

The French Revolution and 1848

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Abstract

The end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century were crucial years for the development of anarchist theory and practice. Anarchist ideology would draw on key ideas from the Enlightenment. The French Revolution would provide a revolutionary model of direct action driven by revolutionary minorities in the cause of liberation and an early form of socialism. It would also be during this period that the term anarchist would enter the political lexicon in a prominent way, and the first anarchist texts would be published. During the French Revolution, the roots of anarchist political theory and revolutionary practice would be laid. Later anarchists would embrace the Revolution's spontaneous revolutionary violence, as well as the role played by revolutionary minorities and the proto-socialist ideas they would promote. Additionally, the direct democracy practised by the Sections and Commune of Paris would provide a model of revolutionary political governance. Also during the Revolution, the term anarchist would enter the political discourse of revolutionaries.

The nineteenth century is considered to be the Age of Ideologies, a period when many contemporary political and social philosophies of the modern era came into being. During this century, anarchism developed into a fully formed political ideology alongside liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, and socialism. However, one can trace its intellectual and revolutionary roots back to the century that preceded it. Beginning with the radical assault on authority launched by Enlightenment *philosophes* and continuing through the struggles of working-class peoples during the French Revolution and 1848, anarchism came into being as a distinct and coherent revolutionary movement in Europe and beyond. Although some scholars argue that anarchism can really only be understood as a response to social problems brought on by industrialisation and modernisation, the intellectual roots of the movement developed earlier.¹ The Enlightenment attacks upon secular and religious intellectual authority at the beginning of the eighteenth century proved to be the catalyst of the anarchist ideology in the nineteenth century and beyond. In addition, the experience of the revolutions in 1789–93 and 1848 contributed significantly to the development of the ideology and movement as well. It is this combination of theory and practice that created the foundation for the classical anarchism of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

The Enlightenment

Broadly speaking, the Enlightenment built upon the Scientific Revolution of the previous centuries by refining the tools of empiricism and rationalism in an attempt to understand the subjectivity of the human world within the objectivity of the natural world. Such Enlightenment thinkers posited the idea that all humans were innately capable of reason, and through this rationalism, they are capable of understanding not only the natural laws of the universe but could

¹ Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt argue in *Black Flame: the Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland, Edinburg: AK Press, 2009) that anarchism as a coherent political tradition can only be understood as a response of modern capitalism, beginning with Bakunin. Thus they preclude not only the Enlightenment, but also Stirner and Proudhon whom they do view as insufficiently anti-capitalist. Paul McLaughlin though makes a compelling contemporary case for Enlightenment roots of anarchism in his *Anarchism and Authority: a Philosophical Introduction to Classical Anarchism* (Ashgate: Burlington, 2007).

also utilise these tools to grasp fully the laws that governed the human world. Once such natural laws were discovered, many believed that people and societies should be free to reform themselves and live in conformity with those natural laws. In fact, many believed that the problems of the modern world could be attributed to custom, tradition, superstition, and oppressive authority that stood in the way of reform. If individuals could break free of these fetters, the result would be deeper understanding and progress. The lynchpin of reason was key, but equally important was the concept of freedom. The individual could only exercise their reason once free to do so. However, those who benefited from the status quo, be they religious or political authorities, often stood in the way. As Immanuel Kant famously wrote in his short work *What is Enlightenment?*:

All that is required for this enlightenment is freedom; and particularly the least harmful of all that may be called freedom, namely, the freedom for man to make public use of his reason in all matters. But I hear people clamor on all sides: Don't argue! The officer says: Don't argue, drill! The tax collector: Don't argue, pay! The pastor: Don't argue, believe! ... Here we have restrictions on freedom everywhere. Which restriction is hampering enlightenment, and which does not, or even promotes it? I answer: The public use of a man's reason must be free at all times, and this alone can bring enlightenment among men.²

It should not then be surprising that such ideas later spawned a movement that took the motto: 'No Gods, No Masters'.

By the end of the Enlightenment era, William Godwin developed the first truly anarchist ideas, of which built upon concepts developed in previous decades. The first sign of incipient anarchist thought can though arguably be found in the obscure writing of Jean Meslier, a Catholic priest who worked out a revolutionary philosophy of atheism and promoted a world without law or inequality. His *Testament of Jean Meslier*, published posthumously in 1729, laid out a rationalist critique of organised religion. In a series of proofs attacking the contradictions and logical errors he saw in Christianity, he argued for a natural religion, without texts, authority or doctrine beyond 'do unto other what we want to have done to us'.³ He focused upon religion as source of error and oppression, and he argued that economic inequality was the prime source of evil in the world. He believed that there were enough resources for all, and spreading those goods equally would yield peace and happiness, obviating the need for coercive law.⁴

Meslier's works were rediscovered by the French *philosophes* later in the century. They provided a basis for their own critiques of religious authority and a foundation for more robust atheist arguments. Voltaire published an edited abridgment of the Meslier's *Testament* and built upon his criticisms of the Catholic Church and arguments for 'natural religion'.⁵ Voltaire influenced later anarchist thinkers, who used his anti-clerical arguments put forth in his *Philosophical Dictionary* and anti-authoritarian sentiments seen in *Candide*, which described the irrationality

² Marvin Perry, et al., *Sources of the Western Tradition*, Volume II (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 56–57.

³ Jean Meslier, 'Testament of Jean Meslier', in *The Great Anger: Ultra-Revolutionary Writing in France from the Atheist Priest to the Bonnot Gang*, ed. and trans. Mitchell Abidor (Pacifica, CA: Marxists Internet Archive Publications, 2013), 995–999, Kindle Edition.

⁴ Meslier, 'On the Great Good at Advantage for Men if They all lived Peaceably, Enjoying in Common the Goods and Conveniences of Life', in *The Great Anger*, 1001–1092.

⁵ Abidor, *The Great Anger*, 230–236.

of contemporary power structures.⁶ But Voltaire's discouragement of radical change and associations with European monarchs, such as Frederick the Great, limited his appeal to anarchists in the following century.

Echoing Meslier in sentiment, Baron d'Holbach's religious and political writings strongly resonated with later anarchist thinkers. In his *System of Nature*, Holbach crafted an entirely materialistic world-view by asserting that reason alone should rule, rejecting religion entirely. By using experience and reason, individuals could completely understand nature and its irrefutable ties to the laws of physics and chemistry. With this materialist understanding, he argued that humankind's chief desire is to achieve happiness through the presence of pleasure and absence of pain. He speculated that misery is the result of misunderstanding one's own nature and the larger natural laws of the physical and social world.⁷ He believed the primary causes of this misunderstanding were religious and secular authorities that abused their power for gain. He extended his rationalist and materialist arguments into the political sphere. In his *Social System*, *Natural Politics*, and the *Universal Morality*, he sought to reduce government to its naturalistic principles. He believed the goal of social association was simply based on utility. He endorsed a form of social contract theory where individuals contracted with each other to secure social existence and then extended it to create government to protect the benefits of social living. And while not making an explicit anarchist argument for the elimination of government, he believed that if governments cease to provide for the common welfare, then citizens had the right to remove that government through revolution.⁸

The most famous of the social contract thinkers of the Enlightenment was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's influence on later anarchists was complex. His embrace of the natural goodness of humankind and his critiques that all forms of misery were the result of manmade exploitation and oppression, particularly as articulated in the *Discourse on Inequality*, resonated strongly in anarchist thought. His analysis that all governments were little more than oppressive institutions created by the wealthy to protect and extend their property could have easily appeared in later anarchist works. As could the opening of his *Social Contract* 'Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains'.⁹ While Rousseau's criticism of the emerging modern civilisation had clear appeal, his solution to the problem was more vexing to many anarchists. Rousseau's arguments for a form of small-scale, direct, participatory democracy in a relatively economically egalitarian society has led some scholars to see him as a proto-anarchist.¹⁰ For many anarchists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries though, Rousseau was too closely associated with the Jacobins of the French Revolution. Beginning with Proudhon, many rejected Rousseau as promoting solely political solutions to all problems. Though much of

⁶ C. Alexander McKinley, *Illegitimate Children, of the Enlightenment: Anarchists and the French Revolution, 1880–1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 87–90.

⁷ Max Pearson Cushing, *Baron d'Holbach, a Study of Eighteenth Century Radicalism in France* (Lancaster: The New Era Printing Company, 1914), 65–68.

⁸ Michael LeBuffe, 'Paul-Henri Thiry (Baron) d'Holbach', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (Ed), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/holbach/>.

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, ed. and trans. G. D. H. Cole (London: Everyman, 1993), 181.

¹⁰ See Stephen Ellenburg, *Rousseau's Political Philosophy: an Interpretation from Within* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976) and Robert Graham, 'Anarchy and Democracy'. *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, 69 (Winter 2017), 18–20, 35. <https://proxy.sau.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1858084701?accountid=28567>.

Rousseau's work influenced Proudhon, the latter would rely on economic contracts between people, rather than political associations.

Rousseau's colleague Denis Diderot more typically appealed to later anarchists. In his *Encyclopédie* entry on 'Political Authority', he argued that the true sovereign was the nation itself, and the only legitimate legislature could be the people. But, like Voltaire, his wariness of revolutionary change, and his association with Catherine the Great would dampen his appeal. For anarchists, particularly at the turn of the twentieth century, his most influential work was *The Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville*, a fictional description of life among indigenous peoples in the South Pacific. He described a simple naturalistic society, without government or central state. Here the people, guided by natural law, free love, and association, lived a contented life based on natural sociability. Diderot's work, republished by anarchists in France, provided a blueprint for a kind of anarchist civilisation.¹¹

While elements of future anarchist thought can be found among Enlightenment thinkers, the English philosopher William Godwin stands out as the first clear anarchist. Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* built on the rationalist ideas of the preceding century and made the first complete statement of anarchist philosophy.¹² Godwin argued that government was the source of humankind's ills and that individual understanding was the only legitimate form of imposition. As Jared McGeough points out, at the heart of Godwin's philosophy were the dual convictions that humans are perfectible and the 'universal principle of reason supersedes the "shrine of positive law and political institution"'.¹³ He believed individual reason could replace positive law, allowing the creation of a system of political simplicity. His ideal vision was of political association governed by public opinion, which would encourage virtue and discourage vice through a system of public inspection and what he termed 'positive sincerity'.¹⁴ As John Clarke asserts, this association would take the form of a federation of small-scale, decentralised direct democracies,¹⁵ an idea embraced by later anarchists. The goal of this association was to make individuals free, virtuous, and wise, eliminating any need for political coercion. As he wrote in the second book of the *Enquiry*: 'There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice, as it is called, and no government'.¹⁶

His belief in a discoverable and uniform code of rational truth can be found in granting the maximum amount of intellectual freedom and engagement between citizens. Maximum political liberty had to be coupled with economic equality, as inequality produced vice and class conflict requiring the need of repressive government. Poverty, he argued, was the root cause of social strife.¹⁷ Godwin flirted with communist views in the earliest edition of the *Enquiry*, but he later retreated from that position. Like Rousseau before and Proudhon after, Godwin envisioned a

¹¹ McKinley, *Illegitimate Children of the Enlightenment*, 107–110.

¹² James Joll, *The Anarchists* (London: Eye and Spottiswoode, 1964), 31.

¹³ Jared McGeough, "'So Variable and Inconstant a System': Rereading the Anarchism of Godwin's Political Justice," *Studies in Romanticism*, 52:2 (Summer 2013), 276. See also Peter Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1984), 96.

¹⁴ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 312–313, 551–552, 593–603, 610.

¹⁵ John P. Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 191–194.

¹⁶ As quoted in Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 7–8.

¹⁷ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (London, 1794), II, 30.

world of relatively equal but independent property ownership. He believed that property was necessary to maintain individual independence, but such property had to be distributed evenly enough to prevent exploitation.¹⁸ Writing during the tumult of the French Revolution, Godwin avoided any endorsement of political revolution. In his opinion, violent revolution unleashed the passions and, in fact, hinders the development of reason. He put his faith in education rather than revolution as the key to progress.¹⁹ Godwin's influence on future anarchists was significant. Later thinkers like Proudhon, Tolstoy, and Kropotkin would echo his ideas. In his entry on 'Anarchism' for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1910 Kropotkin wrote:

It was Godwin, in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (2 vols., 1793), who was the first to formulate the political and economical conceptions of anarchism, even though he did not give that name to the ideas developed in his remarkable work. Laws, he wrote, are not a product of the wisdom of our ancestors: they are the product of their passions, their timidity, their jealousies and their ambition. The remedy they offer is worse than the evils they pretend to cure. If and only if all laws and courts were abolished, and the decisions in the arising contests were left to reasonable men chosen for that purpose, real justice would gradually be evolved. As to the state, Godwin frankly claimed its abolition. A society, he wrote, can perfectly well exist without any government: only the communities should be small and perfectly autonomous. Speaking of property, he stated that the rights of every one 'to every substance capable of contributing to the benefit of a human being' must be regulated by justice alone: the substance must go 'to him who most wants it'. His conclusion was communism. Godwin, however, had not the courage to maintain his opinions. He entirely rewrote later on his chapter on property and mitigated his communist views in the second edition of *Political Justice* (8 vols., 1796).²⁰

The French Revolution

At the end of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution exploded, radically altering the political landscape of Europe. As the era of mass politics developed, anarchism developed within a Europe shaped by the forces unleashed by the Revolution. For the anarchists of the following century, the French Revolution was profoundly influential. The legacy of the Revolution contributed key ideas to the movement including the primacy of revolutionary action and violence, the importance of social and economic revolution over the political conquest of power, the centrality of radicalised mass working-class populations, and the role played by revolutionary minorities. Additionally, in their understandings of the Revolution, they saw their movement's predecessors among the working-class *sans-culottes* and peasants and the *enragés*, the ultra-revolutionary agitators.

The French Revolution offered the anarchists a model in which to build their own revolutionary movement. When nineteenth century anarchists such as Kropotkin, among others, looked

¹⁸ Godwin, *Enquiry*, 710, 744.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251–252, 262, 294.

²⁰ Peter Kropotkin, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition, 'Anarchism' (Cambridge: University Press, 1911), Vol. 1, 915.

back at the French Revolution, they saw much that appealed to them. For them, the French Revolution was primarily a social revolution, which aimed to create a form of popular direct democracy and a primitive form of socialism.²¹

Anarchists believed a crucial factor in the beginning of the Revolution was less the political and fiscal crisis of the *ancien régime*, than the growing economic crisis. The failed agricultural reforms of Turgot unleashed considerable unrest in the French countryside. This unrest, organised by anonymous agitators, collectively called the *jacques* and waged a campaign of violence and intimidation against the noble and clerical landlords in the hopes of recovering their lost communes. These revolts and the breakdown of law and order did much to undermine the legitimacy of Louis XVI's monarchy. For anarchists, the *jacquerie* fulfilled a number of important criteria. The movement appeared to be largely spontaneous and leaderless. The goal was economic and social, the destruction of feudalism and the restoration of the communes, which Kropotkin and others believed to be an early form of socialism. The means employed to achieve these goals was revolutionary violence. To many anarchists, one of the first great achievements of the Revolution, the formal abolition of feudalism on August 4, 1789 was directly attributable to these revolutionary peasants.

This model of spontaneous, leaderless masses using revolutionary violence to achieve a social and economic revolution influenced their general understanding of the Revolution and its major accomplishments. When looking at the early events of the Revolution, the anarchists often ignored the drama playing out in the Estates General and the National Assembly. Rather than focus on the Tennis Court Oath or the proclamation of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, anarchist discussion of the French Revolution concentrated on seemingly obscure events in the early summer of 1789, such as the riot at the Réveillon paper manufactory, the looting of grain from the St. Lazare monastery, and the destruction of the *octroi* (the custom houses taxing goods entering Paris). Like the *jacquerie*, these were events of spontaneous revolutionary violence emanating directly from the lower classes without elite leadership. The more prominent revolutionary events, like the storming of the Bastille and Women's March on Versailles, were described in similar terms. In anarchist histories, the taking of the Bastille had little to do with events in government at Versailles, but instead were carried out to secure the grain and gunpowder in the fortress. The March on Versailles follows in a similar vein, as revolutionary masses, mainly market women angry about the high prices of bread, invaded the King's palace and forced his return to Paris, with no concern for the trepidation and even opposition of moderate, elite reformist aristocrats and bourgeois politicians.²²

This narrative of the Revolution continued throughout their descriptions of the most revolutionary years, 1792–94. The overthrow of the monarchy on August 10, 1792, was the work of the radicalised Parisian workers and soldiers in the sections, local neighbourhood administrative bodies that served as a kind of proto-anarchist political institution of participatory direct democracy. Through the sections, the people acted on their own. While bourgeois politicians eventually supported their actions, they only joined late, if at all. Succeeding revolutionary events are described in the same vein. The September Massacres, while worrisome due to its excesses, were

²¹ Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1793* is the most thorough anarchist history of the Revolution. Murray Bookchin echoed a great many of his ideas a century later in his history of the Revolution. See Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1793*, trans. N. F. Dryhurst (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) and Murray Bookchin, *The Third Revolution: Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Cassels, 1998), Vol. 1.

²² McKinley, *Illegitimate Children of the Enlightenment*, 13–36.

explained as an attempt by the people to save their revolution from counter-revolutionary threats. Later anarchists viewed the purging of the Girondins and the continual push for extending the revolution into economic and social areas as the workings of a revolutionary people, often in opposition to the bourgeois politicians in the Jacobin-dominated Convention.

While anarchists admired, celebrated, and viewed the *grand journées* as models for future anarchist action, they rejected the Terror as a means to secure the Revolution. Among most anarchists, the Terror symbolised a failure of the Revolution. Not because it utilised political violence to achieve its goals, but because it was political violence organised and directed by a centralised state. Anarchists routinely denied the ability to create social revolution through such a state. They saw the Convention and Committee of Public Safety as repressive institutions, dedicated to pursuing a centralising, statist Revolution, and one that in fact was outright opposed to any socialist reform. While the radicalised sections were able to achieve some temporary reform (the return of the communes and the Maximum), the Convention increasingly focused on thwarting and eventually eliminating those seeking to push the revolution to the left. As the revolutionary people attempted to continue the Revolution, the Jacobins sought solely to secure their own power, even at the expense of turning on their *sans-culotte* allies. It is, in fact, during the Terror, that the term anarchist first entered the political lexicon. Jacobin and Girondin legislators used the term to denounce the *enragés* and *sans-culottes* in the sections whose push for social revolution, they claimed, undermined the indivisible republic.

This was one of the important lessons anarchists learned from the Revolution. Once power is concentrated, the government is cut off from the revolutionary light and heat of the masses. It is only a matter of time until the revolution will slow and move towards conservatism. As a result, a core of anarchist ideology became the refusal to take political power or seek a revolutionary dictatorship to achieve social revolution. From this point forward, anarchists, saw dictatorships as incapable of creating liberation and socialism. For anarchists like Kropotkin and Bookchin, the end of the Revolution came not on the ninth of Thermidor but with the execution of the *enragés* and the destruction of the sections, which preceded the fall of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety.

The anarchists of the nineteenth century learned much from their study of the French Revolution beyond their opposition to dictatorship. As they found their intellectual roots in the Enlightenment, in the Revolution they discovered the tactic revolutionary violence and their activist forefathers. The *sans-culottes*, they argued, created a political culture of progressive equality, including sexual equality. In the sections, they saw an experiment in radical, participatory direct democracy, a model for future forms of self-governance.²³

Anarchists found the *sans-culottes'* early expressions of socialism appealing as well. While *sans-culottes* pushed the Convention to restore briefly the communes, take action to punish monopolists, and reduce the cost of bread, they also sought to build a form of socialism among themselves through mutual aid and social insurance. Unlike the Jacobins, the *sans-culottes* were convinced, similarly to the Enlightenment thinkers discussed above, that liberty could only come with economic equality. In calling for government intervention to reduce the cost of bread, the *sans-culottes* addressed the Convention and its commitment to the free market:

²³ See Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, 180–188; Bookchin, *The Third Revolution*, 312–327; Graham, “Anarchy and Democracy.”

You will doubtless object that this goes against the system of liberty you have established. On the contrary, we are going to prove that in not doing this you will forever annihilate liberty and equality. In fact, a hundred individuals who will monopolize all production of the empire could very easily put the nation again in the yoke by giving or refusing it food. Only that portion of men would be free.²⁴

As the *sans-culottes* served as the revolutionary people, the sections and Commune as the forms of anarchist self-governance, among the leaders of these, the *enragés*, anarchists found their direct antecedents. From Bakunin onwards, anarchists stressed the importance of revolutionary minorities to bring about social revolution. Bakunin called them ‘invisible pilots of the revolution’ who inspired a revolutionary people but never ruled them, as the revolution should always remain the work of the people themselves. During the French Revolution, Jacques Roux, Jacques Hébert, Jean Varlet, Pierre Chaumette, Sylvain Maréchal, Anacharsis Clootz, and others played this role.²⁵ These agitators and journalists sought to radicalise the people and inspire them to push the Revolution in ever more progressive directions. They articulated popular demands for economic equality and social revolution, but never attempted to seize and hold power for themselves. Their continual demands for social revolution, economic equality, class warfare, international solidarity, atheism, direct democracy, and resistance to state terror pushed the revolution further and formed the nucleus of anarchist ideology and tactics in the decades that followed.

The proto-anarchist revolution of the *sans-culottes* and the *enragés* failed and met its end on the scaffold of the Terror in 1794. But during their relatively brief, but intense, period of activity, the anarchists found much to admire, inspiring their own movement.²⁶ Their ideas may have been only partially formed, but the anarchists who followed built upon them to create a more complete and systematic ideology in the decades after the French Revolution.

The French Revolution radically changed European politics, launching a host of new movements and political ideas. For many on the left, the Revolution achieved mythic status, with many working towards its re-creation, embracing the Jacobin ideal of creating a republican government based on universal suffrage. In the newly emerging socialist camp, some sought to use that centralised democratic republic as a means to create social and economic equality. In addition, an alternative narrative began to develop among socialists in the 1840s. This counter-narrative learned different lessons from the French Revolution, rejecting the model of political revolution and dictatorship. This new movement centred on the ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first thinker to embrace openly the title of anarchist, and Max Stirner, an influential young left Hegelian who laid the groundwork for anarcho-individualism.

Proudhon and Stirner

In 1840, Proudhon published his first and most influential book, *What is Property? or, an Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*. In this work, Proudhon made a biting and di-

²⁴ Anonymous, *Vous foutez-vous de nous*. Paris, l’Imprimerie des Sans-Culottes, 1792. Trans. Mitchell Abidor, last modified 2007, accessed 12 July 2017, <https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/1792/sans-culottes.htm>.

²⁵ Bookchin sees Jean Varlet as the key figure in the drive for sectional direct democracy and social revolution. See Bookchin, *The Third Revolution*, 326.

²⁶ See McKinley, *Illegitimate Children of the Enlightenment*, 13–82.

rect assault on the morality and contradictions of private ownership of the means of production—this private ownership of the means of production, Proudhon termed ‘property’, differentiating it from ownership of produced goods which he term ‘possession’. In his analysis, all people had a right to occupation and existence and a right to the means to do so. But under the current property arrangements, workers exchange their labour with the owner of the means of production (the proprietor) in exchange for wages. Since the product of labour is necessarily collective and profits generated are social property, the workers should receive a right to the portion he produces, but this is siphoned off by the proprietor in the form of profits, who contributes nothing to production beyond capital.²⁷ In a pre-Marxist version of surplus labour value, Proudhon concluded that workers are thus exploited. He concluded famously, ‘WHAT IS PROPERTY! May I not likewise answer, IT IS ROBBERY’.²⁸ This exploitation inevitably leads to social conflict and, sounding like much the thinkers discussed earlier, he argued: ‘The right of property was the origin of evil on the earth, the first link in the long chain of crimes and misfortunes which the human race has endured since its birth. The delusion of prescription is the fatal charm thrown over the intellect, the death sentence breathed into the conscience, to arrest man’s progress towards truth, and bolster up the worship of error’.²⁹

According to Proudhon, social conflict that is the inevitable result of property leads to the creation of government, whose main function is to protect the property of the proprietors, deny the rights of individuals to support themselves, and protect economic exploitation. This form of oppression exists whatever form the government happens to take, be it monarchy or representative democracy. As long as inequality reigned and exploitative property arrangements existed, even in the most perfect democracy, individuals will still not be free. The state is always tyranny.³⁰ Proudhon thus broke with many of his fellow radicals on the left in regard to the French Revolution and the Jacobin tradition. While he believed in the Revolution’s goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the Jacobins’ defence of private property made it impossible. Private property ensured inequality and thus denied liberty and fraternity.³¹ Additionally, the centralised bureaucratic republic created by the Jacobins simply refined and increased the oppressive nature of the state.

Since property led directly to social conflict, it directly undermined society. Proudhon believed that humans were naturally social beings and required society to produce the means of existence. In order for society to function without conflict, it required mutual recognition of equality. Thus society required the creation of a just social system. But just as Proudhon rejected the Jacobin tradition, he rejected the communist solution as well. Communists, like Gracchus Babeuf, sought to deal with the problem of economic inequality, but their solution proved to be just as damaging as capitalism. Using a bit of Hegelian analysis, Proudhon argued that capitalism, as thesis, through its creation of radical inequality and exploitation created communism as its antithesis. But the communist system through its absolute equal division of property and all the goods of society, enforced by a centralised state would create a tyrannical system of deadening

²⁷ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry in the Principle and Right of Government*, trans. J. A. Langlois (2015), 72–80, 91–92, 115. Kindle.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 53, 86.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 157. See also Robert Hoffman, *Revolutionary Justice: the Political and Social Thought of P.J. Proudhon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

uniformity. As the state, by taking over the economy, would grow ever more powerful, the individual would be lost. Humans may be social beings, but they also love independence and freedom. If capitalism sacrificed equality in the name of liberty achieving neither, communism sacrificed liberty in the name of equality and achieved the same result.³² Proudhon thus provided what he saw as the Hegelian synthesis between the systems of property and communism and declared, 'I am an anarchist'.³³

Proudhon argued that his anarchism (or mutualism as he termed it) preserved both liberty and equality and allowed for true fraternity. Building on the social contract thinkers of the Enlightenment, Proudhon envisioned a new form of social contract, not a political contract between citizens or between people and rulers but economic contracts between free individuals. These contracts, he believed, are the only form of non-coercive contract possible. Rather than a system of state-enforced private or government-controlled property ownership, Proudhon proposed a society where worker associations, similar to those he had witnessed in Lyon, owned the means of production. These associations would produce and engage in trade with other associations through the form of free contracts. Workers in each association would then receive a share of the profits of the social products that they contributed to producing. This would ensure enough equality for all to be able to produce and prevent the use of property in leading to exploitation. The role of the state was then reduced to providing free or low interest credit to the associations and helping maintain contracts. These small-scale associations would federate together and create a decentralised and radically democratic state.³⁴

Free association, liberty—whose sole function is to maintain equality in the means of production and equivalence in exchanges—is the only possible, the only just, the only true form of society. Politics is the science of liberty. The government of man by man (under whatever name it be disguised) is oppression. Society finds its highest perfection in the union of order with anarchy.³⁵

Like Godwin before him, Proudhon remained wary of using violent revolution to achieve social reforms. His understanding of the French Revolution and his experience in the revolution of 1848, which will be discussed below, led him to conclude that social change could only happen through non-coercive means. His vision was of ever-expanding networks of worker-owned cooperatives that would gradually replace the state and achieve his mutualist society. As Robert Hoffman argues, following the disaster of 1848, Proudhon shifted to become a more serious moral philosopher, and his vision of revolution increasingly looked to use mutualist relations to create a free organic community and moral regeneration.³⁶

Proudhon became responsible for helping to create the anarchist school of socialism. His followers, clustered in France, Spain, Switzerland, Russia and Italy developed his ideas of workers' self-organisation, free association, and anti-statist politics. These ideas were refined by Bakunin and his anarcho-collectivism in the First International, Kropotkin's anarcho-communism at the turn of the century, as well as the development of anarcho-syndicalism in the twentieth century.

³² Proudhon, *What is Property?*, 210–223, 227–228.

³³ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 243–246.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 246.

³⁶ Hoffman, *Revolutionary Justice*.

But another school of anarchism, like Proudhon's, emerged in response to the French Revolution and Hegelian philosophy. This anarcho-individualist school of thought is most closely associated with Max Stirner and his *The Ego and Its Own*, published in 1844.

Stirner's abstract and philosophical work made several early anarchist arguments. Like Proudhon, Stirner rejected the Jacobin tradition of the French Revolution. The Republic, created by the Convention, created a state even more absolute than the monarchy it had overthrown and replaced. In fact, it was the inevitable outgrowth of the Christian monarchical tradition. As the state grew in power over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its oppressive power only grew with its transformation into a more democratic institution. The only difference he saw between the subservience demanded by clerics and those demanded by the Jacobins was simply the degree. While the church only demanded your faith, the liberal state demanded your complete dedication. Liberalism, he argued, dissolved the individual into simply a servant of the state, eliminating all mediating bodies and institutions. Political liberty, as defined after the Revolution, meant no more than absolute subjection to the state. Thus liberalism had become the ultimate form of absolutism. For Stirner, the overriding goal was to protect the individual from all authority. To allow the individuals to create themselves as freely as possible, he rejected all claims to authority over the individual, be they religious, political, or economic.

Stirner, building on Hegel, critiqued the alienation of labour caused by the emerging industrial capitalist system. Like Proudhon, he argued the system created an oppressive dependence between the poor and rich, one that inevitably leads to class warfare and the creation of the state to maintain the dominance of the wealthy.³⁷ While Proudhon and Godwin had been leery of violent revolution to effect social change, Stirner was much less reticent. 'In short, the property question cannot be solved so amicably as the socialists, yes, even the communists, dream. It is solved only by the war of all against all. The poor will become free from proprietors only when they—rebel, rise up'.³⁸ Seeing a coalition of the industrial proletariat and intellectual vagabonds like himself, he believed that true revolution could set them free. 'The state' he wrote, 'rests on the slavery of labor. If labor becomes free, the state is lost'. Stirner, like Proudhon, rejected political participation or a strategy for seizing control of the state. Sacrificing one's individuality in service to God and the state, or even a revolutionary party, made no difference, they all claimed you and oppressed your individuality. Parties are simply states within the state. He wrote: 'All parties are shattered not against the state, but against the ego'.³⁹ Individual rebellion became the ultimate solution. 'I am the deadly enemy of the state, which always hovers between the alternatives, it or I'.⁴⁰

As Proudhon did, Stirner rejected the communist solution. He believed that communism simply placed the power currently in the hands of the proprietors into the hands of the collectivity. While communism addressed the problem of inequality and exploitation, it relied on the ever-increasing power of the state. As liberalism had increased the power of the state, communism would grow it ever further. The state could claim both political and economic life, leaving little room, if any at all, to the individual. His revolution was pure insurrection, not aimed at cre-

³⁷ Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. and trans. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 90–91, 96, 105.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

ating new institutions or new constitutions, but to create a world that is institution-less and constitution-less.⁴¹

Therefore we two, the state and I, are enemies. I, the egoist, have not a heart for the welfare of this 'human society.' I sacrifice nothing to it, I utilise it, but to be able to utilise it completely I transform it into my property and my creature; that is, I annihilate it, and form in its place the *Union of Egoists*.⁴²

Stirner's absolute rejection of any kind of collectivism has led some scholars, like R.W.K. Paterson, to reject him as part of the anarchist school of thought.⁴³ In recent decades with the development of post-anarchism, Stirner's relevance and influence has seen some revival. Andrew Koch agrees that he is outside of the classical anarchist tradition of Godwin, Proudhon, and Kropotkin but that his attacks on the 'fixed idea' would set the stage for the twentieth-century development of post-structuralism.⁴⁴ While Iain Mackay embraces Stirner's egoism, as it gives a totalising understanding of freedom, one that Mackay argues can only be achieved through libertarian communism.⁴⁵

The Revolutions of 1848

Only several years after the publication of Proudhon and Stirner's foundational works on anarchism, Europe was rocked by another revolutionary outburst, the largest since the French Revolution. Beginning in France in February 1848 and spreading across the continent, the conservative order established by Metternich after the end of the French Revolution collapsed with astonishing rapidity. In urban centres across Europe, coalitions of liberals, democrats, nationalists, socialists, and others took to the streets against absolutist and liberal monarchies. The revolutions achieved rapid, but fleeting, success. The opposition to monarchy might have brought this disparate opposition together into coalition, but it was not long before the coalitions frayed and then collapsed. By and large, within a few short years, the revolutions were stopped and the revolutionary forces sent into disarray. This experience of failed revolution reinforced the basic conceptions of the anarchist movement. Both Proudhon and Bakunin were participants, in various degrees, in the revolutions, and both came to the same conclusion: attempts at coalition building between the working classes and bourgeoisie were doomed, as were any attempts at achieving revolutionary change through a government mechanism. If anything, the failure of 1848 strengthened these anarchist convictions.

In France, where the revolutions began, the Parisian working class and their radical clubs were instrumental in the street fighting that brought down July Monarchy in February. Quickly, a democratic republic was declared and a provisional government formed. As a result of the large role played by the working class, the provisional government, made up mostly of middle-class Jacobin-inspired republicans, promised a series of social reforms (primarily dealing with

⁴¹ Ibid., 107, 228, 280.

⁴² Ibid., 161.

⁴³ R. W. K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (London, New York Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁴⁴ Andrew Koch, "Max Stirner: the Last Hegelian or the First Poststructuralist?", *Anarchist Studies*, 5:2 (1997), 95–107.

⁴⁵ Iain McKay, "Individualism Versus Egoism", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, 68 (Fall, 2016), 31–34. <https://proxy.sau.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1826428559?accountid=28567>.

the problems of unemployment) and even brought in a Parisian worker as a member. While the government balked at creating a Ministry of Labor, they allowed the creation of a 'Commission for the Workers' at the Luxembourg palace. The Commission became a centre for working-class self-organisation. Described by Woodcock as a kind of soviet, the Luxembourg Commission saw the election of delegates from the various trades, who organised for social and economic reform, as opposed to the political reform championed in the radical clubs. The Commission aided in the creation of trade unions and freely associated producer co-operatives, proposing a kind of Proudhonian mutualist, worker-controlled socialism.⁴⁶

The provisional government trimmed workdays by an hour from 11 to 10 hours in Paris and created the National Workshops to address the problem of unemployment. The National Workshops, a concept developed by the Commission President Louis Blanc, was supposed to be a mechanism of government employment, which Blanc believed could eventually prove to be more productive and efficient than capitalist production. But it was not to be. The radical nature of the Luxembourg Commission led to a reaction from the more conservative members of the bourgeois-dominated provisional government. The government appointed a director of the National Workshops whose hostility to socialism was well known. Rather than provide productive work, the workshops became a form of meagre welfare and means to keep workers off the streets and away from the radicals in the Luxembourg Commission.⁴⁷

As the promised social reforms failed to materialise in the spring of 1848, frustrations began to mount among the working class and the radical clubs. Increasing worker militancy led to a break between the more radical workers and the more moderate leadership in the newly elected Chamber of Deputies. In April, workers and radicals from the clubs organised large demonstrations demanding immediate social reforms. However, they were suppressed. On May 13, the government closed the Luxembourg Commission, and the radicals made a half-hearted attempt to take over the Hôtel de Ville and instal a socialist-oriented government. The government responded by closing the National Workshops. This act proved to be the final straw and unleashed what became known as the June Days. Three days of street fighting raged and resulted in the death of 10,000 mostly working-class insurgents and 4000 deported to Algeria. The split in the coalition between the working-class socialists and middle-class republicans was complete, and the dream of social revolution in 1848 died.

Proudhon, who had not been an active member of the radical clubs and to a certain extent been caught off guard by events in February, initially came out in support of the Revolution. He began as a journalist, promoting his mutualist ideas, but, surprisingly for a self-proclaimed anarchist, was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. Similar to other radicals though, his support for the revolution soured over the course of the spring, and following the June Days, he turned his back on the whole endeavour. However, the insight Proudhon gained in 1848 served to bolster his and later anarchists' positions.

In his *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, published in 1849, Proudhon reflected on the failure of the social revolution in 1848. The root cause of the failure was the belief that political action and government power could be used to carry out meaningful social reform. Rather than seizing power and using the state to pursue socialism, he argued that social revolution ought to have

⁴⁶ See George Woodcock, *A Hundred Years of Revolution: 1848 and After* (London: Porcupine Press, 1948), 18.

⁴⁷ Edward Berensen, 'Organization and "modernization" in the Revolutions of 1848', in *Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform*, ed. Dieter Down, Heinz-Gerhardt Haupt, Dieter Langeweische and Jonathan Sperber, trans. David Higgins (New York: Bergen Books, 2001), 563.

been used to destroy all authority, writing: ‘*The political revolution, the abolition of authority among men is the goal; the social revolution is the means*’.⁴⁸ Over the course of the work, he argued that the failure of capitalism had led to revolution in 1848, but the revolutionaries failed when they attempted to establish a new government, rather than securing liberty. While he was a sharp critic of the July Monarchy’s increasingly undemocratic government, the solution was not simply a more democratic republic. The real problem, he believed, was the social problem of capitalism and that required economic action. The revolution failed because it only pursued political solutions. Proudhon also drew a distinction between his anarchist socialism and that of Blanc and Blanqui, whom he referred to as ‘state socialists’. Their attempts to create socialism from above, through the use of a centralised republic or dictatorship, had led to fears of tyranny and turning people against the idea of socialism. For Proudhon, socialism could only be achieved through free and voluntary association of the workers themselves. Proudhon, foreshadowing the later debates between anarchists and Marxists in the coming decades, argued: ‘Louis Blanc represents governmental socialism, revolution by power, as I represent democratic socialism, revolution by the people. An abyss exists between us’.⁴⁹ Proudhon’s brief participation in revolutionary politics had simply reinforced his belief in using voluntary worker associations as the only effective means to bring social progress.

The Russian born, international revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin cut his teeth and developed his anarchist convictions during the 1848 revolutions. Born to an aristocratic family in Tsarist Russia, Bakunin served in the Russian army where his anti-authoritarian inclinations began after witnessing the suppression of the Polish revolt of 1830. Resigning his commission, he studied the *encyclopedists*, Fichte, and Hegel, developing into a social revolutionary. In 1842, under a French pseudonym, Bakunin published his first essay ‘The Reaction in Germany’. The short but rather abstract and philosophical work is notable for its revolutionary tone, including calls for social revolution and the idea that human freedom was the supreme end to history. The work concluded with one of his most famous statements, blending Hegelian dialectics and anarchist sentiment: ‘The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!’.⁵⁰

Following the outbreak of revolution in February, Bakunin first travelled to France, but believing the revolution to be finished, he travelled east, fighting on the barricades in Prague and Dresden, eventually getting himself imprisoned and in exile for the rest of his life. The revolutions of 1848 though had a profound influence on his life. Their brief victories and ultimate failure began the long process, which turned Bakunin into an anarchist. The outlines of his future, more fully formed anarchist ideology can be seen in his ‘Appeal to the Slavs’ written while imprisoned for his revolutionary activity during 1848. In this essay, Bakunin denounced any form of reformism or compromise. The world was divided into two competing camps, those of revolution and counter-revolution. The forces of revolution he identified as the working classes and the peasantry. The ranks of counter-revolution included not only the autocratic monarchies and the nobility but also the bourgeoisie, who he believed had betrayed the people in 1848. In addition

⁴⁸ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Confessions of a Revolutionary, to Serve as a History of the February Revolution*, last accessed 31 July 2017 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Confessions_of_a_Revolutionary/3.

⁴⁹ Proudhon, *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, last accessed 31 July 2017 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Confessions_of_a_Revolutionary/12.

⁵⁰ Michael Bakunin, “The Reaction in Germany”, in *Bakunin on Anarchy, Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. and trans. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 56–57.

to the betrayal by the bourgeoisie, the failure of 1848 was a failure not of revolution but of solely political revolution. He argued that:

Liberty was merely a lie where the great majority of the population is reduced to a miserable existence, where, deprived of education, of leisure, and of bread, it is fated to serve as an underprop for the powerful and the rich. The social revolution, therefore, appears as a natural, necessary corollary of the political revolution.... The social question thus appears to be first and foremost the question of the complete overturn of society.⁵¹

In the second half of the nineteenth century, starting with Bakunin, anarchism came into being as a mature and fully formed ideology. Its roots though lie in the century that preceded. Its intellectual roots can be found in the Enlightenment concepts of rationalism, freedom, and progress. Moreover, its revolutionary strategies and organising principles developed as a result of the experiences of the French Revolution and the revolutions of 1848. It was this combination of theory and action that built the modern ideology. With the stresses caused by the social transformation of the industrial revolution, the ideology found a receptive audience among the impoverished masses of workers and peasants, particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe.

⁵¹ Michael Bakunin, "The Reaction in Germany", in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 68.

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