

Paul Lafargue

The Police and the Anarchists

The capitalist class, incapable of defending its riches as it is incapable of acquiring them by labor, is the first class of the propertied which has made of the police the most solid pillar of its State and society. Without haggling or counting the cost it spends money for that purpose; it covers all the blind and unlawful brutalities of the police with the mantle of Christian charity; indeed it even gives them a certain satisfaction when, now and then, one of their own members is handled rather roughly by the “eyes of the law,” because that gives them a foretaste of the treatment meted out to poor devils and Socialists who have the misfortune to fall into the heavy and often unclean hands of the police.

A Police Prefect Confesses

The police, treated like a pampered, spoiled child, imagine that it is permitted to do almost anything. And it was thus that it took the liberty of introducing anarchism into France in order to set it against Socialism, because it was amusing to put the fear of God in the hearts of the good citizens. A former prefect of police, M. Andrieux, in his memoirs garrulously revealed that the police furnished the money needed for the foundation of the first anarchist paper published in France, which for the information of all and sundry published recipes for the manufacture of explosives and bombs. M. Andrieux revealed, furthermore, that the first anarchist “*attentat*” [attempt at assassination], the one directed against the Statue of Thiers, was set on foot with the knowledge and aid of the police. But in the eyes of the capitalists the police is so sublime and sacrosanct an institution that whatever it may do can never be bad. Not only did M. Andrieux remain entirely

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unmolested, although by his own confession he had organized anarchist plots, but no one in the government or the “loyal” press even faintly reproached him for having done so. The most they did was to regret his ruthless revelations. The bourgeois papers have always exhibited a certain fondness, not to say tenderness, for the anarchists, and they always encouraged their attacks upon the Socialists. Only last year the *Figaro* gloatingly published a long polemic screed of the anarchist Cohen against Bebel, Liebknecht and the entire German Social Democracy. On the side it may be observed that the paper most liberally paid M. Cohen for his slanders.

The police had entertained the comfortable illusion that it could hold the anarchists in leash at its pleasure. The intention was to use them solely against the Socialists, to hinder the agitation of the latter, disperse their meetings, to invade the editorial offices of Socialist papers arms in hand and to treat their editors with knives and revolvers. So long as the anarchists stuck to that role, working in the service of social reaction, they remained unmolested. The police had orders by no means to interfere when a band of anarchists assaulted a Socialist, even if the latter happened to be a municipal councilor. The present Deputy Rouanet, for instance, who formerly was a municipal councilor in Paris, was attacked by a gang of anarchists under the leadership of the stool pigeon Martinet, and was knocked down and kicked. The policemen who witnessed the scene permitted the assault and went their way, declaring with lofty, philosophic calm that “the gentlemen should settle the matter among themselves.”

The Anarchists Take Too Much for Granted

This so Christian tolerance of the police made the anarchists bold. They began thereupon to translate their individualistic theories about property into practice, plundered show windows and stores, broke into the houses of rich bourgeois and cleaned them out and, if they met with resistance, resorted to knife and revolver. The capitalists did not want to put up with that kind of theft. It looked rather too barbarous to them. The police was therefore

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faced by the necessity of arresting its hand-fed anarchist boys and arraigning them in the courts. The judges then had no choice but to sentence them just like common thieves and murderers. But such procedure produced a deep moral indignation among the “comrades”; and they went after the judges as though they had been Social Democrats. The anarchist appetite having been thus stimulated, they aimed higher: Vaillant threw his bomb into the Chamber of Deputies and Caserio assassinated Carnot.¹

The police, having been encouraged by ministers and politicians to use the anarchists against the Socialists, did not lose its nice equipoise when the knights of the dagger and bomb had robbed private persons, and sent judges and witnesses for the prosecution from this into a better world. But the police found that the joke had been carried too far when the anarchists menaced also the lives of politicians., The Deputies, trembling with fear, demanded anti-anarchist laws and an increase of the police budgets. These gentlemen knew full well that the police, directly or indirectly, is involved as an accomplice in all these attempted murders which so terribly frighten the good bourgeois. Nevertheless, so deeply ingrained in them is the respect for this worthy institution that they dare not utter the slightest censure nor ask for an investigation of its actions. They were anxious not to incur its disfavor and, instead, sedulously endowed it with new prerogatives and privileges. With folded hands they supplicated that laudable institution to protect them against the dynamite and daggers of the anarchists.

Politicians and capitalist press organs, arm in arm applauded the police when it let loose the anarchists in order to hamper Socialist agitation. The bourgeois papers took great pains to depict, in minute detail, the stormy scenes the anarchist “comrades” caused at Socialist meetings. Gleeefully they exclaimed: “Here you can see how the Socialists deal with one another.” Eagerly they spread among the public the falsehood that between anarchism and Socialism there was no essential difference. Anarchism, they said, is the logical sequence of Socialism, the anarchists are courageous people who have the consistency to translate their theories into

¹ Marie Francois Sadi Carnot, fourth President of the French Republic.

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practice; the Socialists, however, are hypocritical, mendacious anarchists who, because of cowardice or ambition, dare not draw all the consequences of their theories. These tactics were not without success, for during a long time a large part of the public held the Socialists responsible for the idiocies the anarchists uttered and for the crimes they committed.

Anarchism and Capitalist Individualism Are Alike

The Socialists endeavored to put an end to this ominous confusion, surreptitiously nurtured and maintained by the capitalist press. They proved that the anarchist theories were the result of the economic *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*,² the legitimate offspring of bourgeois individualism; that the anarchists would operate only through individual action, while the Socialists expected success only through the action of the organized proletariat; that the anarchists fulminated against the suffrage, while the Socialists utilized it in order to penetrate legislative and administrative bodies to the great terror of the bourgeois politicians; that the anarchists preached the propaganda of the deed and the murderous action of the autonomous individual, while the Socialists would sanction only the propaganda of the idea and disapproved of bloodthirsty speeches as much as of dynamite-filled cooking pots, because the thievery of the anarchists and their blindly brutal dynamite outrages would not aid in the solution of the social problem but, on the contrary, would retard it for the reason that they excited the indignation of all the efficient members of the proletariat. But the politicians figured with just that indignation so that the Socialists might be compromised in the eyes of public opinion and in the courts be sentenced as common criminals. When, in 1882, Guesde, Dormoy and Lafargue faced the Court of Sessions at Moulins, and were sentenced to six months' imprisonment, the prosecuting

² The full phrase, "laissez faire et passer, le monde va de lui-meme," may be translated, "let alone [do not interfere]; the world revolves of itself." As used by capitalism's really rugged individualists (as opposed to those who have learned that reforms pay off), the phrase means: no interference; absolutely uncontrolled industrial and commercial competition.

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attorney of the Republic read to the court articles from an anarchist paper which had been founded with the money of the police.

This confusion of ideas about anarchism and Socialism, so hurtful to Socialist agitation, lasted long enough and would have lasted still longer had it not been for later outrages which clarified public opinion as to the true state of affairs. Facts which otherwise would have received no attention were drawn into a glaring light and became generally conspicuous. All the dynamite heroes, who either practiced or approved of the propaganda of the deed, professed implacable hatred against the best-known champions of Socialism; they abused them, called them “bellwethers” and “popes,” just as the capitalists themselves called the same men “inciters,” and even threatened well-known Socialists with death. The books from which the anarchists claim to have derived their hatred of bourgeois society had been written by savants and philosophers who enjoy great renown in the bourgeois world, such as Darwin, Haeckel and Herbert Spencer.³ Never did an anarchist quote Marx, Engels or any other Socialist writer. The modern theoreticians of anarchism, such as Elisee Reclus and Kropotkin, exhibit the same supreme contempt for the scientific achievements of Karl Marx as do the bourgeois political economists; in their sentimental, bombastic and forced dissertations not even his name is mentioned. If a certain doctrine could be held responsible that anarchism germinated and developed in the embittered minds of people who, in capitalist society, belong to the defeated and downtrodden then it ought to be the biologic theory of the struggle for existence, which is but the counterpart and complement of the

³ Herbert Spencer was the philosopher and propagandist of capitalist anarchy. He damned any interference with capitalism’s operations and held that the hardships of capitalism were the “effort of nature” to get rid of the “unfit” among the capitalists and workers. The general capitalist acceptance of ruthlessly rugged individualism was so widespread, and Spencer’s philosophical and propagandistic influence was so great, that even Darwin, on occasion, confused the “survival of the fittest” (Spencer’s phrase) in a state of nature with survival—the good and bad fortune of capitalists, and the desperate plight of workers—in society. Ernst Heinrich Haeckel helped to initiate “social Darwinism,” a misapplication of biology to society.

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free competition theory of the political economists. The materialist conception of history of Marx and Engels has absolutely no connection with anarchism; it shows how the development of economic conditions, which govern man and society, proceeds and necessarily leads to Communism.

The Anarchists' Friends Were Capitalists, Not Socialists!

The police itself contributed to do away with the confusion of ideas it had so industriously maintained. On Jan. 1, of the current year [1895], a few weeks after Vaillant had thrown his bomb, the Minister of the Interior, Raynal, caused 2,000 arrests and domiciliary searches to be made. The residences of all the known anarchists were suddenly and thoroughly gone through, and all the documents found were sequestered. The Minister of the Interior had hoped to dig up facts on the strength of which the impression could be created that a giant conspiracy existed in which the Socialists were also implicated. He imagined that among the documents seized there could or would be found letters and other writings of known Socialists, from which might be deduced intimate collaboration and secret connections between anarchists and Socialists.

M. Raynal experienced a cruel disappointment. Not even the most harmless letter of a Socialist was found in possession of the anarchists; but, on the contrary, all the letters of the anarchists were brimming over with abuse of and threats against Socialists. The raids of the police proved, clear and plain, that anarchists and Socialists in neither their private life nor in their public activity were in any way connected; but that, contrariwise, they faced each other as foes in every respect.

However, even if the efforts of the police to hang the anarchists to the coattails of the Socialists suffered shipwreck, a discovery was made which compensated for the failure and which nobody had expected. Among the papers of the best-known anarchists were found letters from priests, stock exchange kings, dukes and other persons as prominent as they were reactionary. These letters contained expressions of thanks and advised of the remittance of

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money. It appeared that the syndicate of Paris brokers possessed a special fund for the support of the anarchists for the purpose of preventing a repetition of the pistol shot which the anarchist Gallace a few years ago fired in the exchange. Anarchism had become a lucrative business and smart people exploited the terror inspired by the crimes of the fanatics. Sebastian Faure, formerly the clerk of a stockbroker, was the go-between who managed things for the brokers and anarchists. This circumstance explains perhaps the 500 franc notes which Faure so often changed, and which probably came from the “Fund for the Timely Prevention of Dynamite Accidents,” because for years past nobody knew how Faure made his living. Thus the police had caught the bankers of the anarchists. Evidently, it gave publicity to its discoveries in order to clear itself of the charge of having supplied Vaillant with the 100 francs he had required for the manufacture of his bomb. At the trial, the judge inquired about the source of that 100 francs so cautiously and so forbearingly that the public did not hesitate to regard the charge as perfectly true.

Anarchists’ Violence Justified By Clerical Politicians

Press and politicians assert that Socialism is the advance fruit of anarchism; one begins with being a collectivist and, if only logical, courageous and sincere enough, unfailingly winds up an adherent of dynamite. The assertion was not a happy one. A strange and unfortunate accident willed it that the anarchists who distinguished themselves through the propaganda of the idea and the propaganda of the deed almost without exception had been educated by clergymen.⁴

Sebastian Faure, the most phrase-mongering anarchist speaker, who held meetings throughout France at which he called for deeds of force with extraordinary vehemence, spent his youth in the priests’ seminary in St. Etienne. After the death of his father, at the age of twenty-five, when he was about to be ordained a priest, he left it to enter upon a business career wherein he blew in the

⁴ See Daniel De Leon’s analysis of this subject in *Socialism Versus Anarchism*.

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fortune of his wife. Despite his vociferous activity as an anarchist, he remained in close touch with the clergy, and in the cities where he agitated had confabs with the local priests.

Cyvoct, at present sojourning in a bagnio, belongs to the Catholic Union in Lyon; he was still a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul when he first appeared as an anarchist speaker. Ravachol and Vaillant had had a religious upbringing. Caserio was conspicuous by his fervent piety. At the seminary where he spent his childhood he was called “il santo” (the saint), and up to his fifteenth year he functioned at mass as choir boy.

It is characteristic that among the many persons arrested for having openly approved of the assassination of Carnot, there was found not a single Socialist but there were some clergymen. One of them indulged in exalted praise of Caserio and expressed regret that he could not send him money. The clergy hated Carnot, whom they regarded as a freemason; on the very day of his death, the Catholic paper, *La Croix du Nord* (*The Cross of the North*), contained an article leveled at the President of the Republic, prophesying that “his earthly days were numbered.”

At all times the church has maintained that it has the right to judge and condemn kings and princes. In the middle ages it deposed potentates; the Jesuits placed the dagger in the hands of the murderers of Henry III and Henry IV of France; as Pascal has proved in his *Lettres Provinciales* (*Provincial Letters*), the most eminent savants defended the maxim “that one could wish for the death of persons who are about to persecute us,” and, furthermore, the death of “persons who injure our goods and our honor, of false witnesses who testify against us, and of judges who unjustly sentence us.”

Who knows but what these teachings are in some heads effective to this very day? At any rate, the works characterized by Pascal have never been condemned by the Pope. Moreover, does not the Old Testament glorify Judith because she gave herself up to the Assyrian general, Holofernes, made him drunk and then killed him? Who knows whether or not this tragic tale, which Caserio

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learned in his childhood, filled him with the courage to assassinate Carnot?

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