, the universal suffrage granted in 1848 led to the formation of the party of the democratic and social republic, composed of non-socialist bourgeoisie and workers who nonetheless sought to establish a radical secular regime devoted to social reform; this party was practically pulled in two directions, on the one hand by its non-socialist and anti-socialist members, and on the other by its socialist supporters, non-sectarian and non-exclusive socialists, who thereby sought to cooperate with the progressive elements against the reactionary trend that threatened the Republic of 1848 from its very origins—insatiable and unmitigated bourgeoisism such as that of Thiers and Cavaignac, Bonapartism, clericalism, etc.—and all these elements were also hostile towards or skeptical of the dictatorial authoritarian communists (like Blanqui) and of those who appeared to be impractical (like Cabet). In any event, it is well-established that this trend began to gain ground as soon as the events of June 1848 had already closed off the hearts of the people against all these parties, as was proven by their abstention on June 13, 1848 and even more so in Paris following the coup d'état of December 1851. Likewise, in other countries in Europe, the people, discouraged by the ineffectiveness of the social movements of 1848 with regard to the improvement of their social conditions, allowed those movements to disappear without lending them any real support in the second half of 1848 and in 1849. It is necessary, however, to except from this judgment the national struggles of those years, which sometimes found an echo and enjoyed much more popular support than the political struggles, in their struggle against the counterrevolution.

There were, therefore, during the middle of the 19th century: 1) socialists of various types, isolated theoreticians and critics who were not fighters; 2) the authoritarian communists described above—more or less persecuted, imprisoned, uprooted, without any relations outside their own small circles of followers; and, 3) workers organized for the everyday struggle (labor disputes) and political democrats with social concerns, but lacking both socialist conviction and socialist faith.

As I understand it, the historical role of Karl Marx consisted in having striven to bring about the cooperation of the second and third of these categories and to eliminate the first. His tactics were above all protean and elastic, and constantly evinced a tendency to obtain control of the third category—the mass of organized workers and the mass of democrats concerned about social issues—in order to seize power with the aid of these masses of workers and voters, whether in the sense of Blanqui, by direct seizure—which is what Lenin did later—or else by means of the methods of Louis Blanc, via an indirect seizure of the State by means of parliament (which is what social democracy aims to do and is presently trying to achieve wherever it can).

This method is characterized—in my opinion—by its attempt to bring about socialism by means of non-socialists or with men barely imbued with the socialist spirit. Marx replaced the real socialists with the masses, whose living conditions as workers and whose need for everyday defensive struggles caused them to join the trade unions, and with the voters for whom the contemporary state of political oppression led to discontentment; he thus attracted a large number of people to his side, but in this vast aggregation the only socialists were him and the handful of real authoritarian communists. These circumstances caused them to seek to rule these masses, if they were not already authoritarians. This intellectual and organizational dictatorship therefore always exists, and when it obtains power this dictatorship becomes governmental and hierarchical, like that of the Bolshevik party over the many millions of people of Russia. This leads to a fictitious, conventional, executive socialism, the shadow, the ghost, the façade of socialism, but never its reality: thus, too, those who believe that with this method of compulsion the people will gradually come to understand and to love socialism, suffer from a gross error. No, this is just as unlikely and as impossible as educating a child with slaps and beatings so as to persuade him of the necessity of learning his lessons and to make him love doing his homework; to the contrary, he will detest them. This method does not produce enduring results, but it can lead to usurpations, such as those carried out by the Bonapartes and Mussolini (as long as they last . . .), but socialism can never be thrown together this way: it will be an organic development or it will not exist.

This zealous tactic, so devoted to obtaining the regimentation of the masses, was complemented by the systematic rejection of all other types of socialism. If Cabet "refuted" them by his narrow-minded obstinacy, Marx rejected them on principle, and thus managed to make a clean break for his followers with the continuity and mutual connections of socialism; armed in advance against all other varieties of socialism by Marx's polemics and verbiage, his followers soon came to ignore the other varieties of socialism, and felt nothing but pity or scorn for them and if they were still active, hatred. What Marx sought to achieve with his diatribes against Proudhon and his intrigues against Bakunin, the social democracy has managed to do by means of more direct persecution, and the Bolsheviks have carried out by all the means of a repression worse than that wielded by the Czars. The usurpation that was theoretical (Marx) and quite practical (Bolshevism), ultimately leads to a bad conscience, and the usurper instinctively believes it is necessary to suppress the witnesses and critics of his crime. What an illusion it is to believe in the total victory of this usurpation, and to imagine that the trend towards the real socialist ideal will come to an end because certain favorable circumstances allowed for the usurpation of November 1917.

We shall not speak of Marx's ideas about the development of capitalism and its final collapse in favor of socialism. There can be no doubt that he arrived at these conclusions after forty years of extensive study, which ended with his death in 1883; it is above all necessary to understand what the new historical period, which opened up precisely when he died (the capitalist seizure of Africa: Egypt in 1881, the international conference on the Congo in 1883, etc.) and which has led, by way of colonial imperialism, the rebirth of European nationalism, the great wars, the rise of capitalism in the United States, etc., to a chronic or acute universal crisis—who knows which!—it is necessary, I repeat, to understand what this period would have taught an observer like Marx. In any event I think that if the establishment of socialism is dependent on this vast imperialist wave that will culminate in the overthrow of capitalism, its alleged establishment in Russia by way of a series of circumstances in 1917 does not conform to this prediction, but is instead a phenomenon of another kind, an incident rather than an inevitable natural fact, a premature birth or an abortion rather than a healthy and propitious normal birth. If it were possible to hasten the onset of socialism with a bold coup d'état in the style of Blanqui and Lenin, natural development (Marx) and legal revolution (social democratic parliamentarism) would be useless. In reality, Marxism professes three methods: the hope that the ripe fruit will fall into its hands, the legal parliamentary majority, and the coup d'état are therefore always justified in its eyes. But it would indeed be unfortunate if the good socialist seed, sown to produce the most beautiful flowers and the sweetest fruits, is

choked by this bad invasive and usurper weed of Marxism, the incarnation of modern authoritarian communism, which proclaims the authority of a handful of communists over the people and over all other forms of socialism, an odious usurpation if there ever was one.

Chapter 3

I will not spend any time here describing the libertarian communism whose most beautiful expression, integral anarchy, is known under so many forms in every country. It seems that it is less important to review these expressions once more rather than to examine the ways that all these conceptions relate to the world around us. We have seen the distressing narrowness and intolerance of the authoritarian communism in its Bolshevik manifestation and in its social democratic or legalistic socialist aspirations that lead to the same result: the imposition of a single system by authoritarian means and woe to the vanquished, woe to those socialists of other kinds who do not bow down before the new dispensation! We shall not imitate them or, on the other hand, fall below their level. We shall not oppose them in turn with some single system, program or platform of our own, unless we embrace in widespread solidarity, open to all, everything that is voluntary, libertarian and based on solidarity, unless we set ourselves the task of establishing means to ensure the extension, the scope and the depth of our institutions or libertarianism.

It is truly unfortunate that the older social ideas were allowed to perish and their literature to disappear, without subjecting them to the test of experience and making a selection among them on that basis. It is also most unfortunate that ideas as widely propagated as the anarchist collectivism of the international were condemned and abandoned at a certain point in history, and that even the idea of Mella and others, who said that we should not have preconceived ideas about these questions without putting them to the test and that we should admit the plurality of economic hypotheses, has been a dead letter for a long time. More recent still, the split between communists and individualists in France, instead of diminishing in virulence, has become even more irreconcilable, although not entirely without some dissent. Since in all these instances we are dealing with issues that will not be resolved any time soon—the way things are proceeding now—but only in general and specific circumstances that we cannot foresee, it seems to me that our libertarian ideal is constantly diminishing, and becoming—in words and writings—a marvelously cut jewel, but also a much smaller one, more concentrated, less visible and comprehensible to enough men who, not to speak of their realizing it in its entirety, will at least tolerate its realization in a more or less localized environment.

To the contrary, it seems to me that the grand lineaments of our ideas must be engraved in the heavens in flaming letters, but that the details must be left to experience and to the foresight of those who can actually devote themselves to them. Experience will be necessary because we always have to build with the

materials at hand at any given moment, and foresight will give the impulse, bring together harmonious elements and intensify the effectiveness of their deeds.

In the past, Proudhon was majestic in his criticism, but too narrow, unilateral, and specialized in his economic propositions, and magnificent as well with regard to his proposals concerning federalism. Bakunin understood quite well that what was called for was a general demolition and that the next step would be the creation of an extensive domain, firmly guaranteed against relapses and reaction—federated associations—and that then life itself, new experiences, new possibilities, subjective willingness and needs would fill this domain. Élisée Reclus, for whom communism (all for all) was inseparable from anarchy, was very careful in theory as well as in his tactics, to refrain from proposing any program, knowing as a result of his studies the infinite variety of men and things. He came to the conclusion that with the advent of abundance the practical operation of all the varieties of communism and the all-embracing and generous practice of solidarity would be easily realizable, an important point concerning which we are so much less certain in our hard times. Kropotkin cautiously examined this serious problem, but his conclusions seem to me to be too personal, too particularly applicable to certain cases, to be considered as general results: for me, he has become one of those authors whom one follows with pleasure when his work is viewed as a purely personal effort, a hypothesis, an ingenious and delightful utopia in and of itself, but whom one feels impelled to contradict frequently if his writings are conceived as general instruction. Malatesta, again for me personally, provokes much less disagreement, and in his writings after 1919 it seems to me that he is laying the foundations of a serious critique and revision of conventional anarchism, of that anarchism that sees no major obstacles, that does not give profound consideration to any problems, that always says the same things and that lives on the hope that one fine day all of humanity will knock on its door for salvation, and that then, according to what has been written in some programs, articles and pamphlets, will remove humanity's chestnuts from the fire; nothing will ever be so simple. Ricardo Mella, Voltairine de Cleyre and Gustav Landauer are, in my view, the authors who, along with Élisée Reclus, have had a better understanding of the scope and variety that must be provided to anarchist ideas so that, if they are to be worth anything, they will live their own life, impossible to foresee, and which it is absurd to want to condense into formulas and to be cloistered away in a walled compound.

I will conclude this short list whose only purpose is to point out—besides a little of our abundance of thinkers of no common standard—that anarchy is always found fully in motion and that it would be a mistake to consider all its propositions as definitive and to rest on the laurels of the past. Fortunately, if some have not

taken this fact into account, many others have and ideas, a little crystallized after so many years, are once again being thrown into the crucible.

Obviously, what we are all seeking is to connect these ideas and the life of the people. To get the people to be directly interested in the exchange of products, as Josiah Warrant and Proudhon attempted to do, offers little security to those everyday folk who seek above all the safety of routine, the absence of danger. Experimentalism, as useful as it is, has never gone beyond very restricted limits; Gustav Landauer's most ambitious plans died with him. The instinct of revolt that Bakunin hoped to be able to awaken in the people, among whom, according to him, it was only dormant, is very recalcitrant: this instinct, combined with so much prudence and distrust, only appears when the normal routine has been completely shattered, when it has the support of large numbers and when the dimension of personal responsibility is severely restricted. But if Bakunin thought then that the instincts of the people were basically anti-authoritarian and anti-statist, it may have been so during his time; today, these instincts, in my view, seem to have been quite compromised by the spasms of the authority that is the first instinct to display itself, since humanity, since the time of Bakunin, has passed through every form of authority and unfortunately—if we except the sciences and the arts—has passed through no form of liberty. Kropotkin, too, especially between 1879 and 1882, believed in the popular revolt that was so imminent, but still so distant . . . and ten years later many sacrifices were again made to fan the flames of the powder keg of popular rebellion, but the fire never spread.

Then, around 1898, the moment arrived for the great approach of the working people to syndicalism. Which was quite useful because it rendered viable the anarchists' propaganda, advice, and direct practical action in an environment of workers who were united with them in common interests and an ideal and practical solidarity. But such cases were probably rare and only lasted for a short time, and it usually happened that this amalgamation more often assimilated the anarchists to the syndicates rather than the syndicates to the anarchists. The results were necessarily different where syndicalism had a profound anarchist and internationalist pedigree as in Spain, but in France and the other countries the syndicates had a non-anarchist past; in addition, the internal life of the syndicates, their politics and the constant confrontation between various syndicalist tendencies, all these things ultimately produced a history full of altercations and polemics, of fierce hatreds and great passions—like the history of the various fatherlands—rather than effective cooperation against the bourgeoisie, or much less a full unfolding of the anarchist idea. Instead, one soon heard the sublime motto, "syndicalism is enough in itself", and then the infiltrated ideas, considered as totally useless, were thrown overboard.

We still have to mention the support that a significant proportion of Russian anarchists gave in good faith to Bolshevism in 1917–1918, only to be rudely disenchanted after the spring of 1918 and to receive the final blows in 1921, and the fascination displayed by some anarchists, also in good faith, for the same party in other countries outside of Russia, as a result of a lack of reliable first-hand information which has been remedied over the last few years, so that today only a small number of anarchists have joined the Bolsheviks and have been completely lost to our cause, while all the rest are quite clear with regard to this question.

We must also recall the war, in which such vacillations were witnessed, and fascism, which posed the problem of cooperation or non-cooperation with the other anti-fascist parties, socialists, communists, radicals, etc. And finally, we must not forget that a question of pure humanity unites the large number of voices of humanitarians, socialists and communists raised in protest with the voices of the anarchists, while that other question of humanity, the fate of the political prisoners in Russia, causes them to cry out louder, but they lack the kind of widespread support that the rulers of Russia enjoy.

Such is, more or less, the framework in which anarchist action and propaganda have been carried out, and although much has been accomplished and is still being achieved, it is not enough. The libertarian communist idea must be spread throughout the world, which—while a major task—does not pose the task of elaborating programs that are really impossible to put into practice, but rather that of discovering the best way to lead life itself, the appeal to the practice of freedom and the return of that human dignity that is constantly being sacrificed on the altar of authority, proclaiming, finally, happiness and harmony, peace and freedom.

On its own, as it is theorized in programs and platforms, anarchy cannot overcome the inertia created by authority and its accomplice, routine, in the minds of almost everyone, even those people who are said to be the most oppressed and exploited and who, for this very reason, are assumed to be unconscious revolutionaries. The moral collaboration, or at least the silent approval, required of all those who in any particular circle, will practice spontaneity and association, will be necessary, and it will also be necessary that no one attempts to set himself up as master of the others. We like to think that good is, after all, stronger in the world than evil. In that case we have to unite ourselves with everything that is good and try to create a vacuum around it without evil, until we manage to totally eliminate evil. Against the great evil of authority we have to oppose the great solidarity of the good. As much as I love anarchy, I am always pleased by any advances whatsoever in any sphere, because it is progress, because it will be combined with the sum of what is progressive against the sum, that terrible weight, of the authoritarian and the routine.

I do not share that way of viewing the world as a mass of corruption that should be destroyed and which is not worth the trouble to bother about, nor do I feel that the anarchists are the only just men who can regenerate the world. This would be true if there was a good God who will someday put us onboard an Ark like Noah, drown the other inhabitants of the earth and leave us the world free to establish the new society and to continue our debates about the platform. It is hardly likely that things will work out that way. If this world is rotten, so are we, in a certain way, and the more it rots, the more risk that we will be contaminated with the corruption. The more healthy it becomes in every domain, great or small, the easier our task will be, which is not that of persuading the whole world to accept a platform or a counter-platform or to impose our idea of freedom on others (can this be done without authority?), but that of conquering, gradually or all at once, the freedom to live our own lives, which is anarchy (better without a platform, for my part, and let others live their own lives as long as they do not interfere with our way of life, and not to commit acts of cruelty in the heat of revolt or of destruction of the social wealth belonging to others, or monopolizing these objects, etc.!).

The whole world, which will consent to live together harmoniously and will be reasonable enough to practice some intelligent voluntarism and solidarity, will form one big family which one will be able to call, in accordance with the ideas of the trailblazers, libertarian communism, and the libertarian individualists who are not vulgarly egotistical and antisocial, will always be welcome among the free practitioners of solidarity.

The world of authoritarian communism will do what it wants and the egotistical individualists will rejoice in its deeds (the NEP already has found some supporters of this type), and if it invades the free world, the latter will defend itself; otherwise, we will have to admit that there are people who think differently just as there are those of different races and colors, and each will live in his own way.

On such a basis of parallel forces, if they have not yet joined forces, the old and the new authority, a formidable mass, may yet be defeated by a great union of all men of good will. It seems to me unlikely that this can be achieved by means of doctrinaire rigidity.

Max Nettlau
1928

Max Nettlau, Federica Montseny
Authoritarian Communism and Libertarian Communism
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Max Nettlau, "Comunismo Autoritario y Comunismo Libertario", La Revista Blanca (February 1, 1928), VII, No. 113, pp. 513–517; (February 15, 1928), VII, No. 114, pp. 545–550; (March 1, 1928), VII, No. 115, pp. 577–579. Originally written in French, then translated into Spanish by Federica Montseny in 1928 during one of Nettlau's visits to Spain. Translated from the Spanish translation available online at: http://agitacionrural.no-ip.org/node/68
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