

The Anarchist Diet

Vegetarianism and Individualist Anarchism in Early 20th-Century France

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INTRODUCTION

There has been an unprecedented growth in the number of vegetarians and vegans in France in the past few years. In fact, the very word “vegan” entered the French language only recently, making its first appearance in a dictionary in 2013, 3 years after the creation of the first French vegan organization, the *Fédération végane*.¹ It is worth noting that, in contemporary French, one can distinguish between veganism as a diet excluding all animal foods—*le végétalisme*—and veganism as a way of life excluding all animal products—*le véganisme*. Vegetarianism excludes meat and fish but usually includes eggs and dairy.² According to a 2018 survey, it has been estimated that 5.2% of the population in France is now vegetarian, 5% of which is vegan.³ The upsurge of vegetarianism is concomitant with the growth of animal rights advocacy in France in the past decade.⁴ L214, one of the most influential animal protection organizations and known for placing hidden cameras in abattoirs, was founded in 2008. In 2015, the French National Assembly adopted a legislative amendment recognizing animals (whose legal status had not changed since the 1804 civil code) as “sentient beings” (*êtres sensibles*). Finally, 2016 witnessed the launch of an animal advocacy political party, *le Parti animaliste*.⁵ It is fair to say that questions of vegetarianism and animal protection have never occupied such a prominent place on the French political agenda as they do today.⁶

In the modern West, vegetarianism, or rather “abstinence from meat,” emerged in England between the late 17th and late 19th centuries.⁷ It was part of a broader askesis of salvation and spiritual edification promoted by esoteric Christian and mystical sects.⁸ The first vegetarian society was established in England in 1847 by members of the Bible Christian Church. The English animal and women’s rights campaigner Annie Kingsford, vice president of the Vegetarian Church Society in 1873, was an important contributor to the rise of the vegetarian movement in France.⁹

¹ The word “vegan” was originally coined in 1944 by Donald Watson, who founded the U.K. Vegan Society in 1945. In France, *véganisme* and *végane* were first added to the *Dictionnaire Hachette* in 2013, then to the dictionaries Robert and the Larousse in 2015. According to a 2014–2015 Institut National du Cancer study, there are approximately 90,000 vegans in France (see <https://www.federationvegane.fr/documentation/combien-de-veganes/>).

² Larousse defines *véganisme* as a “mode de vie alliant une alimentation exclusive par les végétaux (*végétalisme*) et le refus de consommer tout produit (vêtement, chaussure cosmétique, etc.) issu des animaux ou de leur exploitation.” *Végétalisme* is defined as a “régime alimentaire excluant tout aliment d’origine animal.” Finally, *végétarisme* is defined as a “régime alimentaire excluant toute chair animal (viande, poisson), mais qui admet en général la consommation d’aliments d’origine animale comme les œufs, le lait et les produits laitiers (fromage, yaourts).”

³ Rates in other European countries include: Germany 5.6%, Spain 3.8%, United Kingdom 8% (*Synthèse des résultats à partir de l’étude “Panorama de la consommation végétarienne en Europe,”* réalisée par le CREDOC pour FranceAgriMer et l’OCHA en 2018, October Edition, 2019).

⁴ The modern animal rights movement is called the antispeciesist movement (movement *antispécisite*) in France.

⁵ Note that the *Parti animaliste* is a welfarist organization. It does not advocate the abolition of animal exploitation and ethical vegetarianism. Rather, it promotes the improvement of animals’ living conditions and the reduction of meat consumption mainly for ecological and health reasons.

⁶ Animal rights activism is not necessarily correlated to vegetarianism. Political scientist Christophe Traïni (2012, pp. 12–13) distinguishes three groups in animal rights organizations, namely those who defend companion animals, those who defend free-living animals, and those who oppose animal exploitation more generally. Ethical vegetarianism is practiced mainly by members of the last group.

⁷ The word “vegetarian” was first used in England in the mid-19th century.

⁸ Notably *behmenism*, the *Philadelphians*, and the Bible Christian Church. For further discussion on the development of modern Western vegetarianism, see Ouédraogo (2000).

⁹ *L’Alimentation végétale de l’homme*. Kingsford was one of the first English women to obtain a doctoral degree in medicine. She was also the only person at the time who graduated without having experimented on animals.

She wrote a seminal thesis on the benefits of a plant-based diet at the University of Paris in 1881, 1 year after the establishment of first French vegetarian organization, la Société végétarienne de France.¹⁰ The word végétarianisme first entered the Dictionnaire de la langue française in 1877, with the broad definition “alimentation par les végétaux.”¹¹ In 1906, an article from the newspaper of record *Le Figaro* referred to vegetarianism (végétarisme) and veganism (végétalisme) as fashionable diets.¹²

No comprehensive scholarly history of vegetarianism in France has yet been written. In 1998, André Méry, president of the Association végétarienne de France, wrote an overview of the evolution of the movement until the end of the 20th century (Méry, 1998; Ouédraogo, 1996). André Larue (2015, 2019), who authored a history of Western vegetarianism in 2015, recently published a book on abstinence from meat during the French Enlightenment. The sociologist Alexandra Hondermarck (2021) is currently working on a doctoral thesis on the sociological history of vegetarianism in France, which will be the first thorough academic study on the topic. This article contributes to shedding light on a virtually unknown episode of the history of vegetarianism in France, namely the connection between abstinence from meat and an oft-misunderstood branch of the anarchist movement, namely individualist anarchism. The history of anarcho-individualist veganism is practically unknown by the libertarian movement itself. In fact, when French anarchists began writing about environmentalism in the 1970s and veganism in the 1990s, no reference was made to their individualist predecessors of the first half of the 20th century. The main compilation of texts on anarchist vegetarianism in France is found in two supplements of the journal *Invariance*, published in 1993 and 1994.¹³ The historian Arnaud Baubérot appears to be the only scholar who has investigated the subject in some depth in his history of naturism published in 2004 (see also Baubérot, 2013). The first part of this article provides a synopsis of anarchism and its defense of the animal cause before looking at the naturian movement. The second part examines individualist anarchists’ motives for adopting a plant-based diet, many of which, as we shall see, are just as topical as ever. The concluding remarks will highlight the fact that veganism allows us to better understand a vastly understudied strand of anarchism, namely individualism.

FROM ANARCHISM TO NATURIANISM

The industrial revolution of the 19th century led millions of people to emigrate from the countryside to work in urban factories. Workers lived in extreme poverty. Indeed, their existence was deplorable: Degrading labor and squalid living conditions reduced them to a state of servitude and misery. Malnutrition, alcoholism, and disease were rife and only added to the ordeal of their

¹⁰ The first vegetarian society in the Western world was founded in the United Kingdom in 1847, followed by the United States (1850), Germany (1867), and Austria (1879). The first vegetarian cookery book was written by Martha Brotherton in 1812.

¹¹ The word végétariaisme became more popular than the anglicism végétarianisme. In the 1890s, dictionaries included both words as well as the word végétalisme. For example, the *Grand Dictionnaire universel* (1890) defined végétarisme as a “doctrine diététique consistant dans l’abstention de tout aliment qui ne peut s’obtenir que par la destruction d’une vie animale” and “végétalisme” as a “régime des personnes qui se nourrissent exclusivement de végétaux.”

¹² Parisette. (1906, April 15). *La vie de Paris*. *Le Figaro*.

¹³ “Naturiens, Végétariens, Végétaliens et Crudivégétaliens dans le mouvement anarchiste Français,” *Invariance*, suppléments au n. 9 (July 1993 and January 1994).

12-hour workdays. Along with Marxians and other socialists, anarchists were the main revolutionary forces opposing the capitalist order and denouncing the human degeneration it produced.

Anarchism is a political ideology and an existential orientation that opposes all forms of illegitimate authority and promotes individual freedom. Negatively, anarchism is synonymous with antiauthoritarianism. Coercive authority can come from gods, political leaders, teachers, judges, parents, or traditions and social conventions. Anarchists reject all systems of domination and exploitation. Historically, the state, the Church, and capitalism were viewed as the institutional loci of oppression. Positively, anarchism is a form of autarchism based upon a commitment to equality, justice, and solidarity; upon intellectual and moral self-government; and upon authentic self-expression and creative experimentation. When regarded as a historically sociopolitical tradition, anarchism is usually considered to have sprung from the European workers' movements in the second half of the 19th century along with the main political ideologies of modern society. As such, it was shaped by the industrial and scientific revolutions as well as by the Enlightenment and by Romanticism. Until the 1917 Russian revolution, anarchism was one of the leading radical political movements worldwide. Since the Second World War, during which all ideologies opposed to capitalism were squashed, the influence and diversity of anarchism has been largely underplayed.

Anarchist defenses of the animal cause in France emerged with the birth of the movement in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁴ It is worth noting that many of them were put forth by women. In the late 1880s, the journalist Caroline Rémy (aka Séverine) wrote several articles condemning animal exploitation in the periodical *Le Cri du Peuple*, founded by Jules Vallès on the eve of the Paris Commune of 1871.¹⁵ The poet and activist Marie Huot, founder of the Popular League Against Vivisection (1882), compared the domination of men over women to that of humans over animals.¹⁶ Louise Michel, the French grande dame of anarchy, asserted that animals were sentient beings and decried the violence and cruelty with which humans treated them. Like many other anarchists, she drew a parallel between the exploitation of workers and that of nonhuman animals.¹⁷

The prominent geographer Élysée Reclus is one of the classical anarchists who reflected most deeply upon the animal question. He became a strict vegetarian in 1893, at the age of 63. For Reclus (1905), there are significant similarities between the process of human socialization and that of animal domestication. *Mutatis mutandis*, in both cases submission to authority is partly a matter of voluntary servitude. The devotee praying to their god is akin to a companion animal begging their carer for a treat (Reclus, 1897). Reclus saw animals as having some degree of moral agency. As such, it is partly incumbent upon them to rebel and emancipate themselves from human dominion. That said, Reclus did not believe that domestication was necessarily bad. He distinguished exploitative relationships between humans and other animals from mutually beneficial ones. As with human associations, the latter can be based on cooperation, mutual aid, and camaraderie (even though they initially involve some degree of coercion). Ultimately, Reclus

¹⁴ The geographer Philippe Pelletier (2015–2016) is the main French scholar who has looked at the connection between animal liberation and anarchism. He edited two anthologies on the subject.

¹⁵ Séverine directed the journal from 1885 to 1888, making her the first female publication manager of a major daily newspaper in France (see Couturiau, 2001).

¹⁶ In 1886, Huot interrupted a lecture on a treatment against rabies as it involved animal experimentation (see Bory, 2013).

¹⁷ For further discussion on early anarchist defenses of the animal cause, see Pelletier (2016).

(1897) contends that human and other animals can work together as allies and learn from each other as companions.

After the harsh governmental repression that resulted from the infamous attentat period of 1892–1894, French anarchists sought to diversify their tactics. The mainstream of the movement joined syndicates and advocated the general strike as the primary revolutionary catalyst. In opposition, a fringe group that identified as individualist anarchists (*anarchistes individualistes*) believed that waiting for a hypothetical future revolution prevented people from changing their lives in the here and now. Even if a revolution as a sudden and radical rupture with the social order were to occur, it would not fundamentally change individuals' lives. Economic emancipation alone would not do away with deep-seated authoritarian prejudices such as gender or religious biases. Individualist anarchists wanted to prefigure the state of positive anarchy: They sought to transform themselves and their environment immediately and in their ordinary daily lives. To this end, they experimented with different forms of relationships, education, collective property, communal living, hygiene, and diet. Individualist anarchists were the strongest proponents of vegetarianism in anarchist circles.

The group of the naturians (*naturiens*) were part of this anarcho-individualist subculture. The naturian movement (aka naturianism) was launched by the charismatic painter and illustrator Émile Gravelle in Montmartre in 1894. Naturians believed that human beings living in modern industrialized society were undergoing a process of degeneration. In opposition to this dehumanizing drift, naturians strived to recover the state of nature and to live in accord with natural laws. While some, in tune with the mainstream of anarchism, believed that science could improve their lives, others rejected it altogether, alongside urbanization, mechanization, and indeed the whole of civilization. Thus, naturianism also constituted a critique of the alleged superiority of “civilized” cultures over “primitive” ones, thereby posing a challenge to the authority of Western countries over the rest of the world.

One can distinguish between two waves of naturianism. Early naturians, most active in the last decade of the 19th century, were millennialists who sought to return to a golden age. Their condemnation of modern society was proportional to their idealization of prehistory. The myth of the arcadia had replaced that of revolution. Early naturians were the first anarcho-primitivists. First-wave naturians were not vegetarians. In fact, some figureheads of the movement, notably Henri Beylie¹⁸ and Henri Zisly,¹⁹ were critical of vegetarianism. Nature, they argued, has made humans omnivores. Beylie believed that humans were meant to be predators and that animals would proliferate exceedingly if they were not killed for food (Zisly, 1911). He thought that plant based diets were fitting for the summer whereas meat was to be consumed in the winter. Zisly (1903, 1905) distinguished natural foods (vegetables, honey, milk, meat, etc.) from civilized ones

¹⁸ Henri Beylie (Félix Beaulieu; 1870–1944) was born in Paris, where he worked as a banker and an accountant. He joined the *naturiens libertaires* in 1895 and coedited *La Nouvelle Humanité*, which later became *Le Naturien* (1895–1898), alongside Henri Zisly. He married Clémentine Bontoux in 1898. He participated in the establishment of the *Ligue antimilitariste* with Paraf-Javal and Libertad in 1902. He gravitated toward being a communist anarchist from 1905 onward.

¹⁹ Henri Zisly (1872–1945) was born in Paris to working-class parents living in free union. At age 17, he was already active in anarchist circles. He coedited *La Nouvelle Humanité*, which later became *Le Naturien* (1895–1898), with Henri Beylie. He married the milliner Marie Lucie Dusolon in 1908. He wrote in numerous individualist journals, including articles on naturism and vegetarianism for *l'anarchie*. He launched a naturist periodical *La vie naturelle* (1907–1920) and wrote the entries *Naturianisme*, *Naturocratisme*, and *Naturophilie* in the *Encyclopédie anarchiste*. He participated in the foundation of the *Fédération anarchiste* in 1936.

(all processed foods, sugar, alcohol, etc.) and claimed that meat gave humans greater strength. In his view, animals and plants were both part of nature and both suffered in their own way when killed for food. Although he believed that it would be best if humans and other animals could live in peace, he claimed that vegetarians were “nature fanatics” (Zisly, 1905). Zisly became more sympathetic toward vegetarianism as years passed and even became a member of the Société végétarienne de France in 1905.

It is the second generation of naturians, the neo-naturians, who embraced vegetarianism (as well as veganism [végétalisme] and raw veganism [crudivégétalisme]). Neo-naturianism emerged before the First World War, but really took root in the 1920s with Henry Le Fèvre’s journal *Néo-naturien* (1921–1927). Less radical than their predecessors, neo-naturians yearned for a simpler existence, free from superficial and superfluous needs and possessions. They sought to lead more rustic lives, finding more natural alternatives to housing, transport, relationships, and so on. Close to the naturist movement, they promoted outdoor activities, physical exercise, simple clothing, and nudism. Veganism was at the heart of the neo-naturian quest for natural lifestyles.

VEGETARIANISM IN INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHISM

Explicit anarchist advocacy of vegetarianism began at the dawn of the 20th century. In 1901, two articles (Adrien, 1901; Végétus, 1901) from the prominent anarchist newspaper *Le Libertaire* argued in favor of vegetarianism, and Reclus (1901) wrote a famous piece on the subject for *La Réforme alimentaire*, the publication of the French Vegetarian Society. In the same year, the feminist writer and activist Léonie Fournival (aka Rolande), who had adopted a plant-based diet during her 2-year stay with English anarchists in London, joined the naturians and founded the group *Les végétariens de Paris*. Libertad, Paraf-Javal, and friends of the seminal individualist journal *l’anarchie* began promoting plant-based diets from 1905, but it is from the 1910s that vegetarianism and veganism began to truly flourish in libertarian circles. Several individualist journals published articles on the question of these meat-free diets (e.g., Nada, 1912). Notably, naturist and hygienist doctors provided scientific arguments in favor of vegetarianism in *L’Idée libre*, edited by cofounder of *l’anarchie* André Lorulot (e.g., Guelpa, 1912). Vegetarianism was also a commonly debated topic during anarchist gatherings and conferences. A note from a meeting of the anarchist group of the 15th arrondissement that took place in the winter of 1914 reports that its participants discussed the many benefits of vegetarianism: “The anarchists present only spoke of questions related to the vegetarian diet. They unanimously noted the benefits of this diet for one’s health, as well as for the development of one’s intellect and willpower.”²⁰ Sophie Zaïkowska²¹ and her partner Georges Butaud,²² central figures of neo-naturianism, were among

²⁰ Archive de la Préfecture de Police. January 6, 1914, BA 1506.

²¹ Sophie Zaïkowska (1874–1939) was born in Vilna (Russian Empire, present day Vilnius, Lithuania). She was one of the most active female individualists in the early 20th century. She self-identified as a feminist individualist anarchist. She moved to France in 1898 after having studied physical and natural sciences (specializing in nutrition) in Geneva, Switzerland. She wrote in numerous anarchist journals, including *L’Éducation libertaire* (1900–1902), *l’Autarcie* (1903), and *La vie anarchiste* (which she directed in 1920).

²² Georges Butaud (1868–1926) was born in Marchienne-au-Pont, Belgium, into the petite bourgeoisie. He worked as a stonemason in Switzerland before moving to Vienne (Isère), where he launched the journal *Le Flambeau* (1901–1902) and began collaborating with E. Armand, Henri Zisly, and Sophie Zaïkowska on the foundation of a libertarian

the keenest individualist advocates of vegan and raw food diets (Butaud, 1930). They were also the main instigators of libertarian colonies in France.

Libertarian colonies (*milieux libres*) were a way for workers to escape from urban factories as well as a reaction to the antianarchist laws that had been passed as a result of the terrorist attacks of 1892–1894. In France, the first two libertarian colonies were founded in 1903 in the northeast of the country. They were spaces in which anarchist ideas could be applied, tested, and refined. They also gave the general public a glimpse of what an anarchist society could be like and portrayed its proponents in a new light, far from the stereotypical images of hateful terrorists circulated by the media. Although there were only a few dozen actual colonists, several hundred people visited the *milieux libres*. Colonists sought to be as self-sufficient as possible. To this end, they practiced voluntary simplicity, which consisted primarily in the radical minimization of one's needs for material goods and the adoption of a vegetarian or vegan diet.²³ Several naturians lived in libertarian colonies, notably Zisly and Beylie who were among the first colonists at the Clairière de Vaux (1902–1907), founded by Butaud and Zaïkowska.

In 1911, Butaud and Zaïkowska established a second *milieu libre* in Bascon (Aisne), which became exclusively vegan in 1914.²⁴ It was the longest-lasting *milieu libre* in early 20th-century France. It remained a libertarian colony until 1931 and then became a vegetarian and naturist holiday center until 1951. From 1918 on, Zaïkowska and Butaud gave fortnightly talks on veganism in Paris. In 1919, they founded the Société Végétalienne Communiste, whose manifesto described veganism as: “une base nécessaire du développement individuel et social” (Butaud, 1919). In 1922, Butaud instituted the Foyer végétalien, first in Nice and then in Paris, which acted as the model for other vegan community centers around France.²⁵ The couple contributed to the Néo naturien and launched their own journal, *Le Végétalien* (1924–1929), of which Zaïkowska helmed by herself after Butaud's death in 1926. She continued their vigorous vegan propaganda in years to come and wrote the entry *Végétalisme* in Sébastien Faure's *Anarchist Encyclopaedia* (1925–1934).

Louis Rimbault was another significant individualist anarchist promoter of veganism.²⁶ He was one of the first members of the Bascon colony, where he lived for a couple of years with his wife Clémence alongside Butaud and Zaïkowska. In the early 1910s—probably the time during which he became vegan—he established a *milieu libre* in Pavillons-sous-Bois (Seine-et-Oise) with a dozen comrades, including his brother, Marceau Rimbault, a contributor to *l'anarchie*, and Octave Garnier, future member of the Bonnot Gang. From 1922, his vegan campaigning intensified: He wrote several articles for the Néo-naturien, gave talks at the Foyer végétalien in Paris, and went on a tour giving conferences on veganism all over France with the Breton naturian Hervé Coatmeur. His veganism became gradually more intransigent: He called meat eaters “walking

colony. He was the most active proponent and instigator of the *milieux libres* (Vaux, 1902–1907; Bascon, 1911–1951; Saint-Maur, 1913–1914). He wrote several articles for *l'anarchie* between 1910 and 1911.

²³ It is interesting to note that some anarchist vegans left Europe in hopes of founding libertarian colonies in freer and more fertile lands such as Tahiti and South America, especially Brazil (see Rimbault, 1924).

²⁴ *La Revue naturiste*, September 1922.

²⁵ Zaïkowska, *Végétalisme*, *Encyclopédie anarchiste*.

²⁶ Louis Rimbault (1877–1949) was born in Tours and was one of eight children in a poor family with an alcoholic father. He worked as a locksmith and as a mechanic. He began frequenting the illegalist and individualist *milieux* in the 1910s. He spent 2 years in jail after having been associated with the *Bandits tragiques* in 1911. He became vegan around the same time—a lifestyle he kept on promoting. An accident that occurred at the colony *Terre Libérée* in 1932 left him paraplegic until his death.

graveyards” that “fed on blood” (Levebvre, 1963; Rimbault, 1923, 1924). In 1924, Rimbault established another *milieu libre*, a “vegan city” called *Terre Libérée* in Luynes (Indre-et-Loire), which was intended to be the continuation of the vegetarian experimentation of the Bascon colony. This exclusively and strictly vegan colony had explicit pedagogical goals: It was meant to be “a practical vegan school intended to show that the vegan individual can be self-sufficient” (Rimbault, 1926).²⁷ It was geared toward individuals who already followed a plant-based diet and who wanted to keep exploring and studying the health benefits of plant-based diets. Rimbault coined the term *naturarchie* to illustrate his vision of veganism as a holistic natural lifestyle.²⁸

The restoration and preservation of health in the face of the physical and moral degeneration produced by industrial civilization was the upmost consideration for most vegan anarchists. Indeed, many were those who justified veganism solely on naturist and hygienist medical terms. For hygienists, health is achieved by living in accord with the laws of nature (e.g., Neuens, 1897, p. 18). Disease arises when one transgresses those laws. A healthy body is one that is able to withstand disease (Baubérot, 2004). Diet was seen as the principal means of strengthening the immune system (others included the proper use of water, air, sunlight, rest, and physical exercise; Cornet, 1909). Some also claimed that a plant-based diet had curative virtues. Such was the case of Rimbault, who built a preventorium and a health center for the sick at *Terre Libérée*, where he invented what he believed was an optimally nutritious meal, *La Basconnaise*, a seasonal vegan salad composed of some 34 ingredients, and which could be adapted to the individual’s personal dietary needs.²⁹ Zaïkowska (1929a, 1929b), who eventually made the *Basconnaise* the basis of her diet, wrote that it was her health problems that first led her transition from vegetarianism to veganism. The Breton anarcho-syndicalist Charles Fouyer (1927) claimed that his articular rheumatisms had completely disappeared after spending only 6 months on a vegan diet in Bascon. We are told that 8 years after the colony had embraced veganism, no one had fallen badly ill: “except for a few minor and passing health problems, [colonists] did not suffer from any real illnesses.”³⁰ Veganism was thus regarded as the diet of regeneration.

It is important to point out that vegetarianism and veganism were not always limited to abstinence from meat and fish or from all animal products (as in present-day usages of the term). When it did not imply the exclusive consumption of fruit and vegetables, vegetarianism was linked to a broader hygienist and naturist lifestyle that also excluded processed foods and intoxicants, notably alcohol, tobacco, and sugar.³¹ These were regarded as addictive and debilitating substances that kept workers in a state of weakness and servitude. Conversely, vegetarianism was viewed as the diet that would help people recover their physical and mental abilities. As Jules Méline wrote in the *Encyclopédie anarchiste*: “[Vegetarianism is] a dietary system that excludes all that jeopardizes one’s physical and mental equilibrium, and, consequently, affects one’s vigor, [namely] meat, fish, spirits, fermented beverages, . . . chocolate, coffee, etc.”³² Thus, in addition to health

²⁷ Although there were supposed to be 20 permanent residents at the colony, there were only five for most of its existence, namely Louis Rimbault; his wife, Clémence Rimbault; their adopted daughter, Léonie Pierre; and Gabrielle Lallemand and her daughter, Solange. Visitors were numerous (300 during the first 10 months following the foundation of the colony).

²⁸ For further discussion on Rimbault, see Baubérot (2014).

²⁹ Zaïkowska, *Végétarisme*, *Encyclopédie anarchiste*.

³⁰ *La Revue Naturiste*, September 1922.

³¹ For Zaïkowska, for instance, vegans abstained from eating sugar and drank nothing but water (Zaïkowska, *Végétarisme*, *Encyclopédie anarchiste*).

³² Méline, *Végétarisme*, *Encyclopédie anarchiste*.

promotion, veganism was adopted as therapy and disease prevention. For many individualist anarchists, veganism was no less than the quest for the ideal—or the most natural—human diet.

Veganism, for individualist anarchists, was not merely a question of diet or healthy lifestyle. It contributed to one's personal and social emancipation in other important ways. As Butaud (1922) wrote: "One should not keep considering veganism solely as a therapeutic system. Veganism is part of the doctrine of free inquiry that will transform the world." First, veganism enabled a person to gain economic freedom. Individualists believed that people enslaved themselves with artificial needs. As Butaud (1912) wrote: "One should not keep considering veganism solely as a therapeutic system. Veganism is part of the doctrine of free inquiry that will transform the world." First, veganism enabled a person to gain economic freedom. Individualists believed that people enslaved themselves with artificial needs. As Butaud (1912) wrote:

"One of the tendencies of individualism is to do away with false needs, to make things simpler, less costly, and to reject all that is unnecessary so that it may be easier for the individual to flourish and to maintain a healthy body."

Like Epicureans, they sought to distinguish natural and necessary needs from unnatural and unnecessary ones. Animal source foods and animal products were instances of unnecessary goods that kept one dependent upon the capitalist system and the ultra-consumerist mindset it fostered. During a conference, a speaker gave the recipe for what was supposed to be a wholesome meal made up of corn, oatmeal, cacao, and calcium phosphate, which cost only 25 cents (almost half the price of a 1-kilo loaf of bread at the time and half the price of a baguette today; c. 0.65 euro cents).³³ Individualists such as Butaud, Zaïkowska, and Rimbault were convinced that veganism was the key to monetary independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. Also, veganism was a way to practice anarchy in the here and now: "[Les végétaliens] sont des anarchistes en action, qui ne coopèrent en rien qu ce soit, par notre méthode de vie, aux forces sur lesquelles repose le principe d'État ou de simple autorité" (Rimbault, 1926). It was yet another way to fight against the social order: "Veganism is not merely a question of dietary hygiene . . . it is a formal practice of non-cooperation against all forces on which the State and its satellites rely: Church, Money, Army, Salaried Work, Justice System" (Rimbault, 1926). In addition to health, veganism was a means of self-sufficiency and revolt against society.

As mentioned earlier, vegetarianism has historically been closely linked to various esoteric sects (Spencer, 1993). Some anarchists also seem to have found in it a spiritual conduit. This can be illustrated, for instance, by the quasi-monastic atmosphere at the Foyer végétalien in Paris. The Foyer végétalien organized various activities such as gymnastics and literature classes, weekly talks and debates, as well as feasts. It had six beds for the homeless and comrades in need. It also included a restaurant that served daily vegan meals at a low cost. On its walls one could read oddly juxtaposed naturist and anarchist precepts such as "Do not drink wine, do not smoke . . . learn Esperanto" (Gascoin, 1928, p. 183). There was an overtly religious overtone to these vegan gatherings, such that some commented upon the ritualistic feel of communal meals (Gascoin, 1928, p. 183). Butaud (1924) noted "the religious have understood quite well that sharing food bring[s] men closer together." Elsewhere, he wrote that veganism brought about redemption (Butaud, 1925): "The Church offers salvation through self-sacrifice for God. Veganism and naturism offer serenity and forgiveness for your crimes if you contribute to their dissemination." He

³³ Archives de la Préfecture de police de Paris, April 30, 1912, BA 1499.

even described the core individualist belief in self-transformation, which he viewed as uniting all vegans, in quasi-religious terms:

”The social question is no longer a matter of power, it is a question of individual transformation, and all vegans, regardless of their living conditions, of their social background, and even of their personal ethic, are united by a common calling. (Butaud, 1924)”

For individualists like Butaud, veganism was partly grounded in spirituality. “The real vegan is a mystic,” wrote an anonymous contributor to the individualist journal *L’Insurgé* in 1926.³⁴ Veganism fostered hope in a new world of free, regenerated, and conscious individuals.

Even when it was not explicitly linked to spiritual expression, veganism had an important symbolic and ritualistic value. When awaiting their death sentence, the bandits tragiques, or members of the so-called Bonnot Gang, held fast to a strict askesis: They remained vegan, kept on training their bodies and minds, and still refrained from consuming intoxicants (Michon, 1913, p. 187).

This shows that such practices were valuable in and of themselves, not merely for some kind of future emancipation. In addition, it suggests that they had taken on a ritualistic dimension of their own. They were a way for individualists to preserve their dignity and to remind themselves that they were members of a select group of conscious individuals (Baubérot, 2004). Naturist and hygienist practices may thus be regarded both as means of consolidating the individualist identity and as a form of spiritual exercise. Moreover, they probably gave comrades a sense of working toward a cause that was greater than themselves, thus allowing them to simultaneously assert their marginality and to transcend their individuality. In sum, in addition to being a central element of the process of self-regeneration, naturist practices, of which veganism was the core, were part and parcel of the good life, as well as a way to symbolically identify with an individualist elite that prefigured anarchy (Dequeker, 1914).

Veganism had broader moral implications for anarchists’ self-development. According to a 1924 survey of members of the *Foyer végétalien*, some linked veganism to pacifism and nonviolence as well as kindness and solidarity, while others saw in it the most efficient way to lead a simpler, happier, and more natural life (Butaud, 1924, p. 24). As a 24-year-old respondee by the name of Bourguigneau contended: “The individual who practices veganism moves closer to nature. They achieve greater personal growth and better health. They become happier and better to others” (Butaud, 1924, p. 21). Another respondee, Charlotte Davy, stated: “All vegan, simpler life, less bloody humanity, more goodness . . . what disruption of popular mentality, what a moral revolution!” (Butaud, 1924, p. 27). Veganism was a springboard for moral edification.

Although the regeneration of one’s health along with the quest for personal emancipation (be it economic, moral, or spiritual) were the primary motives for converting to veganism, individualist anarchists also expressed concern for animal suffering and opposed animal exploitation. Many argued that animal life was valuable in and of itself. Butaud denounced the state of servitude of domesticated animals and spoke in favor of agricultural machines that would suppress animal slavery. Rimbault (1922) decried the “necrophiliac business” of meat production and the cruelty it involved: The animal slaughtered for human consumption was always “overworked, exhausted, famished, brutalized, [and] terrorized.” Libertad drew an unequivocal parallel between

³⁴ *L’Insurgé*, n. 52, May 1, 1926.

workers' exploitation and that of animals: "By eating animal flesh you become complicit in numberless murders that are of no benefit to you. You are victims that let themselves be fed with the blood of other victims" (Colomber, 1912, pp. 92–93). The individualist propagandist and member of *l'anarchie* Rirette Maitrejean (1913/1988) concluded: "[Individualist anarchists] cannot bear the sight of slaughtered meat on their plate. The motto 'Be good to animals' is engraved on their heart" (p. 11). It is thus clear that individualist anarchists were concerned with the freedom and well-being of nonhuman animals.

Adopting a plant-based diet was one of the main ways in which individualists sought to live in harmony with nature. The ruthless exploitation of humanity over nature was sometimes described as yet another form of domination, especially in naturian texts. Though not the principal argument for veganism, ecological concerns were nonetheless present in several individualist writings. Even for someone like Rimbault (1922), for whom adopting a plant-based diet was primarily a matter of health, veganism meant respecting and taking care of the more-than-human world:

"The vegan individual cultivates their vegetables. He makes *basconnaise* by collecting one leaf at a time on each plant, and for each plant that needs to be extracted, he will grow many others so as to restore Nature's equilibrium through his work. (Rimbault, 1928, p. 59)"

Veganism allowed individualists to reconsider their place on earth. As Butaud stressed: "[Veganism] is not merely a diet, but a social framework that allows the individual to live in accord with natural laws" (as cited in Zaïkowska, 1929a). Vegan anarchists did not merely follow natural laws for the sake of personal growth; it was a way to reconcile themselves with the rest of the natural world.

Finally, it should be noted that veganism was not embraced unanimously by individualists. In fact, it was occasionally a source of conflict rather than a rallying point. Dietary difference was one of the main reasons for the dissolution of Rimbault's first colony in Pavillons-sous-Bois, which could not afford the expenditure incurred by the purchase of nonvegan food products (Rimbault, 1924). At the *milieu libre du Quai de la Pie*, vegetarians and omnivores ate their meals separately (Zisly, 1914). When living together in the urban colony of Romainville, members of *l'anarchie* quarreled over dietary issues. Lorulot wanted to enforce a strict vegetarian diet that Rirette Maitrejean and Victor Serge refused to adopt. Similarly, Butaud argued with Beylie at the Vaux colony over oysters that the latter had bought from a communist cooperative.³⁵ Many individualists, such as the leading propagandist E. Armand, were in favor of veganism but did not want to impose it on anyone. They thought that the rigid dietary restrictions advocated by individuals such as Butaud, Zaïkowska, Lorulot, and Rimbault were dogmatic. Indeed, their obsession with hygiene and healthy eating was sometimes seen as a form of orthorexia nervosa. The question of diet thus created divisions in anarchist ranks between those who wanted to remain omnivorous or flexitarians and those who swore only by a strict vegan diet.³⁶

³⁵ Bulletin mensuel de la colonie communiste "Le Milieu libre de Vaux," April-May, 1904.

³⁶ There were also petty disagreements between vegan individualists, especially between Rimbault and friends of the *Néo-naturien* and Butaud and Zaïkowska and followers of the *Végétalien*.

CONCLUSION

Individualist anarchists were promoting veganism as an autonomous diet and lifestyle long before the creation of the first vegan society in the United Kingdom in 1945, not to mention that of the French *Fédération végane* in 2010. For individualist anarchists, veganism was first and foremost a matter of personal emancipation through preserving one's health, gaining economic independence, and working toward moral regeneration. It was part and parcel of their aspiration to lead a simpler life, free from unnecessary possessions, and more in line with their instincts. Some individualists also defended the inherent value of animal life and opposed all forms of animal exploitation. Finally, anarchists did not think so much in terms of the ecological impact of the production of animal-based foods but rather in terms of their desire to live in harmony with nature. Influenced by the broader naturist and hygienist movements, anarcho-vegans' primary aim was to recover a natural way of life in opposition to the alienation and degeneration produced by industrial civilization.

Despite having had little impact on the rest of the anarchist movement and still less on society at large, neo-naturians and other individualist vegans can legitimately be considered the forgotten precursors of the modern ecological and animal liberation movements. Moreover, anarcho-individualist vegans show us a different conception of anarchist political struggle, which contrasts with the clichéd image of the thug or the terrorist. Their lives and deeds give us a glimpse into their vision of positive anarchy. Individualist anarchists did not believe that economic emancipation and revolution could truly liberate people. In their view, the only way forward was that self-transformation in the here and now that would eventually ripple through the rest of society. Veganism was one such concrete practice of anarchist prefiguration. In Butaud's (1922) words: "Enlightened individualists who practice veganism transform society by transforming themselves."

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