

About Maximilien Rubel's article "Marx, theoretician of anarchism"

A short biography of Maximilien Rubel

Born 1905 – Chernivtsi, Ukraine, died February 1996 – Paris, France

Source: <http://libcom.org/history/rubel-maximilien-1905-1996>

Maximilien Rubel died in Paris in late February 1996. He had originally arrived in Paris in 1931 to finish his studies in philosophy, sociology and law that he had started in his home town of Czerlowitz, which had been first ruled by the Austro-Hungarians, then by the Romanians, and is now in the Ukraine. He began to frequent radical circles and to express solidarity with the struggle for social emancipation, particularly from 1936 when he gave support to the efforts of the Spanish anarchists during the Civil War and Revolution.

This activity put him in contact with unorthodox Marxists, Anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists. His militant activity began in earnest during the Second World War when he wrote a number of leaflets in German (his mother tongue) distributed among the German forces of occupation by the tiny Revolutionary Proletarian Group in which he was active alongside Roger Bossiere*. The leaflets denounced both Nazism and the Western imperialist powers. He took the double risk in this very dangerous work of being both a Jew and a revolutionary.

A supporter of council communism, he participated in the late forties and the fifties in the activities and the debates of that current, scattered to the four corners of the world by Stalinism, in particular his published correspondence with Anton Pannekoek. He began a critical examination of the work of Marx, and indeed began to produce a Complete Works of Marx. He ferociously denounced both capitalism and what he saw as the false socialism of Leninism. His essay "Marx – Theoretician of Anarchism" horrified both orthodox Marxists and anarchists. His critique of the Soviet

Union and its satellites directed the fire of the Stalinists of the French Communist Party upon him. Unlike others who started out as anti-authoritarian critics of Stalinism, he did not change into a defender of capitalism and Cold War “anti-communism”.

He had contacts with the libertarian socialists of Socialisme ou Barbarie (who in their turn had a great influence on the British group Solidarity) and the anarchist communists of the excellent magazine *Noir et Rouge*. He participated in a reading group alongside Ngo Van Xuhat and Jean Malaquais, and was closely allied to Rene Lefevre whose Spartacus publishing house brought out a vast series of anarchist, council communist and critical Marxist books and pamphlets. He remained a convinced anti-capitalist and anti-statist right up to his death.

Nick Heath

* The original text here read “Roger Bossiere, still a militant today!”. Sadly, Bossiere died on 7 August 2006.

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I have to admit that I was, as Nick says, one of those anarchists who were “horrified”. by Maximilien Rubel’s thesis on “Marx theorist of anarchism”. “Horrified”. is perhaps an exaggeration. In fact I was very disappointed by Rubel’s argumentation. The idea that Marx could have a final vision of communism close to anarchism is not original: that’s what all Marxists say, even if it means forgetting these good intentions when it comes to practice,

I have never taken very seriously this passage where Marx states that “All socialists understand by anarchy this: the goal of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, once achieved, the power of the state disappears and the functions of government are transformed into mere administrative functions.” First of all because the “anarchy”. in question is a passive anarchy, I would say, which occurs through the effect of a historical determinism that escapes real men and women.

Marx wrote this in a polemical text, *The Fictitious Splits in the International* (1871), at a time when he had begun his great manoeuvres against Bakunin and thought he was trying to soften the anarchists by saying: “You see, we’re not that different...”. When a communist says to anarchists: “we’re not that different”, the anarchists had better watch out. In the case of Marx, he had Bakunin and James Guillaume excluded from the

International, and by ricochet the whole organised labour movement of the time. At a time when he needed them, Lenin had also flirted with the anarchists by writing *The State and Revolution*, before having them shot.

In short, this sentence of Marx doesn't really say much, it's a paraphrase of Saint-Simon who was not an anarchist at all and who said that the government of men was going to be replaced by the administration of things. It remains very, very vague.

After reading "Marx, theorist of anarchism", I wrote a very polemical text, "Rubel, Marx and Bakounine", in an anarchist publication from Lyon, *Informations et réflexions libertaires* (Oct-Nov. 1985). Later I rewrote the text, softening the polemical side and I changed the title into "L'anarchisme dans le miroir de Maximilien Rubel" (Anarchism in the mirror of Maximilien Rubel).

In fact what shocked me wasn't really the idea that Marx was a theoretician of anarchism. After all, if one makes a hypothesis and argues it, it can only be interesting, even if one disagrees. What shocked me is that his argument in favour of an "anarchist Marx" is frankly bad, falling far short of what he would have been capable of if his mind hadn't been clouded by a mass of prejudices inspired by all the distortions produced by Marx, whom he repeats uncritically. In other words, if the ideological and partisan Rubel had given way to the critical intellectual Rubel really was, we could have had a genuine and fruitful debate, because there were arguments that could have supported his thesis, but which he was unable or unwilling to use, because he would have had to make some kind of "concessions" and abandon the Manicheist attitude of seeing Bakunin as all bad and Marx as all good.

It's a pity.

A few months before his death, Rubel and I took part in a programme on Radio Libertaire, the radio station of the Fédération Anarchiste, and I took the opportunity to ask him about "Marx, theorist of anarchism". Several times he dodged the subject, but when I insisted he finally said: "But all that isn't important, what's important is Proudhon". A truly astonishing statement.

R.B.

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Anarchism in the mirror of Maximilien Rubel ¹

René Berthier

The evolution of Maximilian Rubel's critical thinking led him to formulate the hypothesis that Marx was a theorist of anarchism.² It is easy to imagine that if the idea did not arouse enthusiasm among Marxists, it did not arouse enthusiasm among anarchists either. It's because the oppositions between Marx and the anarchists of his time were such that if one accepts the idea of a Marx theorist of anarchism, one is forced to reject from the anarchist "pantheon" all the others, which obviously simplifies the debate... by making it useless.

This idea also poses another problem: the "niche" of anarchist theorists is already largely occupied by men, some of them contemporaries of Marx, who had obviously never envisaged such a hypothesis, and one can say, without compromising oneself too much, that they would have vigorously rejected it. Maximilian Rubel is thus in the uncomfortable situation of being alone against all. Worse, he puts Marx himself in this uncomfortable position, insofar as, having fought all his life against the anarchists – Proudhon and Bakunin, mainly – the author of *Capital* finds himself invested with a status that he, his opponents and his supporters would have rejected, but which Rubel proposes to show was justified.

1. The image of anarchism in the mirror of Marx

Since the hypothesis of a Marx theorist of anarchism is obviously not a passing whim of Rubel's, it seems necessary to examine it closely. This examination is largely justified by the very quality of Maximilian Rubel, whose life and work were devoted to revolution and revolutionary criticism.

1 French version:

http://monde-nouveau.net/IMG/pdf/Miroir_de_Rubel.pdf

2 Concerning Maximilien Rubel and his article "Marx, theoretician of anarchism", see <https://libcom.org/article/marx-theoretician-anarchism-maximilien-rubel>

The respect due to the militant and revolutionary intellectual should not, however, blind us or dispense us from exercising critical reflection on his theses. This is undoubtedly the best homage we can pay to him.

We will engage in a double examination: that of the scattered remarks on anarchism and more particularly on Bakunin published in *Marx Critique du Marxisme*, a large volume containing about twenty articles written between 1957 and 1973³; that of the article entitled “Marx theorist of anarchism” contained in this volume.

It is a task which, however, presents a methodological difficulty. Indeed, we can choose to retain only the “anarchist” remarks and argumentation that Maximilian Rubel attributes to Marx, and examine them critically. But we can see that what Marx said on this subject can be reduced to very little, and that the essence of Rubel’s argument rests on the hypothetical content of a book that Marx had planned but did not have time to write.

This first approach has the disadvantage of evacuating... “real anarchism”, that is to say the thought and action of those who have hitherto been regarded as anarchists. Marx, however, was quite determined against them, mainly Bakunin; he provided a corpus of arguments whose relevance should be examined, and which were taken up without any modification by his followers. There is thus an apparent contradiction in the fact that Marx is attributed the status of an anarchist while at the same he constantly fought against the anarchists .

With more than a century’s hindsight, there is not many people today to admit that what Marx said about anarchism, and in particular about Bakunin’s positions, was in good faith. There can therefore be no question of taking up Marx’s argument as it stands, and presenting it as an analysis of Bakunin’s ideas. Such an approach would ridicule anyone who would engage in such work. This is, however, what almost all Marxist authors have done since Marx; the book by Jacques Duclos, the late Secretary General of the French Communist Party, being particularly characteristic in this respect. However, a systematic examination of all references to Bakunin in *Marx critique du marxisme* reveals that Rubel is not exempt from this defect. It is true that Bakunin is far from being the author’s main concern, but the numerous allusions he makes to him are indicative of the limited sources Rubel drew on.

One might then wonder whether the image of anarchism as it appears in the mirror of Marx, the deformations and silences of Marx taken up by his followers, do not say as much about Marxism as the works and practices of

3 Editions Payot, 1974.

Marx himself? I would add that to a large extent Marxism and anarchism determine and define themselves in relation to each other.

But, here again, a difficulty arises: There is a risk of a gradual shift in the debate: “Is Marx an anarchist?” to the “Marx vs. Bakunin debate”.

According to Georges Haupt⁴, Marx’s refusal “to engage in the doctrinal debate [with Bakunin] is above all tactical. All Marx’s efforts tend, in fact, to minimise Bakunin, to deny any theoretical consistency to his rival. He refuses to recognise Bakunin’s system of thought, not because he denies its consistency, as he peremptorily asserts, but because Marx thus seeks to discredit it and reduce it to the dimensions of a sect leader and conspirator of the old type”⁵.

It seemed to us that as soon as he raised the question of the relationship between the two men, Maximilian Rubel too often abandoned the role of researcher to assume that of partisan. One might think that Marx’s assertion as a theoretician of anarchism implies the imperative elimination of Bakunin from the field.

Our hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that the numerous points of conjunction between the two men are not at all detected by Rubel. He is busy pointing out the differences, and presenting them in such a distorted way that they can only lead the reader to believe that Marx is incomparably superior in all areas.

Yet the observation of these many points of conjunction could have served Maximilien Rubel’s purpose. By acknowledging that the violence of the opposition between the two men was due to the identical foundations of their thinking, Rubel could have gone beyond the usual anecdotal level of the debate in which it is maintained.

He could have found considerable support for his hypotheses. Only it would have been necessary to recognize a normative value to Bakunin’s thought, which neither Marx before Rubel nor Rubel himself were willing to do.

2. Legitimizing Doctrines and Founding Myths

Marxism and anarchism were submitted to the test of reality through the experience of the First International. The theorists subsequently elaborated the legitimizing doctrines and founding myths of their respective movements and gave the starting point for all dogmatic approaches to the

4 Georges Haupt, 1928-1978 was a French historian of Romanian origin, a specialist in the international socialist movement, particularly the Second International.

5 *Bakounine, combats et débats*, Institut d’études slaves, 1979.

Marx/Bakunin “debate”. The reality is much more trivial. Neither Marx nor Bakunin represented much.

Let us take the sections that Marx believed he could rely on, and which were also the sections that found in him a justification for their own institutional activity.

– The English workers were completely disinterested in the International Workers’ Association (IWA), and the trade-union leaders were simply using the International to obtain their electoral reform. After the congress in The Hague, the brand new English federation, disgusted by Marx’s intrigues, rallied to the positions of the Jura federation, which was bakunist.

– The German IWA never represented much. When the Social Democratic Party developed, the organization of the IWA in Germany declined. The sections created by Becker were emptied of their substance. The Social Democratic Party, theoretically affiliated, had, in Engels’ own words, a purely platonic relationship with the International: “There was never any real membership, not even of isolated individuals”, he wrote⁶.

Four months before the congress in The Hague, which was to ratify the exclusion of Bakunin and James Guillaume, Engels wrote an urgent letter to Liebknecht: how many cards did you distribute, he asked: “The 208 calculated by Finck are not all!” It’s almost a wind of panic blowing through his pen: “Things are getting serious, and we have to know where we stand, otherwise you’ll force us to act on our own behalf, considering that the Social Democratic Workers’ Party is foreign to the International and behaves towards it as a neutral organization”⁷. It’s difficult to express more clearly the total lack of interest that German Social Democracy had in the IWA.

– As for the Geneva section, it was made up of the aristocracy of citizen-workers in the Swiss watch industry who were busy concluding electoral alliances with the radical bourgeois⁸: “mired in electoral compromises with the radical bourgeois,” as Bakunin puts it.

6 Marx-Engels, *La social-démocratie allemande*, 10/18, p. 68.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

8 “And when the circular [this is the polemical text Marx wrote for the General Council: ‘Alleged splits in the International’] accused ‘young Guillaume’ of having branded the Geneva ‘factory workers’ as awful bourgeois, it purely and simply omitted to say that the term ‘factory workers’ designated in Geneva a layer of privileged, well-paid workers, working in luxury industries and who had made more or less dubious electoral compromises with certain bourgeois parties.” (Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx – Histoire de sa vie*, Éditions sociales, p. 529.)

Thus, when Marx decided to exclude the anarchists, he was singularly deprived of assets, apart from his control over the apparatus of the organization. Bakunin's situation in the International was no better, the real "authority" he could exercise was no greater. When the Geneva section of the Alliance dissolved, it did not even ask Bakunin's opinion, which says a lot about the "dictatorship" he was to exercise there.

A true reading of the history of the IWA as a founding event of real Marxism and anarchism would clean up things a bit, and put the "theorists" in their place. Franz Mehring is one of the few to have perceived the situation acutely. Speaking of the Bakunin opposition, he says: "One realizes that the reason why it borrowed its name from Bakunin is that it believed that it found in his ideas the solution to the social antagonisms and conflicts of which it was the product".⁹ The same could be said of Marx. Mehring, therefore, does not have an ideological approach to question¹⁰, he makes an analysis in terms of class, of the social forces at play. Yet this is precisely where the key to conflict in the IWA lies, which Rubel, at no time, understands, and which blurs his ability to grasp the real issues. Bakunin and Marx are not inventing anything, they are merely theorizing situations they witness.

Marx's approach, whether he likes it or not, reinforces the positions of the sections that can expect an improvement in their lot through the elections. The sections that can expect nothing from electoral action lean toward Bakunin: the foreign workers of Geneva, poorly paid, despised, without political rights; the downgraded youth of Italy with no future; the peasants of Andalusia and Italy starved by the big landowners; the wretched proletariat of Italy; the workers of Catalan industry and the miners of the Borinage, in Belgium, two regions where there is a concentrated and demanding proletariat, but whose smallest strikes are drowned in blood and who cannot expect any peaceful reform. They find nothing in Marx's speech that can help them, that can support them, especially since when Marxists (let's say: people who advocate legal action and claim to be the leadership of the International), break up the protest movements.

Maximilian Rubel's remarks, in the *Dictionary of Political Works*, on Bakunin's positions regarding Italy are particularly revealing of his

9 Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx – Histoire de sa vie*, Éditions sociales, p. 522.

10 By ideological approach we mean the approach which consists of taking an author's ideas on a subject at face value, without critical examination. Thus, The Civil War in France would be a history book on the Commune, to be taken as such, and containing the truth about this event, and not a book setting out Marx's opinions on the question, at a given moment, and for given reasons.

incomprehension of the reality of the problems shaking the International. Rubel indeed ironizes on the fact that Marx...

“...should have renounced the guiding principles of his own theory in order to accept Bakunin’s thesis on the chances of a social revolution: These would be greater in Italy than in Europe, for the simple reason that there exists, on the one hand, ‘a vast proletariat endowed with extraordinary intelligence, but largely illiterate and profoundly miserable, composed of two or three million workers in the cities and factories, as well as small artisans’ and, on the other hand, ‘about twenty million peasants who have nothing’.¹¹ And after having emphasized the advantage of the absence, in Italy, of a privileged layer of high-wage workers, Bakunin moves on to his first attack against the ‘opposing’ party”,

that is: Marx¹².

The simple *exposition* of Bakunin’s positions is worthy of refutation; there is no need to linger; what actually interests Rubel is what Bakunin says of Marx, which in reality is of no interest. One has the impression that Rubel only opened page 206 of *Statism and Anarchy* because Marx is mentioned there, whereas on the previous page is the key to Bakunin’s argument, which is incomprehensible from what Rubel says.

There are, Bakunin says in substance, in Italy three million overexploited, miserable workers, twenty million landless peasants, and – what Rubel does not mention – defectors from the bourgeois world who have joined the struggle for socialism, whose help is precious (on condition that they have “taken in hatred the bourgeois aspirations for domination,”. Bakunin nevertheless specifies). The people¹³ give these people “life, the strength of the elements and a field of action; on the other hand, they give them positive knowledge, methods of abstraction and analysis, as well as the art of organizing themselves and forming alliances which, in turn, create that enlightened fighting force without which victory is inconceivable.”

This is Bakunin’s strategic vision for Italy, a vision that becomes perfectly coherent as soon as we introduce these defectors of the bourgeoisie who will make the cement of the revolution take hold.

11 Bakunin, *Etatisme et anarchie*, p. 206, Champ libre, t. IV.

12 *Dictionnaire des œuvres politiques*, p. 52.

13 Bakunin's concept of the people includes the proletariat, the poor peasantry and the poor petty bourgeoisie.

Moreover, the situation he describes astonishingly evokes another one, that of Russia in 1917.¹⁴

Bakunin's analysis, thus reconstructed, is in no way outside the guiding principles of Marx's social theory, quite the contrary. It could even be that Bakunin is much better "Marxist". than Rubel...

3. Practical experience of solidarity

From 1866 onwards, a strike movement spread throughout Europe, whose often ferocious repression only served to increase the influence of the International, founded only two years earlier. Strikes, which until then had been fortuitous in character, became real class battles, giving workers practical experience of the solidarity that sometimes came to them from abroad.

– Strike by Parisian bronziers in February 1867, collections organized by the IWA; strike by weavers and spinners in Roubaix, March 1867; strike in the mining basins of Fuveau, Gardanne, Auriol, La Bouilladisse, Gréasque, April 1867-February 1867, Fuveau miners join the IWA; from 1867 onwards, the main activity of the French sections consisted in supporting these strikes and in solidarity actions to back up strikes abroad.

– In Belgium, the Charleroi miners' strike, harshly repressed by the army, led to a strengthening of the IWA; the Verviers weavers' strike, who wanted to keep their relief fund within the IWA; the sailboats' strike in Antwerp; the IWA supported the strikers with funds. The entire industrialized part of Belgium is affected by the IWA.

– In Geneva, a well-organised construction workers' strike, launched in a favourable period of full employment, ended successfully. International solidarity was efficient. A delegate to the IWA congress in Brussels declared: "Although this is a republic, the bourgeoisie have been meaner than elsewhere, but the workers have held firm. There were only two sections before the strike; now there are twenty-four sections in Geneva, with 4,000 members.

These events can be contrasted with Mehring's observation that,

14 In a letter to Liebknecht dated April 8, 1870, Bakunin remarked that "the majority of Russian students find themselves in the situation of having absolutely no career, no assured means of existence before them, which makes them, above all, revolutionaries by position, and this is the most serious and real way, in my opinion, of being revolutionary." Significantly, it was these same petty-bourgeois intellectuals who constituted the overwhelming majority of the Bolshevik party cadres thirty years later...

wherever Marx's strategy was applied, the IWA disappeared: "Wherever a national party was created, the International broke up..."¹⁵. This was precisely the danger Bakunin had repeatedly denounced.

The IWA often advocated moderation, but was called upon to take on ever more numerous and violent struggles. Its very existence, backed by a few initial successes, created a ripple effect, a cumulative effect. The violence of repression itself pushed workers to organize. Each time the army intervened, the reformists lost ground and, little by little, the International became more radical; this radicalization, it should be pointed out, was not the result of ideological debate, but of experience of both struggle and the practice of international solidarity in the field.

There was thus undeniably a split in the international workers' movement, of which the Bakunin-Marx opposition was not the cause but the expression. It cannot be stressed enough that the anarchist theory formulated by Bakunin between 1868 and his death in 1876 was entirely based on his observations of the workers' struggles of the time.

So when, twenty-five years later, in 1895, Engels wrote: "The irony of history turns everything upside down. We 'revolutionaries', the 'chambardeurs', prosper much better by legal means than by illegal means and chambardelement"¹⁶, one has the impression that he is in exact continuity with the positions of the Marxian leadership of the IWA, despite a few occasional jabs at the fetishists of legalism. Four years earlier, however, in his critique of the Erfurt program, when the two main demands of 1848 had been realized – national unity and representative government –, Engels noted with chagrin that "the government possesses all executive power", and the "chambers do not even have the power to refuse taxes [...] The fear of a renewal of the law against socialists paralyses the action of social democracy", he goes on to say, confirming Bakunin's opinion that democratic forms offer few guarantees for the people¹⁷.

The originality of Bakunin's analysis lies in having shown that, in its constitutive period, the workers' movement could expect nothing from subordinating its action to the demand for representative democracy, because it was faced with state violence, and that in the stabilization period, when this demand was granted, the ruling classes and the state had the means to prevent the use of representative institutions from challenging their interests. Indeed, Bakunin asserted that the most ardent democrats remain bourgeois, and that "a serious affirmation, not merely in words, of

15 Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx, Histoire de sa vie*, Editions sociales, p. 533.

16 Introduction aux *Luttes de classes en France*.

17 *Critique du programme d'Erfurt*, Éd. sociales, p. 101.

socialist demands or instincts on the part of the people is enough for them to immediately throw themselves into the camp of the darkest and most senseless reaction”, universal suffrage or not. History proved him right.

4. The misunderstanding on Marx's 'statism'

It is regrettable that, in his concern to highlight the oppositions between Bakunin and Marx, Maximilien Rubel was unable to trace the genesis of these oppositions, which rest partly, as we have seen, on the support given to them by different fractions of the European working class, but also largely on a misunderstanding. The statism that Bakunin reproaches Marx for is essentially that of Lassalle¹⁸.

Henri Lefebvre¹⁹ had perceived the problem much better than Rubel: “Bakunin,” he said, “reproaches Marx for the unlimited credit he sometimes gives to universal suffrage; he also reproaches him for his scientism, his nationalism masked by internationalism²⁰.” It is not enough to say, however, that “lassallism, *i.e.* state socialism, has defeated Marxism” and that “Bakunin’s protest and contestation play the role of ferment, but has ‘founded’ nothing that lasts”. It is surprising to see to what extent the most respectable Marxist intellectuals are capable of limiting themselves to a collection of preconceived ideas when it comes to anarchism: their discourse on Bakunin in particular is content to take up without any critical examination the caricatures of arguments provided to them by Marx.

Bakunin is perfectly right to note that it was only after Lassalle’s death that Marx attacked him openly and publicly, but it was too late: Lassallism was firmly rooted in the German working class. And it was probably not the least of Marx’s frustrations that he had to witness, for the rest of his life, the posthumous triumph of Lassalle²¹ at the founding congress of the German Socialist party, which the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* was unable to counteract.

This raises an important point in the history of the relationship between Marx and German social democracy. Marx openly distanced himself from Lassalle only belatedly, for various reasons: because he needed him to get published, because he borrowed money from him, and because he thought

18 Bakunin’s critique of Marx’s statism covers two realities, which it is not our subject to develop: the strategy of conquering state power through elections; the statist conception of communism.

19 Henri Lefebvre (1901 – 1991) was a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist.

20 H. Lefebvre, *De l’Etat*, T. III.

21 Lassalle was stupidly killed in a duel in 1864.

that, despite everything, Lassalle was helping to spread his ideas in Germany. Furthermore, Marx believed that he could rely on German social democracy in his politics within the IWA, which was not the case²².

This helped to fuel both the idea of a convergence of views between Marx and Lassalle and Marx's unqualified approval of the politics of social democracy. Bakunin was obviously unaware of the violent criticisms against German social democracy that Marx was developing in his correspondence.

That two political opponents make accusations accompanied by numerous epithets is part of the game. The researcher, a century later, is not obliged to take these accusations at face value, *i.e.* to enter the opponents' game. Beyond the anecdote or the partisan stance, it was necessary to situate the theoretical basis of the differences. But in the case of Bakunin and Marx, the first question that should be asked, systematically, is: do they disagree so much?

Instead of an ideological approach consisting of retaining only what the protagonists said about themselves and their respective rivals, and taking their statements at face value without any critical examination, a historical approach would have made it possible to prune out a good part of the oppositions.

Maximilien Rubel's assertion regarding Marx's "anarchism" may first of all provoke a violent rejection²³ that the further reading of the article Rubel wrote on Marx's marginal notes on *Statism and Anarchy* in the *Dictionnaire des oeuvres politiques*²⁴ (Dictionary of Political Works) does not diminish. Indeed, the reader who has read Bakunin's book gets the impression that Rubel has retained only those passages where the Russian

22 Four months before the congress at The Hague, which was to expel Bakunin and James Guillaume, Engels wrote an urgent letter to [Wilhelm] Liebknecht: "How many membership cards, for how many members; and where roughly have you distributed them? The 208 calculated by Fink can't amount to all of them!" (Engels to Liebknecht, 22 May 1872.) As he writes, there is almost a puff of panic blowing: "Matters are becoming serious and we need to know just where we are; if not you will force us to act for ourselves, considering the Social-Democratic Workers Party as a stranger to the International and will relate to it as an unattached body." It would be difficult to express more clearly the lack of interest that German Social-Democracy had for the International.

23 This is the reaction I had when I published in 1985 a polemical text in *Informations et réflexions libertaires* (Oct-Nov. 1985), "Rubel, Marx et Bakunin" which later became "L'anarchisme dans le miroir de Maximilien Rubel" (Anarchism in the mirror of Maximilien Rubel.).

24 Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.

revolutionary speaks of Marx²⁵! Rubel concludes his article on Bakunin by evoking the great unrealised project of... Marx — the famous book on the State that would have qualified Marx as a “theoretician of anarchism”. Bakunin’s name is mentioned 53 times, Marx’s 47 times.

If, today, our disagreement with Maximilien Rubel has not changed fundamentally, it is perhaps time to go beyond the problem and ask other more relevant questions. It is perhaps less interesting to ask whether Marx is a “theorist of anarchism” than to ask “Why on earth does Rubel want to make Marx a theorist of anarchism at all costs?” For if Rubel’s objective is to promote anarchism, why does he appeal to Marx for that? And above all, why does he call upon Marx *to the exclusion of all the others*? Why doesn’t he try to do something creative²⁶ and elaborate an original doctrine based on a synthesis of Marx, Proudhon and Bakunin?

And if his aim was to rehabilitate Marx’s thought by freeing it from any accusation of statism, did he need to go so far as to make him a theorist of anarchism?

25 *Statism and Anarchy* is a synthesis of Bakunin’s ideas on the history and politics of the European states, their formation and their perspective of evolution within the framework of a strategy of the workers’ movement. It is also a historical reflection on the respective roles of Germany and Russia in European history and on their status as “centers of reaction” in Europe. The fact that Bakunin believes that Germany has acquired, with the constitution of national unity, this status of center of reaction, is summed up by Rubel’s accusation of “Germanophobia”, which obviously removes any need to analyze Bakunin’s argument.

One can clearly distinguish two parts (the text, included in Volume IV of the Works in Champ Libre, begins on p. 201 and ends on p. 362):

I. – History of Europe and Geopolitics: Russia (p. 209). – Austria (p. 227). – Russia – German Empire (p. 250). – Perspective of war between Russia and Germany (p. 260). – Russian expansionism in East Asia (p. 273).

II. – German Liberalism (p. 286): 1815-1830 “Gallophobia of the Tudesque Romantics” (p. 298). – 1830-1840 Imitation of French liberalism (p. 303). – 1840-1848 Radicalism (p. 314). – 1848-1850 Death of liberalism (p. 319). – 1850-1870 Triumph of the Prussian monarchy (p. 335).

26 The reader may usefully refer to Claude Berger’s book, *Marx, l’association, l’anti-Lénine* (Petite bibliothèque Payot, 1974), which is an original reflection on the theme of Association in Marx as a theory and practice of self-emancipation of the proletariat. His approach is similar to Rubel’s; moreover, it is contemporary to his article on “Marx anarchist” (1974); it is much more convincing, but at no time does he feel the need to transform Marx into a “theoretician of anarchism”.

5. The rational bases of the anarchist utopia

According to Maximilien Rubel, Marx was the first to “lay the rational foundations of an anarchist utopia and to define a project for its realization”. Rubel’s assertion unambiguously implies that contemporary authors such as Proudhon and Bakunin, traditionally referred to as anarchists, are pushed aside from the status of full-fledged theorists and relegated – at best – to that of precursors.

Rubel’s thesis is based on the hypothetical content of a book that Marx did not write, but which he had in mind:

“The ‘Book’ on the State foreseen in the plan of the Economy, but which remained unwritten, could only contain the theory of the society liberated from the State, the anarchist society²⁷.”

Are we, simply because Maximilien Rubel says so, compelled to adhere to what is only a hypothesis? For the whole scaffolding of his reasoning rests on an unverifiable assertion: this unwritten book which “could only contain”, etc., which is tantamount to saying that Maximilian Rubel does not know, but that he assumes it, unless he is able to produce a document in which Marx explicitly says: “I have a project for a book on the state in which I will develop the theory of anarchist society.” But there is nothing of the kind: Maximilien Rubel does not, it seems, have much to produce, since he acknowledges that the anarchist path followed by Marx is “*implicit*”, that is, not formulated: in other words, it must be induced from his work.

If real Marxism did not follow this “implicit” anarchist path in Marx’s thought, it is because “unscrupulous disciples” “invoked certain personal attitudes of the master” in order to put his work “at the service of doctrines and actions that represent its total negation”. The reader will know who these “unscrupulous disciples” or what these “personal attitudes” are.

One could analyse these remarks in the light of historical materialism: a man elaborates the rational bases and a project for the realization of an anarchist society. These bases and this project are “implicit” because they are elaborated in a book that “remained unwritten”. Unfortunately, the master had “certain personal attitudes” apparently questionable, of which no details are given, which incited “unscrupulous disciples” to put his work “at the service of doctrines and actions that represent its total negation”. Marx, it is said, “did not always seek in his political activity to harmonize the ends

27 M. Rubel, *Marx théoricien de l’anarchisme*, p. 45.

and means of anarchist communism. But for having sometimes failed as a militant, Marx did not cease to be the theoretician of anarchism.”

These remarks are very obscure for those who do not know the details of the history of Marx and his close friends excluding almost all the international labour movement from the IWA, although there is a slight hint of a guilty conscience. The unfamiliar reader might guess that Marx did something reprehensible, but this must not be very serious and it does not affect the normative validity of his teaching.

In fact Bakunin’s prediction was no exaggeration. After his own exclusion from the IWA, at the congress in The Hague, the same fate would be reserved for all opposition members. Realizing that they had been manipulated by a rigged congress, the resolutions voted at this congress were disavowed, between 15 September 1872 and 14 February 1873, by the Jura, the French, the Belgians, the Spanish, the Italians, the Americans, the English and the Dutch. Seeing this, the new General Council, transferred to... New York! published on January 26, 1873 a resolution declaring that all those who do not recognize the resolutions of the congress of The Hague “place themselves outside the International Workers’ Association and cease to be members of it”. Marx and those close to him effectively excluded almost the entire international proletariat from the IWA!

In Rubel’s opinion, it seems that the destiny of “real socialism”, euphemism for Stalinism and all the variants of communism that succeeded it, is linked to a few unscrupulous disciples who did not understand the anarchist path *implicit* in Marx’s thought. In terms of historical materialism, such an approach to the problem is called idealism. Maximilien Rubel applies to the history of Marxism the method that Marxism combats.

Anarchism, for its part, has suffered less from the perversion of concrete application because, “not having created a true theory of revolutionary praxis, it has been able to preserve itself from political and ideological corruption”.²⁸ This is a great credit to anarchism: the participation of anarchists in the Popular Front government in Spain cannot, therefore, be classified under the rubric of political and ideological corruption.

The plan outlined by Marx in 1857 called for a fifth and sixth book on State and International trade. But he never had time to work on them, and in the parts he completed, he consciously excluded competition in the world market from his field of study²⁹.

Rosdolsky shows that the 1857 version of the Plan of *Capital* included a Book IV on the State, which no longer appears in the 1866 version. But

28 M. Rubel, “Marx théoricien de l’anarchisme”, *op. cit.* p. 49.

29 Cf R Rosdolsky, *The making of Marx’s Capital*, London 1980 pp. 14 et 22.

there is nothing to indicate that this Book on the State would have been an “anarchist theory of the State”, if not Rubel’s intimate conviction. Indeed, this Book is inserted between a Book III on wage labour and a Book V on foreign trade, followed by a book on the world market and crises. It is not clear how a book on the anarchist theory of the state could fit into this. In all likelihood, Marx would have studied the State within the framework of capitalist relations of production, which seems rather logical. But nothing more.

In his *Introduction* to the first volume of Marx’s works, Rubel himself gives us “a kind of plan” that Marx would have presented as “the logical outcome of his research”. One finds there in point 3°: “Synthesis of bourgeois society in the form of the State; The State considered in itself; The “unproductive” classes; Taxes; Public debt; Public credit; The population; The colonies; Emigration”³⁰. Despite all the interest in studying these points, it is difficult to see how they could provide the foundation for an “anarchist theory of the State”.

What confers on Marx the quality of “the most consequent theoretician of anarchism”, says Maximilian Rubel, is that “the advent of the community liberated from the economic, political and ideological exploitation of man by man is conceived not in terms of individual, morally exemplary behaviour, but as the reforming and revolutionary action of the ‘immense majority’ constituted in social class and political party”³¹.

On the other hand, real anarchism (i.e., not Rubel’s), seems to be limited to the “only individual act of revolt”³².

Entire sections of the history of the international labour movement are thus eradicated. Limiting anarchism to the “only individual act of revolt” obscures a few striking pages of the international workers’ movement, which are certainly little treated in the works that are in the line of orthodoxy elaborated by those “unscrupulous disciples” of Marx evoked by Rubel.

It is true that the anarcho-sindicalist movement had its work cut out for it, since in Spain it had to face simultaneously the international bourgeoisie, fascism, Nazism, Stalinism and the Republicans. Hundreds of thousands of activists of the movement were killed between the two wars on every continent, on the front lines of the struggle against fascism, Nazism, Stalinism, or simply in the struggle against capitalism: they were not driven by the “individual gesture of revolt” and were unaware that they had not “created a true theory of revolutionary praxis”.

30 Introduction by M. Rubel of Karl Marx Works, La Pléiade, T.I, p.XCIV.

31 Marx, Œuvres, La Pléiade, vol. III, note de Rubel, p. 1735.

32 M. Rubel, *Marx critique du marxisme*, postface, p. 430.

6. Explicit references to the stateless society

What, then, is Marx's anarchism made of? In what did Marx lay "the rational bases of the anarchist utopia" and in what did he define its "project of realization"? We know that thanks to Marx, anarchism was enriched "by a new dimension, that of the dialectical understanding of the workers' movement as ethical self-liberation encompassing the whole of humanity" (except perhaps the "reactionary nations" noted by Engels). We will not dwell on trying to understand what the "dialectical understanding of the workers' movement", nor the "ethical self-liberation encompassing all of humanity" are. We will simply try to identify the explicit references to the stateless society that Marx made in his work.

Naturally, there are criticisms of the state in Marx, but criticism of the state in itself does not define anarchism. There are texts in which Marx makes a radical critique of a certain type of state, but the critique of the state *as a principle* remains very limited in his whole work.

a) In Volume I (Political Works) of Marx's Complete Works of the "Éditions de la Pléiade"³³, there are seven references to the abolition of the state, three of which are notes by Rubel. In this Volume, a sentence in the appendices of an 1850 text succinctly, but very rightly, defines the meaning of the abolition of the State: "The abolition of the State only makes sense among communists, as a necessary consequence of the abolition of classes, with which the need of the organized power of one class to belittle the other classes automatically disappears." (Pages 1078-1079.)

b) In volume II, there are four references, three of which are in the notes.

c) In Volume III (Philosophical Works) there is one reference by Marx to the abolition of the State, two notes by Maximilian Rubel, and a passage in the Introduction where Maximilian Rubel tells us that Marx's "vision of a non-political society" was expressed through the demand for representative democracy, that is to say... parliamentarism!

The heading "Abolition of the state" in the index of ideas refers to a passage (page 634) where it is a question of the "overthrow of existing state power", which would not be sufficient to inscribe it in an anarchist perspective. Other references to anarchism or the abolition of the state are contained either in Maximilien Rubel's Introduction or in his notes.

33 I will limit myself here to the references to Marx in the available French editions, mainly in the edition of his works in the "Édition de La Pléiade" established by Maximilien Rubel.

In over 6,000 pages, there are thus 7 direct but scattered references by Marx to the abolition of the state (including one by Engels, by the way), in vague terms, which constitute very thin material for concluding that Marx is a “theoretician of anarchism”.

It is surprising that an author who is supposed to be a “theoretician of anarchism” did not sprinkle his work with more information about the stateless society. Yet this is a determining (but not unique) concept of anarchist theory: one might think that if it constituted a major preoccupation of Marx, it should be sufficiently present in his work so that it wouldn’t be overshadowed by the various parties that claim to follow his teachings.

The most precise passage quoted by Rubel on this question is taken from “*Fictitious Splits in the International*”³⁴:

“All Socialists understand by Anarchy the following: that once the goal of the proletarian movement — the abolition of classes — is reached, the power of the State — which serves to maintain the large producing majority under the yoke of a small exploiting minority — disappears and the functions of government are transformed into simple administrative functions”.

This widely quoted phrase of Marx’s is too vague, too general and too isolated in his work to be considered as an adhesion to anarchism. Above all, it is not an explicit political project insofar as it postpones the abolition of the state to an indeterminate and distant future.

The document that could most convincingly accredit the thesis of an “anarchist” Marx is the *Address on the Civil War in France* written in the name of the General Council of the IWA in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, and which constitutes an important point of contention between Marxists and anarchists. It is, according to Maximilien Rubel, a “text that will pass in the eyes of Bakunin as a denial of the ‘statist-authoritarian’ convictions” of Marx³⁵. Bakunin will indeed say that it is a “travesty” of Marx’s thought.

Although neither Proudhon nor Bakunin had anything to do with it, it was federalist conceptions that dominated in the Paris Commune: federations of decentralized communes, substitution of elected and

34 *Fictitious Splits in the International*, text by Marx adopted by the General Council of the IWA.

35 *Dictionnaire des œuvres politiques*, p. 56.

revocable delegates for the state apparatus, which contrasts considerably with the apology for the work of centralization begun by the monarchy, as developed by Marx in *18-Brumaire*. Now Marx adheres to the work of the Commune, and the Address of the General Council of the IWA was written from the point of view of the “Communards” themselves.

Until now, the creation of a socialist society was, for the *Manifesto*, conditioned by the prior creation of a democratic proletarian state stemming from universal suffrage or, for the *Class Struggles in France*, by the creation of a dictatorial state. The approval of the Commune’s work thus corresponds to a complete reversal of the point of view on the question of power, to the abandonment of the centralist point of view and to the rallying to the Proudhonian and Bakuninist theses (although the latter two points of view should not be assimilated), according to which the destruction of the state apparatus and the establishment of a decentralized political structure to which federalism ensures overall cohesion, are the preconditions for the establishment of socialism.

Bakunin defines the Commune as a “historical negation of the state” (*Écrit contre Marx*, Oeuvres, Champ libre, III, p. 213). The Communalist insurrection in Paris, he writes, inaugurated the social revolution; its importance does not lie in the “very feeble attempts it had the opportunity and time to make,” but in the ideas it stirred, “the bright light it cast on the true nature and purpose of the revolution, the hopes it awakened everywhere, and thus the powerful commotion it produced among the popular masses of all countries”.

And he adds:

“The effect was so tremendous everywhere, that the Marxians themselves, whose ideas had been overthrown by this insurrection, were forced to take their hats off to it. They did much more: in a reversal of the simplest logic and of their true feelings, they proclaimed that its program and purpose were their own. It was a truly but forced buffoonish travesty. They had to do it, or else they would have been overtaken and left behind, so powerful had been the passion that this revolution had provoked in everyone”³⁶

We will have to examine if Bakunin’s recusal is justified.

The Address on the Civil War in France is indeed often cited as a typical

36 Bakunin, Oeuvres, Champ libre, III, 166.

expression of Marx's political thought, whereas he approached this event from a federalist point of view, that is, *in total opposition* to everything he had said before and *in total opposition* to everything he would say afterwards. Marx's writings preceding the book do not hint at this idea, and the texts that follow never allude to it: the *Manifesto* merely states that the first stage of workers' revolution is the conquest of the democratic regime, that is, universal suffrage, which Engels confirms in the preface to the *Class Struggles in France*. Nowhere in the *Manifesto* does Marx say how the conquest of democracy could ensure political hegemony for the proletariat; Engels simply says in his "Catechism" (which was the first version of the *Manifesto*) that universal suffrage will directly ensure the domination of the working class in countries where the working class is in majority.

Bakunin was not alone in perceiving the contrast between Marx's earlier positions and those he defended at the time of the Commune. Franz Mehring also notes that *The Civil War in France* is difficult to reconcile with the *Manifesto* and that Marx develops a point of view close to Bakunin's: "However brilliant these analyses were," says Mehring, "they were nonetheless slightly at odds with the ideas defended by Marx and Engels for a quarter of a century and already put forward in the *Communist Manifesto*."

"The praises that the *Address of the General Council* addressed to the Paris Commune for having begun to radically destroy the parasitic State were difficult to reconcile with the latter conception." (...) "It is easy to understand that Bakunin's supporters could easily use the Address of the General Council in their own way. Bakunin himself found it comical that Marx, whose ideas had been completely disrupted by the Commune, was obliged, against all logic, [*I emphasize*] to give him a pat on the back and adopt his program and his objectives."³⁷

It did not occur to Mehring that Marx was not the kind of man to act against all logic.

I recently read an extremely interesting study by Mathew Crossin³⁸ who quotes an astonishing excerpt from Karl Korsch that I didn't know about, in which he makes roughly the same point as Mehring:

37 Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx, histoire de sa vie*, Éditions sociales, p. 504.

38 "Interpreting Marx's Theory of the State and Opposition to Anarchism", <https://libcom.org/library/interpreting-marxs-theory-state-opposition-anarchism>

“In fact, if we analyse more exactly the political program and goals to be attained as proposed by the two founders of scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, not only in the time before the Paris Commune insurrection, but also afterwards, the assertion cannot be maintained that the form of proletarian dictatorship realized by the Paris Commune of 1871 would in any particular sense be in unison with those political theories. Indeed, Marx’s great opponent in the First International, Mikhail Bakunin, had on this point the historical truth on his side when he sarcastically commented on Marx’s having annexed the Paris Commune retrospectively... The revolutionary ideas of the Paris communardes of 1871 are partly derived from the federalistic program of Bakunin and Proudhon, partly from the circle of ideas of the revolutionary Jacobins surviving in Blanquism, and only to a very small degree in Marxism.”³⁹

It is not our purpose to describe the genesis of Marx’s turnarounds between the beginning of the war and the crushing of the Commune, but it seems useful to us to “decipher” briefly, what seems to him to go “against all logic” in Mehring’s view.

- At first Marx approved of the war because a Prussian victory would lead to strategic advantages for the German workers’ movement, to the constitution of a unified and centralized Germany. In a letter to Engels, July 20, 1870, Marx writes: “The French need a beating. If the Prussians are victorious, the centralization of state power will be useful for the centralization of the German working class.”

- A German victory would ensure the preponderance of the German working class. Letter from Marx to Engels, July 20, 1870: “German preponderance will furthermore transform the centre of gravity of the labour movement in Western Europe, from France to Germany; and one only has to compare the movement in both countries, from 1866 to the present, to see that the German working class is superior to the French both theoretically and organizationally. The preponderance, on the world stage, of the German proletariat over the French proletariat would at the same time be the preponderance of *our* theory over that of Proudhon.”

- French workers must not move, because a possible victorious uprising

39 Korsch, K. (ed. Kellner, D.) 1974. Karl Korsch: *Revolutionary Theory*. University of Texas Press: Austin. p. 207)

and a German defeat would delay German national unity: Germany “would be ruined for years, even generations”. There could no longer be any question of an independent workers’ movement in Germany, as the demand for national existence would then absorb all energies. (*Ibid.*) •

- In a letter to Marx, Engels writes (15 August 1870): “It would be absurd (...) to make anti-Bismarckism the sole guiding principle of our politics. First of all, up to now – and especially in 1866⁴⁰ – did not Bismarck accomplish part of our work, in his own way and without wanting to, but accomplishing it all the same?”

- To justify these positions, the idea of a defensive war for the Germans must be accredited. Marx to Engels, 17 August 1870: “The war has become national.” Kugelmann, for his part, was accused of “not understanding anything about dialectics” because he had stated that the war on the German side had become offensive⁴¹.

- On 4 September 1870, the French Empire collapsed; the French section of the IWA launched an internationalist appeal asking German workers to abandon the invasion. The German Social Democracy responded favourably but were harshly criticized by Marx; its leaders were immediately arrested. Marx described the French workers’ appeal as “ridiculous”. He said it “provoked ridicule and anger among the English workers”.

- Engels wrote on 12 September: “If one could have any influence in Paris, the workers would have to be prevented from moving until peace”. In short, French workers must take the opportunity to form themselves into a party and work within the institutions of the Republic. On September 9, the General Council of the IWA published a manifesto recommending the French workers: 1) not to overthrow the government; 2) to fulfil their civic duty (*i.e.*, to vote); 3) Marx advised the French workers to be “calm” and “sober-minded” and “not be carried away by memories of 1792.”⁴² The

40 At Sadowa in 1866 the Prussians secured hegemony in North Germany by inflicting a crushing defeat on the Austrians.

41 Both Marx and Lenin accused those who disagreed with them of not understanding dialectics. Thus Bukharin, whom Lenin considered the “best theoretician of the party”, was accused in this way. This leaves one wondering about the level of the other party intellectuals...

42 The “Memories of 1792” is a reference to one of the founding myths of the French Republic. France was besieged by the armies of all monarchical Europe. The revolutionary government decreed a “mass levee,” consisting of poorly armed, poorly trained men. On 20 September 1792 the Austrian and Prussian armies, who were about to take Paris, were crushed by the Army of the Revolution at Valmy. The Republic was proclaimed the next day.

Marx and Engels were terrified that the French would repeat the experiment against the Prussians, as this would call into question the unification of

workers, says the Address, “do not have to start over the past but to build the future. That, calm and resolute, they take advantage of republican freedom to work on their class organization.”

Here then are the dispositions of spirit in which Marx and Engels were situated *on the eve of the Commune*, dispositions attested, without many possible disputes, by their correspondence – and that testified to *what they really had in mind*. Already in 1844, Marx had written that “the German proletariat is the theoretician of the European proletariat”. The vocation of the German working class was thus all mapped out from the beginning.

The theory of defensive warfare could not be sustained indefinitely. Both Blanqui and Bakunin called from the outset for revolutionary war, denounced the government’s hesitations, predicted that Prussian hegemony would mean the triumph of reaction in Europe. As early as September 1870, Bakunin had denounced the reactionary defeatism of the French bourgeoisie, which wanted peace at all costs, even at the price of enslaving the country. The social revolution, he said, was a far greater danger for the bourgeoisie than the Prussian occupation.

Blanqui, for his part, declared: “Capital prefers the King of Prussia to the Republic. With him, it will have, if not political power, then at least social power.” Both Bakunin and Blanqui believed that the French bourgeoisie had entrusted the German army with the task of defending social order while Marx urged the French workers to “fulfil their duty as citizens,” that is, to submit to this government and vote. It is only in the face of the obvious collusion between Bismarck and Thiers (head of the French government) that Marx changed his point of view.

Unanimous revolutionary opinion and the resistance of the Parisian masses forced Marx and Engels to change their point of view. It was only when Blanqui declared that all was lost that Marx took up the argument of revolutionary war *five months later*. From then on, Bismarck’s involuntarily “progressive” role diminished, at the same time as rose the glory of the Parisian workers vilified six months earlier. *The Civil War in France* was the opportunistic expression of this change of perspective. Henceforth, Marx says that the National War is a “pure mystification of governments intended to delay the class struggle”. Now class struggle regained its place as the driving force of history; French workers were no longer asked to “fulfil their civic duty” or to refrain from overthrowing the government.

After the Commune, Marx went in the direction history because he intended to rally to his cause the “Communards” exiled in London. Seeing

Germany that they had hoped for from the war.

that the scheme was not working, he wrote a despondent letter to his friend Sorge on November 9, 1871: “And this is my reward for having lost almost five months working for the refugees, and for having saved their honour, by the publication of *The Civil War in France*”!! Bakunin, who was obviously unaware of this letter, had every reason to say that the book was a “buffoonish travesty” by Marx of his own thoughts⁴³.

The ideological approach to the event consists in denying reality, in taking into account only the content of the Address on the Civil War in France, without taking into account the context or existing documents outside the proclamations of principle, and in integrating it into a body of doctrine that one wants to pass off as historical truth. This is what many authors do, historians or not, Marxists or not do, who integrate Marx’s discourse on the Civil War into a global literal reflection of his thought. In other words, they take this discourse seriously. It is pathetic to see certain anarchists who allow themselves to be manipulated by a fraud, just as they allow themselves to be manipulated by Lenin’s *State and revolution*.

The critical approach to the history of political ideas consists in placing them in their context and confronting them with the ideas of the time and the documents available; it also consists in not taking for granted what an author says about himself or his motivations. It consists in confronting what the author proclaims publicly, *i.e.*, what he wants people to believe, with what he says in private. This is what M. Rubel never does. The *Address* is for many Marxists a history book on the Commune, whose content constitutes the truth in itself, and which cannot be questioned, a source of inspiration for a reflection on the theory of the state, whereas everything Marx says in the book contradicts his real thinking – it is an opportunistic work responding to a specific need, a rather sordid one, it is true.

The ideological approach consists in considering the *Address* as the history of the Commune; the critical approach consists in seeing in this text only what Marx says, at a given moment, about the Commune.

While the *Civil War in France* passes in the minds of those who make an ideological reading of it for the document in which Marx sets out a libertarian theory of revolution and the State, a book in which he gives indications on the stateless society, there is a simple way to get an idea of

43 “Travestissement bouffon”, in Bakunin’s original text in French. *The State and the Revolution* plays the same role in Leninian mythology as the Civil War in France played in Marx’s mythology. It is a curious fate that Marx, like Lenin, faced with a revolution, were forced to make a “buffoonish travesty” of their thinking in order to be able to go (temporarily, it is true) in the direction of history...

what the founders of “scientific socialism” *really thought* of the abolition of the State. Engels wrote in a letter to Cafiero *at the same time* as Marx was writing *The Civil War in France*.

“...and the ‘abolition of the state’ is an old German philosophical phrase, of which we made much use when we were tender youths.”⁴⁴

7. Working class and “creative negation”.

If the *Alleged Splits* defines anarchism in terms of “goal in the proletarian movement”, it must be specified that anarchism is also defined in terms of means. It cannot be reduced to the aspiration to a distant goal. It implies a theory of organisation, and some broad strategic lines.

If a policy is judged by its end, it is also judged by the means it gives itself to achieve it. When Maximilian Rubel makes “universal suffrage, yesterday still an instrument of deception, today a means of emancipation”, he completely leaves the frames of reference of anarchism. In the same way, anarchism does not recognise any normative validity to dialectical pirouettes asserting that “the proletariat only alienates itself politically in order to triumph over politics and only conquers state power in order to use it against the formerly dominant minority”. “The conquest of political power is a ‘bourgeois’ act by nature”, adds Rubel, who “only becomes a proletarian action through the revolutionary purpose conferred on it by the authors of this upheaval”

If we can admit that the conquest of political power is a “bourgeois”. act by nature, no revolutionary finality will transform it into “proletarian”. action. On the contrary, this “proletarian” action will be transformed into “bourgeois”. action. Maximilien Rubel shows himself to be a very bad dialectician.

To recommend that the working class “assume the dialectical project of a creative negation”. and take “the risk of political alienation in order to make politics superfluous”. is not part of an anarchist project. For Bakunin, the only creative negation is the destruction of the state and its replacement by the class structures of the proletariat. To engage – voluntarily moreover – in a process of self-alienation would not seem to Bakunin the best way to achieve self-liberation.

There seems to be a confusion in Rubel’s mind between theory of the State and anarchism. It is not disputable that in Marx’s work there is a

44 Engels to Cafiero, 1-3 July 1871. MECW, Lawrence & Wishart, vol. 44, p. 161.

distant project of state decay which is implicit in his theory of the abolition of social classes. The state, schematically defined as an instrument of repression at the service of a dominant class, disappears with the disappearance of classes and their antagonisms. This argument does not, however, make Marxism an anarchist theory, insofar as anarchism is defined, against the idea of the disappearance of the state as a distant end, as a movement which inscribes the destruction of the state as a process beginning with the revolution itself.

The state does not only guarantee the privileges of the dominant class, it is an instrument of permanent creation of privileges, and in this sense it creates the dominant class. There are no classes without the state, says Bakunin. Anti-statism alone cannot define anarchism.

In his quest for an “anarchist”. Marx, Maximilien Rubel is forced to refer to a text dating from 1844, “*Money, State, Proletariat*” in which the author indulges in frankly anti-state declarations: “The existence of the state and the existence of slavery are inseparable⁴⁵”. But here, it is the “slavery of civil society”. Marx is talking about. This is an early writing dating from a period when Marx’s thought was still far from being formed.

Maximilian Rubel hastily states in a footnote on page 1588 (éditions La Pléiade vol. III) that “this aphorism expresses Marx’s anarchist credo in the most emphatic way”. Such an anti-state assertion can, in the eyes of Maximilian Rubel, only firmly establish Marx at the forefront of anarchist thinking. And, responding in advance to the objection that all of Marx’s later praxis totally belies this “anarchist” assertion, Rubel points out:

“His later statements about the need for the working class to ‘conquer’ political power, and thus to ensure the direction of state affairs, or even to exercise, as a class and as the ‘immense majority’, its ‘dictatorship’ over the bourgeois minority legally dispossessed of its economic and political privileges, in no way contradict the initial postulate of the anarchist finality of the workers’ movement⁴⁶.”

In short, we have this: a young and somewhat “leftist”. Marx makes a peremptory declaration against the state, a declaration that the author’s entire subsequent political career in favour of the seizure of power by the proletariat can, in Rubel’s eyes, in no way contradict. This amounts to

45 Œuvres, Ed. La Pléiade vol. III, p. 409.

46 Marx, Œuvres, La Pléiade, vol. III, p. 1588, note de Maximilien Rubel.

saying that a totally extra-anarchist praxis in no way contradicts the initial anarchist postulate. Unfortunately, by stating the terms of the contradiction, Maximilien Rubel does not resolve it.

In another note on the same page 1588, he points out that despite the anti-political character of his writings of the Parisian period (which he no doubt equates with anarchism), Marx would later come to terms “with a workers’ policy quite in keeping with the principle that is condemned here”, which is, to say the least, a euphemism.

Here again, the contradiction does not seem to divert Maximilian Rubel from his idea. On the other hand, he is surprised that Marx’s followers did not understand that their master was not an “anarchist”, despite the very few passages in which he revealed himself as such, and despite a totally anti-anarchist political practice, and despite his furious attacks against Bakunin and his friends in the International.

“As a political ideology, the Marxism of the epigones will feed on this ambiguity which the absence of a “Book” on the State will facilitera⁴⁷.”

Maximilian Rubel seems himself aware of the unconvincing character of Marx’s anarchism as it should appear in his written work. Therefore, the centrepiece of his argument is to be found in this Book on the State which Marx had in mind. This Book remained unwritten and, it should be remembered, “could only contain the theory of the society liberated from the State, the anarchist society.”

The plan of the “Economy” that Marx wanted to write could only be fulfilled for one sixth, says Rubel: “The criticism of the State of which he had reserved the exclusivity (*sic*) did not even get a beginning, unless we consider the scattered works, especially historical ones, in which Marx laid the foundations of a theory of anarchy”⁴⁸. Rubel himself admits that there is not much in Marx to support his theory.

Thus, in spite of a political strategy, a praxis which Maximilian Rubel himself says is contrary to the stated principles, Marx would have written, if he had had the time, an anarchist theory of the State and its abolition. Marx’s heirs, who subsequently built a State capitalism that was not in keeping with the anarchist professions of faith, “fed” on this ambiguity, caused precisely by the absence of the Book on the State. In other words, Maximilian Rubel seems to believe that if Marx had had the time to write

47 Marx, Œuvres, La Pléiade, III, note de Rubel, p. 1588.

48 “Plan et Méthode de l’Economie”, *Marx critique du marxisme*, p. 378.

this Book, his work would not have been subject to this ambiguity (which Rubel points out on several occasions); and his quality as an anarchist would have come to light, and by the same token, probably, the destinies of the international movement would have been different.

An idealistic position, if ever there was one.

The key to the problem of the destiny of Marxism – and its denaturation – lies therefore in this unwritten Book, whose absence has tipped Marxism into the horror of concentration camps.

In order to restore Marx's work to its true anarchist meaning, it is therefore necessary to start from what exists (i.e. not much), from the "scattered works", of which Maximilian Rubel proposes to be the exegete.

Anarchists could legitimately ask Maximilien Rubel whether there is not a big contradiction in reaffirming the postulate of historical materialism, which founds the incomparable superiority of Marxism over anarchism, and then explaining the unravelling of Marx's work by the mere absence of a book he did not write.

Indeed, if we stick to the postulates of historical materialism, the publication of the Book on the State would not have changed much; the "epigones", representatives of social forces that would have developed in any case, would have taken from Marx (or elsewhere) what they needed to justify their policies and left the rest. Nonetheless, it was still in Marx's work – considerable, even without the Book on the State – that the bureaucratic and totalitarian deformations of the workers' movement found their theoretical basis.

If Marx had been an "anarchist", he would have written his Book on the State. One might add, more trivially: if Marx had been a theoretician of anarchism, it would have been known...

Conclusion

Rubel's intention is not very clear. We don't understand his determination to present Marx as a "theoretician of anarchism". – anarchism being reduced in his eyes to opposition to the State, which is extremely restrictive. It wasn't necessary to go that far: all he had to do was say that Marxism was fundamentally opposed to the state, that Marxism was intrinsically anti-state, and then try to demonstrate this with the appropriate arguments. Rubel's approach seems clumsy to us, for several reasons:

— By presenting Marx as a "theoretician of anarchism", Rubel implicitly displaces Marxism in the direction of anarchism and, in a way, deprives it of its autonomy as a doctrine. Marxist readers understand that to seek the truth of Marxism, they have to go in the direction of anarchism,

which most of them are not prepared to accept... and neither are anarchists, for that matter.

— By demonstrating (if such a thing were possible) that anti-statism is the foundation of Marxism, without trying to show that Marx is an “anarchist”. 1, there would no longer be this displacement: we would have two different doctrines whose supporters would not feel challenged and who could eventually debate the validity of Rubel’s thesis. Even so, such a debate would only bring together a handful of academics from both sides.

— By denying any normative validity to “real” anarchism, Rubel deprives himself of considerable assets. Handicapped by his essentially ideological and, it has to be said, sectarian approach to the problem, he fails to see the obvious bridges between Marx and Bakunin (and Proudhon too), which could have contributed to the development of an original work. He had no intention of doing anything constructive. There is no question of him taking stock of the respective positions of anarchism and communism in order to highlight the similarities that might exist — and yet there are some.

It is perfectly understandable that a Marxist should not be satisfied with anarchist doctrine and that, from a critical point of view, he or she should attempt, instead of an absurd synthesis of the “libertarian Marxist” type, a review of the common points and divergences. But such an attempt implies a critical attitude towards Marxism itself and towards the concrete positions Marx took during his lifetime.

But this is not at all what Rubel wants to do: he adopts the behaviour of a cuckoo. He positions Marx as the only theorist of anarchism and dismisses all the thinkers who, for a century, were considered anarchists. Yet he has no real argument and is based on a hypothetical intention of Marx’s — the book he *would have* liked to write but *didn’t*.

An inventory of all the passages in *Marx critique du marxisme* where Bakunin is mentioned reveals a portrait of the Russian revolutionary which is in no way different from that painted by Jacques Duclos, then General Secretary of the French Communist Party, in *Bakunin Marx ombre et lumière [Bakunin and Marx, Shadow and Light]* published by Plon in 1974. Rubel may say things less bluntly, but the sources are absolutely the same: Marx and Engels. The arguments are **absolutely identical**. He does not even take into account the reservations expressed by Franz Mehring, who acknowledges – albeit very discreetly – that Marx was not always right in his dealings with Bakunin.

And yet there are many confluences.

Rubel could have spoken of the common training of Marx and Bakunin in Hegelian sources. A careful examination of the positions taken by the two men, when one manages to avoid the dizzying polemic, shows that on the great problems of their time the two men made astonishingly similar analyses: their divergences appear most often at the level of the conclusions they drew from them.

Rubel could have spoken of the decisive role played by Max Stirner in the evolution of Marx's thought, by opening his eyes to the dead end of Feuerbachian humanism into which Marx was falling. Do we really believe that Marx would have devoted 300 pages of hysterical polemic against Stirner in *The German Ideology* if the author of *The Unique and its Property* had been a second-rate writer?

Rubel could have taken stock of the concepts developed by Proudhon in his *System of Economic Contradictions*: utility value, exchange value, division of labour, machinismo, competition, monopolies, concentration of capital, etc., which we find again twenty years later in *Capital*. He could have mentioned Bakunin's criticisms of the exclusively economic vision of historical evolution, the relevance of which Marx and Engels finally recognised after Bakunin's death, without mentioning him of course⁴⁹.

He could also have recalled Bakunin's criticisms of the supposedly universal character of the "laws of historical development", the validity of which Marx recognised – again after Bakunin's death – in his correspondence to N. Mikhailovsky in 1877 and to V. Zassulich in 1881⁵⁰.

Rubel could have said a few words about the concept of "red bureaucracy", developed by Bakunin and which, as can be imagined, has given rise to some unease among the few Marxists who have taken the trouble to examine the question a little. After the succession of historical

49 "It is Marx and myself, in part, who must bear the responsibility for the fact that young people sometimes give more weight than is due to the economic side. Faced with our adversaries, we had to stress 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." (Letter from Engels to Joseph Bloch, 21 September 1890).

50 In 1877 Marx wrote to N. 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 their historical circumstances" (Pléiade III, 1555), which was precisely Bakunin's point of view. In 1881 Marx wrote to Vera Zassoulitch that the "historical fatality" of the genesis of capitalist production was "expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe", which again corresponded to Bakunin's point of view (Pléiade, II, 1559).

forms based on slavery, serfdom and wage-labour, Bakunin envisaged the possibility of the accession to power of a “fourth governmental class”, the bureaucracy, in the event of the defeat of the working class following its inability to ally itself with the peasantry : how can we fail to think of the fate of the Russian revolution?

From the outset, Bakunin himself and those close to him considered *Capital* to be an indisputable theoretical achievement, an irreplaceable work explaining the mechanisms of capitalist society. Cafiero wrote an abridged version accessible to workers, with a preface by James Guillaume. Cafiero had been close to Engels, but had gone over to Bakunin’s side.

Bakunin’s opinion of this work deserves to be quoted in extenso:

“This work should have been translated long ago into French, for none, as far as I know, contains an analysis as profound, as luminous, as scientific, as decisive, and, if I may say so, as mercilessly unmasking, 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 de Bruxelles*, – positivist in the sense that, based on an in-depth study of economic facts, it admits of no logic other 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 no doubt misled *La Liberté de Bruxelles*, and which makes it difficult and almost unaffordable reading for most workers. And yet it is the workers in particular who should read it. The bourgeois will never read it, or if they do read it, they will not want to understand it, and if they do understand it, they will never speak about it; this work being nothing other than a death sentence, scientifically motivated and irrevocably pronounced, not against them as individuals, but against their class”.⁵¹

Why doesn’t Rubel refer to Bakunin’s opinion of Marx’s work?

Book I of *Capital* had been given to Bakunin by Johann Philipp Becker in September 1867: Marx wanted Bakunin’s opinion.

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

Cafiero's Abridgement was intended to make up for Bakunin's criticism of the book and to make Marx's main ideas accessible in a small pamphlet. Indeed, despite the opposition between anarchists and Marxists within the IWA, the Bakuninists recognised Marx's merits for the "immense services" he had rendered to the cause of socialism, in Bakunin's words, and as a critic of capitalism. "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.⁵²

There is no shortage of examples of interrelations between Marxism and anarchism, which Rubel could have drawn on. But that would have meant a debate between equals, which he was not prepared to engage in.

Bakunin's relativisation of Marxism is unbearable for many communists, precisely because it resituates Marxism in the current of ideas of the time, as one explanation of the social among others. It removes the quasi-religious character that Marxism had in the minds of many communists and restores it to the status of a scientific hypothesis, one that can be refuted, modified and supplemented. Marxism is brought back to what it should never have ceased to be, no longer the absolute science of the social and of revolution, but a theory, a 'reading grid' among others, no more or less valid than the sociology of Max Weber, for example, or the psychoanalysis of Eric Fromm.

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

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