



## CHAPTER 12

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# The Social Doctrine of Anarchism

*Neue Zeit* 10/1(12, 14), 10/2(45–7, 51–2) (December 1891, July–September 1892), pp. 358–65, 421–8, 589–96, 618–26, 657–66, 772–8, 813–19.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside the social-democratic movement, which is growing from day to day, there is in almost all countries where it is represented another movement as well, which likewise aims for a total change in societal conditions, but repudiates both the means as well as the fundamental principles of the former: that of anarchism. Although it is not especially strong anywhere, it is at its strongest in the Romance countries, has taken root here and there in England and the United States—albeit certainly less among the indigenous than among the immigrant population—counts members in various sections of the Slavic family of peoples, and also is tentatively propagated in Germany too. Although the latter has hitherto been without notable success, its zeal there has been all the greater. Whether the recent secession of the so-called Opposition from the German Social-Democratic Party will help this propaganda much remains to be seen. It has been pointed out from various sides quite rightly that the views expressed in the most recent fliers of the secessionists lead, if pursued consistently, to anarchism; but that is not yet to say that the authors themselves will now also draw the same conclusions. And even if they did so, it is more than doubtful whether anarchist propaganda would for that reason find more footing among the mass of the population in Germany. Its

success depends not only on the goodwill, the zeal, and the capability of its propagators. It also comes down to the disposition of those who are to be won over, that is, the progressive German working class. But this is decidedly unfavourable to anarchism.

The lack of success of an intellectual current, however, is no reason to ignore it or to deal with it with a few general slogans. It may be wrong in the form in which it appears, and still contain a correct idea—it can be a reaction, which has lapsed into the opposite extreme, but is justified all the same, against certain exaggerations of a current that predominates in certain larger circles. And even if it were fundamentally wrong, and rested only on empty phrases—nothing is more dangerous than answering phrases with phrases. Almost always, a false phrase is confronted by no less false a phrase to counter it. Hence, as calm and proper as possible an exposition and critique of the fundamental ideas of anarchism seems not to be untimely.

## I. AN ANARCHIST “PICTURE OF CIVILISATION”

In our time of enormously increased production of printed matter, even the literature of so comparatively young a movement, with followers so few in number, as that of anarchism, already presents a veritable wealth of awkward dilemmas. First, anarchists have periodically provoked extensive talk about themselves, and thereby given the daily writers occasion to pre-occupy themselves with them, and secondly within their own ranks the authorial element is represented in relative abundance. If, as a result of this, there is by no means any shortage of writings by anarchists about anarchism, then by contrast the nature of the matter prevents us from treating any of these as an authentic depiction of the aspirations of anarchism in general. It is almost always only a matter of depicting the perspectives of a particular tendency among the anarchists, which often has not much more in common with other tendencies that give themselves the same name than opposition towards the state—the only practical demand on which all anarchist theories are united. Anarchism, at least in its contemporary form, has not yet brought out any work that has distinguished itself so much from the mass of ephemeral publications that it would be regarded by friend and foe alike as a classic, in the way that Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* and Ricardo’s *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* count as classics for liberal bourgeois economics.

However, a short while ago, a work appeared from the pen of an anarchist which in any event claims to be more than a mere piece of agitatory writing in favour of anarchism, which wants to be more than an *exposé* of individual anarchist opinions, and to which also a greater literary significance has already been ascribed by various reviewers. It is the book by Herr John Henry Mackay: *The Anarchists: A Picture of Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*.<sup>2</sup> Set the task of reporting on this work for the readers of the *Neue Zeit*, I believe that I can combine this report with the critique I already announced some time ago of the social doctrine of anarchism in general. After all, the title and the foreword of Mackay's book promise to give us an overall picture of the anarchist movement of our time.

Herr Mackay's work presents itself to the reader in the garb of belletristic fiction. It is no doctrinaire tract, illustrated with images that the author serves up, but a series of tableaux, interspersed with arguments about the doctrine. Not an actual novel, but a sketch tailored in a novelistic way. By means of a young author, Carrard Auban, the son of a Frenchman and an Alsatian woman, in whose mouth the author puts his own ideas, he lets the reader take part in discussions and reflections about the social state of affairs and revolutionary theories of society, leads them through the worst areas of London, the lodgings of the poor and the lower criminals, into anarchist clubs and into a revolutionary protest meeting, describes the demonstrations by the unemployed of 1887, and the ensuing battles between police and workers in Trafalgar Square, and recounts the Chicago bombing affair as well as the anarchist trial associated with it and its tragic conclusion. All of this in a skilful, lovely, and often gripping portrayal, which especially in the opening chapters reminds one strongly of Zola. Herr Mackay also has in common with Zola a great love for the macabre and for crass effect. We see only silhouettes of the workers' lives, the deepest misery and oppressive squalor everywhere. Insofar, the author could certainly have chosen no more suitable terrain than London, and on top of this, London under the commercial stagnation of 1887. But as admirably suited as this setting is to visualising the hideous outgrowths of the bourgeois-capitalist economic order, and as rewarding a backdrop it hence also provides for anyone seeking to portray this misery and this criminality, it still all the same only offers *one* picture, and not *the* picture of the living conditions of the English proletariat. Without an illustration of the misery in the East End, in Seven Dials, in the alleys of South London that lie next to the Thames, the picture of proletarian life in England would be

incomplete, a whitewashed caricature. But anybody who only sees this misery, and wants to outline the workers' question using it alone, also only manages to paint a distorted picture. And a theory of society that rests on the tension between life in the filthy dens of Seven Dials and the hustle and bustle in the fine restaurants on the Strand, on the contrast between the East End and the City, can likewise only be a distorted picture. In the City, the wealth "of four worlds" flows together, in the East End congregate outcasts from every corner of the Earth. In Seven Dials lives the scum, on the Strand bustles the frothy head of London's population. Froth and scum, millionaires and paupers are the opposite poles of society, but not the elements that make up its body. The novelist may be allowed to single out only one side of societal life for reproach, but anyone who wants to justify a social theory must consider all sides of it.

All of this is not to say that Mackay's theory or the theory that Mackay expresses only recognises this one side of the social picture, but with him we only get to see this one side of it.

Besides Auban as *staffage*, and accompanying him almost until the end, is the worker Otto Trupp. A dutiful, self-sacrificing soul, intelligent, but still somewhat weak in his logic. While the other represents a consistent individualistic anarchism, this one swears allegiance to fire-and-water anarchism, that is, communist anarchism of the autonomist tendency. Auban is the realist, Trupp the idealist of anarchism. Sancho Panza and Don Quixote in the reverse class position. While Sancho Panza–Auban wins for himself a comfortable existence and, as soon as he notices that they cannot complete any great works without him, puts the screws on his superiors using every trick in the book—how many intellectual workers get into such a situation today?—Don Quixote–Trupp lives in starvation, even though he is likewise very diligent in his trade, with the outcasts of the East End. In other points, the contrast looks as follows: Since he is a poor logician, Don Quixote–Trupp gives an unmasked informer a proper belting so that he almost goes deaf and blind, but Sancho Panza–Auban, when there is talk of such an informer, finds it appropriate to make the very profound remark: "Perhaps he was only unfortunate." All the same, Auban is decidedly opposed to all tactics that give informers the opportunity to practise their craft. What he wants to put in their place we shall see later.

Several degrees below Trupp in intelligence and logic lies an anarcho-communist of the "*Freiheit*" tendency.

Social Democracy is not represented by any personality that intervenes in the principled discussions.

In the aforementioned protest meeting, several of the better-known representatives of anarchism and socialism in London are described, who are easily recognisable to everyone who has ever attended such London meetings. Likewise at the end a formerly widely-fêted and feared anarchist, who now, accused of betraying a comrade, is a broken man. Some of Auban's visitors, while for a time he hosts free discussions on Sunday afternoons in his home, represent the various shades of the three fundamental anarchist types.

Yet the primary debate plays out between Auban and Trupp, and again and again intensifies around the opposition between "individualist" and "communist" anarchism, until finally the erstwhile friends take their leave of each other, realising that their convictions are leading them down entirely different paths. Trupp submerges into the mass, and Auban remains alone—lonely, but certain of the victory of his idea. When at last socialism, the "last general stupidity of mankind" is overcome, then the time of salvation will have come. Egoism will bring humans full freedom and only thereby the Realm of Fortune. And, with a "calm, magnanimous, confident smile, [...] the smile of invincibility, [...] on his thin, hard features", Auban goes on with his work.<sup>3</sup>

Seen from an artistic side, *The Anarchists* also reveals Herr Mackay as the same eloquent author that he shows himself to be in his earlier writings. Herr Mackay knows how to write a gripping account, and to recover several new sides to things that have been presented often. On the other hand, his style, although mostly fluid and punchy, is really quite mannered. An irresistible predilection for long words makes itself notable in a bothersome way, and no less annoying is his urge to emphasise incoherent sentences in a sententious way. Herr Mackay is a dab hand at effects, but he plays to the gallery far too much to ultimately achieve any effect that is worth the effort. Just as certain actors and speakers show the gallery when it is supposed to clap by leaving artificial pauses, so too his book features countless artificial pauses that belabour the reader in a similar way. But all the effects achieved in this way do not make up for the honest success of attaining "understanding and open meaning", even if these are delivered with little skill.

Yet the cheap showmanship of our painter of civilisation is not restricted to mere stylistic arts. Rhetorical exaggerations of all kinds must serve to bring about the desired effects. About the treatment of the question of the

unemployed by the London daily newspapers, it reads: “[B]ut all agreed that it was a disgrace for our ‘orderly commonwealth’ that this degraded rabble should undertake to parade its misery in public.”<sup>4</sup> That is simply not true. Even the actual bourgeois newspapers did not adopt so narrow-minded a point of view. Herr Mackay seems to have limited his cultural studies in this respect to papers such as the *St. James’s Gazette*. Another time it says of the unemployed: “[A]nd they, they were described as a disgrace of their age, they who were only the victims of the disgrace of their age.”<sup>5</sup> Again, nobody in England expressed themselves as narrow-mindedly as is suggested here.—Auban, we are told, was only sentenced to a one-and-a-half-year prison term for resisting a policeman, and after he held an anarchist revolutionary propaganda speech before the court instead of defending himself. “To-day”, it continues, “the courts of the civilized countries of Europe, when they hear such language, know that it is an ‘enemy of order’ who is before them, and do not again let him go”.<sup>6</sup> Now, as far as we have already taken things in class justice, they have fortunately still not yet got to this point. One might allow a club speaker to use such hyperboles, although even on the rostrum only impotence seeks refuge in them, but the author who wants to depict civilisation only makes themselves ridiculous through them. On page 295, Auban recounts:

But I should not hesitate a moment to send a bullet through the head of the burglar who should enter my house with the intention of robbing and murdering me. And I believe that he would think twice before entering on the burglary if he were certain of such a reception, instead of knowing, as at present, that stupid laws make it difficult for me to protect my life and my property, and that at the worst he will receive but such and such punishment.<sup>7</sup>

Although Auban knows admirably how to bluster about the laws, his knowledge of them is concerningly weak. To only pick out one case, the German Reich Penal Code says: “It is not a punishable action if the action was demanded by self-defence”, and defines self-defence as follows: “Self-defence is defence that is required to ward off a present, illegal attack from oneself or another”. And even “exceeding self-defence is not punishable if the perpetrator went beyond the limits of defence out of distress, fear, or terror”.<sup>8</sup> The ideal state of affairs that our hero yearns for is offered to him even in the Prussian-German Reich.

Several passages read as though they were written thirty or forty years ago, and not in England today, with its ever more strongly-developing

workers' movement, with its legislation that is coming ever more under the influence of the enfranchised workers. Auban watches in the surroundings of Leicester Square a brawl between a greying matchseller and a prostitute "amid the wild applause of the spectators".

This scene, one among countless, what was it other than a new proof that the method of keeping the people in brutality, in order to talk about the 'mob' and its degeneracy, was still very successful?<sup>9</sup>

This "method", as much as it conformed to the ideal of individualist anarchism, "everyone for themselves", has been given up in the meantime even by the Tories as antiquated.

Music halls and boxing-matches, these occupy the few free hours of the poorer classes of England; on Sundays prayers and sermons: excellent means against 'the most dangerous evil of the time', the awakening of the people to intellectual independence.<sup>10</sup>

One should think that apart from the few revolutionary clubs, in England there was otherwise only a totally degenerate, physically and morally *lumpen* proletariat. Not only the workers' economic situation, but also their intellectual complexion here appears in the bleakest light.

Here, his pessimism becomes downright insufferable. The most conceited aristocrat cannot speak more dismissively of the mass than Auban and an English doctor with whom he is acquainted, Dr. Hurt. When a Swedish socialist expresses the hope that, if in future there will also truly be fewer geniuses, but that instead capacities are more widely distributed, and on average will be higher than today, Auban adds "to himself": "And a thousand donkeys will be wiser than ten wise men. Why? Because they are a thousand!"<sup>11</sup> But why must the thousand necessarily be donkeys, wise Herr Auban? Indeed, to this question we also receive in the book no other answer than "because they are a thousand." With obnoxious self-importance, during the fighting in Trafalgar Square, the mass is described without distinction as a pile of senseless idiots, who one moment whoop jubilantly at the military, and the next, following Auban's example, whistle and boo at them. When Auban sees wounded policemen and citizens, or rather workers, having their wounds tended by the same warders in Charing Cross Hospital, the following profound observation escapes him:

First they crack each other's skulls, then they let the same hand mend them,—an innocent pastime. *Pack schlägt sich, Pack verträgt sich* [Cads' fighting when ended is soon mended].<sup>12</sup>

That such punch-ups among the “*Pack*” often proved themselves very useful for the political freedom of the English people does not concern him in his lofty grandeur. Dr. Hurt, the consistent materialist, assures us that

the time is not distant when it will be impossible for any proud, free, and independent spirit to still call himself a Socialist, since he would be classed with those wretched toadies and worshippers of success, who even now lie on their knees before every workingman and lick his dirty hands simply because he is a workingman!<sup>13</sup>

And so as not to be confused with those “wretched toadies”, Dr. Hurt will from now on only gaze at his “proud, free, and independent” navel. But Auban, no less enamoured of his navel, already thinks of the time when “must be fought that other tyrant, more blind: ‘the sovereign people’”. That would be

the age of dulness, the age of mediocrity, of dead-level-ism in the strait-jacket of equality, the age of mutual control, of petty quarrels in the place of the great struggles, of perpetual annoyances...

Then

the fourth estate would have become the third, the class of the workingmen “promoted” to the class of the bourgeois, and the former would then exhibit the characteristics of the latter; commonplaceness of thought, pharisaical complacency of infallibility, well-fed virtue!

And then

would again appear the genuine insurgents, great and strong, hosts of them, the champions of the ego threatened in every movement...<sup>14</sup>

They are rather old acquaintances that the most keen-minded of all anarchists presents to us here, rather—if it is permitted—*commonplace* ideas. Hundreds of times we have heard them droned out by reactionaries of all kinds, and most recently by the great, insuperable advocate of nothing-but-free-trade liberalism, Herr Eugen Richter. They are the old



sayings with which the most ignorant of all common-or-garden writers think they can kill off socialism without having to go to the effort of studying it. They are the same idioms with which the advocates of privilege have since forever put themselves in the way of every great societal reform. So the defenders of the *ancien régime* in the last century looked only with dread to the time where the “*roturier*” could come to power, because this would mean the death of the fine ideas with which the aristocracy whiled away its boredom. But is our time poorer in ideas *because* the privileges of birth have fallen, because “dead-level-ism in the strait-jacket of equality”, at least in a political respect, is becoming more and more a fact, because education is ceasing to be a monopoly of the property-owners? No reasonable person will wish to claim this. What paralyses the full unfolding of ideas today is the economic pressure that makes *acquisition of earnings* [*Erwerb*] the first commandment of self-preservation, but in no way political “dead-level-ism” or the generalisation of education. Or does the “commonplaceness” of ideas consist precisely in the fact that they are grasped today by a wider circle of people, that they have become more common property? To bemoan this means to yearn for the times where a person already counted as half a scholar simply by having the same knowledge that today every half-decent elementary school provides; it means wishing to maintain the blindness of the mass so that the one-eyed can continue to be king or bask in the edifying consciousness that they are “the great and strong”. Behind all the chatter about the necessarily imminent death of ideas, as soon as the spectre of need no longer works as a whip for the masses—that is, as soon as differences in class have fallen, and where the struggle for existence between one human being and another has ceased—there lies, where it is not the outcome of a one-sided ideology, fundamentally nothing but a great, vast helping of arrogance. But even this arrogance is perhaps still modesty compared to the intellectual foppishness that, draped in the garb of a revolutionary, has only the cool smile of superiority for the revolutionary movement of the present, because it is not waged under the banner of the pronoun for the first person singular: *ego*!

I said the cool smile, but I should have called it “the great”. After all, everything that goes on with these ego-revolutionaries is great. The foreword to Mackay’s book already makes that clear to us. One almost cringes before the greatness that proclaims itself there. We are dealing with nothing but titans here. Proudhon begins the list, we hear of the “titanic labour of his life”. Then comes Max Stirner, the author of the “immortal” work: *The Ego and Its Own*. A new titan is Herr Benj. R. Tucker of Boston, who for seven years has fought for anarchy in the New World with the

“invincible” weapon of his *Liberty*, whose “gleaming light begins to lighten the darkness”.<sup>15</sup> And finally, “in these days of the growing reaction, which will culminate in the victory of State Socialism”, the demand has become irrefutable for Herr Mackay “here also” to be “the first champion of the Anarchistic idea”. Certainly, “the majority ... will tear into tatters this work, too, without having understood it.” But “me their blows will not strike”.<sup>16</sup> And how could they!

Not for nothing does the foreword seem to hail from Rome.

But since in no domain of social life today “does there exist to-day a more lamentable confusion, a more naïve superficiality, a more portentous ignorance than in that of Anarchism”, then we will nonetheless attempt the balancing-act of analysing the theoretical content of this infallible work, in which the *Dresdner Volkswohl*—as the bookseller’s note informs us—has discovered “many splendid arguments” that “are useful as good weapons against Social Democracy”, and which has enthused our friend Tucker in Boston to exclaim:

What he (the author) has created is a precious gem,  
In it flash rays of light for eternity.<sup>17</sup>

## II. MAX STIRNER AND *THE EGO*

The nineteenth century has given birth to the idea of Anarchy. In its fourth decade the boundary line between the old world of slavery and the new world of liberty was drawn. For it was in this decade that P. J. Proudhon began the titanic labour of his life with *Qu’est-ce que la propriété?* (1840), and that Max Stirner wrote his immortal work: *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1845).<sup>18</sup>

So Herr Mackay in the foreword. Here he follows Herr Georg Adler, who in the *Concise Dictionary of the Political Sciences* describes Proudhon on the one hand, and Stirner as well as some radical German Young Hegelians on the other hand as the first theorists of anarchism. But even if this is only conditionally correct, it is flatly wrong to present the “idea of anarchy” as a product of the nineteenth century. The idea of anarchy as a societal state of affairs without any coercion from human sources, without rulers and without binding external obligations, can be traced back right up to the earliest beginnings of the literature of civilised peoples. In Antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times, it has been depicted as a societal ideal in one form or another by poets and philosophers, by

religious fanatics and learned politicians. It is as old as the idea of communism in general. Almost all authors of communist theories of society had in mind as their final goal a free society, innocent of all coercion. Where coercion is permitted or endorsed, this applies usually only to the epoch of transition, as a means of education and preparation.

But even if one ignores these communist ideal societies on account of their utopian character, it is still wrong to lead back the idea of anarchy to Proudhon or Stirner. The so very voluminous philosophy of state literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which follows on from Hobbes' work *De Cive*, polemically and deductively, is full of treatises that portray the coercion exercised by the state or in the state's name as an evil, and by contrast a societal state where everyone acts according to their own discretion as the sole "natural" one, and hence worth striving for. And even this philosophy of state or of society [*Staats- oder Gesellschaftsphilosophie*] was nothing new, it was for the most part only repeating comments by Greek and Roman authors from certain epochs of the two civilised countries of Antiquity.

What is unique to the nineteenth century are only the specific applications of the idea—the form that it assumes in Stirner, Proudhon, and others.

Undeniably, of all the anarchists, Stirner, to preoccupy ourselves next with this original author, is the most consistent. Without accepting the name of anarchist, he developed his object, the idea of the absence of rulership [*Herrschaftslosigkeit*], up to its last conclusions. He rejects not only the state, but also society, humanity, any idea that is supposed to bind the individual; for in the moment where the human being places any object or idea whatsoever, e.g., freedom, truth, above themselves, above their own personality, they are dependent, they are not their "own". Not freedom, but rather *ownness* is to be aspired to.

Ownness, on the contrary, is my whole being and existence, it is I myself. I am free from what I am *rid* of, owner of what I have in my *power* or what I *control*.<sup>19</sup>

Wherever he speaks of it, Stirner mocks absolute freedom, which anarchists today make so much of, for him it is "an ideal, a phantasm". He exclaims:

What have you then when you have freedom—[...] complete freedom? Then you are rid of everything that embarrasses you, everything, and there is probably nothing that does not once in your life embarrass you and cause you

inconvenience. And for whose sake, then, did you want to be rid of it? Doubtless *for your sake*, because it is in *your way*! But, if something were not inconvenient to you; if, on the contrary, it were quite to your mind (such as the gently but *irresistibly commanding* look of your loved one)—then you would not want to be rid of it and free from it. Why not? For *your sake* again!...

Why will you not take courage now to make *yourselves* really the central point and the main thing altogether? Why grasp in the air at freedom, your dream? Are you your dream?<sup>20</sup>

And at another point:

If your efforts are ever to make ‘freedom’ the issue, then exhaust freedom’s demands. Who is it that is to become free? You, I, we. Free from what? From everything that is not you, not I, not we. I, therefore, am the kernel that is to be delivered from all wrappings and—freed from all cramping shells. What is left when I have been freed from everything that is not I? Only I, and nothing but I. But freedom has nothing to offer to this I himself....

Now why, if freedom is striven after for love of the I after all, why not choose the I himself as beginning, middle, and end? Am I not worth more than freedom? Is it not I that make myself free, am not I the first?...

Think that over well, and decide whether you will place on your banner the dream of ‘freedom’ or the resolution of ‘egoism’, of ‘ownness’....

‘Freedom’ is and remains a *longing*, a romantic plaint, a Christian hope for unearthliness and futurity; ‘ownness’ is a reality, which *of itself* removes just so much unfreedom as by barring your own way hinders you. What does not disturb you, you will not want to renounce; and, if it begins to disturb you, why, you know that ‘you must obey *yourselves* rather than men’!...

The own man is the free-born, the man free to begin with; the free man, on the contrary, is only the eleutheromaniac, the dreamer and enthusiast.<sup>21</sup>

All that is thought out very logically, and no less so is the further exploration of what this “own” or “own man” now looks like, that it is not Feuerbach’s objective or abstract “human”, but rather the subjective human, the individual personality, which embodies itself in the ego—be it noted, not in Fichte’s absolute, but in the ephemeral, finite ego. *The* human being, i.e., the human in the objective sense, as a description for the human genus, is according to Stirner only another highest being, “the last evil *spirit* or spook, the most deceptive or most intimate, the craftiest liar with honest mien, the father of lies”, and the cult of humanity preached by the atheists is “merely an altered form of the fear of god”.

Whether ... anything is held sacred for God's sake or for man's (humanity's)—this does not change the fear of God, since man is revered as 'supreme essence', as much as on the specifically religious standpoint God as 'supreme essence' calls for our fear [*Furcht*] and reverence [*Ehrfurcht*]; both overawe us.<sup>22</sup>

It is not saying too much of Stirner's book, neither in a good nor a bad sense, if one describes it as the Song of Songs of egoism. Not only the state, society—everything is negated that opposes the representatives of the ego, the own man. Stirner derides the liberals, the radicals, the communists, he ridicules Proudhon, and he would also have mocked today's anarchists if he had been familiar with their writings. When Proudhon declares in the *Creation of Order in Humanity*: "In industry as well as science, the publication of a discovery is the first and most sacred of duties", then Stirner has for that only the cool remark: "the beautiful dream of a 'social duty' still continues to be dreamed".<sup>23</sup> But society is not an ego at all, that can give, lend, or guarantee, but rather "an instrument or means from which we may derive benefit", since "we have no societal duties, but solely interests for the pursuance of which society must serve us". Another time it says:

Proudhon (Weitling too) thinks he is telling the worst about property when he calls it theft (*vol*). Passing quite over the embarrassing question, what well-founded objection could be made against theft, we only ask: Is the concept 'theft' at all possible unless one allows validity to the concept 'property'? How can one steal if property is not already extant?<sup>24</sup>

But according to Stirner, others' property—and of this alone Proudhon is speaking—"not less existent by renunciation, cession, and humility; it is a *present*".<sup>25</sup> Hence, why

so sentimentally call for compassion as a poor victim of robbery, when one is just a foolish, cowardly giver of presents? Why here again put the fault on others as if they were robbing us, while we ourselves do bear the fault in leaving the others unrobbed? The poor are to blame for there being rich men.<sup>26</sup>

With respect to Proudhon's distinction between owners [*Eigentümer*] and possessors [*Inhaber*] or beneficiaries [*Nutznieser*], it says, *inter alia*:

Proudhon might spare his prolix pathos if he said: 'There are some things that belong only to a few, and to which we others will from now on lay claim or—siege. Let us take them, because one comes to property by taking, and the property of which for the present we are still deprived came to the proprietors likewise only by taking. It can be utilised better if it is in the hands of *us all* than if the few control it. Let us therefore associate ourselves for the purpose of this robbery (*vol*).'—Instead of this, he tries to get us to believe that society is the original possessor and the sole proprietor, of imprescriptible right; against it the so-called proprietors have become thieves (*La propriété c'est le vol*); if it now deprives of his property the present proprietor, it robs him of nothing, as it is only availing itself of its imprescriptible right.—So far one comes with the spook of society as a *moral person*. On the contrary, what man can obtain belongs to him: the world belongs to *me*. Do you say anything else by your opposite proposition? 'The world belongs to *all*?' All are I and again I, etc. But you make out of the 'all' a spook, and make it sacred, so that then the 'all' become the individual's fearful *master*. Then the ghost of 'right' places itself on their side.<sup>27</sup>

Every collectivity that stands above the individual is rejected. Individuals may well unite, form a club or an association, but nothing binds the individual to these other than their *interest*. As soon as this is no longer calculated in this association, the own one leaves it, "[f]or him the party remains all the time nothing but a gathering: he is one of the party, he takes *part*".<sup>28</sup> But here too, Stirner is more logical than the anarchist of our times. When he says that it is ludicrous that one "spot" defection with "the stain of faithlessness", then he finds it no less laughable to curse at political or other cooperatives, parties, clubs, etc., if they exclude members who contravene their interests. The anarchists believe that they are saying who knows what when they compare such expulsions with the excommunications of the Catholic Church. Stirner describes the complaints of the Protestants against the excommunications of heretics as a "subterfuge"—albeit one that they believe themselves—"to roll the fault off oneself".<sup>29</sup>

He writes:

That a society (such as the society of the state) diminishes my *liberty* offends me little. Why, I have to let my liberty be limited by all sorts of powers and by every one who is stronger; indeed, by every fellow-man; and, were I the autocrat of all the Russias, I yet should not enjoy absolute liberty. But *ownness* I will not have taken from me....

A society which I join does indeed take from me many liberties, but in return it affords me other liberties; neither does it matter if I myself deprive

myself of this and that liberty (such as by any contract). On the other hand, I want to hold jealously to my ownness. Every community has the propensity, stronger or weaker according to the fullness of its power, to become an *authority* to its members and to set *limits* for them.<sup>30</sup>

But according to Stirner, there is nothing concerning about that yet as such.

Limitation of liberty is inevitable everywhere, for one cannot get rid of everything; ... As religion, and most decidedly Christianity, tormented man with the demand to realise the unnatural and self-contradictory, so it is to be looked upon only as the true logical outcome of that religious overstraining and overwroughtness that finally liberty, itself, absolute liberty, was exalted into an ideal, and thus the nonsense of the impossible comes glaringly to light.<sup>31</sup>

Absolute freedom “religious overstraining” and “the nonsense of the impossible”—the slogans of anarchism today come off almost worse with Stirner than the slogans of the liberals, radicals, and communists of his time. The most consistent anarchist is at the same time the most unrelenting critic of anarchist rhetoric.

So, for example, he also mocks those who believe that they are performing some great feat if they fundamentally go to war against all considerations. He says:

Wild young men, bumptious students, who set aside all considerations, are *really* philistines, since with them, as with the latter, considerations form the substance of their conduct; only that as swaggerers they are mutinous against considerations and in negative relations to them, but as philistines, later, they give themselves up to considerations and have positive relations to them.<sup>32</sup>

We can observe the accuracy of this statement every day even today.

The “own man” in Stirner’s sense recognises nothing above themselves, neither an idea nor an object. “Nothing is more to me than myself.”<sup>33</sup> (Introduction.) They are “unique” to themselves. Nothing but interest, which however can change at any moment, binds them to their fellow human beings, today to these, tomorrow to those. There is no duty that is imposed on them through their existence vis-à-vis their surroundings. They also have no duties towards themselves, apart from those they

impose on themselves. How they are, so should they be, and what they can become so they shall be, however much more one may tell them of their human, etc., “callings”. “I do not develop men, nor as man, but, as I, I develop—myself.”<sup>34</sup>

The critique of this theory, which is undertaken with great sagacity, is given in the passage with which Stirner closes his work:

I am *owner* of my might, and I am so when I know myself as *unique*. In the *unique one* the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, of which he is born. Every higher essence above me, be it God, be it man, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and pales only before the sun of this consciousness. If I concern myself for myself, the unique one, then my concern rests on its transitory, mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say:

All things are nothing to me.<sup>35</sup>

That is right, for cause and owner are up in the air. This own one, who “in the unique one” returns to their “creative nothing”, is a mere abstraction, as much as or even more so than Feuerbach’s “human”, about which Stirner gives his often very accurate glosses. If that is the mere abstraction of “genus”, then is his “unique one” the abstraction of a species, but torn out of all the conditions in which this species exists. Where in all the world do we have such a “unique one”—except in the asylum? Only in their imagination can the human being in the nineteenth century be “unique”, in reality they are no more absolutely unique than they are or can be absolutely free. The striving for “uniqueness” is likewise only “religious overstraining and overwroughtness”, the “unique ego” is no more rational than “absolute freedom”, “absolute equality”, the absolute human, or any absolute idea whatsoever, it too is “a dream, a phantasm”.

Stirner believes he is standing on the most secure, realistic foundation when he starts out from no philosophical ego, but from his own personal one. But by leaving entirely undiscussed the conditions under which this ego lives and has emerged, its history and the circumstances of its existence, he distances himself necessarily again and again from reality, and ruminates rather than examining. The world that exists outside his head is only presented by way of an example. But that also happens with the philosophical idealists whom he attacks, he only distinguishes himself from them by gradation, not in principle, he does not rid himself of the metaphysical way of thinking, and so his entire enquiry remains, as Friedrich Engels calls it, a *curio*—it ends in a *cul-de-sac*. It is again and again the Hegelian absolute “idea”, only that here it calls itself “ego, the unique



one". This unique one too stands on its head—Max Stirner's head. It is, as we have said, "a phantasm".

Sofar as Stirner's egoist holds water, it is only the cheap ideological imitation of the member of bourgeois society, resting on competition. They are after all also an "own man", who has to assert their "own" if they want to amount to anything in it. But woe to them if this own only consist in its metaphysical "ownness", they can thereby starve miserably, just as things went only too literally for the poor schoolteacher Kaspar Schmidt, *alias* Max Stirner. Bourgeois society points everyone towards their "ego", to their "natural egoism". It says to them: My good friend, see how you make it through. Fight, defend yourself, try to expand yourself out—the more you do so, the more you serve *yourself*, the better. Although I ask that in doing so you observe certain rules, but even that is not meant so seriously. You must only not let yourself be indited. I cannot guarantee you any absolute freedom, but you can unfold your "ownness" in every direction, you can be as much of an egoist as you like.

Egoism, far from being a vice, is in bourgeois society the highest virtue. With greater or lesser provisos, depending on their standpoint, all philosophers of the bourgeoisie have expressed this; one should only remember Bentham and his school in England, the materialists of the previous century in France, and their precursors in other countries.

Stirner only takes this idea to its most intense extremes; if the term were not so often misapplied, one could say that he "Hegelises it". But as much as he takes pains to drive the idea of the "unique one" to its zenith, he must still, exactly like his precursors, at every moment take refuge in mere excuses in order not to lose himself in pure absurdities. What with them, e.g., is "enlightened egoism", is for him "self-serving love", or rather partisan concern [*Teilnahme*].

Am I perchance to have no lively interest in the person of another, are *his* joy and *his* weal not to lie at my heart, is the enjoyment that I furnish him not to be more to me than other enjoyments of my own? On the contrary, I can with joy sacrifice to him numberless enjoyments, I can deny myself numberless things for the enhancement of *his* pleasure, and I can risk for him what without him was the dearest to me, my life, my welfare, my freedom. Why, it constitutes my pleasure and my happiness to refresh myself with his happiness and his pleasure. But *myself*, *my own self*, I do not sacrifice to him, but remain an egoist and—enjoy him. ...

I love men too, not merely individuals, but every one. But I love them with the consciousness of egoism; I love them because love makes *me* happy, I love because loving is natural to me, because it pleases me.<sup>36</sup>

That seems entirely logical, but it is still only rabulistic sophistry. A different meaning is inveigled into the concept of egoism or self-interest [*Eigennutz*], completely different things are lumped together within it, and it is thereby voided of any definite meaning. None of our sentiments, be they love, concern, or hatred, hang in the air, or are purely objective in nature; all of them are expressions of the subject, of the ego. But they are not yet for that reason already egoism, nor do they become this merely because we become conscious of their subjective character. Just like the love of the child, or of humans in nature often expresses itself in an egoistic fashion, without therefore being egoistic—for to egoism belongs the consciousness of an exclusive consideration of the ego—so too is the love of the reflecting person only egoistic once their consciousness of its subjectivity is joined by the deliberate—and as the case may be also the careless—betrayal of the well-being of the other person. If possible, it is even more wrong to call egoism the sacrifice of one's own personality for the sake of a loved one or thing, as soon as it becomes reasonable, i.e., not caused by folly. Then all distinction ceases, and the end-point is the crassest commonplace.

Stirner's apparent realism is in reality the highest ideology, the idealisation of the bourgeois competitive struggle. This too substitutes a society comprised wholly of individuals. But already in bourgeois practice, the matter turns out differently in many ways. Instead of realising their ideal more and more with every forward step, at a certain point the bourgeois class starts to backslide. Their means of economic power grow over their heads, they take on an ever more societal form, and individuals are no longer capable of mastering them. Here the state, there the community are now called on afresh to intervene and help, associations form anew with their own laws, in which individuals give up their economic "ownness" wholly or in part. "Out of self-interest", Stirner would interject here. But self-interest only plays a secondary role except where it is a matter of mere alliances of robbers. *Necessity* plays first fiddle here. The drowning person does not reach for the wooden plank that keeps them afloat for a while out of self-interest, but out of a drive for self-preservation, which again is not the same as egoism. Incidentally, here it does not even come down so much to *motives*. The main point is that bourgeois practice does not amount to the realisation of the "unique individual".

There remains proletarian practice. According to Stirner, it is egoism that will deliver the workers from their servitude, and in his vein "become egoists!" is Auban's cry in Mackay. But already by the example that Stirner

offers can one recognise the flaws in his theory, as soon as one examines it more closely in a practical light. For when Stirner has “the farmhands” announce to their former masters that from now on they would no longer hire themselves out “below price”—we will ignore his extremely unclear way of expressing himself economically—then already he presupposes the singleness of mind of *all* farmhands, not the egoism of the “unique individual”, but that of a multitude, a *class*. But this looks completely different than the former. Before getting to the stage where farmhands as a class behave with unified demands and are strong enough to push them through, they must in their outsized majority have ceased to feel that they are “individuals [*Einzelne*]” let alone “unique individuals [*Einzige*]”, or “the solitary ego [*das alleinige Ich*]”. It requires longer struggles, struggles with temporary setbacks and partial victories, and struggling means making sacrifices. *Class* interest does not at every moment coincide with *personal* interest, the interest of the *individual*. In such a conflict, what does the theory of egoism decide? Shall “I” give up “my” warm spot because of a strike, which could possibly be lost? The “unique individual”, for whom “nothing is more to me than myself”, who declares that it is “obsession” to place any idea or object higher than their own-ness, can, as soon as the fortunes of the strikers are in doubt, do nothing other than to stay in the dry. Egoism commands it. The knight of uniqueness or own-ness or whatever else one may like to call the thing presents himself at the given moment—as the political or economic blackleg.

And for this purpose, Stirner gives them for the road the lovely doctrine that his pettifoggery and sophistry is “the first step in freedom”, nothing “but a way of utilising something established without doing away with it”.<sup>37</sup> The “unique individual” is no revolutionary, but an “outrage”, but an outrage like Christ, who rendered unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. That may from time to time be very practical, but it is not the be-all and end-all. The history of Christianity permits a different conclusion. However, in Stirner history precisely only counts so far as it reinforces his idea, and not only the past but also the present and future. For the actual struggles of his epoch, for the imminently to-be-realised demands of the societal classes that are driving forwards, Stirner only has supercilious critique. Freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, etc., are not enough for the “unique individual”, and they also do not even need them to affirm their “ownness”. If they find it necessary, they seek to betray the state, found secret printer’s, etc. If others do the same as them, then one day it will collapse by itself.

Thus his seemingly highly intellectual audacity—for Stirner does not shy away from anything, lying, hypocrisy, and betrayal according to him look worse than they really are, and he does not recognise any vices—culminates in a theory of complete impotence. In the comfort of one's study, one can found "secret printer's" on egoism, but in the real world several other properties are also needed for this as well. The nihilism that Stirner's theory amounts to has a different face than the idea that carries this name in Russia. His cause he has "built on nothing". But nothing comes from nothing. According to him, there are no more steps forward to be taken. All his parroters and followers could only achieve anything by faking Stirner, by pawning him, so that they regressed a whole way behind him. What Bakunin offered, and what Mackay offers, are only bastardisations of Stirner's ideas. Nothing cannot conceive any children—the "unique individual" remains unique.

### III. PROUDHON AND MUTUALISM

In his radicalism, Stirner was no friend of sonorous slogans. He wanted to impress with the acuity of his analysis, with the audacity of his conclusions, but he was not particularly fussed about marshalling statements that merely through their paradoxical echoes were meant to cause a sensation among the wider public. In this respect, his book rather distinguishes itself more through a stately indifference. Not so Proudhon. His writings are lousy with paradoxes, he lapses into declamation at every opportunity, he constantly tries to formulate statements that express things that have never yet existed in a baffling form, and, since after all it is mostly only the *form* in which what has not yet existed lies, he finds himself compelled to make constant revisions. It is usually the misfortune of authors who have their own ideas to be misunderstood—and I want from the outset to forestall the view that I wish to dispute this quality in Proudhon—but with Proudhon, misunderstanding is downright obligatory. Whichever one of his writings one takes in one's hand, one will never be able to say with certainty about any sentence it contains that it is the expression of Proudhon's view about the object it deals with. Rather, the more apodictic the statement, the more certain one can be of finding it either modified or even reversed into its opposite in a subsequent work. And this not even as a result of any change in Proudhon's fundamental views that happened in the time between the two publications, but rather simply because in the meantime it suited Proudhon to look at the matter from another

perspective. It was, I believe, Karl Grün who once wrote that Proudhon has a bit of a squint. But if that was true about the man, it applies still far more to Proudhon the author. His eyes were constantly pointing in different directions, when he wrote he never looked straight ahead with both of them, but rather always at most with one, while the other glanced now here, now there. In this way, with Proudhon more than with any other author, one is reliant on interpretation and integration.

So Proudhon's German evangelist, Herr Dr. A. Mühlberger, writes:

A true depiction of Proudhon's theory of property thus has as its precondition a precise analysis not only of several specific writings on property, but likewise also his occasional elaborations about it in other works. These analyses should then be put in relation to one another, the main points of their argument picked out and compared, and ultimately all of it examined as to its conceptual value. Only then can the question be answered of whether Proudhon's theory of property is a *smörgåsbord* of more-or-less ingenious, often mutually contradictory *aperçus* ... or not rather—a unified edifice of ideas, as grandiose as it is logical, and of strict consistency.<sup>38</sup>

What does that mean? That if we want to learn what Proudhon's standpoint with respect to property is, we cannot, as we would with other authors, cleave to a work from the man's mature period that deals with the object, but instead must heave our way through the whole mountain of Proudhon's publications, and practise exegeses, homiletics, and God knows what other theological arts on them.

Just as with Proudhon's theory of property, according to Mühlberger, the same can also be said regarding his theory of the general franchise and, we must assume, also all other questions of politics and economics with which Proudhon occupied himself. For there is no shortage of contradictory statements anywhere; everywhere one has to discover this "unified logical edifice of ideas" within and from statements that fly directly into each other's faces.

Fortunately, the task is in reality not quite as hard as it seems from Mühlberger's instruction. One thing is namely truly unified in Proudhon's works, and if one wishes, even grandiosely unified, and that is the nature and the mainspring of the contradictions they contain. Once one is clear about this, one really does not need to have all the products of Proudhon's pen in hand to learn what his stance towards some individual question or other really is. It is enough, as a rule, to take the work in which Proudhon

addresses the object the most thoroughly, and one or two other writings besides. One will learn just as much from them.

Besides Stirner, Proudhon is the author to whom anarchist doctrine is commonly traced back. He was even the first to use the word anarchy to describe the societal state of affairs he strove for. So far as this word only signifies the absence of any oppressive, regulative state force that stands by its own right above that of society, Proudhon certainly was not thereby postulating anything new, no more than his expression “property is theft” was new. But irrespective of what significance he himself associated with them—in 1840, when Proudhon’s work *What is Property?* came out, the negation of property and the state already meant something different than they had in the authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is time that gives slogans their meaning, and the time of Proudhon’s first appearance is the time of the first revolutionary stirrings of the modern proletariat. The influence that Proudhon later gained over the French workers’ movement, and indirectly over the workers’ movement in other countries, and which namely also asserted itself in the International Workingmen’s Association, became the reason that the first attempt to form an anarchist party within the workers’ movement followed on directly from Proudhon. So far it is accordingly also justified, as Herr Mackay does, to call Proudhon the “Father of Anarchy”. Let us see how far this is the case.

Already in the work *What is Property?*, where Proudhon confesses himself to be an anarchist, he reduces his attack on property ultimately to fighting against specific forms of it. It is very easy to say this in retrospect, but it is nevertheless still indisputably correct that already in this book is contained in embryonic form the fundamental idea of the conclusion of Proudhon’s examinations of property: “Property is freedom”. It is not property *simpliciter*, but exclusive, privileged property that he repudiates, and for the rest it says:

Possession is rightful, property is unrightful. Suppress property while preserving possession; and, even just by this modification of the principle, you will change everything in the laws, the government, the economy, the institutions: you will drive evil from the Earth.<sup>39</sup>

Entirely in the same vein, Brissot, who later became a conventionalist, who famously sixty years before Proudhon—in his *Recherches philosophiques sur le droit de propriété*, which appeared in 1780—called exclusive

property theft, and declared possession to be “the true, sacred property”. Possession does not found any titles of right.

If the possessor has no need and I have one, then that is my entitlement, which rescinds possession.

If need is present on both sides, then the question is “a matter of statics”. That is the right of our original condition, and this right is universal and inalienable.<sup>40</sup> But Brissot does not only declare that exclusive—one should take note of the restriction—property is theft, he justifies theft based on need, and in this way at least those who glorify the scoundrel’s tactics among the anarchists would have every reason to go back to the first author to pronounce the expression above. But Brissot does not lend himself to any further use than that, and so we can also let rest the question of whether Proudhon plagiarised him. In the most extreme case, it was only ever a matter of his having used a paradoxical expression for an idea that already runs through the entire literature of the natural-rights philosophers—that is, of a stimulating suggestion. The substance that is at stake here is not the critical stance towards traditional property *simpliciter*, but rather the particular nature of the critique and the applications that arise from it.

The treatise *What is Property?* is a mixture of moral, sociological, and economic deductions, in such a manner that Proudhon does not examine the question successively from these three angles, but mostly entirely arbitrarily draws his arguments now from the one, now from the other domain, continuously jumps from one to the other, and in the middle of an economic analysis, e.g., suddenly starts to moralise, and manipulates around the ethical concepts of freedom, equality, justice, where the thread of historical or economic analysis tears off. The core point of the latter can be found at the following point:

Does every industrial creation have an absolute, unchangeable, hence also legitimate and true exchange value?—Yes.

Can every product of man be exchanged for another product of man?—Again, yes.

How many nails is a pair of shoes worth? If we could resolve this frightful problem, we would have the key to the social system that humanity has spent six thousand years searching for. Before this problem, the economist becomes confused and retreats; the peasant who does not how how to read or write answers without batting an eyelid: As much as one can make in the selfsame time with the selfsame effort.<sup>41</sup>

“Before this problem, the economist becomes confused and retreats.” But it is well-known that “the economist” did *not* retreat before the problem already 23 years before Proudhon’s work appeared, but gave the same answer to it as the one that Proudhon here places into the mouth of a farmer, and that this economist was called Ricardo. In other words, the philosopher’s stone had been found long before the “farmer” P.-J. Proudhon by the bourgeois economist David Ricardo. Everything further about the history of this discovery can be read in the *Poverty of Philosophy* by Karl Marx, and in the preface that Fr. Engels wrote for it; here a particular detailed reference to it would take us too far off course. Only that already soon after the first appearance of Ricardo’s main work, in the 1820s and 1830s, English socialists attempted to forge Ricardo’s theory of value into a weapon against bourgeois society.

Proudhon too deploys the statement that the value of a product lies in the labour time required to manufacture it as a weapon against property. But it is almost exclusively landed property that he uses as an example, as well as usurious capital. By comparison, he consistently quickly skates over industrial capital.<sup>42</sup> It is rent and landed property against which he turns the entire force of his attacks. But land rent is famously also the main object of Ricardo’s critique. Of which Proudhon, however, knows nothing. He writes:

According to Ricardo, MacCulloch, and Mill, the so-called ground rent is nothing other than the *excess of the product of the most fertile piece of earth over the product of pieces of earth of inferior quality*; in such a way that the ground rent only starts to apply to the former once one is obliged by the increase in the population to resort to cultivating the latter. It is difficult to find any sense in that. How can a right over a plot of land come about as a result of different qualities of the soil? How should the varieties of *humus* give rise to a principle of legislation and of politics? Such metaphysics is so subtle for me, or so dense, that I lose myself the more I think about it....

If they had limited themselves to saying that the difference between pieces of earth was the *occasion* for ground rent, but not that it is the *cause* of it, we would have gleaned a precious lesson from this simple observation, namely that the establishment of a ground rent would have had its principle in the desire for equality.<sup>43</sup>

To allege that Ricardo and his school had derived a *right* to ground rent from the varied qualities of plots of land is a pretty hefty claim, which it becomes truly difficult to believe is a mere misunderstanding. However,



with Proudhon, one must in these matters now be very forbearing, and so we wish to assume that it truly escaped him that for Ricardo it was not a matter of justification, but only of economic *explanation* of ground rent, and that the tendency of Ricardo's enquiries is one that is *hostile* to ground rent. But for us, Ricardo's putative opponent unveils himself here again as his straggling latecomer.

This becomes even clearer several pages after the cited passages. Proudhon raises the question:

But if the smith, the wagoner, in short every industrious person has the right to the product for the instruments that he delivers, and if the earth is an instrument of production, why should this instrument not grant its actual or alleged owner a share in the products, as is the case for the owners of plough- and wagon-factories?

And he answers:

Answer: Here lies the nub of the riddle, the *arcanum* of property, which it is absolutely essential to untangle if one wishes to understand something about the strange effects of the right of the owner. The worker [Ed. B.—in French *ouvrier*, so more accurately translated as 'craftsman'] who fabricates or repairs the instruments of the agriculturalist receives the price for doing so *once*, either at the moment of delivery, or in several instalments; and once this price is paid to the worker, the tools he has delivered no longer belong to him. He never demands a double salary for the same tool, or the same repair: if he shares with the tenant-farmer every year, it is because he is doing some work for the farmer every year....

Between the land-owner and the tenant-farmer there is accordingly no exchange of values or services; thus, as we said in the axiom, tenancy is truly an escheat, an extortion founded uniquely on fraud and violence on the one hand, and on weakness and ignorance on the other. *Products*, say the economists, *cannot be bought except by products*. This aphorism is the condemnation of property. The property-owner, producing nothing by himself nor by his instruments, and receiving products in exchange for nothing, is either a parasite or a thief.<sup>44</sup>

In short, the kind of property to be rejected is landed property, the property income to be rejected is ground rent, alongside which also ranks interest.—Proudhon's axiom "property is theft" resolves into the statement: ground rent and interest is theft. Business-owners' profit slips through the net along with labour income.

Yet the struggle against ground rent constitutes, as one knows, a phase in the history of *industrial* capital, it is a struggle within bourgeois society, not against it. What distinguishes Proudhon from the economists who represent the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie against that of the landowning class is not the core but the form of his critique. While these anxiously guard against appearing to be principled enemies of property, Proudhon behaves as if he were putting property on trial *tout court*; while they plead naïve innocence, Proudhon cloaks himself in the garb of the bourgeois Antichrist, the raging avenging angel, who is conducting a trial to the death for bourgeois society. But the sword that he draws against it does not aim for its heart, and the “right to fair exchange” graven on its blade is the ideal of the well-meaning bourgeois.

And anarchy? Now, one needs only consult the arguments with which Proudhon follows the passage where he avows that he is an anarchist in order to become convinced that here too “the new and unprecedented” lay in the choice of words and not in the substance of the matter. Five pages after that passage it says:

Property and royalty have been heading towards their downfall since the beginning of the world; just as mankind looks for justice in equality, society seeks order in anarchy. *Anarchy*, absence of a master, of a sovereign, that is the form of government which we are approaching every day, and which lets us see our entrenched habit of taking man as our rule and his will as the law as the greatest disorder and the expression of chaos.<sup>45</sup>

Then a little later:

Incidentally I do not see the danger for citizens’ freedom if instead of the pen of the legislator, the sword of the law is placed back in the hands of the citizens. Executive power belongs essentially to will, and cannot be entrusted to too many mandataries: that is the true people’s sovereignty.<sup>46</sup>

Further in the final theses:

2. The law that rests on the science of facts, consequently on necessity, never infringes independence.

3. Individual *independence* or autonomy of private reason, deriving from the difference in talents and abilities, can exist without any danger within the limits of the law.<sup>47</sup>

And finally it says of freedom, the “synthesis of community—*communauté*—and property” found by Proudhon:

Freedom is anarchy because it does not admit the government of will, but solely the authority of the law, that is, necessity.<sup>48</sup>

The line of thought everywhere here is the same as that of unailing bourgeois liberalism. Anarchy is the subjection of public institutions to the needs of “fair exchange”.

This is Proudhon in his first economic treatise, in which he at least is still a proletarian, and also now and again speaks the language of the proletarian and himself does not spare business-owners’ profit. But with every successive work, the force of his attacks on bourgeois institutions lets up, and his demands adjust themselves more to the needs of bourgeois society. The original misunderstanding, to consider the ideals of the bourgeoisie that believes in itself to be those of the proletariat, becomes a conscious tendency to embourgeois the proletariat. But his trajectory of development is logical. After the work *What is Property?*, Proudhon was only left with the choice of either getting rid of the bourgeois prejudices it contained, or giving up acting as an opponent of bourgeois property. The next longer work was a step in the latter direction, and from there on there was no more stopping him. The many contradictions in Proudhon’s writings, insofar as they are not the products of dialectical sensationalism, can be described as the results of the contest between the proletarian and bourgeois ideas within him. Hence also his latest writings, where the bourgeois has fully prevailed against the proletarian, evince the fewest contradictions. Only very exceptionally and in very weakened wails—instead of threatening protests—can the voice of the proletarian be discerned. For example, in the *Theory of Property* that stems from Proudhon’s final years, and which was only published after his death, the result of his enquiry is a glorification of property of a kind that the most inveterate bourgeois economist could not have delivered more crassly, whereupon right at the end Proudhon plaintively cries that what he said there was only the voice of his reason, but his *heart* would never be in favour of property. The high walls surrounding Paris, which robbed the poor pedestrian of the enjoyment of the sun and the view of the fields, and the inscriptions “Private Property” over open thoroughfares always awoke a feeling of embitterment within him.

If I ever find I have become a property-owner, then I will act in such a way that God and the people, and above all the poor, will forgive me for it.<sup>49</sup>

All honour to Proudhon's good heart, but let us now hear the voice of his chastened reason.

The first 62 pages of the work *The Theory of Property* are not by Proudhon. Since the manuscript of it has been lost, the publishers of Proudhon's *Nachlass*, his friends J. A. Langlois, G. Duchêne, F. G. Bergmann, and F. Delhasse compiled the introduction on the basis of the views that Proudhon developed in his later years about the object elsewhere. Right at the start, they also have Proudhon say: "Only of the latter—namely landed property—have I said that it is theft."<sup>50</sup> Further, they cite Proudhon's statement from his *Of Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, where Proudhon breaks away from his theory, which echoes Hegel, of contradictions that resolve into a higher unity, that is, not only from his often very skewed application of Hegel's formula, but also from its revolutionary core. It reads *verbatim*:

*The antinomy* [Ed. B.—the contradictory element in things] *is not resolved*; therein lies the fundamental flaw of all Hegelian philosophy. The two terms which it comprises *balance* one another, either between themselves, or with other antinomic terms: which leads to the result we are looking for. But equilibrium is not synthesis as Hegel understood it and how I assumed it, following him.<sup>51</sup>

That is certainly correct, since this theory of equilibrium, according to which everything that exists is worth never perishing, is the greatest consolation for all philistines, whereas Hegel's dialectic is their eternal frustration. Instead of the resolution of contradictions, Proudhon only seeks to "balance" them, the most conservative of all enterprises; and "seek, and ye shall find".

It is hence proved that property ... is the most fearsome enemy and the most faithless ally for governmental power; in a word, that in its relations to the state it is guided by only a single principle, a single feeling, a single idea: personal interest, egoism. This, from a political perspective is the abuse of property.<sup>52</sup>

Property is the greatest revolutionary force that exists and that can oppose state power.... Where to find a power that would be capable of counter balancing this frightful power of the state? There is none other like

property. To act as a counterweight to public force, to keep the state in check, and thereby securing individual freedom—that is thus the primary function of property in the political system.<sup>53</sup>

So the absolutism of the state opposes the absolutism of property, and the two act upon one another, whereby through their reciprocal action and reaction they continuously call into being new safeguards for society, and new guarantees for the property-owner, and ensure that freedom, work, and justice finally triumph.<sup>54</sup>

Modern property, seemingly founded against all right, all sense, and all reason on a double absolutism, can be regarded as the triumph of freedom.<sup>55</sup>

Let the property-owner guarantee it. ... No, even in the case where it suits the property-owner to leave his estates untilled, you helmsmen of the state may not interfere! Let the property-owners guarantee it.<sup>56</sup>

Property is absolute and includes its misuse; to impose conditions on it means to destroy it.<sup>57</sup>

Property is by its nature federal, it resists unitary governance.<sup>58</sup>

These samples will suffice; they show what kind of an enquiry led Proudhon, instead of starting out from the material conditions of societal life, instead of studying the economic circumstances, classes and their emergence, conditions of existence and needs, to seek to develop out of abstract concepts formulas that were generally valid and decisive for all times and conditions. It could do nothing other than end in the apotheosis of what these concepts rested on, and that was here society as it existed. Proudhon's ideal of freedom is bourgeois freedom, which has property as its foundation, his ideal of justice is bourgeois justice. He writes: "What is justice in fact if not the equilibrium between forces?" But what does the creation of an equilibrium between forces mean? Stability, the preservation of what exists. The political magic formula to realise this ideal should be federalism, the formula by means of which the working class too should find itself taken into account should be mutualism. This Proudhon had already sketched out in earlier writings, but it is developed in the most thorough detail in the second of his two *Nachlass* works: *Of the Political Capacity of the Working Class*.

The treatise *Of the Political Capacity of the Working Class* was written in 1864. Apart from the final chapter, it is wholly by Proudhon, who also had already read through the corrections to it. A preface that Proudhon had managed to write dedicates the work to a number of workers in Paris and Rouen, who had asked Proudhon about the conduct they were to observe in the elections of 1863 and 1864, and to whom he had recommended in

his well-known missive that they should cast blank ballots as an expression of protest. In a further sense, it has not incorrectly been described as Proudhon's bequest to the French working class. In light of this, and since the book has to my knowledge not yet been more thoroughly discussed in the German socialist press, a detailed outline of its content, insofar as the same is relevant to our object, seems to me to be entirely in order.

As its title indicates, the book wants to examine the question of the political maturity—that is how the word *capacité* is probably best translated here—of the working class. Political maturity, according to Proudhon, presupposes three things: first, that the personality, corporate body, or population *stratum* (*collectivité*) it applies to are conscious of themselves, of their societal role and interests; secondly, that they give expression to their “*idea*”, i.e., they are able to clarify to themselves through their intellect the law of their existence in its principles and its consequences, translate it into words, and explain it through reason; thirdly, that they can draw *practical* conclusions from this idea, posited as a confession of faith, according to need and their respective circumstances. With regard to the working class, the problem poses itself as knowing: (a) whether the working class with respect to their relations towards the state and society has attained self-consciousness, whether it distinguishes itself as a collective, moral, and free entity from the bourgeoisie as a class; whether it knows how to separate its interests from the other's, and abides by not mistaking itself for the other;—(b) whether it has an *idea*, i.e., has crafted for itself a concept of its own nature (*de sa propre constitution*), knows the laws, conditions, and formulas of its existence, anticipates its determinations and ends, and whether it grasps itself in its relations towards the state, the nation, and general order;—(c) whether the working class is ultimately capable of drawing practical conclusions from this idea for the organisation of society, which are its own, and, if power falls to it through the decline or the abdication of the bourgeoisie, whether it can create and develop a new political order.

As one sees, Proudhon here fundamentally poses the same question that Lassalle set himself in the *Workers' Programme*, about which perhaps some details might have reached him, and it would in any case not be uninteresting to give a parallel examination of the line of thought that the two men pursued in their enquiry, who diverged so far in their conclusions, and yet in many respects were so similar to one another. However, here we must limit ourselves to characterising their respective conclusions. These are in both cases the same in the point that merely formal equality of rights, which has been proclaimed since the French Revolution, should

be extended to social equality; but whereas Lassalle describes as the outcome of the political idea of the workers' *stratum* the strengthening of the state, placed under the rule of the general franchise, Proudhon seeks by contrast, if not to abolish the state, then still to weaken it in every way vis-à-vis the "natural" elements of society. And while for Lassalle the general franchise in its traditional form should be the means of achieving this purpose, for Proudhon it was, on the contrary, the root cause of deception and oppression. Lassalle describes it as a bourgeois idea to let the state sink into society, whereas Proudhon makes precisely the maintenance of the principle of authority, whose expression is the state, the characteristic reproof towards the bourgeoisie. All this is explained by the particular conditions that each of the two had before their eyes, while both of them, despite frequent reference to these conditions, ultimately again and again make their deductions from certain derivative ideas. So it is no wonder that for Lassalle—in *Bastiat-Schulze*—Proudhon is no socialist at all and "was never an economist", whereas Proudhon would have inserted Lassalle's theory under the rubric of the "System of the Luxembourg" that he repudiated—both with emphatic appeal to "science".<sup>59</sup>

The "Luxembourg System"—a collective name that was undoubtedly chosen with polemical intention against Louis Blanc, whose followers wanted nothing to do with Proudhon's tactics of the blank ballots—is according to Proudhon

fundamentally the same as the systems of Cabet, R. Owen, the Moravian Brethren, Campanella, More, Plato, the first Christians, etc., a communist system, governmental, dictatorial, authoritarian, doctrinaire; it proceeds from the principle that the individual is essentially subordinate to the collectivity; that from it alone he derives his right and his life; that the citizen belongs to the State as a child does to its family; that he is in its power and possession, *in manu*, and owes to it in all things subjection and obedience.<sup>60</sup>

In accordance with this principle,

the school of the Luxembourg strives in theory and practice to transfer everything to the state, or, which amounts to the same, to the community: work, industry, property, commerce, public education, wealth, as well as legislation, justice, the police, public works, diplomacy, and war, so that afterward all of it is distributed and divided, in the name of the community or of the State, to each citizen, member of the great family, according to their qualities and needs.<sup>61</sup>

Yet this only meant preserving the old principle of society, which, whether it is now a matter of the society of Antiquity, feudalism, or the bourgeoisie, about that of divine right or the Revolution, is always called *authority*. And as in politics, so too in the economy. Property has been hitherto almost fundamentally only a concession of the state, as representative of the national community, only the way of applying this fundamental principle has varied, and by it being the goal of communism to bring all the fractions of the domain of the state again under its supreme authority, the democratic and social revolution was, according to the Luxembourg System, in principled respect only a reconstruction, i.e., a step back. Communism had turned their own artillery against the army of property-owners, like an army that seizes the cannons of the enemy; just as the slave always aped the master, so too the democrat had taken the autocrat as their model example. As a means of realisation, the Party of the Luxembourg had described and propagated the *association* [*Assoziation*]. But the idea of the association was not remotely new in the economic world, the states of divine right had founded the mightiest associations and provided the theory that bourgeois legislation recognised various kinds and forms of the same.

What have the theorists of the Luxembourg contributed? Absolutely nothing. Now the association was for them a simple *community of goods and benefits* (§1836ff of the *Code Civil*); sometimes they made of it simple participation or *cooperation*, or even a collective society of limited partnership; more often, one understood workers' associations to mean powerful and numerous companies of workers, subsidised, funded, and directed by the State, attracting the working multitude, hoarding works and enterprises, invading the entirety of industry, all culture, all commerce, all functions, all property; creating a vacuum in private establishments and exploitations; obliterating and pulverising around them all individual action, all separate possession, all life, all freedom, all fortune, exactly as the great anonymous companies do today.<sup>62</sup>

It was the same with the political system of the school of the Luxembourg, it was always the old formula, but with communist exaggeration: the system of privilege turned against its previous protégés, aristocratic exploitation and despotism turned to the advantage of the mass; the

servant state become the milking cow of the proletariat and nourished in the fields and pastures of the property-owners; in a word, a simple shift in favouritism.<sup>63</sup>



With respect to the ideas, the freedoms, justice, science—nothing. Only in one point does communism differ from the system of the bourgeois state: this maintains the family, whereas communism seeks to abolish it at any cost. Why?

Because marriage, the family, is the fortress of individual freedom, because freedom is the guardstone of the state, and because, to consolidate this, to deliver it from all bothersome and constraining opposition, communism has not seen any other means than to deliver also women and children to the state, to the community, along with everything else.<sup>64</sup>

So far Proudhon's critique of the communist system, which evangelist Mühlberger claims "could have no equal in fitting brevity, acuteness of formulation, and destructive force."<sup>65</sup> No doubt, communism and what goes along with it is not the "idea" of the working class. But what is this idea? Now that would be mutualism. Proudhon proves this by means of the manifesto of the sixty workers who turned to him. The manner in which he uses this manifesto for his argument is one that Goethe already characterised as follows:

Be bright and lively in expounding,  
If you can't expound, then pound it in.<sup>66</sup>

However, we will not go further into this here, but stick exclusively to Proudhon himself. Let us hear from him what new and better things mutualism teaches in all the matters wherein communism sins.

The "principle" of mutualism was, according to Proudhon, expressed for the first time in the famous maxims that the elders taught and the constitutions of the years II and III of the first French Republic laid down in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*:

Do not do unto others what you would not want them to do unto you.  
Always do unto others the good that you would wish to receive from them.<sup>67</sup>

This principle presupposes that the individual to whom this admonition is issued, is firstly free and secondly knows how to distinguish good from evil, i.e., possesses the fundamental elements of justice. But freedom and justice elevate us well above the idea of authority resting on community or on divine right, on which the Luxembourg System relies.

Hitherto, however, the fine maxim above was only a kind of counsel for peoples, in the language of moralist theologians. But through the importance that it is given today, and by the manner in which the working masses demand that it be applied, it tends to become a *precept*, to take on a decidedly obligatory character, in a word, to attain *the force of law*.<sup>68</sup>

So *par ordre du mufti*, we must be exemplary humans. Our freedom, which was just promised to us, is thereby already somewhat dulled.

But that was only the principle, let us now look at the “idea” of mutualism more closely. Proudhon instructs us:

The French word *mutuel*, *mutualité*, *mutuation*, which is equivalent in meaning to *reciprocal*, *reciprocity*, comes from the Latin *mutuum*, which signifies a loan (for consumption), and in a broader sense, exchange. We know that with the consumer loan, the loaned object is consumed by the borrower, who only returns the equivalent, either in the same kind or in some other form. Suppose that the lender becomes a borrower in turn, you will have a mutual lending, an exchange as a result: that is the logical connection that has given the same name to two different operations. Nothing is more elementary than this notion: so I will not insist any further on its logical and grammatical side. What interests us is to understand how, based on this idea of mutuality, reciprocity, exchange, *justice*—substituted for those of authority, community, or charity—one has come to build a system of relations in politics or in political economy that strives for nothing less than to overturn the social order from the ground up.<sup>69</sup>

The matter is frightfully simple. Adherents of individual freedom have opposed to the governmental perspective the idea

that society must be regarded not as a hierarchy of offices and capacities, but rather as a system of equilibrium between free forces ... that the state is merely the result of the free association of equal, independent persons wishing for justice; that hence it only represents grouped freedoms and interests; that all debate between Power and this or that citizen reduces to a debate between citizens; that, as a consequence, there is no other prerogative within society than liberty, no other supremacy than that of the Law. Authority and charity, they say, have had their time; in place of them we wish for justice. From these premises, radically opposed to those of the Luxembourg, they settle on an organisation that follows the mutualist principle in its widest scope.—Service for a service, they say, product for a product, loan for a loan, insurance for insurance, credit for credit, surety for

surety, guarantee for guarantee, etc.: that is the law. It is a kind of inverted application of the ancient talion: *eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life*, transported from criminal law and the atrocious practices of the *vendetta* into economic law, the activities of labour, and the good offices of free fraternity. From this stem all the institutions of mutualism: mutual insurances, mutual credit, mutual aid, mutual tuition; reciprocal guarantees of market sales, exchange, labour, of good quality and a fair price of merchandise, etc. Here is what mutualism hopes, with the aid of certain institutions, to turn into a principle of the State, a law of the State, I will almost say a sort of State religion, the practice of which will be as easy for citizens as it will be advantageous for them; which requires neither police nor repression nor coercion, and which can in no case become for anyone a cause of deception and ruin.<sup>70</sup>

Let us pause here for a moment. Before us lies another book, and in it we read:

Yes, gentlemen, but as an *economic principle*, as foundation for the order and regulation of the household, of human beings' professional life, there we cannot possibly set up *fraternity*. The foundation for these relations, as we have seen when we spoke about exchange and justified self-interest, is *reciprocity*. "*Nothing without compensation! A service for a service!*", so goes the saying according to which the economic intercourse of human beings regulates itself. ... But just as *reciprocity* is the principle for economic life, so is *justice* the foundation for political state life.<sup>71</sup>

The book in which that can be read is called *Chapter on a German Workers' Catechism*, and its author is—Schulze-Delitzsch. How joyous that the typical representative of enlightened German philistinism had recognised the "idea of the working class" no less than Proudhon, "to whom ever and ever all must go back who would lay bare the roots of the new creed of no authority."<sup>72</sup> And one should not believe that this agreement lies only in their words. Countless parallel points evidence that such agreement applies in fact to their *principle*, and their agreement in their "devastating critique of communism" is truly moving. Anybody who is interested in this can look this up more closely themselves on pp. 82–9 of Schulze's book, and pp. 52–63 and 70–1 of Proudhon's. The end of the story here as well as there is the prophecy of general *lumpenisation* and an increase in misery should socialism, the System of the Luxembourg, govern society.

However, let us go from the development of the idea to its application in Proudhon.

The first example that Proudhon gives is insurance on the basis of reciprocity, in contrast to insurance against fixed premiums. Whatever the advantages of the former, it is an institution that is thoroughly conducive to bourgeois interests. The second example is the improvement of the law of supply and demand by the principle of mutuality. Today, with supply and demand, now the buyer, now the seller is short-changed, and sometimes the two even con one another. But there is a remedy against this disgraceful situation, and that is—the fixed price.

It is certain that sale at fixed prices presupposes more good faith and presents more dignity than sale through horse-trading. Suppose that all negotiators and producers were to shift to using it, we would have mutuality in supply and demand. Doubtless, someone who sells at a fixed price can be in error about the value of the merchandise; but notice that he is restrained, on the one hand by competition, on the other by the enlightened freedom of the buyer. ... And does one know what would follow from such a principle? Doubtless fewer fortunes of such a vast size could be made, and so quickly; but there would also be fewer insolvencies and bankruptcies, fewer ruinations and despairs. A country where things cannot be given except for what they are worth, without the hunt for agios [*M.O.—speculative premiums*], would have solved the double problem of value and equality.<sup>73</sup>

Famously, the fixed price is the rule at the developed stage of bourgeois intercourse. Where large-scale industry and modern large-scale commerce reign, Proudhon's ideal is pretty much implemented, but defaults and bankruptcies have not for that reason ceased.

The third example of the application of mutuality refers to labour and wages. Since mutuality, as Proudhon stresses anew, consists in the exchange of valuable services and products, the question is posed as follows: how to procure and secure for the worker a fair exchange for their labour, that is, a fair wage? After some reflections about the physical and intellectual differences between people, whereby just like the evil communists he comes to the outcome that deviations from the average *niveau* both in number and in scale are far less than they are commonly held to be, Proudhon defines the normal working day as follows:

It consists of what in every industry and every job a man of average strength, intelligence, and average age, knowing well his business and its various aspects, can accomplish in terms of service provided or value produced, over a given interval, be it ten, twelve, or fifteen hours in the occupations where

work is evaluated on a day-by-day basis; be it a week, a month, a season, a year for those that require a longer space of time.<sup>74</sup>

For children, women, the aged, the sick, the working day is only “a fraction of the official, normal, legal (!) working day, which serves as a unit of value”; the same for suboperative workers, “whose purely mechanical effort, which requires less intelligence than it does routine, cannot be compared with that of a true industrial worker”. Conversely, the worker who grasps things more quickly and works faster must deliver more and better work, and even more so the one who combines this superiority with the genius of leadership and the ability to command, will receive an appropriately higher wage. But this increase will not be out of a preference for the person, but only one for their abilities, which justice will always recognise.

But how now to reach this fine goal? Two things are necessary for this. Firstly,

that the working society attain that level of industrial and economic morality that all people submit to the justice that is done to them, without concern for pretensions of vanity and personality, without consideration of any titles, ranks, status, honorific distinction, of fame, in a word of their value in people’s opinion. Only the usefulness of a product, its constitution, labour, and the costs that it requires may be taken into account here.<sup>75</sup>

Secondly, workers’ democracy must take the question in hand.

If it speaks out, the state, the organ of society, will have to act under the pressure of its opinion. If workers’ democracy, satisfied with conducting agitation in its workshops, with haranguing the bourgeois, and with making itself known in useless elections, remains indifferent on the principles of political economy, which are those of revolution, it should know that it is neglecting its duties and one day will be branded before posterity.<sup>76</sup>

We rub our eyes in disbelief. The state should act, all should subject themselves to the justice allotted to them, personalities should take a step back. So where have all the fine freedoms that we were promised beforehand got to? Here, where a question is at issue in which the workers are quite immediately interested, we find ourselves suddenly in the most beautiful “System of the Luxembourg”. The state should act. Very well. After everything that has been said here, one cannot assume anything other than that it should determine through law what should be the normal

wage and what the gradations of it should be, expressly there was even talk above about a “legal wage”. But how to force the individual business-owner to abide by this legal norm?

The evaluation of works, the continuously renewed measurement of values is the fundamental problem of society a problem that only social will and the power of the collectivity can solve,

it says here, whereas above in the critique of communism it stated that authority, whether one let it come from the sky above or, along with Rousseau, derived it from the national collectivity, as the fundamental principle of the old society, a reconstruction, is reactionary.<sup>77</sup> And if we flick through the entirety of Proudhon, we do not find a solution to this contradiction anywhere.

Commercial exchange, with all its reciprocal defrauding, is reformed in a trice by mutualism.

Not by swaddling it in a net of more or less petty and almost always fruitless penal prescriptions; not by constraining the freedom of commerce, a cure that is far worse than the disease: but by treating commerce as an insurance, I want to say by surrounding it with all public guarantees and thereby leading it to mutuality.<sup>78</sup>

The following are the measures by which this fine result will be achieved: detailed and often-renewed statistics, precise information about needs and supply inventories, a faithful itemised list of cost prices, the anticipation of all eventualities and, after prior friendly discussion between producers, traders, and consumers, fixing a set rate of maximum and minimum profits, depending on the difficulties and risks, as well as the organisation of regulation associations. As much freedom as one wishes, but what is even more important than freedom, sincerity and reciprocity, light for all. If this is taken care of, then customers will go to the most diligent and the most honest seller.

Does one not believe that after several years of this reform, our commercial morals will not be entirely changed, to the great advantage of general happiness?<sup>79</sup>

A likely story!, goes the proverb, but since now almost all the fine little means of this commercial reform already exist, without having brought about the beatific effect the prospect of which was held out to us, then we cannot help ourselves if we hear the tidings well, it is only that our faith is wanting.

*Variatio delectat*, variety gladdens the heart. After a reform on the basis of the highest freedom, again another one by means of the authority of the law. It is now a matter of the question on all the world's lips, the question of housing [ *Wohnungsfrage* ]. What virtuous temperament is not outraged about the high rents and profits of the landlords?

One point where the law of mutuality is infringed in the most extreme way is rental contracts. ...

Here the old Roman law still reigns, this antique tyrannical cult of property.<sup>80</sup>

The law favours the proprietor, and treats the renter with suspicion. There is no equality between them, hence there is general hardship while the proprietors become millionaires. But

there is nothing easier to discipline than the rental contract under the regime of mutuality, without violating the law of supply and demand, and under strict observance of the prescriptions of pure justice.

For this, there are three means, "which are just as flawless as they are infallible":

1. Application of the legal provisions for moneylending to housing contracts. Since the law of 1807 prescribes a maximum of 6% for the former in business affairs, nothing could be more just than to say to landlords: "Since you profit from this limit more than anyone else, you will in turn submit to general law; the same interest that you pay your banker, to your outfitters, you will yourself be paid. Reciprocity is justice."
2. "Another means to keep in check built property would be to incorporate the value of social right into the surplus value of landholdings where this derives from circumstances extraneous to the action of property-owners. I will not go further into this."
3. Rental contracts are legally equalised to commercial contracts, and thereby all privileges of proprietors are abolished. More than that, a consequence of this equalisation, in unified combination with the first two measures, would be that "through the authority housing statistics are put up; better control over sanitary conditions is organised; Masonic societies could be formed to buy landholdings, for construction, for the maintenance and the location of housing, in competition with the former property-owners and in the interest of all."<sup>81</sup>

Only two comments on this. Firstly, part of these reform proposals have already been implemented, while the rest is included in the programme of bourgeois parties, and constitutes one of their primary means of agitation. For however much the working class suffers under housing conditions today, great swathes of the bourgeoisie suffer from this too. Secondly, there is very little to be seen of mutuality in all three measures. Everywhere it reads: Legislation, Community, Authority to the rescue! In other words, a threefold retreat to the “System of the Luxembourg”.

It is no different with mutualism in transportation, and on more precise inspection also with mutualism of credit. With reference to the former, Proudhon attacks Louis Philippe’s government on account of its franchising of private railway companies, and says that if it had grasped that it alone had to be the organ of the relations of solidarity and mutuality, it would have organised the transport service itself, or transferred it to workers’ associations to be carried out according to the principles of economic equality and reciprocity. In relation to credit, Proudhon writes that his “people’s bank” of 1849 was only meant to serve as a way to economically educate the people, but that for the creation of the *credit mutuel* the entire strength of a collective, expressly reformatory will would be required.

Not through dissociations, through insignificant attempts at competition, and even less through philanthropic grants or subscriptions out of loyal devotion, will mutual credit be realised in Europe.<sup>82</sup>

And at another point he protests against the freedom of the note-issuing banks demanded “by certain partisans of economic anarchy”, and “reminds” us that

every public service organised in the form that it costs consumers nothing or almost nothing is a work of the collectivity acting by itself and for itself, work that is hence as much outside the *communauté* as its is beyond centralisation.<sup>83</sup>

Whether he calls the thing *communauté* or something else, the collectivity that institutes public services that acts by itself, etc., is the organised community [*Gemeinschaft*], i.e., for the time being the political commune [*Gemeinde*] or the state.

The final economic category by means of which Proudhon proves the unsurpassable efficacy of mutuality is that of the association [*Assoziation*].



In his earlier writings, he attacked with great vehemence the workers' associations [*Arbeiter-Assoziationen*], in particular Blanc's idea of the organisation of labour, which all the same did not prevent him, when he founded his cooperative bank, from turning for help to precisely these associations, any more than the help afforded by the associations on that occasion held him back from afterwards—in the *Confessions of a Revolutionary*—speaking about these associations in exactly the same dismissive way.

The contradiction resolves itself in the present work. Proudhon's condemnatory verdict was not intended for the association as such, but rather the association without Proudhonian mutuality. The association, he explains here, is an economic force like the division of labour, cooperation, machinery, competition, exchange, credit, property, etc.<sup>84</sup> However, the greatest economic force, the force of all forces, one is tempted to say the force-in-itself, is mutualism.

But of all economic forces, the greatest, the most sacred, the one that, in its combinations of work, reunites all the conceptions of spirit and the justifications of conscience, is mutuality, in which one can say that all the others will be confounded. By mutuality the other economic forces enter into law; they become, to put it this way, integral parts of the Right of Man and of the Producer: without that they would remain indifferent to social good as well as ill; there is nothing obligatory about them; they do not reveal in themselves any moral element whatsoever. ...

Certainly, the association, seen from its good side, is lovely and fraternal: may it please God that I do not lower it in the eyes of the people! ... But the association in itself, and without a pervasive idea of right to dominate it, is no less for that reason an incidental bond based on pure physiological and interested sentiment; a free contract, revocable at will; a closed group, whose members one may always say are only associated for themselves, and are associated against everyone else in the world: in this way, then, the legislator understood it: and he could not have understood it any other way.<sup>85</sup>

Proudhon first and foremost produces as proofs for his condemnation of all associations not filled with the spirit of mutualism the “great capitalist associations, organised in the spirit of mercantile and industrial feudalism”, for which it is a matter of “seizing fabrication, turnover, and profits”. Even what he says in criticism of them is often very open to challenge, but since the object does not belong to our topic, we will not go into it any further, but instead turn immediately to his critique of workers' associations.

What was at stake in the workers' associations according to the System of the Luxembourg? To replace the capitalist associations by the coalition of workers, and by means of state subsidies, that is to say, by the centralisation of business, the concentration of workers, and the superiority of capital, to always wage war on free industry and commerce. In place of the hundred or two hundred thousand licenced enterprises that there are in Paris, there would have been no more than a hundred or so great associations, representing the diverse branches of industry and commerce, where the working population would have been regimented and definitively subjugated by the *raison d'état* of fraternity, as it tends to be presently by the *raison d'état* of capital. What would freedom, public happiness, and civilisation have gained there? Nothing. We would have exchanged our chains, and, which is even sadder and which shows the sterility of legislators, fantasists, and reformers, the social idea would not have advanced a single step; we would still find ourselves under the same arbitrariness, not to say find itself under the same economic fatalism.<sup>86</sup>

Already this short overview reveals that

the ones like the others [Ed. B.—i.e., the communist like the capitalist associations] were founded for particular goals and in view of egoistic interests; that nothing about them reveals a reformist thought, a superior view of civilisation, the slightest care for progress and general destiny; that, on the contrary, they proceed after the model of individuals, in an anarchic mode, that they could never be considered anything other than small churches organised against the great one in whose bosom and at whose expense they live.<sup>87</sup>

So it continues for a while further, whereby Proudhon raises the question of whether it “occurs even to a single person that all these associations should dissolve into one another and form one and the same general society”, and closes by saying:

so if the associations are different, then they will also by the nature of things rival one another; their interests will diverge; there will be contradictions and hostilities between them. You will never get beyond this.<sup>88</sup>

Whichever one of the communists or socialists who have come out in favour of associations we consult, we will find not a single one to whom the aforesaid critique of Proudhon's fits. With all of them, the association is only the means to a higher purpose: to raise the workers and with them humanity to a higher level. The individual association is, where it appears, always

imagined only as a transitional stage, the combination of associations into one great solidary community is everywhere the final goal. One can doubt whether the associations are the most appropriate means to achieve this goal, but to insinuate that the socialists merely want to replace the capitalist collective affiliations [*Verbindungen*] with workers' affiliations, without offering any new ideas about the fundamental principle of societal relations, does mean making this criticism rather too easy for oneself. Even for Louis Blanc's associative project, of which one is always first reminded with Proudhon, this critique fits like chalk to cheese. Proudhon imputes flaws to it that it does not contain, in order then to lay into them with all the greater force. However, that is just his method, which we have already come to know on other occasions—we need only recall his critique of Ricardo. Let us see how he cures the alleged flaws of the communist associations through mutuality.

But one will say to me, have we not, to reconcile our associations with each other and to make them live peaceably without dissolving them, the principle of mutuality? ...

*À la bonne heure.* Already mutuality appears as the *deus ex machina*. So let us grasp what it teaches us; and, to start, let us establish that mutuality is not the same thing as association, and, as great a friend of liberty as it is of the group, it shows itself equally removed from all fantasy as from all intolerance.—

We were just speaking about the *division of labour*. A consequence of this economic force is that it both engenders specialisation and creates sources [*foyers*] of independence, which implies the separation of enterprises, exactly the opposite of what the agitators [*fauteurs*] for communist associations, like those for capitalist associations, are striving for. Thus, combined with the law of the natural grouping of populations into regions, cantons, communes, quarters, streets, the division of labour leads to this decisive consequence: that not only each industrial specialism is called to develop and act in full and complete independence, under conditions of mutuality, of responsibility, and of guarantee that form the general condition of society; but that it is likewise the case for the industrialists who, in their respective localities, each individually represent a work specialism: in principle, these industrialists should remain free. The division of labour, freedom, competition, political and social equality, the dignity of Man and the Citizen do not permit any replacement institutions [*succursales*].<sup>89</sup>

The most devout parrot of all the commonplaces of liberal economics could not speak any differently. The division of labour creates—economic independence. That means going back almost to before Adam Smith. The cottage industrialist, who in their miserable dwelling manufactures some

special article for the large factory-owner is, according to Proudhon, the archetype of economic freedom. The same, it seems, is true of the suboperation worker in the factory who works for piecework wages. In fact, in the fourth chapter of his work, Proudhon lets his “sixty” corroborate the “freedom of labour, which was condemned by the Luxembourg in the question of piecework.” An unpardonable crime by the Luxembourg, not to have halted respectfully before this form of exploitation, cloaked in the garb of freedom.

But let us hear further:

It follows from this that the principle of mutuality, where the association is concerned, consists in associating people only where the exigencies of production, the cheapness of products, the needs of consumption, the safety of the producers themselves require it, where it is not possible either for the public to sustain that particular industry, nor for it to bear alone the burdens of the business-enterprises and their risks. ...

This side of the mutualist idea, as it emerges from the most vigorous sympathies of the petty-bourgeois, petty industrialists, and petty traders agreeable to the new democracy.

Is this a question of large-scale production in the manufacturing, extractive, metal, and maritime industry? It is clear that there is a place for the association here: nobody would contest this anymore. Is it, however, a question of one of these great enterprises that have the character of a public service, such as the railways, the credit institutions, the docks? I proved elsewhere that it is a law of mutuality that these services, excluding all capital profit, are delivered to the public at the price equivalent to the cost of exploitation and maintenance. In this case too, it is entirely evident that the guarantee of good execution and cheapness cannot be provided either by monopoly companies or by *communautés* patronised by the State, exploiting in the name of the State, and at the cost of the State. This guarantee can only come from free associators [*sociétaires*], obligated on the one hand towards the public by the contract of mutuality, and on the other hand obligated towards one another by the conventional associative contract.<sup>90</sup>

But where “the thousand occupations and shops are concerned, which exist in such great number in the state and the country”, Proudhon sees with reference to them

the need for and the usefulness of the association even less given that the advantage that one could expect to gain from it is provided by the ensemble of mutualist guarantees, reciprocal insurances, reciprocal credit, market police, etc.<sup>91</sup>

More than that,

presupposing these guarantees, in the cases we are discussing, there is more certainty for the public in dealing with a single businessman than if it has to do with an entire company. ...

The trader is above all the distributor of products, whose qualities, manufacture, origin, and value he has to know. He has to keep the consumers in his district abreast of prices, new articles, the risks of price increases, the likelihood of decreases. It is continuous work, which strains their intelligence, zeal, and honesty, and which, I repeat, in the new conditions in which mutualism places us, does not require any guarantee, suspect in other respects, of a great association. For public certainty, it is enough here to undertake a general reform of morals through principles. So I ask myself: why should such economic individuality disappear? What do we have to interfere here? Let us organise the law and let the boutique keep existing.—*Organisons le droit et laissons faire la boutique.*

Let us repeat: It cannot here be about undoing positions that have been achieved; it is simply about, through the reduction of the rent for capital and lodging, through the easing and cheapening of discount rates, the elimination of parasitism, the extirpation of share-trading [*agiotage*], the policing of markets and storage, the lowering of transport costs, the equilibration of values, the better education given to the working classes, the final preponderance of labour over capital, the fair measurement of esteem for talent and function—through all that, I say, it is about restoring to work and to probity what the capitalist tithe unjustly takes from them ... in a word, to put an end to all anomalies and disturbances which healthy criticism has at all times shown to be the chronic causes of misery and of the proletariat.

But why argue over words and waste time on fruitless discussions? One thing is sure, namely that the people, whatever one may say, has faith in the Association, that it affirms it, presses for it, and proclaims it, and that meanwhile it is nothing other than the contract of society defined by our legal codes. Let us then conclude, to remain true to our faith in the gifts of science and in the people's aspirations, that the Association, whose formula the contemporary innovators have sought after as if the legislator had never mentioned anything about it, but which none of them was able to define ... the Association, which workers' democracy incessantly appeals to as the end of all serfdom and the superior form of civilisation, who does not see that it is not and cannot be anything other than MUTUALITY? Is mutuality, in fact, whose outlines we have tried to trace, not the social contract *par excellence*, at the same time political and economic, reciprocally unifying [*synallagmatique*] and commutative, which encompasses at the same time, in such simple terms, the individual and the family, the corporation and the city, selling

and buying, credit, insurance, labour, education, and property; every profession, every transaction, every service, every guarantee; which, in its highly regenerative scope, rules out all egoism, all parasitism, all arbitrariness, all speculation [*agiotage*], all dissolution? Do we not truly find in it this mysterious association, which was dreamed up by the utopians but has remained unknown to philosophers and legal scholars, and which we can define with two terms: the *contract of mutuation*, or of *mutuality*?<sup>92</sup>

In a note to this, Proudhon protests that he has not pursued any vain drive of personal thirst for glory if he has described mutuality as the formula of the economic revolution instead of the association; only the interest of scientific precision had guided him in doing so. The word association is too vague, it speaks less to our intelligence than to our feeling and does not have the character of universality demanded in such circumstances. Also, there are all manner of possible kinds of associations, and after all, it is clear that three-quarters, if not four-fifths of a modern nation, property-owners, crop farmers, petty industrialists, authors, artists, officials, etc., could never be societally unified. If one does not now wish to declare these beyond reform from now on, beyond the Revolution, one would have to admit that the word “society”, “association”, does not fulfil its scientific purpose, and find a new one that combines simplicity and resilience with the universality of a principle. Ultimately, he had already previously argued that in the new democracy, the political principle would have to be aligned with the economic one and be identical to it, but the latter had long since been expressed and defined—“it is the principle of federalism, which is equivalent in meaning to mutuality, to reciprocal guarantee, and which has nothing in common with the principle of association”.<sup>93</sup>

In the text, the chapter closes with a further *apologia* on the “new pact” created by mutuality. However narrowly-delimited it might seem in its beginnings, the mutualist association—the name that “we can give it from now on”—still contains within itself a capacity for development, which strives with irresistible force to assimilate and annex everything that surrounds it, and to shape the surrounding humanity and the state in its image. The cadres of the mutualist association are open to all, it knows no exclusion, it is by nature unrestricted in relation to persons, which is the opposite of every other association. The same applies to the objects it relates to: it strives to involve all the industries with which it is more closely or distantly connected in its system of guarantees, it is “of unlimited force in affiliation”. And it is the same with its duration. Since, above all, it is

founded on an idea of right and the economic realisation of the same, the mutualist association brooks no temporal restriction.

Mutuality or the mutualist society is justice itself; and one does not take backwards strides in matters of justice any more than in matters of religion ... People who have made a pact of integrity, loyalty, guarantee, honour, cannot say when they separate [Ed. B.—if this has become necessary through material failures]: We made a mistake; now we will become liars and scoundrels again; we will have more to gain.<sup>94</sup>

And, the final good aspect of mutualist society: the procurement of capital is in it no longer an imperative condition; “to be an associate, it is enough to observe reciprocal fidelity and faith in transactions”.

... Once the generations are transformed through mutualist law, then nothing whatsoever stands in the way of private associations continuing to form as they currently do, with the object of either exploiting an industrial specialism, or running a business, in pursuit of their own benefit. But these associations, which could even keep their current designations, are subjected to one another and to the public vis-à-vis the duty of mutuality; imbued by a new spirit, they could no longer compare themselves with their equivalents today. They would have lost their egoistic, subversive character while preserving the particular advantages that they derive from their economic power. They would be just so many individual churches in the bosom of the universal Church, capable of recreating it anew, if it were possible that it ever died out.<sup>95</sup>

With that, enough. We have been as thorough as possible, so that we do not misappropriate even one concept that is valuable for Proudhon's idea of mutuality, especially as here we are dealing with a work from Proudhon's most mature period, the period of his “complete clarification”, to speak once again with his German evangelist Mühlberger. And as what, if we summarise everything, does this “idea of mutuality”, which is “justice”, now present itself to us? Quite simply as the glorification of *exchange*. “Honest exchange”, which already lurked in Proudhon's first work about property, is the alpha and omega of the earthshattering idea of mutualism, which is to regenerate humankind. If all societal relations are restored to a pure exchange relationship [*Tauschverhältnis*], and this exchange always happens honestly, nobody cheats anybody else, then the empire of freedom and justice is at hand, and humanity redeemed from all its evils.<sup>96</sup>

But what does honest exchange mean? An exchange in which things that are equal in value are given for one another, Proudhon answers us. And what is equivalent in value? With Ricardo, whom he constantly tears down, Proudhon declares: whatever costs the same amounts of human labour. But now famously not all human labour is equal. Peter is skilful and works swiftly, Paul is clumsy and works slowly, Fritz is working with an old-fashioned hand tool, Hans at a mechanical lathe driven by some natural force. Are the products of an hour of labour by Peter and Paul, by Hans and Fritz, equal in value? Where Peter and Paul are concerned, we have seen in the section about wages that according to Proudhon, their labour is *not* equal in value, Peter must be paid more highly than Paul, whereas in relation to Hans and Fritz, Proudhon leaves us in the dark. Although he says that whoever carries out more and better work should be paid more highly, and that would, thanks to his better work tool, after all probably be Hans, but Hans is perhaps only a suboperation worker in a modern factory, and Fritz works in his little workshop, and there again, according to Proudhon, Hans must receive fewer wages than Fritz. So we stand before an unresolved contradiction, even though the society of honest exchange is supposed to put an end to the “confusion” of contradictory political economy.

However, let us let this contradiction rest, and see further how things go with Peter and Paul. Peter is supposed to be paid more than Paul. By what criterion? According to the quantity [*Menge*] and quality [*Güte*] of finished work. Who determines this criterion, who fixes the normal quota [*Quantum*] and the normal character [*Beschaffenheit*] for every category of labour? Here suddenly the “social will”, the “power of society” cropped up, as we have further seen, and behind them “the state, the organ of society”. Under the pressure of the expressed will of the workers’ democracy, it said, *the state, the organ of society, must act*, and the workers were threatened with being branded before posterity if they did not agitate for this with the required energy. We have already shown how much Proudhon flies in the face of his explicit condemnation of the “Luxembourg” with this idea of state wage regulation: it is at the same time the most decided negation of “free exchange”. Here, we want to leave entirely undiscussed the question of feasibility given the otherwise unhindered working of free competition, but rather satisfy ourselves with verifying that in relation to the remuneration of human labour power, “honest exchange” is realised through the suspension of “free exchange”.



Here, Proudhon is so much an enemy of the free action of workers that he cannot express himself disparagingly enough about the workers' coalitions for wage increases and shorter working times. The individual worker may, if need be—so long as “social justice” does not award them their wage, with which they then kindly have to be satisfied—try to attain as good a remuneration as possible; they may associate with other workers in order to compete with the capitalist business-owners, but, as soon as they form coalitions with their work colleagues [*Arbeitsgenossen*] in order to exert stronger pressure on their masters to approve higher wages and shorter working time, they are sinning against “social morality”. In this point too, Proudhon at the end of his career cleaves to the same standpoint as at the start of it. What he wrote in the *Philosophy of Poverty* against coalitions, he not only repeats but also strengthens further in the *Political Capacity*.<sup>97</sup> He cannot chide the liberal republicans, who in the 1860s opposed the Empire, harshly enough for interceding in favour of the workers' right to form coalitions. For him, the workers' coalitions do not differ in any way from the business-owners' coalitions for enforcing monopoly prices. He declares:

The law that permits coalitions is fundamentally anti-juristic, anti-economic, and opposed to every society and every order.<sup>98</sup>

And then again:

One pretended to believe that, since the bosses were already through their higher position and their low number in a position to form coalitions unpunished, the only side to be taken by the legislator was to equalise conditions, by placing the workers on the same footing as their masters, and dis-burdening the tribunals of any manner of pursuits. Reader, what do you say to this invention? ... Follow this fine principle of neutralising crimes and offences by allowing everyone to commit them, and tell me what need Society could have for a Government after that?

Likewise, under the pretext of raising up the working class from its so-called social inferiority, you will have to begin by denouncing *en masse* an entire class of citizens: the class of masters, business-owners, bosses, and bourgeois; you will have to rouse workers' democracy to disdain and hatred for these repugnant and inconceivable coalitions of the middle class; you will have to choose mercantile and industrial warfare over legal repression; class antagonism to the State police; the régime of force to the discipline of the law; and, despite this baleful necessity, the Opposition will not protest; it will

not try to enlighten the Government when, in its unthinking liberalism, preoccupied with the welfare of the workers, cries without knowing it: Up against the bourgeois! On the contrary, it will answer: Kill, kill!<sup>99</sup>

But towards the workers, Proudhon feels himself justified, as the herald of the idea of mutuality, in making, *inter alia*, the following reproach:

Under threat of strikes, some, the great number, demanded a rise in wages, the others a reduction in working hours; some both at the same. As if you did not know, from long experience, that raising wages and the reduction in working hours cannot lead to anything other than general price inflation; as if you could ignore the fact that here it is not at all about a reduction or an increase in prices and wages, but about a general equalisation [*péréquation*], the first condition of wealth! They went too far. By raising wages, they thought they could impose the equality they sought. A sad reminder of the Luxembourg, which the manifesto of the Sixty had condemned, while strongly recognising free competition.<sup>100</sup>

Outside mutuality and the association purified by it of all dross, nothing but doom threatens the working class, saith the prophet. Woe unto it if it goes any other way than the one he has preordained for it. But despite the prophet resting his anathema on the wisdom of the most orthodox of all economists, the workers have pushed through wage increases and shorter working times without “general inflation” setting in.

To the way in which, under mutuality, every product achieves “honest exchange” and the “realisation of its full value”, we will not even go into here. The recipes that we have come to know in discussing the chapters about trade and supply and demand have nothing more to them than certain pieces of advice, which one will find in every textbook for budding businesspeople. In part, they are things that are self-evident, which already in Proudhon’s time lacked the allure of novelty, in part pious wishes whose realisation can only be counted on where they coincide with the interest of the participants. But all of these only represent—precisely as their author intends—modifications of bourgeois competition, but are on no account supposed to break with it. And for that reason it is nonsense to expect of them the wonder of realising the “value” of every product. The law of value of bourgeois competition, or, in other words, of commodity-producing society, consists precisely in the fact that the value is only realised in the fluctuations of prices. The “set price”, on which Proudhon

pins such great hopes, can change no more about this than calibrated gauges can perhaps act as means against the fluctuations of beer prices. In the best case, it means a more precise alignment of the prices of the smaller market to the price fluctuations of the greater market—in the last instance, to the changes in the relations of production; but often enough it is a pure formality, in which everything possible comes out, only not the blue flower of Proudhonian Romanticism: the “absolute value” placed in “equilibrium” with all others of its equivalent kind.

In fact, this yearning for the “equilibrium of values”—a term that all Proudhonians venerate as a magic formula that opens the gates of the Palace of the Blest—is nothing but the purest Romanticism, the wish to elevate oneself beyond bourgeois society, without changing anything about its fundamental economic conditions. With all its fibres, Proudhonism clings to bourgeois, commodity-producing society. Even the most audacious of his economic reforms does not go beyond it, and nine-tenths of them consist of generalisations and above all rechristenings of institutions that are already found on its terrain. His morality, his ideal of justice, is nothing but the ideological apotheosis of commodity exchange, the rights-conception of the commodity producer, and nothing is hence more perverse than wanting to elevate bourgeois society beyond itself by preaching this morality, summoned up from bourgeois conditions. The “idea” of mutualism is “honest” exchange, exchange in which nothing is given and nothing is taken without equivalent counter-value; but this “honest” exchange is the practice of the inveterate *bourgeois*: they fundamentally give nothing without also taking something in return. Precisely for him, society presents itself as the great exchange shop [*Tauschanstalt*], which mutualism deludes itself that it must develop in order “to emancipate labour”. To damn the practice of the bourgeois and in the same breath hold it up as an ideal has forever been the wont of petty-bourgeois doctrine, and anyone to whom the verdict that Marx passes on Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy* still seems too harsh, who after everything developed here can still, with the German professors, consider it to be the product of some personal rancour if Proudhon, at a time when he still counted to the world as an ultra-revolutionary, was described as an arch-petty-bourgeois, they may even now examine the rueful wail with which Proudhon closes his book about the *Political Capacity of the Working Class*, because the French workers started to coalesce into trade unions instead of associating with each other in a mutualist way:

This middle class, into whose bosom the better-advised workers' democracy a year ago declared it wished to dissolve itself entirely, does it not seem that one is working on all sides with a sort of fanaticism to demolish it, that one wants to take it down to the level of wage-workers? Every day, insolvency tears large holes in the ranks of the petty-bourgeois; what is all the more unbearable, their desperate need continues, their life from hand to mouth, their secret misery decimates them. The workers have seen nothing but their own sufferings; they know nothing of the tribulations of the bourgeois. Through the law on coalitions, they have become the auxiliaries of capitalist aristocracy against petty industry, petty commerce, and petty property; in 1869, they will doubtless vote for the candidates of the administration; that would be logical. Free coalition, free usury, free exchange will deserve this proof of their faithlessness against their natural allies. Yet let them be clear about this: it is not through such contradictory behaviour that they will succeed in taking the lead of civilisation and reforming society. It is not by surrendering themselves as venal souls to fantasies of counter-revolution [Ed B.—he means counter-revolution against the “freedoms and guarantees of 1789”!] that they will make people believe in the power of their Idea, nor believe that their political capacity is raising itself to the level of economic science.<sup>101</sup>

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After we have got to know mutualism in this way from out of Proudhon's mouth himself, let us also hear what the anarchist who swears by Proudhon today has to say about it.

What in the confusion of the day, the father could not comprehend, perhaps because it was too near him, the son—writes Mackay of Auban Jr., who drew the final conclusion of the doctrine—was to grasp in its entire range and tremendous significance: that each one by means of the principle of mutualism, and independently of the State, could exchange his labour at its full value, and thus in one word—make himself free!

He now saw what it was that Proudhon had meant by property: not the product of labour, which he had always defended against Communism, but the legal privileges of that product as they weigh upon labour in the forms of usury, principally as interest and rent, and obstruct its free circulation; that with Proudhon equality was nothing but equality of rights, and fraternity not self-sacrifice, but prudent recognition of one's own interests in the light of mutualism; that he championed voluntary association for a definite purpose in opposition to the compulsory association of the State, “to maintain equality in the means of production and equivalence in exchange” as “the only possible, the only just, the only true form of society”.<sup>102</sup>

Auban in Mackay has admirably memorised Proudhon's turn of phrase. He naturally has no clue about the fact that with "to exchange his labour at its full *value*", so far as there lies any meaning whatsoever in this statement, it is a privilege of the worker in modern society; but it is a wonderful-sounding phrase—so keep it coming! No less wonderful does the "free circulation of labour" sound, which is only inhibited by the "legal privileges of the product of labour", so keep that coming too! That this statement partly swallows up the first one again, what does it matter? After all, we saw the master in one breath proscribing the state, and then becoming outraged that "instead of the State police", instead of "legal oppression", the class struggle was set free. Only someone can stumble against such contradictions who has not grasped the deeper meaning that underpins them. And so we also want to console ourselves with the fact that Proudhon, the "father of Anarchy", to whom "ever and ever all must go back who would lay bare the roots of the new creed of no authority", in the *Capacity* opposes the mutualist idea, "which today constitutes the foundation of democratic emancipation", to the "*anarchic or bourgeois idea*"<sup>103</sup> But after all, we know that despite this, "mutualist" and "anarchic ideas" are close relatives, daughters of one and the same mother: the society of "free exchange".

#### IV. BAKUNIN'S ANARCHISM AND THE VARIOUS ANARCHO-COMMUNIST HYBRID CONSTRUCTS

Already soon after the appearance of Proudhon's first work about property, all manner of people turned up who seized on the idea of anarchism as it is developed there, as the most extreme consequence of the revolutionary opposition to the existing state of things, and sought to develop it further in one way or another. To these belong, *inter alia*, various German Young Hegelians, like Karl Grün and Moses Hess, although of these the former merely babbled the idea away into belletristic utopianism, while Hess very soon left its realisation to a later future, and endorsed for the present day political and economic reforms that rather belonged to the species of measures that Proudhon later branded as the "System of the Luxembourg". Further, Wilhelm Weitling too shows himself to be influenced by Proudhon in various ways. However, with him, Proudhon's slogans acquire a completely different meaning than with their original author; the declaration of property as theft is stretched to apply to everything traditional, and the opposition to the state is more a revolutionary

protest against the various conventional forms of government than the product of a certain economic-political conception. Rather, Weitling is in all significant points a communist. He insists on the dividing boundary between utopian and modern revolutionary communism and could—if one wishes to bring him into some relation to the anarchist movement on the basis of some of his statements—be described most likely of all as a precursor of so-called anarcho-communism [*anarchistischer Kommunismus*]. Weitling famously also initially defended with great impetuosity the idea of resorting to using the population of penitentiaries and theft in revolutionary struggle against bourgeois society. But with him, this remained a theory, his friends and kindred spirits rejected it, and later he himself also did not come back to it, while the propaganda for specifically Weitlingian communism fell dormant fairly quickly.

The first one who sought to make the idea of anarchism the departure-point for agitation on a grand scale was Bakunin. It appears with him preferentially as a political principle, while Bakunin comments about the economic-social side of the question always only very much in passing. In any case, he can hardly be called a theorist of anarchism. Himself famously a radical Young Hegelian, he knew Stirner personally, likewise Proudhon and also Weitling, and traces of all three can be found in his anarchist publications. But on the other hand they also betray his reading of Marx, whom Bakunin knew since the middle of the 1840s as well, and whose *Communist Manifesto*, written together with Engels, he himself had translated into Russian. So, for example, on page 3 of Bakunin's left-behind fragment on *God and the State*, it already reads almost *verbatim*, following Marx: "Yes, the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history."<sup>104</sup> On the whole, however, Bakunin did not really have much use for Marx–Engels' materialist conception of history; his excursions onto the domain of ancient history and philosophy of religion in the cited work do not go a single step beyond what Strauß, Feuerbach, and Bruno Bauer said in these areas, but often even rather represent a step backwards compared with them.

Bakunin wants to show that theoretical idealism always of necessity comes down to brutal practical materialism, whereas natural materialism is the foundation of all healthy idealism—an idea that, although it is very open to challenge in the form in which Bakunin posits it, rests on a fundamentally correct idea and is also partly correctly motivated by Bakunin. But Bakunin also wants to prove it historically, and hence exemplifies it on the basis of Greek and Roman civilisation. He asks:

Which is the most materialistic, the most natural, in its point of departure, and the most humanly ideal in its results? Undoubtedly the Greek civilisation. Which, on the contrary, is the most abstractly ideal in its point of departure,—sacrificing the material liberty of the man to the ideal liberty of the citizen, represented by the abstraction of judicial law, and the natural development of human society to the abstraction of the State,—and which became nevertheless the most brutal in its consequences? The Roman civilisation, certainly.<sup>105</sup>

Of course, the Greek civilisation was like all antique civilisations exclusively national, and had slavery as its foundation. But,

in spite of these two immense defects, the former none the less conceived and realized the idea of humanity; it ennobled and really idealised the life of men; it transformed human herds into free associations of free men; it created through liberty the sciences, the arts, a poetry, an immortal philosophy, and the primary concepts of human respect. With political and social liberty, it created free thought. ...

Human emancipation,—that is the name of the Greek civilisation. And the name of the Roman civilisation? Conquest, with all its brutal consequences. And its last word? The omnipotence of the Caesars. Which means the degradation and enslavement of nations and of men.<sup>106</sup>

This characterisation of Roman and Greek civilisation stems from Hegel, the old master of philosophical idealism. If for him Greek civilisation was the development of the idea of the free and beautiful human being, the Roman that of the idea of right, then that is understandable. But to construct history and bash it into shape according to the same template going on for fifty years after Hegel, only someone could do for whom the materialist conception of history had remained an entirely closed book. Here is not the place to examine in detail the reasons why the Romans remained semi-barbarians for a comparatively long time in relation to the sciences and the arts, after the Greeks had already reached so high a level in both of these, but it is obvious that these causes are not to be found in the “theoretical idealism” of the Romans, but rather that the Romans’ distinctive legal system [*Rechtssystem*] and state conception are products of Roman history. Were the Romans for that reason conquerors that they had a fully-constructed law and that state sovereignty stood in uncommonly high esteem with them, or were Roman law and Roman state authority not rather consequences of the Roman conquests? Or, to

pose the question differently, what is the point of departure for Roman and what for Greek civilisation? If the Romans had their Romulus and their Servius Tullius, then the Athenians had their Theseus, their Solon, their Cleisthenes, they had a property law with testamentary freedom and a very highly-developed state constitution, long before they reached that high level of culture in the Periclean Age for which we still admire them today. And if, in practice, they did not reach the state absolutism of the Romans, then precisely their philosophy peaks with Plato and Aristotle in the glorification of it. On the other hand, not Greece but Rome developed the concept of world citizenship and the emancipation of the human as such. It all depends on where in history one draws the line.

Even more arbitrary is the evidence that Bakunin fetches from more recent history for his theory. Here, Italy is supposed to represent materialism and Germany the most abstract, purest, and most transcendental idealism. But Italy could, despite its bourgeoisie, boast a Garibaldi and a Mazzini, while Germany's current heroes are Wilhelm I, Bismarck, and Moltke.<sup>107</sup> Since its formation, Germany appears everywhere as a conqueror, and seeks to extend its own voluntary thralldom [*freiwillige Knechtschaft*] to all its neighbouring peoples; since it has become a unified Reich, it has become a danger to the freedom of all of Europe. Quite apart from the fact that here, just as otherwise in the cited work, Bakunin's pan-Slavist hatred for Germany breaks through to the fore, the weakness of his chosen example is obvious. He abstracts here from all special conditions that contributed to the German unification movement ending in a national war waged under purely dynastic leadership, whereas the Italian unification movement could play out in more revolutionary forms. No doubt, the prevalence of religious or philosophical doctrinairism in a people can under some circumstances become a moment of great political weakness, but in the rule, political weakness and philosophical, or specifically religious idealism are products of one or several deeper-lying factors. They were quite particular historical circumstances under which the Germans became "the most philosophical people in the world". Before these set in, they lacked the innate hue of resolution no less than any other people.

The absolute interpretation that Bakunin gives his statement quoted above about the consequences of the materialist and idealist ways of thinking, and the formulaic way in which he applies it to history, is at the same time typical for his anarchism in general. An absolute contrast is constructed and applied to the various phenomena and institutions of societal life, of such a kind that everything that does not fit into the category he



has declared to be just of the natural, resting on a materialist foundation, is abruptly rejected. But now, it is well-known that all the work of human hands is at the same time the work of their minds; that every human action is mediated through the brain, and that there is no institution that would be purely materialist. Consequently, only the unconsciously-working law of nature would hence be fundamentally good, and to it then Bakunin in fact also ascribes unconditional authority. And he restricts this authority not to the natural laws of the physical world, but extends them also to the laws of the *social* world.

What is authority? Is it the inevitable power of the natural laws which manifest themselves in the necessary concatenation and succession of phenomena in the physical and social worlds? Indeed, against these laws revolt is not only forbidden [Ed. B.—!],—it is even impossible ...

*Yes, we are absolutely the slaves of these laws ...*

The great misfortune is that a large number of natural laws, already established as such by science, remain unknown to the popular masses, thanks to the watchfulness of these tutelary governments that exist, as we know, only for the good of the people.

There is another grave difficulty,—namely, that the major portion of the natural laws connected with the development of human society, which are quite as necessary and invariable as the laws that govern the physical world, have not been duly established and recognised by science itself. Once they shall have been recognised by science, and then from science, by means of an extensive system of popular education and instruction, shall have passed into the consciousness of all, the question of liberty will be entirely solved. The stubbornest authorities must admit that then there will be no need either of political organisation or direction or legislation, three things which, whether they emanate from the will of the sovereign or from the vote of a parliament elected by universal suffrage, and even should they conform to the system of natural laws,—which has never been the case and never will be the case,—are always equally fatal and hostile to the liberty of the masses from the very fact that they impose upon them a system of external and therefore despotic laws.

The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognised them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual.<sup>108</sup>

After all of that, it would be the highest wisdom, the redemption of mankind would consist in recognising the laws of our physical and social

existence and slavishly *subjecting* ourselves to their *authority*. Anyone can hold that to be a goal worth aspiring to if they like, hitherto civilised humanity has only taken it in its head to *command* the laws of their existence as far as possible, to *regulate* them. That is already possible to a certain degree with the laws of the physical world surrounding us, but to a still far higher degree with the laws of societal life. Only that individual effort is not enough for this, but that for that is required the strength of organised *society*. The mere *recognition* of the laws of social life, which Bakunin demands, would be downright worthless if it led to the unconditional subjection to these laws, since so long as they are “natural laws”, they will still assert themselves without our doing so. But even the advance of recognising these “natural laws” depends on the degree to which humans *master* the nature they have recognised—their societal relations.

We do not want to engage in any literary dressage [*Buchstabenreiterei*], but concede that Bakunin will have *presupposed* this gradual mastery as the self-evident conclusion of the relevant advances in the recognition of the laws of social life. But this is by no means the case under all circumstances. To this belongs respectively a very strong *interest* that is very capable of guidance, and where this interest is not present or is neutralised by other interests, stagnations or even regressions in one direction or another are unavoidable. However, irrespective of what Bakunin imagined, what he has proclaimed is the *absolute authority, the unconditional validity of the natural laws of the physical and social world*.

And that is only logical too. Either—to stay with the social world—humans regulate their conditions themselves, or they become slaves to these conditions. This contrast is not yet present at the first stages of societal development. Original communism does not have it at all, here humans are absolute slaves of the physical world around them, but within the bosom of every individual society there reigns complete order. With the dissolution of the original social units [*Verbände*], this natural order ceases, but still conditions remain easy to oversee in light of the simplicity of production and undeveloped intercourse. By contrast, the more intercourse among humans and peoples increases, the more production becomes specialised, and the more complex and potent productive tools become, the more natural forces are placed in the service of production and intercourse, the more intricately-entangled societal relations become. Production and intercourse develop their own laws, and these laws from now on affect the mass of people with the same compulsive force as the law of nature on savages. So long as they exist, the individual must subject

themselves to them, if they do not want to perish. Every bourgeois grasps this, indeed the recognition of the “natural laws of the social world” and the obedient subjection to the same is *the pinnacle of all bourgeois wisdom, the gospel of the bourgeois economists*. “One must”, Bakunin writes at another point in relation to these “laws of nature”,

be at bottom either a theologian or at least a metaphysician, jurist, or *bourgeois* economist to rebel against the law by which twice two make four.<sup>109</sup>

That is a great error, precisely for the bourgeois economist the “societal laws of nature” are as fixed as “twice two make four”. And there is no bourgeois economist who will not agree with Bakunin on the additional statement: “But these revolts”—namely against the laws of nature—

or, rather, these attempts at or foolish fancies of an impossible revolt, are decidedly the exception; for, in general, it may be said that the mass of men, in their daily lives, acknowledge the government of common sense—that is, of the sum of the natural laws generally recognised—in an almost absolute fashion.<sup>110</sup>

Let all do and act as they please, the world will take its course by itself!—

In this too, the bourgeois economist has little to object to in Bakunin, when he says: In the face of the laws of nature, the human being only has one possible freedom: to recognise them and, in accordance with the goal of collective and individual emancipation or humanisation, which they pursue, to apply them more and more—since that means nothing other than that these endeavours have to move within the boundaries of these “immutable” natural laws. That these laws themselves *change* along with society, that humans thus have to become ever more the *masters* of their societal relations—of that, there is nary a word.

And how would such a word have even fitted into that system—into the absolute condemnation of the state, regardless of how it is constituted, into the rejection of all legislation, regardless from whom it proceeds and of what kind it is. The theory that the state could only ever benefit those classes whose tools it once was earlier, that legislation could only ever be of use to the “dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them”, dissolves into nothing if one does not cling firmly to the idea that however society is composed, its natural laws are still always and forever the same, and rule with the same

absolute force.<sup>111</sup> But does “twice two” still always and under all circumstances “make four”? Certainly, yet through advances in mechanics one has figured out how to achieve an effect through expedient ordering of units of “twice two”, which goes far beyond the units with their individual effects of “four”. Bakunin’s entire work is full of anathemas against the pretension of learned scholars to sacrifice human beings to the abstractions of science, but

*These people never smell the old rat,  
E’en when he has them by the collar.*<sup>112</sup>

A theory that says to the proletarians: because the state and legislation hitherto was only used by your exploiters for their own purposes, you may not make use of it, since however you set about it, you will always only benefit your exploiters and harm yourselves—such a theory is itself the crassest abstraction from all reality, all actual life in society. And again we come up against an insoluble contradiction: above, it was said that all intellectual and moral, political and social history of humanity is merely a reflection of its economic history. The state is a historical phenomenon—so it is as a social and political institution only a reflection of economic conditions; to wish to *abolish* the state, so long as the economic conditions continue to exist whose reflection it is, the attack on the state *qua* state, is hence fundamentally wrong according to Bakunin’s own argument. And if one wanted to interject that the state is still simply a tool of class rule and so had to be smashed to pieces, if an end is to be put to class rule, then this is to be answered by saying that class rule cannot be eradicated without the preceding rule of the class of the proletariat, and that the measures to remove the economic foundations of class rule are partly statist in nature, so that the workers hence must first and foremost strive to make state power amenable to their purposes.

Judging by Bakunin’s comments in incidental essays [*Gelegenheitsaufsätze*], after the disintegration of the state, “*natural solidarity*” shall supply the cement of the societal edifice of the future that is to be erected, and all communist anarchists parrot it after him. Now *prima facie* there are two kinds of solidarity: a solidarity in *doings* [*Dinge*] and the so-called *feeling* of solidarity [*Solidaritätsgefühl*]. These can coincide, i.e., the solidarity in doings can be recognised by people, and this recognition can become as a feeling of solidarity, or rather consciousness of solidarity, a mighty driving motivation for societal progress. But on a large scale,

consciousness of solidarity only works strongly enough to prompt voluntary relinquishment of individual interests under a certain *pressure*. A dissolution of the group association, which, however deficiently, still today for better or worse functions as the organ of the great interests of society, without *previously* creating institutions that make such an association unnecessary, could by contrast only have the effect of *intensifying* the *contradiction* between individual interest and societal solidarity. This contradiction today is already large enough, despite all better insight, to oppose societal progress in a thousand different points, and how much more would this be the case if society consisted of nothing but a multitude of groups and individuals competitively busying themselves side-by-side. First raising the contradiction of interests to a heightened potential, and then expecting from the insight of humans and the compulsion of natural laws what ultimately would still be nothing other than a modification of the institutions that had previously been smashed to pieces, means leaving the safe route towards the goal in order to strike out on a different one, which possibly also leads towards the goal, but only by great detours, which cost time and cause unspeakably many troubles.

That applies not only to Bakunin's anarchism, it applies to all the different subtypes and variants of anarchism, in which free communist society forms the desired end goal. It is always the same tendency of going round the houses, it is the same internal contradictions, the same abstractions that we meet. Now the emphasis is laid more on the local associations, the municipalities, now on the economic associations that "freely" form for certain purposes, the so-called "free groups". Groups or municipalities, or rather groups *and* municipalities only enter into association with one another so far as need and insight occasion them to do so, otherwise they are absolutely sovereign—autonomous—just as individuals are themselves. With conditions of this kind, in order to make imaginable a further development of society along the lines of the greater welfare and greater well-being of all, as well as elevated culture, an almost angelic perfection is ascribed to human beings, and to natural laws a panacean force that puts the most famous universal remedies in the shade—the world is perfect wherever the *state* does not manage to force its way in with its tortures.

"Church and State are my two *bêtes noires*", it says another time in Bakunin, and the state must well be this even more than the Church, since Bakunin overcomes his dread before the latter at least so far that he manages, as hard as he claims that this is for him, at the relevant point to speak

of “our [Ed. B.—the anarchists’] own church”.<sup>113</sup> But shuddering with fear before an institution is almost always proof that one has only deficiently recognised its nature. Behind the exaggerated fear of the state lies the same superstition as behind the exaggerated cult of it.

We said above that the state of affairs expected by the anarchists would also only present itself, if it is achieved, as a *modification* of the institutions that are programmatically to be smashed to bits by them beforehand. The proofs for this jump out at us at first glance in almost every anarchist treatise that we take in our hand. Here we have a veritable embarrassment of riches as soon as we want to go about citing them. As anti-authoritarian as the anarchist may comport themselves, for them there is always a point where the groups, municipalities, associations appeal to “society”. Now, the word society sounds harmless enough, one can imagine by it the most innocent thing conceivable—the pure concept of a multitude of individuals living alongside one another uncoercedly—but in reality a society that is supposed to intervene, take care of certain needs, regulate certain misuses, needs organs, a constitution, financial means, and potentially means of compulsion. Here it is only a matter of a *more* or a *less*—the more “communist” the anarchist, the stronger the *more*, so that their “society” all of a sudden becomes a *state*, as *they* define it; but also the anti-communist anarchist, who does not absolutely represent the brutal standpoint of the right of the stronger, at some point, as soon as they try to outline their future society, undergoes their Damascene conversion, where society must intervene in the sphere of the sovereignty of the free groups. With Proudhon we saw how, right in the middle of the loveliest mutualism, state and legislation were resorted to directly. Bakunin—we keep only to the works that appeared under his name, not the anonymous articles in the *Volksgericht*—did not go into the details of his anarchist society, but Kropotkin, whom in the question of anarchist doctrine one can describe as his successor, and who today is acknowledged by the great majority of anarchists as the most scientific representative of anarchism, demands that in anarchist society everyone is awarded vital provisions according to their need: whatever is present in excess, of that everyone should “take from the pile”, but what can only be produced in a limited scope should, taking in the first instance the old and children into consideration, and the weak in general, should be disbursed in *rations*, measured according to need.<sup>114</sup> How that is to be brought about, Kropotkin of course does not say, but that there is more to this than some mystical incorporeal “society” is entirely obvious.

On this hurdle, all communist systems of anarchism founder. The prevaricating cop-outs by means of which their various fathers try to cover up this fact us recognise the shipwreck all the more clearly.

In this way, Kropotkin—and after him Reclus and others—helps himself by pointing to the great accomplishments that many free associations are already carrying out for common purposes—the Society of the Red Cross, the Lifeboat Institutions in England and elsewhere, the hospital fraternities, etc.—and how many great things are achieved by way of free covenants, without the state or legislative institutions having any role in the matter—hence how much greater the things that would be accomplished if only the more noble moral qualities that humanity has developed over its long history could develop free from any state authority, free of any statist compulsion. Everyone by themselves would feel the need in some way or other to carry out useful activity for society, and just as the librarian of the British Museum does not ask the reader what his services earlier rendered to society were, just as the crew of a lifeboat does not first reassure themselves whether the people on a ship that finds itself in need have won a right to their help, so too would anarchist society fearlessly be able to allow every individual freely to choose from out of the common stock of society the satisfaction of their needs at their discretion.<sup>115</sup>

Whoever knows the real state of things even only to some degree, to them the deceptive conclusions of this reasoning are as clear as day. To start with, by far not all the enumerated associations are “free” in the sense that the state does not lend them notable assistance through financial aid, guaranteeing privileges, legal protection, etc., and only then makes possible their existence. Next, many of their accomplishments, as worthy of recognition as they may be in themselves, are absolutely inadequate for the envisaged purpose. London has innumerable free hospitals [*freiwillige Krankenhäuser*], which partly have at their disposal very great endowed funds, saved up over centuries, and collections are taken for them in all kinds of ways, on certain days at every street corner, and everyone acknowledges their benevolent purpose; and yet they cannot solve the task that falls to them, and still despite knowing this their municipalisation is now sought by all the progressive elements of London; yet the city of five million is really not a “free group”. Thirdly, most of these charitable [*gemeinnützig*] associations are designed for certain quite exceptional needs and emergencies, etc., or for ideological purposes—but what is at issue here is the question of the procurement and distribution of objects for everyday need, of the most prosaic articles of daily life. Whatever great things the

English Bible Society accomplishes in the name of supplying humanity with holy sustenance—to conclude from this that the humans of the future, like the birds in the sky, must be unconcerned about their terrestrial fare is somewhat rather too audacious a conclusion. It misses its mark all the more since, as remarked earlier, the nearest effect of the immediate disintegration of the state and all state organs would be that the drive for individual self-preservation would assert itself even more strongly than it does anyway already in today's society. The strengthening of egoism is, however, equivalent to a weakening of the existing altruistic drive. The egoism of municipal groups [*Gruppengemeinden*], etc., would suffocate the most broadminded public spirit [*Gemeinsinn*].

As regards their social doctrine, the inner dualism of communist or communisant systems of anarchism presents itself in such a way that they dictate the economic liquidation of society, and from this economic dissolution the highest, hitherto unattained ethical regeneration of humanity is supposed to proceed, which then would again reverse this dissolution and only then construct the true community. “Nothing from the top down, everything from the bottom up”, it reads in the anarchist catechism—but here, history should suddenly make itself from the top down—from the airy domain of ethics shall the bridge be built to economics, and not the latter, but the former figure as the foundation of the societal edifice. Let nobody be concerned that with such construction engineering, things could turn out somewhat wobbly. Even if the walls are leaning apart and the beams come out skewed—the “nature of things”, the “compulsion of conditions” will soon bring everything back again into its right equilibrium, the anarchist assures us. Whereupon we wish anybody who believes this the very best of luck.

“Individual liberty!”, it reads in Kropotkin's work *The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution*—

“Take pebbles”, said Fourier, “put them into a box and shake them, and they will arrange themselves in a mosaic that you could never get by entrusting to anyone the work of arranging them harmoniously.”<sup>116</sup>

Fourier was an imaginative man, and often there is very much that is right in his comparisons—but they must be applied with intelligence. Human beings are not pebbles, and to be shaken so long by a higher power until everyone falls into their fitting situation is everything but an ideal of individual freedom.



It would be absurd to wish to claim that the ethical conceptions of civilised humans, which have been acquired over the course of thousands of years of development, are worthless or even only insignificant for societal progress. It would be no less absurd to delude oneself that societal relations allow themselves to be satisfactorily regulated down to the smallest detail from one centre or a few centrales. No adherent of modern socialism who is even somewhat of sound mind harbours ideas of such a clownish kind about the communist society to be striven for. The doom-mongering about the communism of the barracks [*Kasernenkommunismus*] with narrow-minded templates and banal rulership [*Allerweltsregiererei*] are debonair inventions of the anarchists, or trashy rumour-peddling of fairy-tales dished up by bourgeois critique. Starting with Proudhon, we find in no anarchist a properly appropriate critique of modern socialism, an attempt that encourages discussion and analyses of its fundamental concepts. Everywhere there is the same manner of proceeding, of insinuating downright rubbish about one's opponents, to let the sublime excellence of one's own recipe appear in all the better a light.<sup>117</sup> A factual enquiry into the works of the acknowledged theorists of modern socialism would in fact only reveal that these, less "authoritarian" than all the anarchists from the extreme right through to the extreme left, offer no instructions to future humanity about how it has to regulate its common affairs, that they do not confront it with a penal codex: *verboten*, to go any other way than that sketched out by us; *verboten*, to make use of these or other institutions, even for a single day; *verboten*, to reach for the heights of your needs and possibilities, instead of strictly adhering to the legal and moral concepts condoned by us. About all of this one finds not a word in the writings of Marx and Engels—but all the more in the writings of the theorists of anarchism.

It sounds very "freedomly [*freiheitlich*]" when they say again and again: nothing from the top down, everything from the bottom up, nothing from the centre to the periphery, everything from the periphery to the centre, no centralisation, federalism everywhere, no general representative bodies, only specialised agreement committees [*Vereinbarungskomiteen*]<sup>118</sup>—but in reality this is the highest authoritarianism—to transfer an idea drawn from the struggle of the bourgeois and the working class against bureaucratic state absolutism onto the entirety of societal affairs—the method of Dr. Eisenbart, but in a form that could hardly be any less in agreement with the scientific examination of the societal body and its needs.

Modern society, as we *prima facie* have it handed down to us and have to develop it further, is far too complex an organism to let itself be readily reshaped according to an arbitrary template without endangering the welfare of its members—regardless of whether this is a matter of the “state” template, or that of some “freedom”, centralisation, or federalisation. Absolute centralism would be, if it is feasible at all, economically and socially equally pernicious, but society would be suicidal if, with all its existing centralised institutions, instead of reorganising them appropriately according to its needs, it wanted to summarily clear them away and expect their replacement from chance coincidence or the compulsion of conditions. It will only remove what is truly dispensable, whose functions can better be carried out elsewhere. This it will do with the state, the same with several individual administrative organs, it will perhaps for a time strengthen some, then very soon let others shrivel, and call yet others into existence for the first time. In this, we presume, it will proceed according to certain fundamental political and social principles—nothing lies further from our minds than to make the case for unfounded eclecticism—but in its application, it will let common sense and experience have a role to play.

That the anarchists simply will not get into their heads. Freedom, unleashing individual forces, is the *arcantum* that is supposed to cure everything, remove all evil, and bring everything good by itself. But this is neither the case in nature, which all anarchists like to point to so much, nor has history shown that the way to progress is only freedom and nothing but freedom. In nature, a vicious struggle for existence reigns, destruction of billions of seeds and millions of individuals that are otherwise capable of life. But in the history of peoples, progress, the enabling of greater freedom and greater well-being, has often taken place initially through the restriction of certain freedoms—the destruction of feudal freedoms, and the constitution of the absolute state represents an important milestone on the way towards the emancipation of the human race. There is no formula that is fitting for all situations, according to which this emancipation happens—depending on circumstances, one principle or another will step more into the foreground. What was the loftiest condition for the full unfolding of bourgeois society can conceivably recede into the second or third tier for the development of the communist society aspired to by the working class. The working class, awakened to consciousness of itself, and determined to reshape society according to its needs, will

not be so foolhardy as to do this in such a way that it forges chains for itself in doing so—but no more will it let itself be sworn to a principle, a universal remedy, that in fact is nothing other than the mere exaggeration of the doctrine of untrammelled economic competitive struggle, derived from the needs of the bourgeois classes.

We want to break off here. In the original plan for this work, the intention was to go into all the better-known varieties of anarchism and show how they all amount to shaping the proletarian movement according to bourgeois concepts—and themselves to model whimsical quirks and salvage for future society as great a store as possible of bourgeois institutions—partly out of conscious infatuation with these institutions, as with Proudhon and his successors, partly out of ambiguous taking-over of bourgeois slogans—out of the inclination to give relative truths an absolute interpretation. Considerations for other works, however, force the author to let matters rest with the summary passages above. Also, an all-too detailed critique would perhaps not have fitted into the framework of this periodical. For this reason, I have left out a few further examples, by which the deceptive conclusions of anarchist economics in particular become strikingly manifest. Yet I hope that I have sufficiently brought out the moments that are to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the fundamental economic principles of anarchism. In the last instance, all anarchist systems demand fearfully strong *faith*. With them, one must be satisfied with the hope that the free economy of free groups will regulate everything for the best. To the question: and what if it does not? its exponents remain silent or answer with prevarications. They also cannot do any different, after they have *forbidden* society from interfering in the economic domain of the free groups or municipalities.

In this entire treatise, the social doctrine of anarchism was examined only as to its *economic* content—only right at the end was also the *ethical* side of it touched on. But this belongs to this topic, and should originally have also been considered in these articles. Letting matters rest with these comments in passing about it would already seem even less justified because certain currents today, which here and there are even propagated in the workers' movement, either derive from it directly or are closely associated with it. Here one should recall, *inter alia*, only the so-called Nietzscheanism. But the topic is interesting enough to merit a separate treatment, and for that reason we break off here with the plea to see the sketch above as only dedicated to the economic side of the question.

## NOTES

1. [Ed. B.—The series of articles begun under the above title in issue 12 of volume 10 of the *Neue Zeit* suffered an interruption already after the second article, because a nervous ailment prevented me from undertaking any authorial activity for some time. When I resumed it to its full extent, the dynamite attacks in Paris were at that time preoccupying the daily press, and the moment hence did not seem suitable to me to continue my analysis. Later, I started to doubt whether there was even any interest in it among the readers of *Neue Zeit* anymore. Yet after several letters convinced me otherwise, I do not want to tarry any longer in completing the discussion I have begun.

For new readers, I will add the remark that the starting-point for these articles is the work by Herr John Henry Mackay: *The Anarchists: A Picture of Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, which appeared last year. The first article was concerned with the content of Mackay's book in general, the second characterised Stirner's oft-cited treatise *The Ego and Its Own*, first published in 1848, which presents the most radical form of what the literature that centres on the individual has brought out in this century.]

2. John Henry Mackay, *The Anarchists: A Picture of Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, George Schumm (tr.) (Boston, MA: Benj. R. Tucker, Publisher, 1891). John Henry Mackay (1864–1933), Scottish-German author and individualist anarchist thinker, hagiographer of Max Stirner, advocate for pederastic emancipation.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 291, 294.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
8. §§32–3 *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich vom 15. Mai 1871*: Notwehr; Überschreitung der Notwehr.
9. Mackay, *The Anarchists*, p. 15.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
15. *Ibid.*, p. ix.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. vii–viii.
17. Benjamin Ricketson Tucker (1851–1939), American journalist and anarchist thinker, editor of the periodical *Liberty* (1881–1908), initially a libertarian socialist with Ricardian and Proudhonian influences, later a convert to individualist anarchism inspired by Thomas Jefferson and

- Max Stirner, strongly opposed to bureaucratic trade unionism and legal monopolies over money, land, tariffs, and patents.
18. Mackay, *The Anarchists*, p. ix.
  19. [Ed. B.—True to his theory, Stirner capitalises the first-person pronoun everywhere.] Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, David Leopold (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 143.
  20. Stirner, *Ego and Its Own*, pp. 145–6.
  21. Ibid., p. 148.
  22. Ibid., pp. 165–6.
  23. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *De la Création de l'Ordre dans l'Humanité, ou Principes d'Organisation Politique* (Paris: A. Lacroix et Cie, 1873), §435; Stirner, *Ego and Its Own*, p. 111.
  24. Ibid., p. 223.
  25. [Ed. B.—Stirner already uses the word *Fremdentum* [foreignness] in contrast to *Eigentum* [ownness].] Stirner, *Ego and Its Own*, p. 279.
  26. Stirner, *Ego and Its Own*, p. 279.
  27. Ibid., p. 222.
  28. Ibid., p. 211.
  29. Ibid., p. 196.
  30. Ibid., pp. 271–2.
  31. Ibid., p. 272.
  32. Ibid., pp. 99–100.
  33. Ibid., p. 7.
  34. Ibid., p. 319.
  35. Ibid., p. 324.
  36. Ibid., pp. 257–8.
  37. Ibid., p. 191.
  38. [Ed. B.—*Studies on Proudhon*, p. 164.]
  39. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?* (Paris: Garnier Frères, Libraires, 1849), p. 250.
  40. [Ed. B.—Cf. Jules Panin, *Les origines du Socialisme Contemporain*.]
  41. Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?*, p. 116.
  42. [Ed. B.—“He (Proudhon) wants to criticise all kinds of property, but actually offers only a critique of private property in land, as he himself says in his *Majorats littéraires*, which came out in 1862: 22 years ago I formulated a critique of landed property.” (Diehl, *P. J. Proudhon*, first section: The Theory of Property and Value, p. 34)]
  43. Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?*, p. 137.
  44. Ibid., pp. 142–3.
  45. Ibid., p. 242.
  46. Ibid., p. 244.
  47. Ibid., p. 246.
  48. Ibid., p. 247.
  49. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Théorie de la Propriété* (Paris: Lacroix, Verboeckhoven, & Co., 1866), p. 246.

50. Ibid., p. 15.
51. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie de Garnier Frères, 1858), p. 353.
52. Proudhon, *Théorie de la Propriété*, p. 135.
53. Ibid., pp. 136–8.
54. Ibid., p. 142.
55. Ibid., p. 144.
56. Ibid., p. 167.
57. Ibid., p. 176.
58. Ibid., p. 181.
59. [Editors of *Neue Zeit*—After the February 1848 Revolution, a workers' commission was instituted by the provisional government, so that the massing workers would calm themselves and believe that something was being done for them. *L. Blanc* had himself placed at the head of this commission, which took up its seat in a palais, the *Luxembourg*. Hence the expression to which Proudhon helped himself to describe “authoritarian” socialism.]
60. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *De la Capacité Politique des Classes Ouvrières* (Paris: Lacroix, Verboeckhoven, & Co., 1868), p. 57.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., p. 59.
63. Ibid., p. 61.
64. Ibid.
65. [Ed. B.—A. Mühlberger, *Studies on Proudhon*, p. 62.]
66. Georg Jellinek, ‘Constitutional Amendment and Constitutional Transformation’, Belinda Cooper (tr.), in Arthur Jacobson and Bernhard Schlink (eds.), *Weimar—A Jurisprudence of Crisis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. 56.
67. Proudhon, *Capacité Politique*, p. 64.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 68.
70. Ibid., pp. 69–70.
71. Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch, *Kapitel zu einem deutschen Arbeiterkatechismus* (Leipzig: Ernst Keil, 1863).
72. Mackay, *The Anarchists*, p. 109.
73. Proudhon, *Capacité Politique*, pp. 83–4.
74. Ibid., p. 95.
75. Ibid., p. 96.
76. Ibid., p. 97.
77. Ibid., p. 96.
78. Ibid., p. 101.
79. Ibid., p. 102.
80. Ibid., p. 105.
81. Ibid., pp. 109–11.
82. Ibid., p. 128.

83. Ibid., p. 126.
84. [Ed. B.—Here to be understood in a technical sense.]
85. Proudhon, *Capacité Politique*, pp. 130–1.
86. Ibid., pp. 132–3.
87. Ibid., p. 133.
88. Ibid., p. 134.
89. Ibid., pp. 134–5.
90. Ibid., pp. 135–6.
91. Ibid., p. 136.
92. Ibid., pp. 136–9.
93. Ibid., p. 139.
94. Ibid., p. 141.
95. Ibid., p. 142.
96. [Ed. B.—Logically, Proudhon then also writes at one point, “love is only perfect to the extent that it has taken as its motto the maxims of mutualism—I would almost have said of commerce: I give if you give.” *On the Capacity*, p. 165.]
97. [Ed. B.—cf. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., p. 154.]
98. Proudhon, *Capacité Politique*, p. 335.
99. Ibid., pp. 337–8.
100. Ibid., p. 343.
101. Ibid., p. 346.
102. Mackay, *The Anarchists*, pp. 94, 109–10.
103. Proudhon, *Capacité Politique*, p. 323.
104. [Ed. B.—Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*. Geneva 1882. We are citing this original edition, since we do not have the later German translation to hand.] Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*, Benjamin R. Tucker (tr.) (New York, NY: Benj. R. Tucker, Publisher, 1895 [1882]) p. 6.
105. Bakunin, *God and the State*, p. 27.
106. [Ed. B.—On p. 29 of the same work of Bakunin’s it reads: “It is the characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the mind and heart of men. The privileged man, whether politically or economically, is a man depraved in mind and heart. That is a social law which admits of no exception, and is as applicable to entire nations as to classes, corporations, and individuals. It is the law of equality, the supreme condition of liberty and humanity. The principal object of this treatise is precisely to demonstrate this truth in all the manifestations of human life.” If the Greeks, even though their civilisation rested on slavery, could accomplish everything listed above, then something must be awry with the *absolute* validity of this truth. In fact, to the cultivation of sciences at a certain stage of civilisation belongs a privileged existence, independent of care for the procurement of daily keep.] Bakunin, *God and the State*, p. 27.
107. Giuseppe Maria Garibaldi (1807–1882), Italian guerrilla general, republican politician, and nationalist activist, and Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872),

- Italian journalist, republican revolutionary, and advocate for women's rights, together along with Camillo Cavour and Victor Emmanuel II of Piedmont-Sardinia seen as the leading figures of the *Risorgimento*. Wilhelm I (1797–1888), King of Prussia (1861–1888) and first Kaiser of a united German *Reich* (1871–1888). Helmuth Karl Bernhard von Moltke (1800–1891), Prussian field marshal, played a crucial role in the military victories during the wars of German unification (1864–1871).
108. [Ed. B.—The publishers of this fragment—Herr Elisée Reclus and the now likewise deceased C. Cafiero—add the following note to this passage: “Bakunin doubtless here wants to speak of “economic laws” and “social science”, which in fact only finds itself in its early stages so far.”] Bakunin, *God and the State*, pp. 17–18.
  109. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
  110. *Ibid.*
  111. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–2.
  112. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, Charles T. Brooks (tr.) (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868 [1808]), “Auerbach’s Cellar in Leipzig”.
  113. Bakunin, *God and the State*, p. 21.
  114. [Ed. B.—cf. *Anarchy in Socialist Evolution*, Paris 1887, p. 13, and the essay “The coming anarchy” in the collected volume published under A. R. Parson’s name: *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Foundation*. Chicago 1887, p. 130.]
  115. [Ed. B.—cf. essay “The coming anarchy” in the aforementioned collected volume, pp. 129–42.]
  116. Peter Kropotkin, *The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution*, Henry Glasse (tr.) (London: William Reeves, 1886 [1884]), p. 12.
  117. [Ed. B.—Whereby all the same it must be remarked that the anarchist often does not treat their brother anarchists who differ from them much better. “You want free love, like myself”, the individualist anarchist Auban in Mackay says to the communist anarchist Trupp in their discussion about the advantages of their systems. “But what do you understand by free love? That it is the duty of every woman to yield to the desire of every man, and that no man has the right to withdraw himself from the desire of any woman”, etc., and Auban “shudders” at the thought that this idea could ever become dominant. (Mackay, *The Anarchists*, p. 140) He could have saved himself the goosebumps. With no anarchist, however communist they may be, and no more with any “authoritarian” communist have we come across this ghastly idiotic interpretation of the concept of free love. Something like that only Master Proudhon could concoct in hallowed union with the muckraking papers of the bourgeoisie, in order to present the “System of the Luxembourg” to the outraged philistine as the pinnacle of all abomination.]