

James Guillaume (1844–1916) & the birth of syndicalism, anarchist communism

Anonymous

March 1917

The international labor movement, the anarchists and syndicalists, have lost one of their earliest pioneers. James Guillaume, the friend and co-worker of Bakunin, has died in Switzerland.

He witnessed the first awakening of the militant international spirit in the laboring classes of all countries governed by capitalism and its servant, statecraft.

When on the 28th of September, 1864, at a meeting in St. Martin's Hall, London, the International Workingmen's Association came to life a new dawn flamed up on the horizon and created strong hopes and visions all leading up to the future, when the barriers and prejudices between peoples would fall, and knowledge, solidarity, courage, would enable the working people of the earth to throw down the yoke of oppression and servitude.

It was to this spirit, these convictions that the life of James Guillaume was consecrated. To the very last he remained their noble knight, whom neither disappointment with individuals nor impatience with the slow growth of freedom's true army could lure from the right path.

When in the Internationale unavoidable clash between revolutionists and politicians, between authoritarians and anti-authoritarians occurred, James Guillaume stood with Bakunin, and others against Karl Marx and his followers. They contended that political socialism as Marx and Engels expounded it would inevitably lead to the surrender of the interests of the proletariat to the state and to a new deception and enslavement under the political machinery of the ruling classes. The history of the labor movement of the last fifty years as far as it followed the lead of parliamentary socialism has proved this contention to be only too true.

Out of these travails in the ranks of the Internationale, Anarchist Communism, and the anti-political principles of syndicalism, direct action, anti-militarism, general strike were born. James Guillaume was one of the most clear-sighted early propagandists of these principles, which later were more elaborated by the writings of thinkers and authors like Peter Kropotkin, Elisee Reclus, Errico Malatesta, Domela Nieuwenhuis, Emile Pouget.

While Bakunin expounded the philosophy of the revolutionary movement, James Guillaume was its practical counsellor and organizer. Later he also became the historian of the Internationale. His grand masterly work *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs*, is so rich in material that it has become the one great source for the writers and students who want to gain insight and knowledge as to the beginnings of the modern international labor movement.

In spite of world-wide slaughter [this was written during the First World War — ed.] there are hundreds of men and women in all of the belligerent countries who will at least in spirit assemble and join hands around the grave of James Guillaume to renew the pledge never to give up the noble fight for solidarity, international co-operation between individuals, groups, and countries.

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