

# Answer to Mick Armstrong's “Property is sacred: How Proudhon moulded anarchism”<sup>1</sup>

René Berthier

*“...the theoretical debate caused by the conflict between anarchism and Marxism has left the movements that fight against domination with a problematic project: self-emancipation. For this reason, it is important to appreciate that the relevance of anarchist critiques of Marxism goes beyond the immediate context in which these critiques were articulated. Whether one is identifying the revolutionary subject, understanding the conditions under which a society freed from the state is possible, or protecting against reproductions of domination using the means of emancipation that organizations are supposed to provide, the problems identified by these critiques are still ours.”<sup>2</sup>*

There is one thing that never changes when you read a Marxist dealing with anarchism: bad faith, distortion, selection of sentences out of context, the systematic concern not to dialogue, not to debate, to look for what separates rather than what brings together. In other words, it's about snarling sectarianism<sup>3</sup>. There is one more thing: the source of the argument is invariably what Marx said about anarchism, sometimes taken up and customised by Hal Draper or authors who have only read these two authors. In other words the most unreliable sources and the most tainted by bad faith.

This is particularly true of a text written by an Australian Marxist, Mick Armstrong, who has produced an article delirious with bad faith compounded by a selection of absolutely questionable sources and preconceived ideas.

In a document whose intention is openly polemical, Armstrong obviously goes looking for everything that can discredit the anarchist movement. In the 150 years of its existence, any political movement has been able to accumulate questionable acts or thoughts. The anarchists themselves have not hesitated to mention and condemn them, which is not the case with Marxism, whose errors, and even crimes, are immeasurably more serious.

In their great candour, anarchists have always hesitated to criticise Marxism from this point of view, and after all, there is material. Engels wanting to exterminate the Czechs, Marx having a child with his maid, Marx's ferocious anti-Semitism in his correspondence,

---

1 Mick Armstrong, “Property is sacred: How Proudhon moulded anarchism”, [https://marxistleftreview.org/articles/property-is-sacred-how-proudhon-moulded-anarchism/#\\_edn2](https://marxistleftreview.org/articles/property-is-sacred-how-proudhon-moulded-anarchism/#_edn2), <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-actuel-marx-2013-2-page-173.htm>  
email: Marxistleftreview [at] gmail.com  
Web: [www.marxistleftreview.org](http://www.marxistleftreview.org)

2 Jean-Christophe Angaut, “Revisiting anarchist critiques of Marxism” In *Actuel Marx Volume 54, Issue 2, 2013*, pages 173 to 183 <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-actuel-marx-2013-2-page-173.htm>

3 This text is not an academic document. I have translated the quotations into English without going through the tedious task of searching for their English equivalents – except in a few cases.

etc. There's no end to it. And in the "whacky" section, we could mention Juan Posadas, an Argentine Trotskyist, who in the 1960s developed an ideology based on the idea that socialists should use aliens as political allies. The idea was that if aliens landed on earth, it would mean that they had developed the productive forces to a point that they had necessarily established communism on their planet. This is not an anecdotal fact: there was a time when his theory spread among the communist intelligentsia of South America. And Posadas now seems to be receiving renewed interest<sup>4</sup>.

It is obvious that this is not the way to make a credible critique of Marxism. This is the method Armstrong uses.

Armstrong intends to focus on Stirner and Proudhon because, he says, "they played a decisive role in establishing the anarchist world view and moulding the outlook of subsequent anarchists including Bakunin and Kropotkin." It is not possible, he continues, to understand the anarchist movement today without dealing with Stirner and Proudhon, which is practically word for word what Hal Draper says<sup>5</sup>. Since Marx is the measure of all things, Draper makes it clear that what he seeks in his critique of anarchism is to "present Marx's view". So does Armstrong, obviously.

Armstrong is convinced that "Stirner still exercises a major influence on anarchist writers"<sup>6</sup>. To support his point, he refers to the "Anarchist FAQ" according to which "his ideas remain a cornerstone of anarchism"<sup>7</sup>, and to George Woodcock according to whom Stirner had "a considerable influence in libertarian circles during the present [twentieth] century".<sup>3</sup> At last, the anarchist writer April Carter states that Stirner's book "had an impact on Bakunin just when the latter was being radicalized for the first time in Young Hegelian circles".<sup>5</sup>

The *Anarchist FAQ* tells us that Stirner argued for "an extreme form of individualism", which placed the individual above all else. George Woodcock, quoted by Armstrong, tells us that "Nietzsche himself regarded Stirner as one of the unrecognized seminal minds of the nineteenth century". However, speaking of Godwin and Stirner, *An Anarchist FAQ* says: "Regardless of their merits, neither of these people influenced the rise of anarchism as a theory or a movement. Indeed, both were discovered by a fully developed anarchist movement in the 1890s and, ironically, the only impact Stirner had in his lifetime was on Marx and what became Marxism (needless to say, Marx distorted Stirner's ideas just as much as he did Proudhon's or Bakunin's)."

Even Armstrong's anarchist sources are questionable.

The FAQ is not a medium in which a reader can expect to find any "orthodoxy"<sup>8</sup>. While the editors take the viewpoint of so-called social anarchism, including Proudhon's mutualism, it also exposes other schools of anarchist thought. It is in a way an encyclopaedia in which one finds everything without indicating any point of view more relevant than another. So Armstrong had no trouble finding what he was looking for to support the caricature of anarchism that he exposes. However, in insisting that anarchism is an individualism he fails to point out that the FAQ also exposes the oppositions between social anarchists and individualists. It is therefore difficult to consider as relevant an article in which the author proceeds in this way.

In 1968 after the strikes I went to Scotland to get a change of scene and I met a young American who told me about George Woodcock while we smoked a joint lying in the sun on a big boulder on the bank of Loch Ness. Back in France I bought the book which had interested me a lot, but I was new to anarchism. Today, in retrospect, Woodcock seems to me to be more a specialist in Tibet than in anarchism. I've gone through *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* again for the occasion and I must admit that it was a bit depressing. I felt like I had walked into a room full of dust and cobwebs. This book was published in 1962. The historiography of anarchism has made some progress since then, which Armstrong doesn't seem to be aware of. I would make the same comment about April Carter, whose little but interesting 125-page book was published in 1971.

And if one looks at the bibliography in Armstrong's article, one sees that the vast majority of the references are from the 1950s to the 1970s, with the best being a 96-page

---

4 A.M. Gittlitz, *I Want to Believe: Posadism, UFOs and Apocalypse Communism*, Pluto Press.

5 Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's theory of Revolution*, vol. IV, p. 107.

6 In the fifty years I have been in the anarchist movement I have not found that "Stirner still exercises a major influence", except on authors who are determined to show that Stirner was an anarchist. But in everyday militant practice, I have *never* met a single anarchist militant who referred to Stirner. On the other hand, I have met many people who started to read *The Unique* and gave up because they didn't understand what all this was about.

7 "Who are the major anarchist thinkers?", *An Anarchist FAQ*.

book on Proudhon published in 1934! At best, if one considers his references, his article could have been written in 1970s,

So let us summarise:

1. Stirner and Proudhon played a decisive role in the formation of anarchism;
2. Stirner still exerts a decisive influence on anarchist authors;
3. Stirner is an individualist;
4. Stirner had an impact on Bakunin;
5. Nietzsche considered him a “seminal mind”.

## Proudhon

I shall content myself with outlining Proudhon's contribution in the theoretical field, a contribution which has been integrated by the anarchist movement (French at any rate) and which is not called into question. Of course, this does not detract from the fact that there are also contestable aspects of Proudhon's work which the anarchist movement does not hesitate to challenge.

### ◆ Property

To begin with, since the title of Armstrong's article evokes the notion of property, let's start with that.

Proudhon had a taste for provocative formulas. At the beginning he says that property is theft, at the end of his life he says that it is freedom; all the while claiming that he has not changed his views on the question. A good Marxist like Armstrong, used to dialectics, should not be confused by this apparent contradiction<sup>8</sup>. When Proudhon says that property is theft he does not mean that the owner of a toothbrush has committed theft. Theft is the appropriation by the capitalist of the value produced by the combined labour of the workers.

Deciphering Proudhon's point of view on property is an extremely complex matter. Three “keys” are needed to understand his point of view:

- You can't make a social revolution against the peasantry.
- The population's attachment to property, including the working class, is so deeply rooted that it is necessary to find transitional measures to overcome this bias.
- The issue of ownership is in fact a false problem.

If we look at things closely, it will be seen that Proudhon's constant preoccupation has been to seek the best strategy to convince the population to accept the idea that production, society in general, should be organised in a non-state socialised manner. All of Proudhon's variations on this theme are merely a reflection of his wanderings in search of a good solution

If Proudhon poses the problem of property so insistently, it is because this problem poses itself insistently. But in the end it is for him a far outdated affair, which he makes extremely clear when he points out that the large manufacturing owner does not care about owning the land on which his factory is located, or even the building and machinery itself. What interests him is the appropriation of the value produced by the collective labour of the workers who produce in the factory. The manufacturer does not have the mood of the petty bourgeois owner: “Does the manufacturer need, in order to be industrially and commercially free” – that is, free to appropriate the surplus value – “to own the house or apartment he lives in with his family, the workshop in which he works, the store where he keeps his raw materials, the shop where he exhibits his products, the land on which the dwelling house, workshop, store and shop have been built? In no way<sup>9</sup>.”

As long as he obtains a lease long enough to give him time to recover the full repayment of the capital he has spent on his lease, and which, because of the nature of things, he cannot take with him at the end of his lease, the manufacturer enjoys, although he is a tenant, sufficient freedom. This brings us completely back to the problem of 1840 in *What is property?* What Proudhon condemns is the appropriation of the surplus-value resulting from the exploitation of the workers. This is what defines *capitalist theft*.

For Proudhon, the obsession on property is the expression of the phantasm of the petty bourgeois terrified by the idea of sinking into the proletariat, into poverty, and fanatically obsessed with the idea of ensuring a “future”, that is, in fact, “capital” for himself and his

8 See: René Berthier, "Proudhon's theory of Property", <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article822>

9 Proudhon, *Théorie de la propriété*, L'Harmattan, p. 31

children. Therefore, overcoming the problem of property means first of all convincing people that in a libertarian society, there will be no need to fear for one's future, nor for that of one's children. This means that the social revolution, understood as a revolutionary process, must immediately provide the population with decent living conditions. Gaston Leval<sup>10</sup>, who was once asked what revolution was, answered: "Revolution? It means delivering 40,000 liters of milk to Madrid every day."

Proudhon's lapidary formulas on property have unfortunately prevented his readers from grasping the nuances he brings to this concept. Property is theft when it provides an opportunity to realize the appropriation of value produced by the work of others. When it guarantees the security of the individual, it is a genuine factor of freedom and well-being.

Proudhon considers it impossible to disregard the obvious tendencies of the population:

"The people, even the people of socialism, want, whatever they say, to be property owners; and if I may quote my own testimony here, I will say that after ten years of inflexible criticism, I have found the opinion of the masses on this point harder, more resistant than on any other question. I have done violence to convictions; I have achieved nothing on consciences. And moreover (...) the more the democratic principle has gained ground, the more I have seen the working classes in the cities and the countryside interpret this principle in the sense most favorable to property."<sup>11</sup>

This is a terrible and very disillusioned observation. If socialism is based on the negation of property, and if the "instinct of property" is so deeply rooted in the masses, this means two things: either socialism has no future, or it must be reconsidered from top to bottom by reintroducing the notion of property, one way or another. State socialism never envisaged this kind of approach: theory cannot be wrong; it is the masses that are wrong. For Proudhon, this is a matter of simple common sense. Proudhon does not seek to perpetuate property, he seeks ways to overcome this notion.

#### ◆ Methodological contribution

Proudhon was undoubtedly the first to apply, in *The System of Economic Contradictions* (1846), the inductive-deductive method to the analysis of the functioning of the capitalist system. For more details, see: "Proudhon and the problem of method",

[https://www.academia.edu/39264248/Proudhon\\_and\\_the\\_Problem\\_of\\_Method](https://www.academia.edu/39264248/Proudhon_and_the_Problem_of_Method)

The choice of this approach resulted from his realisation that it was impossible to account for the mechanisms of the capitalist system by the historical method, that he had to resort to abstractions (hypotheses, or "categories") in order to construct a simulation of the system (he called it a "scaffolding"). This method was very violently criticised by Marx, who had just "discovered" "historical materialism" and who wanted to achieve this project with his new discovery (which was nothing new): it was only many years later, that he explained in the 1873 Afterword to *Capital* that he had taken up Proudhon's method, but of course without mentioning Proudhon.

#### ◆ Concepts

The use of categories (hypotheses) allows us to resolve the question of how to explain the mechanisms of the capitalist system that operate *simultaneously*. But it is necessary to begin by defining an initial category. For Proudhon, this is value. This will also be the case for Marx in *Capital*. It is starting from value that Proudhon will "deduce" the mechanisms of the system. The categories of division of labour, machinism, competition, monopoly, falling profit rates, cyclical crises, etc., follow.

When Marx published *Capital*, he took up most of the categories used by Proudhon in his *System of Economic Contradictions*. An examination of the plan of the two works shows some strange similarities. Naturally, *Capital* was published twenty years later and is a much more elaborate work than Proudhon's, which in a way "wiped the slate clean".

Bakunin praised *Capital* as a reference work.

◆ **Proudhon's analyses started from** a sociological rather than a political point of view. It is not by chance that he is considered by some sociologists such as Georges Gurvitch as a precursor of sociology.

---

10 Gaston Leval was an anarchist who refused to be enlisted during the WWI, he settled in Spain where he actively participated in the libertarian movement, was a delegate of the CNT to the founding congress of the Red International of Labor Unions, his report contributed to the CNT not joining the RILU. Wanted by the police, he settled in Argentina and returned to Spain at the time of the Popular Front. He is the author of a reference book on collectivisations in Spain.

11 Proudhon, *Idée générale de la révolution*, éditions Garnier, 1851, p. 253.

- In particular, he understood that France in his time was 85% rural and that it was not possible to talk to the peasants, but also to the craftsmen, about socialisation: it was necessary to find transitional arrangements to gradually bring the peasants to accept the idea.

- He understood that the overwhelming majority of the working classes were attached to property: his idea of distinguishing between property and ownership was a way of gradually bringing about socialisation.

- It was also the sociology of the country that led him to attempt an alliance with the petty bourgeoisie: he realised that in the end it was not possible.

- Finally, his experience of universal suffrage, which led him to be elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1848, convinced him that the parliamentary regime ultimately led to the handing over of power to the bourgeoisie and that the proletariat should not go down this road. This led him to the conclusion that the proletariat should not participate in the parliamentary game, but should find *something else*. This is not a metaphysical opposition to elections, but the assertion that the workers should act within their own class organisation, what he called the "workers' companies" which are an anticipation of revolutionary syndicalism, whose militants did not hesitate to claim him as their own.

#### ◆ **The opposition to strikes**

Proudhon and Marx do not attach the same importance to the conflicts inherent in capitalism. For Proudhon, economic struggles such as strikes, recognised as “the only means” of defence for workers, are more actions of desperation than effective struggles adapted to needs. By stopping their work, workers delegate to their employers the task of solving the difficulties. The increase in wages, moreover, is part of a system whose inherent laws cancel out its effects. Economic struggles are not part of the dynamics of the system. It is futile to expect a transformation of the working class condition from them. Proudhon, who had no real experience of the proletariat as an organised class – and neither did Marx, for that matter – misses a point of which Bakunin was very much aware: if strikes do not fundamentally modify the working class condition, they are a powerful factor in revolutionary education, which the anarchist Émile Pouget, deputy secretary of the CGT, called "revolutionary gymnastics".

Marx also did not believe that economic struggles could significantly alter the system, but they did intervene in two important respects that Proudhon overlooked: fixing the working day and keeping wages at the natural price.

Mike Armstrong is probably unaware that Proudhon's stance on strikes did not prevent revolutionary syndicalists from claiming to be his followers. The proximity between Proudhon and revolutionary syndicalism is probably mainly explained by the fact that his thought was very closely linked to the thinking of the labour movement of his time. Contrary to what Schmidt & van der Walt write, Proudhon's stance on strikes did not at all “isolate him from the nascent labour movement”. This opposition to partial strikes, considered useless and counter-productive, was shared by the revolutionary syndicalist movement, which had recognised in Proudhon a precursor!

His conceptions are often complex, cannot be easily summarised and can hardly be condensed into congress motions. The right-wing Proudhonians who, at the Basel congress, contested the plans for the collectivisation of land were not wrong to point out that there were no peasant delegates present. In his study “Proudhon and revolutionary syndicalism”<sup>12</sup>, the sociologist Daniel Colson addresses the reasons why “the revolutionary syndicalists were able to recognise themselves in Proudhon”: “We underestimate, he says, or we completely misunderstand the extraordinary practical and theoretical intelligence of the workers' movements of the time”.

#### ◆ **“Collective force”**

The notion of “collective force” is central to Proudhon's thought and sweeps aside all the nonsense that is said about his “individualism”: “we propose to give”, he says in *De la justice...*, “a complete theory of collective force, consequently, a direct demonstration of the reality of social being”<sup>13</sup>. The sociologist Pierre Ansart comments that collective force “has as its focus and origin the social group insofar as it is organised according to the rules of the division of labour and the unification of work”.<sup>14</sup>

According to Proudhon, the group's capacity to intervene, in other words its collective strength, is greater than the sum of the individual strengths making up the group. It follows that what holds the group together is the relationship of cooperation<sup>15</sup>. And what ensures the

12 <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article765>

13 4<sup>e</sup> étude, t. II, p. 312.

14 Pierre Ansart, *Marx et l'anarchisme*, chapitre sur Proudhon, PUF 1969, p. 155.

15 *De la justice...*, 4<sup>e</sup> étude, pp. 259-261.

development of collective strength is the “relationship of functions, the solidarity of interests that it creates, the feeling that the producers acquire, the new consciousness that results from it”.<sup>16</sup> Collective force is the “synthesis of individual and collective activities”<sup>17</sup>.

For Proudhon, society is a “collective work” whose creation is the work of “social spontaneity”.<sup>18</sup> This concept will be taken up by Bakunin, for whom a social phenomenon is spontaneous when it appears and develops as a result of its own internal determinisms, without external interventions. For Proudhon, the state is a spontaneous creation of the social body, corresponding to needs at a given moment, but which by its own development ends up alienating the social body. It is a “phenomenon of collective life, the external representation of our law”, “a manifestation of social spontaneity”.<sup>19</sup>

Society can invent collective forms, institutions; this creation is immanent and can only be understood through the dynamics of complex individual and collective needs. This creation of collective force is not necessarily consciously perceived, but it responds to needs and have a function. However, it does require a certain degree of collective consciousness, of “social recognition” (*System of Economic Contradictions*). These collective creations will be preserved as long as they meet the needs for which they were created, or as long as they have not been alienated, absorbed by another institution – the state for example.

“Social power”, says Proudhon, was not at first perceptible to men, who made it an “emanation of the divine Being”. The consciousness of the existence of this social force is not an established thing: “Hardly if, even today, economists name the collective force.” There is, in this respect, a “delay in the knowledge of the collective being”. It is this backwardness that has led to “the appropriation of all collective forces and the corruption of social power”, i.e. to the state.<sup>20</sup>

According to a “law of nature” following which “the greater force absorbs and assimilates the smaller forces”, the state was formed by a successive agglomeration of groups. “By the grouping of individual forces, and by the relationship of groups, the whole nation forms a body: it is a real being, of a higher order, whose movement brings about all existence, all fortune.”

The individual is immersed in society; he is part of this high power, from which he would only separate to fall into nothingness. For however great the appropriation of collective forces, however intense the tyranny, it is evident that a share of the social benefit always remains with the mass, and that, in short, it is better for each individual to remain in the group than to leave it.<sup>21</sup> The state is formed as a result of a set of determinations internal to society, it is an immanent process.

Proudhon argues that if “workers and citizens” submit to the exploiter and the tyrant, “seduction and terror enter into their submission to a small degree”. What attracts them is “social power”; a “power ill-defined in their minds, but outside which they feel they cannot subsist; a power whose seal the prince, whoever he may be, shows them, and which they tremble to break by their revolt.” [emphasis added]<sup>22</sup>. This means that an institution remains legitimate until it is overthrown. This idea is found in Bakunin, for whom “each people [is] more or less in solidarity with and responsible for the acts committed by its State, in its name and by its arm, until it has overthrown and destroyed this State...”<sup>23</sup>

The State, says Proudhon, is “social power constituted as a principate, appropriated by a dynasty or exploited by a caste”. Whereas “in the natural order, power is born of society” this relationship is completely reversed in a system where collective power is alienated, monopolised by a privileged minority. Society *appears* to be generated by power: thus appear the army, the police, the tax, capable of “resisting any attack from within and of forcing the nation into obedience if necessary: it is this princely force which will henceforth

---

16 *De la Justice...*, 4<sup>e</sup> étude, II, 261.

17 Proudhon, *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* : « Le principe à l'aide duquel nous allons donner force à la société, corps à l'État, moralité au gouvernement, fonder enfin la politique réelle, est le principe de la force collective indiqué par moi dans plusieurs publications, et dont je me propose de donner ultérieurement l'exposition complète. » Voir : « Proudhon. – Force collective et pouvoir social ». <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article598>.

18 Lorsque Proudhon parle de « spontanéité sociale », il parle du mouvement naturel de la société consécutif à l'ensemble des interactions qu'elle subit. C'est en somme équivalent aux déterminismes sociaux, concept qui s'insère mieux dans la terminologie marxiste.

19 Proudhon, *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire*, Préface, Éditions Tops/H. Trinquier, p.18.

20 Proudhon, *De la justice...*

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 Œuvres, Champ libre, VIII, p. 59.

be called power”: once the collective forces have been appropriated, “public power [is] converted into a privilege”.<sup>24</sup>

The anarchist society will be one in which the alienation of collective forces has disappeared, and individuals and groups have reappropriated them.

“Marx, incidentally, repeated Proudhon’s analysis of the role of “collective force” in *Capital* in essentially the same fashion but without acknowledgement”<sup>25</sup>

#### ◆ Theory of exploitation

The *First Memorandum* (“What is Property”) contains, in the metaphor of the grenadiers, a draft of the theory of the exploitation of the working class based on the idea of an “error of account”: 200 grenadiers were able to erect the obelisk on the Place de la Concorde in a single day, while a single grenadier could never have done the job in 200 days. In other words, the combined effort of 200 people can accomplish in one day a task out of proportion to the effort of one person in 200 days.

Applied to production, we have a capitalist entrepreneur who pays individually for the working day of the workers; but the coordinated work of many workers creates wealth out of proportion to the number of individual workers applied to their task; the owner does not pay this additional value, he monopolizes it.

Proudhon's theory differs markedly from that of Marx, who explains that the worker’s day is divided between necessary labour, which produces the value that allows the reproduction of the labour-power, and surplus labour, which produces the part that the capitalist appropriates. Marx considers the question from the point of view of the *individual worker*, while for Proudhon, the question is posed in terms of *collective force*: it is the organized and combined work of a group of workers that produces a value that exceeds that produced by each individual worker: the appropriation of this collective value defines the exploitation of the worker. The perspective is totally different.

This is why the idea, which has been anchored in the labor movement, that each worker must recover the product of his work (or rather the value of his work-force) is meaningless. All production is collective, says Proudhon, since it is due to “the immense force which results from the union and harmony of the workers, from the convergence and simultaneity of their efforts”: Consequently, says Proudhon to the capitalist, “there always remains a collective property right that you have not acquired, and which you unjustly enjoy” (*What is property?*)

The capitalist owner appropriates the difference between the value produced by the collective strength of the workers and the wage paid to them. This theft is at the root of social inequality, of the division of society into classes.

#### ◆ Individualism

Anarchism is a global doctrine, which focuses on a reflection on all social phenomena and which tries to find a way towards human emancipation from all exploitation and oppression. The means that anarchism intends to implement are therefore also global means even if, circumstantially, it is necessary to insist on this or that aspect of the struggle, which can take different forms depending on the situation.

The great anarchist authors are naturally attached to a reflection on the individual, and no doubt more than any other social doctrine, anarchism insists on the necessity that the collective emancipation of humanity is inseparable from the emancipation of the individual. It is perhaps this insistence that has led some malicious or illiterate authors to conclude that these anarchist authors: Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, were individualists, whereas the attachment to the question of the individual is only one aspect of their thought. Perhaps these authors are not really malicious, but unable to walk and chew gum at the same time, and unable to understand that social and individual emancipation are not separable?

To call Proudhon an individualist is quite absurd. The relationship between the individual and society can be understood by referring to his reflections on Justice. He is opposed to the thesis that justice is a constraint internalised by the individual as a result of education. In this he opposes the individualists, in particular Rousseau. According to Proudhon, social life is a natural fact. Man is a sociable animal, he says, “he cannot develop and live otherwise than in society. There is no dispute today about this fact of nature, which it once pleased Rousseau's rhetoric to deny.” The individual cannot be thought of in contradiction with social life. The human being can only fulfill his capacities in society: “The social condition cannot be for the individual a diminution of his dignity, it can only be

---

24 Proudhon, *De la justice...*

25 <https://enoughisenough14.org/2019/12/26/anarchism-marxism-and-the-lessons-of-the-commune/>

an increase of it.”<sup>26</sup> I suppose this settles the matter concerning Proudhon's alleged “individualism”.

This point of view will be that of all anarchist authors.

◆ **General conclusions:**

- 1) Social contradictions are a consequence of the regime of ownership of the means of production ;
- 2) By monopolising the means of production, capitalism condemns the proletariat to wage labour ;
- 3) The surplus value defines the capitalist theft;
- 4) Labour is the sole creator of value, so profit is a part of labour itself;
- 5) Profit is an unpaid part of labour appropriated by the capitalist;
- 6) The end of exploitation requires the destruction of capitalism;
- 7) The state is the organisation for the defence of the interests of the bourgeoisie;
- 8) The capitalist regime, by generating a break in “civil society” (this is a Saint-Simonian term), condemns itself historically.

## Proudhon-Stirner

Stirner hated Proudhon and Proudhon despised Stirner<sup>27</sup>. It's true that you don't have to like each other to found a movement, but it's also true that it doesn't help. But *neither of them founded a movement*, because anarchism as an identified current was not formed until thirty years after the first writings of both men. It is therefore perfectly anachronistic to speak of anarchism in relation to *The Unique*, but the same reasoning applies to Proudhon.

Strangely, before any “anarchist” claimed to be inspired by Stirner's ideas, Marx and Engels were the ones who propelled him into the anarchist galaxy forty years *after* the publication of *The Unique*... which means that for forty years no anarchist has bothered to invoke Stirner or individualism. So perhaps the more pertinent question is not *in what way* Stirner is an anarchist but *why on earth* did Marx and Engels insist that he was one at a time when he had been totally forgotten and no anarchist thought of claiming him !!!

Stirner mentions Proudhon 14 times in the *Unique*. He refers to *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?* (1840) and *De la Création de l'ordre dans l'humanité ou principes d'organisation politique* (1843), the two main works of Proudhon at this time.

Stirner never qualified himself as an anarchist. Apart from Stirner's animosity towards Proudhon, the two men were separated by an unbridgeable gap on the question of property. Stirner radically contests Proudhon's differentiation between property and possession, which is a central point of Proudhonian doctrine. In essence, Proudhon is accused of not questioning the principle of property<sup>28</sup>.

This opposition between Stirner and Proudhon on an essential point of the latter's doctrine suggests that there can hardly be any agreement between the two men. Moreover, to call both Stirner and Proudhon anarchists raises a methodological problem: the same doctrine cannot be based on opposing principles: there is a requirement of cohesion. Whereas for Proudhon and Bakunin society is the *condition* for the development of the individual<sup>29</sup>, for Stirner individuality is a state that is conquered *against* society. Here again, we have a requirement of coherence.

It is all very well to say that anarchism is “plural” or multiform, but there comes a time when the principle of non-contradiction must be applied. This clarification is not irrelevant, because many authors, in good or bad faith, cling absolutely to the idea that anarchism is an individualism, which somewhat distorts the debate, or that Stirnerism is an individualism, which it is not strictly speaking.

---

26 *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, Etude I- Position du problème de la justice”.

27 Proudhon mentions Stirner in his *Notebooks* as representing “the religion of the individual self”.

28 See: Maurice Schuhmann, “Max Stirner's Critiques of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon” <https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/24184/1/Maurice%20Schumman%2057-69.pdf>. The English text is unfortunately difficult to read because of an obviously faulty translation from German.

29 Bakunin: “Man constitutes himself as an independent and free person only by the degree of consciousness he has of himself, only by the development of his thought; but since his thought can only be born and developed in human society, it is obvious that man can only constitute and recognise himself as a free person within society. It was not, therefore, at the beginning of history, the freedom of men that created society, but, on the contrary, it was society that successively created the freedom of its members, organically united within it by nature, independently of any contract, of any premeditation and of any will on their part.” (Bakounine, *l'Empire knouto-germanique*.)



## Stirner

The generations of so-called individualist anarchists who have taken Stirner's egoism literally have made a misreading. Stirner does not consider the isolation of the individual to be natural: "The primary state of man is not isolation or solitude, but society," he says. "Society is our natural state". Stirner is in fact less concerned with his freedom than with his individuality. He invites us to distinguish whether it is "my freedom or my individuality that is limited by a given society".

"That a society, the State-Society, for example, should restrict my liberty, I do not revolt. If, however, I have to allow my freedom to be limited by all kinds of powers, by any man stronger than myself and even by each of my fellow men, even if I were the autocrat of all the Russias, I would still not enjoy absolute freedom. But I will not let my individuality be taken away. And it is precisely because every Society has its eye on individuality that it must succumb to its power."

We can thus see that Stirner's concern is to preserve his individuality, even if it means restricting his freedom, but in the final analysis this struggle is directed against society.

The often incomprehensible form of Stirner's discourse outside its Hegelian context has undoubtedly encouraged some readers to limit the interpretation of his thought to individualism. Yet his thought goes far beyond this. The individualist is one who asserts his or her self against society. Stirner's main opponent is the *sacred*, and above all society in its sacredness. It is therefore no small paradox that the individualist anarchists who claimed to be his followers ended up sacralising the ego. Thus, at the 5th session of the Amsterdam Anarchist Congress in 1907, the individualist H. Croiset, developing a very badly digested Stirnerism, summed up the position of the individualists: "My motto is: Me, me, me... and then the others!"

Poor Stirner.

Croiset added: "The fatal result of organisation is to limit the freedom of the individual to a greater or lesser extent." This question does not particularly preoccupy Stirner, who advocates association, which is in any case a form of limitation of liberty, but this does not bother him too much: "In terms of liberty, there is no essential difference between the State and association":

"No more than the state is compatible with unlimited freedom, association cannot arise and subsist unless it restricts freedom in some way. One cannot avoid a certain limitation of freedom anywhere, for it is impossible to be free of everything: one cannot fly like a bird just because one wants to, for one does not get rid of one's own weight; one cannot live at will under water like a fish, for one needs air, and this is a need from which one cannot be free, and so on. Religion, and in particular Christianity, having tortured man by demanding that he carry out the unnatural and the absurd, it was a natural consequence of this extravagant religious impulse that freedom in itself, absolute freedom, was elevated to an ideal, which was to expose the absurdity of impossible vows."

No doubt many "Stirnerian" individualists have overlooked this passage from *The Unique*. Association provides "a greater amount of freedom", it can be "considered as 'a new freedom'". This is a far cry from the caricature of individualism resulting from a misunderstood reading of Stirner. In association, one escapes "the constraint inseparable from life in the state or society". "The State is the enemy, the murderer of the individual; association is its daughter and auxiliary". The State is a spirit, it is outside of me, whereas the association is my work, it is not "a spiritual power superior to my spirit". "The aim of the association is not precisely freedom, which it sacrifices to individuality, but this individuality itself."

One cannot be any clearer: in association I do not realise my freedom but my individuality. What interests Stirner, therefore, is above all individuality, understood as the totality of the subjective elements that constitute the personality of the individual, the individual himself being the actual person.

There is nothing anarchist about Stirner, who is rather a forerunner of Freud.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> There is a passage in *The Unique* in which Stirner amazingly describes sexual repression: "Here, seated opposite me, is a young girl who has been making bloody sacrifices to her soul for perhaps ten years already. On a blooming body a mortally tired head bows and the pale cheeks betray the slow hemorrhage of youth. Poor child, how often must passions have come to beat

## Stirner-Marx

Authors who approach *The Unique and its Property* in a spirit of anti-anarchist polemic not only make the mistake of obscuring the fact that he was not an anarchist: they also miss out on a work that played an essential role in the formation of Marxism through its scathing critique of Feuerbach's generic man, which it equates with a reintroduction of religion into philosophy. Similarly, Stirner accuses communism of being, like humanism, an avatar of religion. The questioning of Feuerbach's "generic being", like that of communism, is at the root of Marx's fierce opposition to Stirner.

According to Marx, Feuerbach allowed man to reappropriate forms that he attributed to a generic being. At the same time, Feuerbach shows that the Absolute of the philosophers is only the refuge of divinity. Religion, it was said at the time, is only a product of human consciousness. This idea, common to the entire Hegelian left, is attributed to Feuerbach who, according to Marx, introduced a "great revolution" in thought. (actually, this idea is also found in Hegel.) It was Feuerbach who, according to Marx, put the finishing touches to the critique of religion, the condition for all political critique. He founded "true materialism and true science by rightly making the social relation of 'man to man' the fundamental principle of theory".<sup>31</sup> In 1844, therefore, Feuerbach-inspired humanism predominated in Marx's thinking. For a short time he spoke only enthusiastically of the "great deeds", the "discoveries of the man who gave a philosophical foundation to socialism".

Thus, in the *1844 Manuscripts*, we read that "communism is not as such the goal of human development", meaning that the goal is Man – *and not the proletariat*. Marx, with the post-Hegelians, thought that philosophy was the truth of religion: it was religion fulfilled; in this he remained a Feuerbachian. Didn't Feuerbach say in particular that "modern philosophy is derived from theology – it is in itself nothing other than the resolution and transformation of theology into philosophy"<sup>32</sup>?

This enthusiasm, manifest in the *1844 Manuscripts* and in the *Holy Family*, provided Stirner with the fuel for a fundamental critique in a book published in 1845<sup>33</sup>, *The Unique and its Property*, i.e. a year before Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions*. Both books provoked a vigorous reaction from Marx. In a very short period of time, therefore, Marx twice found himself reacting against writings which, in one way or another, called him into question<sup>34</sup>.

Thus, Stirner reproaches Feuerbach for not having destroyed the sacred, but only its "heavenly dwelling", and for having "forced it to join Us with lock, stock and barrel". Not only, Stirner thinks, has philosophy removed from religion only its sacred envelope, it can only develop to its fullest extent and be fulfilled as theology: its emancipatory efforts are penetrated by theology, says Stirner, who asserts that Feuerbach's generic man is a new form of the divine and that he reproduces Christian morality. This is a severe blow to the positions Marx was developing at the time. In sum, at a time when Marx is trying to show that the suppression of philosophy is the achievement of philosophy<sup>35</sup>, Stirner demonstrates that "their philosophy was not able to become theological or theology, and yet it is only as theology that philosophy can actually realize itself, complete itself. The battlefield of its death struggle is in theology".

Now, the generic being of man, the generic man borrowed from Feuerbach, gave, according to Marx, a philosophical foundation to communism. It was a reality in the making, the accomplished essence of an alienated existence of man reconciled with the community. Stirner shows that this generic man is only a new form of the divine, that it merely reproduces Christian morality; philosophy, he says, is a lie: its role is socially religious.

---

against your heart, the lively forces of youth to claim their rights! When your head turned over and over on the soft pillow, with what shivers the awakening of nature shook your limbs, how the blood swelled your veins, and what ardent images gave your eyes that voluptuous glow! But then the ghost of the soul and its bliss appeared to you and you became afraid, your hands joined, your tormented eye turned towards heaven and you prayed!"

This passage perfectly describes the phenomenon of sexual repression and the weight of the superego represented by religious prohibitions.

31 Marx, *Ebauche d'une critique de l'économie politique*, Pléiade, Economie II, p. 121.

32 Feuerbach, *Manifestes philosophiques*, PUF, coll. Epiméthée p. 155.

33 The reference date for the release of *The One and His Property* varies. The book was published in Leipzig in 1845, but the work was circulating in December 1844 and copies were available before that date, as Moses Hess had one in November 1844, which he then passed on to Engels.

34 On the methodological issues between Proudhon and Marx, see René Berthier, *Etudes proudhoniennes. – L'Economie prouhonnaise*, Editions du Monde libertaire. 2009.

35 Citation des manuscrits de 44

The situation was becoming worrying for Marx. Indeed, Stirner was making a name for himself in German intellectual circles. After *The Unique*, he published *The Anticritic*, in which he “ridiculed the arguments of the man whom Marx still considered his spokesman, but he emerged from a confrontation with three mediocre polemicists who nevertheless represented the elite of the German left”, writes Daniel Joubert<sup>36</sup>. “Stirner’s influence continued to grow: some left-wing Hegelians rallied and made it known in Germany and France that communism was a religious delusion. Henceforth, Marx would endeavour, without further delay, to exonerate himself by separating himself from Feuerbach and by presenting Stirner as a puppet”.<sup>37</sup>

The Stirnerian critique of Feuerbach was successful. Marx indeed rejected those concepts whose idealism was too apparent: Total man, real humanism, generic being, real humanism. But he did not renounce the essence of Feuerbach’s approach. He only transposed from philosophy to science what Feuerbach had transposed from theology to philosophy; on this point one can say that Bakunin took over from Stirner by developing his critique of science as the new theology of the time. Under the blows of the Stirnerian critique, Marx radically modified his approach to the problem of communism, not without having exorcised his youthful demons by a full-scale and somewhat hysterical attack on Stirner, in *The German Ideology*.

*Needless to say that this conflict is in no way an expression of the opposition between Marxism and anarchism.*

Marx’s explanation that in writing the *German Ideology* he wanted to “settle accounts with his former philosophical conscience” has been taken up uncritically by almost all Marxist authors, who, moreover, have generally not critically examined Marx’s arguments against Stirner. This is a curious settlement of accounts with his philosophical conscience, where the lowest polemical procedures, bad faith and pettiness rather evoke a personal settlement of accounts and where the violence of the tone resembles above all an attempt to exorcise his own previous positions. Marx’s “rebuttal” of Stirner consists of numerous personal attacks on him: “he has so often drunk himself to death under the table”<sup>38</sup>; Stirner married a “chaste seamstress”<sup>39</sup>; he failed in the creamery trade; he failed in his academic career. Marx even reveals the address of Stirner’s favourite café and the name of the library he frequents, all of which are essential in refuting the ideas of a thinker. It is indeed an exorcism of his own positions or actions: the future author of *Capital* was himself condemned at the age of 17 for drunkenness and rowdiness and failed in his academic ambitions. No one among Marx’s anarchist opponents would have dared to speak of the “chaste Jenny von Westphalen”, a 29-year-old aristocratic spinster (according to the criteria of the time) who, for this very reason, was allowed to enter into a misalliance with an unemployed academic of Jewish origin. The mother-in-law paid for the young couple’s honeymoon.

Franz Mehring, the Marxist historian, seems a little disgusted when he talks about *The German Ideology*. It is, he says, “a still more discursive super-polemic than even *The Holy Family* in its most arid chapters, and the oases in the desert are still more rare”. When the authors’ dialectical penetration manifests itself, writes Mehring it “soon degenerates into hair-splitting and quibbling, some of it of a rather puerile [knabenhaft] character”<sup>40</sup>. In other words, Mehring elegantly states that *The German Ideology* is even more boring than *The Holy Family*. The “philosophical self-examination” advanced by Marx to explain the writing of *The German Ideology* is an ex post argument and makes no sense in view of the violently polemical character of the work. As for the shelving of the manuscript, the official thesis conceals that the authors tried in vain to have it published and that no publisher wanted to publish such an unreadable and polemical book.

## Stirner-Bakunin

Bakunin mentions Stirner only once in an unflattering enumeration where he is called a “nihilist” – intellectually speaking because the characters listed were anything but men of action. On the other hand, it is known that they once were in the same place during the revolution of 1848, but they did not speak to each other: Bakunin was at that time busy

---

36 “Karl Marx contre Max Stirner ” in *Max Stirner*, Cahiers de philosophie – L’Âge d’homme, p. 188

37 *Ibid.*

38 *German Ideology*.

39 En 1837 Stirner épousa Agnès Butz, la fille de sa logeuse, qui mourut en couches en 1838. En 1843 il épouse Marie Dähnhardt, une féministe qui faisait partie des “Freien”.

40 Franz Mehring, *Life of Karl Marx*.

revolutionising Central Europe, while Stirner was busy doing nothing<sup>41</sup>: there was nothing to bring the two men together, and nothing in Bakunin's thinking to suggest any influence from Stirner.

The only evidence of influence comes from gratuitous and completely unargued assertions by Engels, long after Bakunin's death, and repeated uncritically by Marxist writers such as Hal Draper and Armstrong and many others who probably never read a page written by Bakunin. Therefore, the question is not how Stirner influenced Bakunin, but why Engels and his successors make such claims in the 1880s-1890s when Bakunin was dead<sup>42</sup>.

Two documents refer to Stirner and Bakunin. The first is *Ludwig Feuerbach and End of Classical German Philosophy*, from 1888, in which Engels states:

”Finally came Stirner, the prophet of contemporary anarchism—Bakunin has taken a great deal from him—and surpassed the sovereign ‘self-consciousness’ by his sovereign ‘ego’.” (*Feuerbach and End of Classical German Philosophy*, 1888, MECW vol. 26 p. 364)

(...)

“Stirner remained an oddity, even after Bakunin blended him with Proudhon and labelled the blend ‘anarchism’.” (*Ibid*, p. 382)

But the most interesting document is a letter to Max Hildebrand dated 22 October 1889 in which Engels shows that he knew Stirner perfectly well at the time the latter published *The Unique*<sup>43</sup>:

”I knew Stirner well and we were on Du<sup>44</sup> terms; he was a good sort, not nearly as bad as he makes himself out to be in his *Einzig* and we discussed Hegelian philosophy a great deal.” (MECW, vol. 48, p. 393 sq.)

Engels shows in his letter that all these young intellectuals mingled happily in the taverns. He could have specified that at that time their literary productions, signed with pseudonyms because of censorship, were interchangeable since one text by Engels had been attributed to Bakunin, and another by Bakunin had been attributed to Engels!<sup>45</sup> We can deduce that if Engels lies brazenly when he speaks of Bakunin, it is with full knowledge of the facts. He was perfectly capable of distinguishing between the Bakunin of the 1840s, who was by no means an “anarchist”, and the Bakunin of the IWA period and of the conflict with Marx. Incidentally, Bakunin was an anarchist only from 1868, during the last eight years of his life, which does not prevent some authors from criticizing his anarchism by referring to facts or statements prior to this period.

Engels also knew Bakunin:

“Stirner enjoyed a revival thanks to Bakunin who, by the way, was also in Berlin at the time and, during Werder's course of lectures on logic (1841-42), sat on the bench in front of me along with four or five other Russians. Proudhon's harmless, purely etymological anarchy (i.e. absence of government) would never have resulted in the present anarchist doctrines had not Bakunin laced it with a good measure of Stirnerian ‘rebellion’”. (Letter to Hildebrand, *loc. cit.* p. 394)

The date of this letter provides the answer to the question: why on earth did Marx and Engels insist on Stirner being an “anarchist”?

---

41 Stirner “went through the revolution of 1848-1849 observing events through cigar smoke and a wet glass in Hippel's Weinstube: the very image of the detached Ego...”, says quite rightly Hal Draper (vol. IV, p. 115).

42 During Bakunin's lifetime Marx had suggested (in 1874) a connection between Stirner and Bakunin in notes he had scribbled in the margin of his copy of *Etatisme et anarchie*, but these remained unpublished until 1975.

A careful reading of these marginal notes, which were commented on in France by Maximilien Rubel (author of an article entitled “Marx theorist of anarchism”), shows an astonishing closeness to Proudhon's thought. Shortly before his death, I interviewed Rubel on Radio Libertaire and asked him to explain his article. He dismissed the question with a wave of his hand and said: “All that is not interesting, what is interesting is Proudhon”.

43 [http://www.hekmatist.com/Marx%20Engles/Marx%20&%20Engles%20Collected%20Works%20Volume%2048\\_%20Ka%20-%20Karl%20Marx.pdf](http://www.hekmatist.com/Marx%20Engles/Marx%20&%20Engles%20Collected%20Works%20Volume%2048_%20Ka%20-%20Karl%20Marx.pdf)

44 In german: *du* or *thou*, the intimate form of address.

45 Engels' first anonymous pamphlet was attributed by contemporaries to... Bakunin! Arnold Ruge wrote to a friend in April 1842: “I recommend that you read the pamphlet [*it is “Schelling and the Revelation”*] written by a Russian, Bakunin by name, who now lives here...”  
On the other hand, Bakunin's “The Reaction in Germany” was attributed to... Engels!

1889 is the year of the foundation of the Second International. What does this have to do with it? After the dissolution of the anti-authoritarian International in 1877, the workers' militants found themselves in a way "orphaned" from the International and participated in the international socialist congresses organised by social democracy. The presence of anarchist militants did not pose too much of a problem for the socialist delegates, but was fiercely opposed by the socialist leaders, who tried a whole series of measures to prevent the presence of these militants who insisted on discussing the organisation of a joint general strike in the event of a war between Germany and France – a general strike to which the German socialist leaders were totally opposed. It was only in 1896 that the social democratic leaders succeeded in expelling the "anarchists" from the Second International for good.

In order to justify this exclusion, the German social democrats, led by Engels, used every means to discredit the anarchists, and one of their arguments was to present Bakunin as a disciple of Stirner, which was totally implausible. To say that Stirner may have played an important role in the formation of anarchism is absurd because his book (published in 1845) was totally incomprehensible without a Hegelian "deciphering"<sup>46</sup> and had fallen into oblivion, and no anarchist claimed it until a certain John Henry Mackay "discovered" it in 1890.

Yet, from 1845 to the 1880s/1890s, an anarchist movement had developed in spite of everything, and Engels' ideas on the matter as well as MacKay's publicity were made when an anarchist movement already existed. In other words, the anarchist movement of the 1880s/1890s could not have been influenced by a book that the activists did not know!

Establishing Bakunin as a Stirnerian is not credible because Bakunin had taken a strong stand against individualism, which he equated with bourgeois ideology! Nevertheless, Engels and the German social-democratic leaders needed this identification to discredit the anarchists: let us specify that for the German socialists was anarchist any militant, including socialist, who declared himself in favour of the general strike. This is how Rosa Luxembourg was qualified as an anarchist, to her great fury because she hated anarchists !!!

Armstrong takes things the wrong way. The question is not how Stirner's thought influenced anarchism, because I don't think it did, or only very marginally, but what were the political and social conditions that made some people feel the need to invent an "individualist anarchism" and hold Stirner hostage in order to legitimise their approach.

There is a very interesting study entitled "Stirner et l'anarchie" (Stirner and Anarchy) written by Jean-Christophe Angaut<sup>47</sup>, probably the best connoisseur of the Hegelian left today. He is a historian, a real one, not a polemicist like Armstrong. He writes:

"One cannot understand the infatuation of a certain number of anarchists with Stirner in the last decade of the nineteenth century if one does not take into account the existence of individual anarchist practices which, in the process of mutating into anarchist individualism, sought out theoretical cautions."

This suggests in some ways that a social mutation occurred in the 1890s which produced among some anarchists practices which were not anarchist, such as "individual reclamation"<sup>48</sup>. This is a symptom of a drift that affected a small part of the anarchist movement. This drift can be explained by several factors. The exclusions of Bakunin and James Guillaume from the Hague Congress, followed by the domino effect of the exclusion of almost the entire international workers' movement of the time<sup>49</sup>, caused a trauma: these

---

46 The censors who supervised publications in Prussia let the book pass because they thought no one would understand it.

47 Jean-Christophe Angaut. "Stirner et l'anarchie". Agard, Olivier; Larillot, Françoise. Max Stirner, *L'Unique et sa propriété : lectures critiques*, l'Harmattan, pp. 205-223, 2017. halshs-01685183

48 "Individual reclamation" is characterized by the individual theft of resources from the rich by the poor. It gained popular attention in the early 20th century as a result of the exploits of anarchists and outsiders such as Ravachol and Clément Duval who believed that such expropriations were ethical because of the exploitation of society by capitalists. Justified by noble pretexts, "Individual reclamation" manifested itself, according to witnesses of the time whom I was able to interview, by a form of aggravated parasitism, the burglary of the dwellings of poor people who were easier to "expropriate" than the rich, or even theft between comrades.

49 See: "1872-1873. — Bref rappel des mesures par lesquelles Marx, Engels et quelques-uns de leurs amis exclurent de l'AIT la totalité des organisations adhérentes (1872-1873), et réactions de ces dernières" ("1872-1873. — Brief reminder of the measures by which Marx, Engels and some of their friends excluded from the IWA all the member organisations (1872-1873), and the reactions of the latter".) <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?page=recherche&recherche=bref+rappel>

exclusions were not interpreted as the consequence of a seizure of decision-making power by a clique of uncontrolled leaders, but rather as the consequence of the very principle of organisation.

All organisation, intrinsically, was seen as leading to authority, centralisation and bureaucracy. The solution proposed was therefore to constitute autonomous structures, with no links between each other except than occasional. This evolution was a challenge to one of the foundations of anarchism: federalism: “Federalism has been constitutive of anarchism since the period of the International Workers' Association, since the anarchist current affirms itself there through its critique of centralism and its celebration of autonomy”, says Marianne Enckell, who is perfectly right to specify that it is federalism “which is the antonym of centralisation, not decentralisation”<sup>50</sup>.

Observing what they considered to be the damage to the very principle of organisation after the end of the IWA, some “anti-authoritarian” militants stripped federalism of its content and advocated maximum decentralisation. They turned first to the small affinity group, which was supposed to be the guarantee of the absence of bureaucratisation (of “authority”), and then to the individual, after which there was nothing more to decentralise. The function of the organisation, limited to the affinity group, was not to analyse a situation and define a common course of action, but to allow *personal development*.

Other factors must also be taken into account, such as the formation of non-wage-earning strata attracted to anarchism, but also the decrease in the level of political training of militants and the renunciation of class collective action by one part of the anarchist movement at the very moment when another part was engaged in the foundation of revolutionary syndicalism.

*The ground was thus perfectly prepared for Stirner's theses, or rather what was thought to be his theses.*

## Proudhon-Bakunin

Referring to the revolution of 1848, Bakunin wrote that “in this revolutionary phantasmagoria of 1848 there were only two real men: Proudhon and Blanqui”. The others “were only mediocre comedians who played at revolution”. Bakunin describes Proudhon as a poor man of action and a poor organiser. But then, what is left? His theoretical contribution. Although Bakunin also challenges Proudhon on certain theoretical points, he recognises him as a revolutionary for his critique of the bourgeoisie and for his theory of the state. Bakunin thus identifies himself particularly with Proudhon's analyses of the period between the 1848 revolution and the coup d'état of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte.

However, Bakunin's main credit to Proudhon is probably to the notion of the revolutionary destruction of the state. His books, says the Russian, contained the seeds of “the whole social revolution, including above all the socialist commune, destructive of the state”. Note, however, that Bakunin specifies that these ideas were contained only “in seeds” in Proudhon<sup>51</sup> This reservation is confirmed elsewhere, when Bakunin reaffirms that Proudhon had the honour of announcing the principle of the abolition of the States, “albeit in a very incomplete manner”.<sup>52</sup>

We can see, therefore, that the anarchist movement's debt to Proudhon was not as massive and unconditional as Armstrong thinks. If Bakunin clearly recognises the filiation with his elder, there is therefore no blind and unconditional adhesion to Proudhon's theses. This filiation does not mask the points on which he is in fundamental opposition. Bakunin nevertheless distinguishes between oppositions with Proudhon himself and those with his successors, but in the second case, the “misguidance” of the Proudhonians is often attributed in large part to the ambiguities of Proudhon himself.

For example, at the Basel Congress of the IWA, the delegates had been divided in the debate on land collectivisation. The Proudhonians were against it, and Bakunin writes about it in a fragment of *The Knuto-German Empire*:

“ Of this individual liberty, which a small number of Parisian workers, led astray by the latest works of Proudhon or by the propaganda of the positivist school, were

---

50 Marianne Enckell “Fédéralisme et autonomie chez les anarchistes”, *Réfractations*, n°8, 2002, p. 8.

See also Amédée Dunois: “Anarchism is not individualistic; it is federalist, 'associationist' in the first place. It could be defined as “internal federalism”. (*Anarchism and syndicalism. The International Anarchist Congress of Amsterdam (1907). Introduction by Ariane Miéville and Maurizio Antonioli, Nautilus - Éditions du Monde libertaire, 1997, p. 157.*)

51 Bakounine, *L'Empire knuto-germanique*, Œuvres, Champ libre, VIII, 323.

52 *Ibid.*, 403.

very mistaken to defend at the last congress of the International; of this hypocritical, exclusive, oppressive, bourgeois freedom in a word, we do not want<sup>53</sup>.”

The liberty of which Bakunin speaks here is that founded on individual, hereditary, legal property, and which is “the individual privilege of an exploiting minority”. Elsewhere, referring to this same congress, Bakunin spoke of “bourgeois socialists, co-operators, socialists of the school of Proudhon”. And, in fact, the Bakuninians of the International will ally themselves with the Marxists on this question, against the Proudhonians.

The event that provoked Bakunin's strongest reaction against Proudhon was the publication in 1863, in the midst of the Polish insurrection, of a pamphlet, *If the Treaties of 1815 Ceased to Exist*, in which a view of the partition of Poland was presented which Bakunin considered unacceptable.

“Seeking at all costs to absolve history, he [Proudhon] wrote an unfortunate pamphlet in which, after demonstrating with great reason that aristocratic Poland should perish, because it bore the seeds of dissolution in its bosom, he tried to oppose it to the empire of the tzars as the representative of triumphant socialist democracy. It was more than a fault, I do not hesitate to say, in spite of the tender respect I have for the memory of Proudhon, it was a crime: the crime of a sophist who, driven by the urges of polemics, did not fear to insult a martyred nation, at the very moment when, revolted for the hundredth time against its dreadful Russian and German tyrants, for the hundredth time it lay slaughtered under their blows.”<sup>54</sup>

The Russian revolutionary does not mince his words.

“Of all the thinkers who have contributed to the development of modern socialism, Proudhon is the one who has acquired the greatest notoriety. This fame, in our opinion, his name owes it so far less to the ideas of the writer than to a few formulas in which he has wrapped some of his conceptions; two or three frankly paradoxical aphorisms have done more to make him illustrious in the eyes of the general public than all his economic and philosophical theories.”<sup>55</sup>

It is true, the foreword adds, that Proudhon himself enjoyed complicating the task of those who wanted to find in his works a complete body of doctrine. In the last years of his life, revising his works, “he was anxious to correct them in a more mystical and idealist sense”.

James Guillaume and some of his comrades had undertaken to write a pamphlet in which the great ideas of Proudhon would be synthesised, but pruning out what was not admissible. The aim of the book was not to analyse the whole of Proudhon's work, but simply to comment on the part of his theories that is “recoverable from the point of view of socialist propaganda”. It was a sort of selection, in order to give “its true features to Proudhon's socialism”.

If one were to make a real analysis of Proudhon's work, the foreword admits, one would be led to stigmatise “the strange association of the idealist philosopher and the realist revolutionary, the metaphysician and the accountant. Such a work, in which one would be led to refute abundantly the various oddities of Proudhon, notably his theories of immanent justice and marriage, would obviously be very interesting. But the purpose of Guillaume's book is simply to comment on “that part of Proudhon's theories which, taken up in the programme of the IWA, have entered into social life”. It is therefore a “utilitarian propaganda” aim.

The part of Proudhon's work which is recognised as having a revolutionary scope is precisely designated: it is the doctrines set out in the works written at the time of the 1848 revolution, in which the ideas of the abolition of the state and the organisation of society into an economic federation are developed. Apart from that, the author does not undertake to follow Proudhon step by step but to criticise him “in many places” or to complete him “when necessary”.

In short, the anarchist movement of 1874 refers to Proudhon only selectively, and only for the ideas he developed around 1848. For the rest, Proudhonism is considered critically, by filtering its content considerably. We can thus see that the anarchists of the 1870s had not waited for Armstrong to distance themselves from certain aspects of Proudhon's thought.

---

53 Bakounine, *L'Empire knouto-germanique*, Œuvres, Champ libre, VIII, 449.

54 Bakounine, *Écrit contre Marx*, Œuvres, Champ libre, III, p. 199.

55 Bakounine, Œuvres, Champ libre, VI, lxiv.

If Bakunin repeatedly expresses deep reservations about Proudhon, he never confuses him with his disciples, whom he occasionally describes as a “so-called Proudhonian coterie”<sup>56</sup> – those who, like Tolain and Langlois, went over to the Versailles and exploited the memory of Proudhon for the benefit of their bourgeois tendencies, “so that today the name of Proudhon serves in France as a flag for a school which the author of the *First Memorandum on Property* would certainly not recognise as his own”<sup>57</sup>.

James Guillaume himself, at the last moment, saves Proudhon from the flames: he had not, he says, entirely repudiated the revolutionary form of action. He had certainly built his system with a view to amicable liquidation, but he also envisages the case where the bourgeoisie “will not accept the market, for which the revolutionary massacre will then be substituted”. And then, Proudhon concludes, there will be no question of redemption or compensation.

This brief development of the relationship between Proudhon and Bakunin clearly shows that although Proudhon played an essential role in the formation of anarchist doctrine, his role and his positions gave rise to reservations that the militants did not hesitate to express. This is a far cry from the kind of relationship Armstrong describes, hopefully more out of ignorance than bad faith.

## Bakounine with Marx against Proudhon

In *Statism and Anarchy* Bakunin acknowledges that Marx's criticism of Proudhon was not entirely unfounded: “There is no doubt that in his merciless criticism of Proudhon there is much truth.”<sup>58</sup> Proudhon's starting point is the abstract idea of law, says Bakunin; then from law he moves on to economic fact. Marx, on the other hand, has demonstrated this truth, confirmed by history, that “the economic factor has always preceded legal and political law”. “Marx is a very serious and profound economic thinker. He has this immense advantage over Proudhon, of being in reality a materialist.”

On this particular point Bakunin does not do justice to Proudhon, who on countless occasions reaffirms the materialist postulate. “Labour is the generating fact of economic science”, he says in *La Création de l'Ordre*, it is the “plastic force of society, the standard idea which determines the various phases of its growth and consequently its internal and external organism”. Bakunin is, moreover, in contradiction with himself, since on occasion he declares: “The ideal, as Proudhon said, is only a flower of which the material conditions of existence constitute the root.”<sup>59</sup>

It is therefore not quite right to criticise the Frenchman for his idealism and to oppose him to Marx, who “as a thinker is on the right track”: He has established as a principle that “all political, religious and legal evolutions in history are not the causes, but the effects of economic evolutions”.<sup>60</sup> Bakunin specifies that this idea has been expressed by many others than Marx, but to him belongs “the honour of having firmly established it”.

”Proudhon, in spite of all the efforts he made to shake off the traditions of classical idealism, remained all his life an incorrigible idealist, drawing his inspiration, as I said to him two months before his death, sometimes from the Bible, sometimes from Roman law, and always a metaphysician, right to the end of his nails. His great misfortune was that he had never studied the natural sciences, and had not appropriated their method. He had the instincts

56 Bakounine, *La Théologie politique de Mazzini*, Œuvres, Champ libre, vol. I, p. 241.

57 Bakunin, Champ libre, vol. VI, lxvii.

The Russian revolutionary decidedly had no liking for the Proudhonians, especially Gustave Chaudey, towards whom he was ferocious. Chaudey, the executor of Proudhon's will, had acquired real influence among the latter's disciples: “... his influence on a small workers' coterie which had formed in the last years of Proudhon's life, around this great thinker, great revolutionary theorist, formidable in rational negation, but a pitiful organiser and man of action - this influence, This influence, I say, which Chaudey inherited from Proudhon and which he shared with the melodramatic and ebullient citizen Anglois [Langlois], formerly an international, but now seated next to Tolain on the benches of the Versailles Assembly, has never constituted a power. Besides, all this so-called Proudhonian coterie was a stillborn. (...) “Chaudey's actions could only be those of a bourgeois, that is, of a reactionary, because he was from head to toe a bourgeois, nothing but a bourgeois. He had all the prejudices, the instincts, all the hatred against the egalitarian aspirations of the proletariat. “He was a bourgeois bird who had unduly adorned himself with socialist feathers. (“The International Alliance of Social Revolutionaries,” 1873.) (“L'Alliance internationale des sociaux-révolutionnaires,” 1873.)

58 Bakounine, *Étatisme et anarchie*, Œuvres, Champ libre, vol. IV, p. 317.

59 Bakounine, *L'Empire knouto-germanique*, Œuvres, Champ libre, vol. VIII, 87.

60 Bakounine, *Étatisme et anarchie*, Œuvres, Champ libre, vol.IV, 437.



of a genius, which made him glimpse the right path, but dragged along by the bad or idealistic habits of his mind, he always fell back into the old errors; which makes Proudhon a perpetual contradiction, a vigorous genius, a revolutionary thinker always struggling against the phantoms of idealism, and never having succeeded in overcoming them. <sup>61</sup>. ”

If Bakunin recognises without ambiguity what he owes to Proudhon, he does not conceal his reservations on several occasions and does not hesitate, on certain precise points, to rally to the point of view of Marx. It would be a mistake to think that anarchism and Marxism are defined only in opposition to each other.

In reality, the question is much more complex than it seems. Indeed, if Proudhon asserts the importance of the economic factor in explaining historical evolution, he considers that it is not the only one and that it interacts with the political and the ideological. A social system is made up of a combination of these three factors, which can be called exploitation, domination and alienation. “The power of the altar, the throne and the strongbox has multiplied, like a network, the chains on humanity. After the exploitation of man by man, after the government of man by man, after the worship of man by man...” <sup>62</sup>. These three dimensions are too intertwined to hope to change society by acting on only one of them. This is the basis of the anarchists' opposition to an exclusively political revolution.

“The economic idea of capital, the political idea of government or authority, the theological idea of the Church, are three identical and reciprocally convertible ideas: to attack one is to attack the other, as all philosophers know perfectly well today. What capital does to labour, and the State to liberty, the Church in turn does to intelligence; this trinity of absolutism is fatal, in practice as in philosophy. In order to oppress the people effectively, it is necessary to enchain them at once in their body, in their will, in their reason.”<sup>63</sup>

Bakunin will say exactly the same thing: the principle of the pre-eminence of the economic fact is true, but relatively<sup>64</sup>. There is agreement between Proudhon and Bakunin, and it was Marx and Engels themselves who later tempered the absolute character of their conceptions by explaining that if they insisted a lot on the economic aspect, it was in reaction to the tendencies of the time which did not attach importance to it.

## Nietzsche considered Stirner a “seminal mind”

On this last point, I would be more inclined to believe Albert Lévy than George Woodcock. Lévy wrote a doctoral thesis on the Stirner-Nietzsche relationship<sup>65</sup>, but I will not attempt to write a synthesis of his work; two quotations will suffice, in my opinion:

“One does not meet the name of Stirner either in the works or in the correspondence of Nietzsche. Mrs. E. Förster-Nietzsche, in her meticulous biography of her brother, does not mention the author of *The One and His Property*.” (p.18)

“In short, it does not seem that Stirner had a decisive influence on Nietzsche; he may have helped to keep Nietzsche for a time in the realm of Schopenhauer's metaphysics; he was probably gradually forgotten in the aftermath.” (p. 19)<sup>66</sup>

Finally *An Anarchist FAQ* tells us that Stirner argued for “an extreme form of individualism”, which placed the individual above all else. George Woodcock, quoted by Armstrong, tells us that “Nietzsche himself regarded Stirner as one of the unrecognized seminal minds of the nineteenth century”. I wonder where he found that one.

”Stirner's name does not appear in Nietzsche's works or correspondence. Mrs. E. Förster-Nietzsche, in her meticulous biography of her brother, does not mention the author of *The One and His Property*. (p.18)

---

61 Lettre aux frères de l'Alliance en Espagne.

62 Proudhon, *Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire*, Édition /Trinquier, p. 40.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

64 Lettre à *La Liberté* de Bruxelles, 5-11-1872.

65 Albert Lévy, *Stirner et Nietzsche*, Société nouvelle de librairie et d'éditions, Paris, 1904

66 Albert Lévy, *Stirner et Nietzsche*, thèse présentée à la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Paris, Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition, 1904.

”In short, it does not seem that Stirner had a decisive influence on Nietzsche; he may have helped to keep Nietzsche for a time in the realm of Schopenhauer's metaphysics; he was probably gradually forgotten in later years.”

There is the thesis that Stirner did influence Nietzsche, but that Nietzsche wanted to conceal it. Franz Overbeck (*Souvenirs sur Nietzsche*, 1906, Allia 1999, p. 63) recounts that during a visit Nietzsche made to them in Basel in the winter of 1878-79, he “spoke of two very curious phenomena which occupied him actively at the time, Klinger (and his aphorisms) and Stirner”, and that Nietzsche had seemed embarrassed by this confidence.

I will not go down this rather exegetical road. I will confine myself to the observation that people far more competent than I am, and doubtless far more competent than Armstrong and all those he quotes, cannot agree on this question.

## Bakounin and individualism

I won't waste my time on Armstrong's fantasies about Bakunin's individualism, which only prove that he hasn't read anything by him: Armstrong simply repeats what Marx said, recycled by Hal Draper. I will simply state Bakunin's views on the matter briefly, which I think will be a suitable response.

Bakunin is not an individualist, far from it. Significantly, at no point does he consider the possibility of “turning” individualism in an anarchist direction, and this alone should be enough to question the validity of the notion of “individualist anarchism”. Bakunin's philosophy of the individual is a reflection on the place of the individual in the social world, on the genesis of human individuality, and on its limits. This reflection is all the more interesting because it is radically detached from the metaphysical conceptions of the question that one sometimes finds in the anarchist movement.

The sources of the main elements that constitute Bakunin's criticism of individualism must be sought first of all in certain French authors of the Enlightenment, notably Rousseau, whose notion of the social contract is perceived as the ideological foundation of the state. It is also in Rousseau that Bakunin will look for the elements that will allow him to develop the criticism of individualism, considered as a pillar of the exploitation society. The idea – disputed by Bakunin – of the isolated individual, detached from any social environment, could only be formed in an atomised society, or in the process of atomisation. This idea, expressed in Robinson Crusoe-type stories, suggests that the state of the individual is natural, and appeals to a golden age in the past, whereas it is merely the product of present history. The individual, according to Bakunin, can only develop in society, and to the “robinsonnades” he opposes the idea that men who voluntarily isolate themselves from society, like hermits, quickly become morons.

Bakunin's concern from the outset is the real, living, historical human individual. Following Feuerbach, the left Hegelians had asserted the materialist postulate that man is a part of nature. Feuerbach's anthropology radically challenged the theocentric point of view that prevailed at the time. Bakunin recognised the philosopher's decisive role in the critique of Hegelian idealism, and retained a genuine affection for him throughout his life, while considering him only as a stage in the process of overcoming Hegelianism. It was in fact Stirner who developed the most fundamental critique of Feuerbach's philosophy, a fact that is rarely acknowledged. His critique will provoke a real trauma on Marx and will be the cause of the latter's “reorientation” towards a materialism stripped of its metaphysical scoriae. Marx reproached Feuerbach's anthropologism for its narrow naturalism, which did not take into account history and the social factor in the conception of the individual.

Like Marx, Bakunin declared that it is life that determines consciousness, not consciousness that determines life. There are, says Bakunin, no “spontaneous and pure creations of our mind”. All human representations are initially mere observations of natural or social facts:

”In the practical developments of mankind, as well as in science proper, accomplished facts always precede ideas, which proves once again that the very content of human thought, its real background, is not a spontaneous creation of the mind, but is always given to it by the reflected experience of real things.”<sup>67</sup>

The approach of the two great adversaries of the First International is astonishingly

---

67 Bakounine, *L'Empire knouto-germanique*, “Considérations philosophiques sur le fantôme divin...”, Champ libre, VIII, 206. Cf. également VIII, 41 : “La vie domine la pensée et détermine la volonté.”

similar, for the simple reason that they came from the same Hegelian milieu and at the same time, with the difference that Marx's "humanist" positions were not published until 1927, in the case of his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, and in 1932 for his *German Ideology*, whereas Bakunin's positions were, if not well known, then at least published a long time before.

Individualism is one of Bakunin's main targets in his attack on bourgeois ideology. But the individual, on the other hand, is one of the foundations of his theory of socialism. Man's innermost being, his individuality, can only manifest itself "in the total sum of his external relations or actions on the external world".<sup>68</sup> The definition of the individual cannot therefore be limited to his physiological and psychological structure, to his description as a biological species. In order to obtain a representation that is not a juxtaposition of definitions but a coherent whole, man must be analysed in his social relationships. Man is not only, as Aristotle said, a political animal, he is also a social animal, a product of society.<sup>69</sup>

Man is born into a given society, into a given social environment, which is the result of the activity of previous generations who have created a socially given system of values and institutions. "Each new generation finds in its cradle a world of ideas, imaginations and feelings which is transmitted to it as a common heritage by the intellectual and moral work of all the past generations." Compare with Hegel: "What we are historically [...] is the heritage and the result of the labour of all the previous generations of the human kind"<sup>70</sup>.

However, Bakunin adds, these ideas, these representations "acquire later, after they have become well established, in the manner I have just explained, in the collective consciousness of any society, this power to become in their turn the causes producing of new facts."<sup>71</sup> Man does not bring with him any ideas when he is born, what he brings is a "natural and formal faculty, more or less great, of conceiving ideas which he finds established either in his own social environment or in an alien environment, but which in one way or another enters into communication with him"<sup>72</sup>. He can then give this world of ideas a new form and extension according to his own capacities.

"This means that no man, not even the most powerful genius, has any treasure of his own<sup>73</sup>; but all those which he distributes with great profusion have been first borrowed by him from the same society to which he seems to donate later on. It may even be said that, in this respect, men of genius are precisely those who take more from society, and who, consequently, owe it more."<sup>74</sup>.

Thus, social relationships determine the prevailing social consciousness and shape the individual. Man does not come into the world with innate ideas, he only has potentialities for development. Bakunin, however, often insists that the ideas acquired by man can in turn influence the course of events and constitute determining material. Man is born into society, he does not choose it. He is a product of it. He is therefore subject to the natural laws that govern social development. Society pre-exists and outlives the individual: it is in a way the last great creation of nature.

Outside of society, man would not have ceased to be an animal without speech or reason. If the individual can develop today, it is thanks to the cumulative efforts of countless generations. The concepts of individual, freedom and reason are the products of society. Society is not simply the product of the individuals who make it up, it is a historical creation. The more developed the individual is, the freer he is, and the more he is the product of society. The more he receives from society, the more he owes it. History is a creation of real men. In this sense, Bakunin opposes Hegel's theory of the ruse of reason, according to which history uses man to achieve its goals.

---

68 Bakounine, *Champ libre*, VIII, 277.

69 *Ibid*, 278.

70 Hegel, *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie*, "Introduction du cours de Berlin", 1820, Gallimard Idées, Tome 1, p. 35.

71 Bakounine, *Champ libre*, VIII, 206.

72 *Ibid*, 275.

73 L'idée de "trésor" est peut-être une réminiscence de Hegel, qui parle dans ses *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie* de "trésor suprême, celui de la connaissance rationnelle".

74 *Ibid*.

## The Individual and society

If the individual is indebted to society, society is also indebted to the individual because he or she influences society even in an unconscious and tenuous way. The real life of society is the sum total of the lives, developments, relationships and actions of all the individuals in it. But society is also a grouping independent of the will of the individuals gathered and combined; it is more than the mere addition of the individuals that compose it. Here we find Proudhon.

Individuals are born, develop, in a material, intellectual and moral context of which they are the expression as well as the realisation. Conscious or not, the action of individuals on the society that created them is in fact the action of society on itself. Created by society, man is also its creator: man's individual life and his social life cannot be separated. But then why pose the problem of the individual? Why not stick to the positions of Lucaks who, in *History and Class Consciousness*, posits that the individual is only a social fiction and that from the individual isolated from the social group to which he belongs, it is not possible to conceive the historical process in its totality. Or why not hold to the view of vulgar communism, according to which the interests of the individual coincide with those of society, and therefore it is not necessary to dwell on this problem?

For Bakunin, there is no question of leaving it at that, because it would be contrary to human dignity and freedom seen from a materialist point of view. The idealist and metaphysical view bases this dignity and freedom on “the seemingly proud negation of nature and of all natural dependence”, but it has led us “logically and straight to the establishment of a divine despotism, the father of all human despotisms.”<sup>75</sup>

To pose the problem of the individual is also to pose the problem of man's responsibility in history, the question of historical determinism, that is to say necessarily the question of human emancipation. We can therefore say that the questioning of the individual is essential in the struggle for human emancipation. If the individual, his thoughts, his actions are conditioned by the environment and by education, if, in short, he is entirely a social product, does he cease to be an individual? What then is his degree of independence and responsibility in his actions? There is, says Bakunin, an initial error in the way this problem is posed. It consists in “the absolute sense which our human vanity, supported by a theological and metaphysical aberration, gives to human responsibility. The whole error is in this word: absolute. Man is not absolutely responsible and the animal is not absolutely irresponsible. *The responsibility of both is relative to the degree of reflection of which they are capable.*”<sup>76</sup>

The will, like intelligence, is not an “immortal and divine mystical spark that miraculously fell from heaven to earth, to animate pieces of flesh, corpses”, adds Bakunin. It is the product of organised and living flesh and also the product of society. It is therefore capable of being developed by education; the habit of thinking and willing, received from outside through education, can constitute in the individual an inner force “identified henceforth with his being” and allow him to continue to develop himself by a gymnastics, so to speak, spontaneous of his thought and will.

“...spontaneous in the sense that it will no longer be solely directed and determined by external wills and actions, but also by that inner force of thinking and willing which, after having been formed and consolidated in him by the past action of these external causes, becomes in its turn a more or less active and powerful motor, a producer, as it were, independent of the things, ideas, wills, and actions which immediately surround him.”<sup>77</sup>

It is in this sense, says Bakunin, that man can become to a certain extent his own educator, his own instructor, the “producer of himself”.<sup>78</sup> If successive generations are subjected to ideas, dominant representations from which they can only with difficulty escape, the contestation of these representations, by producing other ideas, can itself be productive of new effects. This is a characteristic Bakunin approach: a phenomenon produced by given causes can, once created, become autonomous from its initial causes and become in its own right “producer of new effects”.

---

75 *Ibid*, VIII, 213.

76 *Ibid*, VIII, 209.

77 *Ibid*, VIII, 211.

78 *Ibid*, VIII, 211.

## The year 1846

1846 was a very interesting year, because :

1. Marx and Engels wrote *The German Ideology* and
2. Proudhon wrote the *Système des contradictions économiques* (System of Economic Contradictions).

*German Ideology* is a book in which Marx and Engels establish the great lines of their historical method, which Marx never names, but which Engels calls “historical materialism”.

The *Système des contradictions économiques* is a book in which Proudhon attempts a description of the mechanisms of the capitalist system and in which he exposes his own method, to which he gives no name, but which is simply the inductive-deductive method (named also hypothetical-deductive method). This method is very commonly used in sciences. Proudhon is the very first who used it in political economy. Roughly, this method consists in testing a hypothesis and then checking if facts confirm it. If they do, you form another hypothesis, and so on.

What is it all about ? Proudhon wanted to explain how the capitalist system works. At first, he tried the historical method, and he said : where (when) do I begin ? The year 1900 ? 1600 ? 1000 ? It simply didn't work. Finally he decided to use abstract categories.

The heart of Marx's criticism of Proudhon's book, when you put aside all the details, is precisely his use of the inductive-deductive method and categories. Proudhon, says Marx, rejects the only possible method : the study of the historical movement of production relationships (“rapports de production”, in French, I'm not used to Marxist jargon in English). Proudhon, on his side, wants to show that the categories of economy are in interrelation in a contradictory way and that all these categories work simultaneously, hence the difficulty of determining where to start. Therefore it is necessary to define the basic category, from which you build up a simulation of the system (Proudhon uses the word “scaffolding”, “échafaudage” in French). His idea is that the simple description of a phenomenon does not enable to understand its internal movement.

The basic category, according to Proudhon, is *value*, which is the fundamental category from which the essential structure of capitalism can be unveiled. From that, he deduces the division of labour, machinism, competition, monopoly, etc. “Value is the cornerstone of the economic building” says Proudhon in the *Système des contradictions économiques*. I don't think Marx would disagree with that.

So where is the problem? The problem is that in 1846 Marx hysterically attacked Proudhon's method, accusing it of being idealistic, petit-bourgeois and all sorts of things, and then for more than ten years he didn't produce anything with his own historical method. A letter he wrote to Engels (April 2, 1851) shows his despair : “*Ça commence à m'ennuyer. Au fond*”<sup>79</sup>, this science has made no progress since A. Smith and D. Ricardo, however much has been done in the way of individual research, often extremely discerning.”<sup>80</sup>

These words are practically the same you can read in Proudhon's *Système des contradictions économiques* : “Monographies and history books: we are saturated with them since Ad. Smith and J.-B Say, and only variations are made on their texts.” Obviously, Proudhon and Marx were faced with the same problem and came to the same conclusion. Unfortunately for Marx, he lost fifteen years searching the solution Proudhon had found in the *Système des contradictions économiques* as soon as 1846<sup>81</sup>.

I'm mentioning this only to show that Marxism and anarchism are much more interrelated than what one might think because they had to face the same theoretical problems.

---

79 In French in the text: “It's beginning to bore me. Basically.”

80 MECW vol. 38, p. 325.

81 See: René Berthier, “Proudhon and the problem of method”,

[https://www.academia.edu/39264248/Proudhon\\_and\\_the\\_Problem\\_of\\_Method](https://www.academia.edu/39264248/Proudhon_and_the_Problem_of_Method)

## About *Capital*

In the *General introduction to the critique of political economy* (1857), Marx has still not found how to explain the structure of the system. There is an abundant literature about the modifications in the plan of *The Capital*<sup>82</sup>. On December 18, 1857, Marx writes to Engels that he is eager to “get rid of this nightmare”. (MECW vol. 40, p.224)

On February 22, 1858, Marx writes to Lassalle that after 15 years, “I am at last ready to set to work after 15 years of study...” (My emphasis)

Good. Fifteen years after his hysterical attacks against Proudhon, he found at last something. Let’s see what it is.

In the *Introduction*, Marx asks: where should one start? Which scientific method should be used? Then he starts explaining the proper method: usually, he says, when you write about political economy, you start with generalities, production, population, import, export, annual production. That’s not the good method, he says. The “scientifically correct method” consists in considering that “the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought” – which is exactly what Proudhon had explained in 1846.

Marx also says : “the economic categories would appear on the whole in the same order as in the logical exposition” (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political economy*). Which is also what Proudhon had said. So: the logical exposition is not the historical exposition.

Marx is now advocating the same method Proudhon used in the *Système des contradictions économiques* and appeals to “categories”! He now discovers that each economic category, such as exchange value, exists only in relation with a whole, something Proudhon had discovered more than ten years earlier. Now Marx says that “it is wrong and inopportune to present the succession of economic categories in the order of their historic action”. Once again, that is precisely the idea he had attacked in Proudhon in 1847.

When the first volume of *Capital* was published in 1867, the preface said that “abstraction is the only method to analyze economic forms”, which is again precisely Proudhon’s viewpoint. And if one compares the respective plans of the first book of *The Capital* and of the *Système des contradictions économiques*, one can see that they are strangely identical.

The funny thing in that affair is that the masterpiece of Marx, *Capital*, is based on a method that has nothing to do with “historical materialism” but on the inductive-deductive method, an authentically scientific method, which Proudhon used twenty years before him ; and precisely because of that method, *Capital* is an authentically scientific work!!! Proudhon’s genius was that he was the first to apply it to political economy.

Now it is interesting to explain how Marx justified the use of this “new” method. Of course, he could not say: “Good old Proudhon was right.” Acknowledging he was wrong and someone else was right was not his style. So he said that one day, he “by mere accident” fumbled through Hegel’s *Logic*, and that helped him find the proper method. The funny thing about that book is that it had belonged to... Bakunin: “Freiligrath having found and made me a present of several volumes of Hegel, originally the property of Bakunin”, he says in a letter to Engels (January 14, 1858, MECW vol. 40, p. 249). Obviously, Marx wanted to establish a link with German philosophy rather than with French socialism.

Later, a lot of Marxist authors realized that there was something wrong about the method used in *Capital*. I won’t quote them all<sup>83</sup>.

Preobrajensky for instance, is a little upset because he realizes that there is nothing to do with “historical materialism” in the book. So he says it is necessary to “rise above all the phenomena of practical capitalism which keep us from understanding this form and its movement in their purest aspect.” (*The New Economy*.) This is a pretty good definition for “simulation”. So, says Preobrajensky, you must use an “analytical-abstract method adapted to the peculiarities of the subject which is studied” (*sic*). Interesting, that. Translated, it means : “You don’t use historical materialism and you change method according to what you are studying”. A great step has been made in the understanding of “scientific socialism”...

---

82 See: Marx-Engels, *Lettres sur le Capital*, Editions sociales, 1972.

See: Henryk Grossman, *The Change in the Original Plan for Marx’s Capital and Its Causes*.

83 See René Berthier, *Etudes proudhoniennes, L’Economie politique*, Editions du Monde libertaire, pp. 102-116.

After a somewhat confused explanation of this method, which is obviously not “the usual materialist dialectics” (*sic*) Preobrajensky turns the difficulty baptizing the method: “abstract analytical dialectics”. Whaow ! That was a narrow escape for “dialectics”.

I won't quote all the Marxists who seem obviously upset with the *Capital* using the inductive-deductive method. Most of them are French and English speaking reader probably never heard about them<sup>84</sup>.

## Conclusion: Bakunin a “disciple ” of Marx ?

It's been a while since we had to deal in France with hysterical anti-anarchist Marxists like Hal Draper or Mike Armstrong. In my opinion, this is due to three things:

1. The change in the political context following the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the discredit into which Marxism has fallen. To put the scale of the disaster into perspective, the Communist Party received 25% of the votes in elections in the 1970s, today it receives only 1.5%.

2. The considerable increase in studies on anarchism which would make a laughing stock of authors who would publish texts like Armstrong's today.

3. The tendency of most groups claiming to be Marxist to recuperate anarchism, the most striking example being that of the "New Anti-Capitalist Party" in France, which has grown out of the Revolutionary Communist League (Fourth International) by successive watering downs: two of its leaders recently published a pathetic work intended to smooth the way between Marxism and anarchism<sup>85</sup>.

I could also quote an older text, published by a well-known Marxologist, Maximilien Rubel, who wrote an article – not at all convincing I must say – in which he claimed that Marx was a theorist of anarchism.<sup>86</sup>

### Close relationship between anarchism and Marxism

In my opinion, there is a very close relationship between anarchism and Marxism in their respective formation as a theory, but in general neither anarchists nor especially Marxists are really willing to acknowledge it.

It should be remembered that in the beginning Marx was full of praise for Proudhon, who was presented in *The Holy Family* as “the most logical and penetrating socialist writer”. This work, dating from 1845, contains a vibrant praise of Proudhon, who is recognised as the master of scientific socialism, the father of the theories of labour-value and surplus-value. It is true that Proudhon soon lost this privileged status with Marx and became a “petty-bourgeois” author, but this transformation had more to do with the personal history of the two men than with the intrinsic nature of their ideas.

It is not possible to elaborate on this question, which would require a book, but we can summarise:

1. Until 1845, Marx was a supporter of Feuerbachian humanism. Stirner's critique of humanism in *The Unique* forced him to reject this approach and to give up, for example, Feuerbach's notion of “generic man”. It is not surprising that Marxists are not prepared to accept this idea, but this alone explains why Marx devoted 300 pages of polemic against Stirner in the *German Ideology*: Stirner had given Marx a philosophical kick in the ass.

2. About *The German Ideology*, precisely. In this work, Marx and Engels explain their brand new toy, their materialistic conception of history. From this, Marx will be able, he believes, to explain the mechanisms of the capitalist system. The problem is that he can't. Proudhon published his *System of Economic Contradictions*, in which he used the

---

84 Lucio Colletti, Louis Althusser, Maurice Godelier, Maximilien Rubel, Roman Rosdolsky, Pierre Naville, Henri Denis.

85 Olivier Besancenot, Michael Löwy, *Affinités révolutionnaires, nos étoiles rouges et noires*. Editions Mille et une nuits.

For a reply to this book, see: René Berthier, *Affinités non électives*, Editions du Monde libertaire.

86 Maximilien Rubel, *Marx Theoretician of Anarchism*,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubel/1973/marx-anarchism.htm>

Apart from the fact that Rubel's argument is very unconvincing, his article is tarnished by the fact that in order to elevate Marx to the anarchist pantheon, he feels obliged to exclude Proudhon and Bakunin by repeating the caricatured arguments of Marx and Engels as they stand, which is very disappointing for an intellectual of this value.

For a reply to Maximilien Rubel, see: René Berthier, “L'anarchisme dans le miroir de Maximilien Rubel”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article260>

inductive-deductive method, that is, nothing to do with “historical materialism”, a term that Marx did not use: it was an invention of Engels. Marx was furious and attacked Proudhon violently. Then, for fifteen years, he published nothing on economics. Then suddenly he discovered the right method: the one Proudhon had used years earlier. I tried to explain this in *Études proudhoniennes, L'Économie*<sup>87</sup> [1] which in fact develops the theme addressed in “La Question économique” published in the journal *La Rue* in 1983.

3. When Marx published *Capital*, Bakunin recognised it as an essential contribution to the critique of the capitalist system. Those close to Bakunin published it as an abridged version accessible to workers.

4. In the First International, the Bakuninists allied themselves with Marx against the right-wing Proudhonians.

There are also interesting theoretical interrelations. For example, Bakunin challenged the Marxian theory of necessary historical phases. Marxists, he said, reproach us for “ignoring the positive law of successive evolutions”<sup>88</sup>. Not that the Russian revolutionary denied the existence of these periods: he only contested their universal character and affirmed that this theory did not apply to the Slavic world; he recognised the validity of this theory only for Western Europe. Curiously enough, Marx ended up agreeing with Bakunin, at least on two occasions:

- In 1877, he wrote to a Russian correspondent, Mikhailovsky, that it was a mistake to transform his “sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historical-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves” (Marx, Œuvres, Pléiade III, 1555).
- In 1881, he wrote to Vera Zassoulitch that the “historical fatality” of the genesis of capitalist production is expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe (Marx, Œuvres, Pléiade, II, 1559).

On the question of the primacy of economic determinations in history. Bakunin adheres to this theory, but he nevertheless expresses reservations. Marx ignores an important fact: if human representations, whether collective or individual, are only the products of real facts (“both material and social”), they nevertheless end up influencing “the relations of men in society” (*God and the State*.) Political and ideological facts, once given, can in their turn be “causes producing effects”. It is therefore not so much “historical materialism” – a term unknown during Bakunin's lifetime – that is contested as the narrowness of vision with which it seems to be applied.

On this point again, Marx and Engels agree with Bakunin. In a letter to Joseph Bloch of 21 September 1890, *i.e.* well after Bakunin's death, Engels wrote: “According to the materialist conception of history, the determining factor in history is, in the last instance, the production and reproduction of real life” [*emphasis added*]. Engels thus gives “economy” an extremely broad definition. “Neither Marx nor I have ever affirmed more. If someone then tortures this proposition into saying that the economic factor is the only determinant, he turns it into an empty, abstract, absurd sentence.” Engels continues:

“It is Marx and myself, in part, who must bear the responsibility for the fact that, at times, young people give more weight than is due to the economic side. Faced with our opponents, we had to emphasise the essential principle denied by them, and then we did not always find the time, the place or the opportunity to give their place to the other factors which participate in the reciprocal action.”<sup>89</sup>

This was a full recognition of Bakunin's reservations about Marxist theory. But this recognition was limited to the correspondence of Marx and Engels. “Marxism” as we know it, as reconstructed by German social democracy and then by Lenin, was already in place.

About “historical materialism”, I note that this expression is never used by Marx. Bakunin, on the other hand, explains and clearly designates the method he claims to use: the *experimental method*. And philosophically he calls his system “scientific materialism”<sup>90</sup>.

---

87 *Études proudhoniennes, L'Économie, Tome I. L'économie politique*, Essai, Éditions du Monde libertaire, 2009.

88 *Écrit contre Marx*, Œuvres, Champ libre, III, 16.

89 Letter to J. Bloch, 21 septembre 1890.

90 Cf. Bakounine : “ Notre programme ”, été 1868. – “ Lettre à La Démocratie ”, mars-avril 1868. – *L'Empire Knouto-Germanique et la Révolution Sociale*. Appendice, novembre-décembre 1870. – “ La théologie politique de Mazzini et l'Internationale ”, août-octobre 1871, etc.



Although Marx's texts on questions of method are few, the fetishism of method is one of the characteristics of the movement that claims to be his. This fetishism reaches its apogee in argumentation of the type developed by Lukács when he asserts that historical materialism is the “most important means of struggle” of the proletariat and that “the working class receives its sharpest weapon from the hands of true science”, namely, “historical materialism”. (*History and class consciousness*.)

We then reach positions comparable to those of Lenin, who writes in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*<sup>91</sup>: “No fundamental principle, no essential part of this philosophy of Marxism cast in a single block of steel, can be cut out without departing from objective truth, without falling into a bourgeois and reactionary lie.” There is no need to emphasise to what extent this kind of talk, contrary to any materialist vision of history, constitutes a terrible regression of thought. Marxism is transformed into a religion.

### **A materialist worldview**

Marx sent Bakunin a copy of Book I of *Capital* when it was published, seeking his opinion. Bakunin was in Italy at the time, and he made a serious mistake: he did not acknowledge receipt, which offended the author. Nevertheless, the Russian revolutionary spoke very highly of the work. His opinion deserves to be quoted in extenso:

“This work should have been translated into French long ago, for none, as far as I know, contains such a profound, such a luminous, such a scientific, such a decisive, and, if I may say so, such a ruthlessly unmasking analysis of the formation of bourgeois capital and of the systematic and cruel exploitation which capital continues to exert on the labour of the proletariat. The only fault of this work, perfectly positivist, notwithstanding *La Liberté* of Bruxelles, – positivist in the sense that, based on a thorough study of economic facts, it admits of no other logic than the logic of facts – its only fault, I say, is to have been written, in part, but only in part, in a style that is too metaphysical and abstract, which has undoubtedly misled *La Liberté* of Bruxelles, and which makes it difficult to read and almost unapproachable for the majority of workers. And it is the workers in particular who should read it, however. The bourgeois will never read it, or if they do, they will not want to understand it, and if they do understand it, they will never speak of it; this work being nothing other than a death sentence, scientifically motivated and irrevocably pronounced, not against them as individuals, but against their class.<sup>92</sup>”

The difficulty of the book for the workers led an anarchist close to Bakunin, Carlo Cafiero<sup>93</sup>, to make a more accessible *Abrégé*, translated into French by James Guillaume, the man who was probably closest to Bakunin. It was for them an indisputable theoretical achievement. It is significant that they did not make an abridgement of Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions*: it is simply that *Capital*, Book I of which was published twenty years after Proudhon's book, provides elements of knowledge superior to what is contained in the book that Proudhon wrote in 1846.

“Bakunin and Cafiero had hearts too high to allow personal grievances to influence their minds in the serene region of ideas” says James Guillaume in the foreword<sup>94</sup>. The two currents of the workers' movement, beyond differences of principle, tactics or organisation, agree on the essential. *Capital* is indeed a meeting point between anarchism and Marxism, no doubt because it starts from a scientific and explanatory intention and there is no organisational or programmatic suggestion in it.

But this does not make Bakunin a “disciple” of Marx, as some suggest.

The common perception of Marxism does not take into account, on the one hand, that ideology can become a material force once it is constituted, and, on the other hand, that there is not always a match between class interests and ideology. Marx recognised this a few years later, in *Le 18 Brumaire de Louis Bonaparte* (1850) and in *Les luttes de classe en France*<sup>95</sup>. In these two texts, it appears that the struggle between the two fractions of the bourgeoisie of the time, the Orleanists and the Legitimists, cannot be limited to purely

91 Éditions du Progrès, Moscou, p. 461.

92 Bakounine, Œuvres, Champ libre, VIII, 357.

93 Cafiero had previously been close to Engels, but completely disgusted by his bureaucratic practices in the International, he rallied to Bakunin.

94 For the record, Bakunin even undertook to translate *Capital* into Russian, a project that finally came to nothing. The virtuous Marx reproached him for having pocketed the publisher's advance...

95 The latter work was written in 1850 but not published until 1895.

economic contradictions. The struggle between the two camps, Marx then says, is explained by “the superstructure of impressions, of illusions”... On this point again, Marx agrees with Bakunin that social phenomena cannot be explained by single causes. Although the division of society into antagonistic classes remains one of the keys to the analysis of society, it appears to be an insufficient method for apprehending reality in its totality.

It is not disputable that Marx and Engels developed a “materialist worldview”: “The materialist worldview,” says Engels in his *Ludwig Feuerbach*, “simply means the conception of nature as it is, without any foreign additions.” But “historical materialism” is presented as a brilliant innovation only by those who have not studied the history of ideas in the early 19th century, and particularly the French historians of the Restoration.

“Historical materialism” was interpreted by Marx's successors in an extremely mechanistic way, which is precisely why Marx declared that he was “not a Marxist”. Bakunin had never contested the materialist conception of history, not because he had “adopted” Marx's views but because this conception was simply “in the air” and flowed logically from their common Hegelian training. Bakunin is not Marx's “disciple” on this question, Bakunin and Marx simply think more or less the same thing. Except that the Russian revolutionary had made reservations about the approach of Marx and Engels, reservations which both men eventually subscribed to<sup>96</sup>, but too late: the damage was done and Marxism had become a sclerotic and rigid doctrine.

According to Bakunin, ideological phenomena, once given, can become “causes producing new facts”<sup>97</sup>. The principle of the pre-eminence of the economic fact is “profoundly true when considered in its true light, that is to say, from a relative point of view”, but “envisaged and posed in an absolute manner, as the sole foundation and the primary source of all other principles”, it is false. The pre-eminence of the economic factor is real, but relative: Marx “takes no account of the other elements of history, such as the reaction, however obvious, of political, legal and religious institutions on the economic situation”<sup>98</sup>

All these reservations were recognised by Marx and Engels, but in their correspondence and after Bakunin's death.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that during Marx's lifetime, a doctrine developed which quickly escaped his control, and which was transformed into a heavy and dogmatic machinery. It is this Marxism that Bakunin analysed and criticised.

◆ At the end of their lives, and in any case after Bakunin's death, Marx and Engels made corrections to this mechanistic and deterministic doctrine, but these corrections were not incorporated into the body of doctrine known to the public.

◆ Marx even admitted the possibility of indeterminacies in history and acknowledged the sometimes decisive role of chance: history, he said, “would be of a very mystical nature if ‘chance’ played no part in it. These chance occurrences naturally fit into the general march of evolution and are compensated for by other chances. But the acceleration or slowing down of the movement depends very much on similar ‘chances’, among which is also the ‘chance’ of the character of the leaders first called upon to lead the movement.”<sup>99</sup>

◆ These rectifications were not introduced into the “official” corpus of the doctrine because they were made in their correspondence, and belatedly.

◆ Finally, these rectifications were entirely in line with Bakunin's reservations.

Bakunin did not absolutely “adopt” Marx's “historical materialism”; on the contrary, one would be tempted to say that Marx and Engels adopted Bakunin's scientific materialism, if the reservations Bakunin had formulated had been expressly integrated into the body of doctrine of Marxism and assimilated by the disciples instead of remaining in their correspondence. Unfortunately, by the time these reservations were recognised by Marx and Engels (without any explicit reference to Bakunin), Marxism had already become a sclerotic doctrine, and the two men seem to have made no effort to change the course of events.

---

96 1877 : Lettre de Marx à Mikhaïlovski (Œuvres, éditions de la Pléiade, III, p. 1555) et 1881 : lettre à Vera Zassoulitch (Pléiade, II, 1559).

97 “Ideas acquire later, after they have become well established, in the manner I have just explained, in the collective consciousness of any society, this power to become in their turn the producing causes of new facts.”(*L’Empire knouto-germanique*, Œuvres, Champ libre, VIII, 206.)

98 Lettre à *La Liberté* de Bruxelles, 5-11-1872.

99 Lettre à Kugelmann, 17 avril 1871.

I haven't seen a text like Armstrong's for a very long time.

It reminds me a lot of a large book published in 1974 by the General Secretary of the French Communist Party – his name was Jacques Duclos – entitled *Bakounine-Marx, ombre et lumière* (Bakunin-Marx, Shadow and Light). This book was obviously intended to exorcise the anarchist ideas that had reappeared during the month-long general strike that hit France in May and June 1968. The title itself, Manichean, sets the tone of the book. It contains the same kind of arguments as Armstrong's, almost all taken from Marx, and a few others of the same kind. For example, the collectivisations during the Spanish civil war are reduced to the collectivisation of hairdressing salons...

What is striking is that when we examine the bibliography of Armstrong's article, we realise that it could almost have been written at the same time as Jacques Duclos wrote his book. The only difference is that Duclos didn't know Hal Draper. I wonder what it would have been like if he had known him!

Unlike the communist movement, the anarchist movement is perfectly capable of criticizing its own mistakes and misguidings: there are many examples. It did not need Mr. Armstrong for that. This is why I wonder why he wrote this article and why his website thought it was worth publishing. Is he so afraid of anarchism that it might be a competitor?

In this period of triumphant international reaction, one would think that it would be more useful for anti-capitalist movements to stand together.

## Table des matières

Answer to Mick Armstrong's.....	1
“Property is sacred: How Proudhon moulded anarchism” .....	1
Proudhon.....	3
Proudhon-Stirner.....	8
Stirner.....	9
Stirner-Marx.....	10
Stirner-Bakunin.....	11
Proudhon-Bakunin.....	14
Bakounine with Marx against Proudhon.....	16
Nietzsche considered Stirner a “seminal mind” .....	17
Bakounin and individualism.....	18
The Individual and society.....	20
The year 1846.....	21
About <i>Capital</i> .....	22
Conclusion: Bakunin a “disciple ” of Marx ?.....	23