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Émile Armand and “*la camaraderie amoureuse*”: Revolutionary sexualism and the struggle against jealousy

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Only a few members participate. Overall, the Amis de *L'en dehors* are not revolutionaries; they do not attend the meetings or demonstrations of the other anarchist movements in the Paris region.”

The theory was more alluring than the practice. Armand’s crazy dreams confirmed that only worldwide dissemination of *camaraderie amoureuse* would enable eradication of totalitarian dictatorships, while ensuring “a better understanding, either between sociable entities or between peoples.”³⁰ The true reasons for this failure lie both in his operation’s innovative and excessive nature and in the approach taken by Armand, who refused to envisage his accomplishments in any way other than emanating directly from his goodwill. By refusing to develop his initiatives and trying to constrain them too much, however, he suppressed any truly subversive aspects of his ideas. As the facts revealed, Armand’s lofty ideals about strengthening the bonds of camaraderie through the practice of *camaraderie amoureuse* proved to be merely the small plans of a grocer interested in remaining in charge of his shop and deriving primary benefit from the hypothetical advantages that he envisaged for others.

His publicity efforts served their purpose, as he indisputably revealed the fears and prudishness that prevailed, even in his own libertarian circle of the era.

³⁰ *Les Tueries passionnelles et le tartu/fisme sexuel*, Paris, Limoges and Orleans: published in *L'en dehors*, [1935], pp. 8–9.

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had registered its 199th member, marking the culmination of Armand's dreams.

His activities remained highly diverse. Information from the police reports provides distinctive but fairly good corroboration of the signs we gleaned from Armand's publications. A report issued in March 1933 and addressed to the police prefect by the director of general information (B/a 1900) emphasized that *L'en dehors* was thriving. "Unlike most other anarchist periodicals, *L'en dehors* has no deficit. (Its circulation is 6,000.) The proceeds of the conferences organized for its benefit and the returns from subscription sales are sufficient for the publication to appear on schedule. Moreover, most of the readers are anarchist intellectuals who remain loyal to the publication." On the other hand, the publication contained a merciless description by Armand of the chronic anaemia of the associations he had established.

A report from 1928 read: "Individualist anti-revolutionaries, partisans of the 'ability of individuals to manage on their own' even advocate prostitution and sodomy. The theoretician is Emile [sic] Armand, who founded the free-love organizations Compagnons de *L'en dehors* and Groupe Atlantis. The members of these groups agree to discard jealousy and are expected to engage in licentious sexual acts during their excursions and gatherings. Armand contributes personally and, under the pseudonym Fred Esmarges, advertises in pornographic magazines to recruit members. In Paris Armand's theories have about a hundred supporters, although the membership of Compagnons de *L'en dehors* numbers barely a score there."

A report from 1933 read: "About fifty individuals, including several with special morals, attend these meetings addressing issues related to sexuality, vegetarianism, and the like. (...) On the other hand, the Amis de *L'en dehors* oppose sentimental jealousy and demand complete sexual freedom. They do not ruin their reputations by engaging in violence, fraud, misrepresentation or bribery. During the summer they organize country excursions outside Paris.

the Association internationale de combat contre la jalousie sexuelle et l'exclusivisme en amour (AICCJEA) (50 members by mid-February 1927). In March 1927 he established the Club Atlantis, which was restricted to members from the Paris area, a "group for selected realization." In April-May 1928, he started Les Amis de *L'en dehors*, which was dedicated to disseminating and funding the journal. From 30 June 1928, the AICCJEA admitted only subscribers to the review that had been members of Les Amis de *L'en dehors* for a while. Only after having belonged to these two groups successively, were individuals eligible to join *L'en dehors*.²⁶

In mid-February 1930 amendment the articles of association for 1931–1935 was proposed.²⁷ Henceforth aspiring companions of *L'en dehors* had to supply medical certificates, and wanderers were denied membership. The association also tried to compensate for the lack of female members by proposing intermediate arrangements. Companions could thus start by convening a "forum of *camaraderie amoureuse*" to overcome the reluctance of less sophisticated women, starting with "undressing in a small group" to enable them to "contemplate their mutual aesthetic qualities."²⁸ Concurrently, the Atlantis Club became a group reserved for couples (September 1933). In January 1936 the Association contre la jalousie registered its 186th member. By May, however, the advertisements for companions were gone, as were those for the Association internationale de combat contre la jalousie, which seemed to have united to form the Compagnons du combat contre la jalousie et pour une nouvelle éthique sexuelle.²⁹

The war interrupted Armand's publicity campaigns and his assorted initiatives. On the eve of World War II, the August-September 1939 issue reported that the Compagnons du combat

²⁶ *Ibid.*, n° 135, late May 1928.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, n° 176–177, mid-February 1930.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, n° 242–243, mid-November 1932.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, n° 301, mid-December 1936.

Ernest Juin, known as E. Armand (1872–1962), was a member of the Salvation Army when he discovered anarchism around 1896 while reading *Les Temps nouveaux*, a journal recently launched by Jean Grave. He contributed to Sébastien Faure's *Le Libertaire* before founding *L'Ere nouvelle* with his companion Marie Kugel. From 1901 to 1911 the journal evolved from mystical Christian socialism to philosophy and the Communist libertarian morale, culminating in individualist anarchism.

In 1907 he wrote his first pamphlet on sexuality: *De la liberté sexuelle*, where he advocated not only a vague free love but also multiple partners, which he called "plural love." Although the publication's tone was considerably more outspoken than most others like it, Armand's theses did not differ significantly from the ones repeated incessantly by the male and female companions that supported free love.

Only after founding *L'en dehors* (1922) did Armand elaborate an increasingly original conception of libertarian sexuality.

1. The establishment of *l'en dehors* and the campaign for revolutionary sexualism

L'en dehors did not champion revolutionary sexualism from the outset. During its first twenty months, few articles referred explicitly to issues concerning sexual ethics. Armand tried at first to state his view of anarchist individualism by repudiating both the vegetarian movement and the "heroic" interpretations of individualism. He also opposed André Lorulot, who was accused of ridiculing the shady circles in which Bonnot's group emerged, as well as Victor Serge and the anarchists who supported the Bolsheviks.

In issues 6 and 7, however, he began to criticize the practice of the free union (which he called unicity in love) that prevailed in the colony "L'Intégrale." He contrasted this experience — deemed "imperfect in educational respects" — with the superiority of "free

plural unions.” Only in the course of 1924, however, did the debate about issues concerning “sexual ethics” become permanently enconced in *L'en dehors*. The theme continued to be addressed there until the periodical ceased publication in October 1939.

In the letters from readers that he published and in his responses to them, Armand shared increasingly radical theses on sexuality. The debate arose from a letter signed “Raphaële” that he printed in February 1924. The woman writing this letter echoed the habitual view of free love by stating that she found “making love without being in love” impossible, as doing so would be tantamount “prostituting” herself. Armand seized this opportunity to outline his theses supporting revolutionary sexualism and *camaraderie amoureuse* that differed from the traditional views of the partisans of free love in several respects. Armand submitted that from an individualist perspective nothing was reprehensible about making “love,” even if one did not have very strong feelings for one’s partner. *Camarades* such as Raphaële were wrong to attribute excessive importance to various erotico-sexual manifestations. Biologically, after all, these acts were “entirely healthy and normal.” They were therefore not to be regarded as an “exceptional or extraordinary action.” Moreover, he urged “our female congeners” not to exaggerate the value they associated with “granting their favours.” In particular, Armand failed to understand why a young girl with modern ideas would refuse on principle — invoking a petit-bourgeois view of sexual relations — to share the joys of love with *un camarade* that she merely respected or liked. Agreeing out of comraderie to satisfy the sexual desires of others with the same ideological views seemed to him no more dishonourable than accepting an appointment as a state official. Armand continued that if he were a woman, he would feel “tremendous inner joy” if he “believed” he were “the object of desire to share amorous delights” with a friend who was “not entirely repugnant” and with whom he “sensed a common mood and spirit.” The debate on *camaraderie amoureuse* had begun.

anonymity of each of the parties to the contract in an effort to avoid last-minute cold feet with respect to the actual practice of comraderie, including the amorous variety. The provisions served to reinforce inter-individual relations in a very rigid and even distinctly bureaucratic framework, engulfed in legalities, which contrasted with the intentions of those involved to foster the freest and most complete forms of comraderie. The internal operations of the CED were rather obscure in other respects. All information requests and membership applications were to be directed to Armand, who was solely responsible for the project and was both the instigator and the driving force according to the criteria that he had defined and had no intention of abandoning.

Nor did the members seem upset. In April 1926, *L'en dehors* reported that 33 people had joined the Compagnons de *L'en dehors*, distributed throughout France, Germany, the United States, Brazil, Switzerland, the Republic of Argentina, and Morocco, including about twenty in France. By mid-July 1926 membership had climbed to 45 and reached 53 in mid-February 1927.

Failure became manifest with the decision in January 1928 to bar men from joining (given the minute number of female companions), “unless their applications coincided with ones from female candidates.” In addition to the shortage of female applicants, the CED encountered two general problems. One was the refusal of several companions to observe the overly rigid stipulations in the articles of association. The other was the pattern of couples emerging from this type of association. For these three reasons, Armand had a purely personal view of the operation of the companions, which underlay the disaffection and the repeated conflicts. Nor did he ever express the slightest intention to modify his project or make it less sectarian. On the contrary, he responded to the mounting reproaches by reaffirming that his decisions were well reasoned.

These meagre results did not prevent Armand from increasing his efforts by founding a society against jealousy (late May 1926):

beliefs without needing to be deferred until “the day after the revolution.” “Any ethical realizations that can be accomplished immediately are sexual by nature; they are optimally suited for being tried between friends, without publicity or upheaval.”²³ The proof was all that remained!

From October 1924, Armand proposed forming several associations, including one that would address “issues concerning sexual education and ethics.” Although the formulation was vague, the same issue contained a most opportune reprint of a certain Club Atlantis outside Europe, where the members engaged in swapping, claiming that Armand’s theses were their source of inspiration.²⁴

In June 1925, the articles of association of the Compagnons de *L’en dehors* (CED) appeared in *L’en dehors*. This association was defined as a setting of practical comradeship.²⁵ It served individuals who shared Armand’s views. Article 7 stipulated that in sexual matters the group condoned plural love, as well as the struggle against jealousy. The number of female members was expected to equal the number of male members. The only membership requirement was having a subscription to *L’en dehors*, and membership requests could be deferred. The association charged an annual fee and issued cards that served as passports for companions travelling in France or abroad to visit each other. Lists of the names of male and female companions were available on request. Hosts were to be notified a week before the visit. Those invited were not allowed to back out, except for health problems or publicity needs. The visits were restricted to 12 hours in the city and 24 hours in the countryside. Although no grounds for exclusion existed, membership could be revoked in the event of physical violence or prostitution.

These articles of association abounded with nitty-gritty details for preserving the autonomy, personal freedom, and even the

²³ *L’Emancipation sexuelle*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁴ *L’en dehors*, n° 44, 1 October 1924.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, n° 60, 12 June 1925.

The tenor of such proposals obviously shocked the majority of militants who considered free love more an ideal standard moderately influenced by romanticism than an actual practice. Exercising this broad conception of comradeship encompassing sexual relations presented a range of theoretical and practical problems (even for the supporters of individualist theses), which Armand’s opponents were quick to observe both in the columns of *L’en dehors* and in other publications of the libertarian movement. Should a physically attractive female *camarade*, for example, consent to sexual relations with all *camarades* who were not absolutely repulsive to her? Under what circumstances might she (or he) reject the advances? Was consenting to sexual relations with somebody to whom one was not physically attracted a sacrifice for the person offering his or her body? Did this practice entail the risk of imposing a type of sexual communism that would stifle individual freedom?

During the following months, Armand progressively elaborated and stated his ideas more specifically, while trying to make them appear more systematic. His reflections culminated in the *L’en dehors* issue of 10 July 1924, which featured a preliminary study entitled “Comment nous concevons la liberté de l’amour” [Our perception of free love], which was published as a pamphlet as well.¹

In a polemic with Han Ryner, Armand observed that the objective of his campaign in *L’en dehors* was to “tear down the impenetrable partition, which, even in surroundings such as ours, distinguishes amorous expressions from other manifestations of comradeship.” He noted with surprise that some comrades tried to differentiate between “having fun” in intellectual or economic endeavours and “having fun” with sex. “I have often asked comrades who had invited friends that they knew to be ‘sensual’ [...] why they had not tried to find them a delight that matched their amorous

¹ This text appeared as a pamphlet issued by *L’en dehors* and was entitled: *Entretien sur la liberté de l’amour*.

disposition. I never received a satisfactory answer.”² Armand then became far more specific and stated that he would refuse “a limited camaraderie, an incomplete hospitality,” as, “wanting no part of a welcome that made me feel comfortable in all respects except sexually, I exercise my freedom of choice as much as the most individualist of all individualists.”³ In “Lettre d’un philosophe à un camarade qui l’avait invité à une partie de plaisir”: “You will not be surprised if I ask you whether among your close friends or your circle of acquaintances, a lady *camarade* might be willing to spend two days in my company to partake in *camaraderie amoureuse*.”⁴

Nonetheless, Armand denied advocating that people (whether male or female) should have sexual relations against their will. “[...] Our conception of love, he explained, implies complete freedom to give ourselves to whomever we want, absolute freedom to reject someone who displeases us.”⁵ Far from giving rise to “sexual communism,” *camaraderie amoureuse* is by definition an act of free will. He was equally adamant that “beyond the issue of a single amorous temperament,” this must be the standard prevailing in relations between *camarades*. Accordingly, he wrote: “[...] no healthy, *normal* [underlined by us] male or female *camarade* will refuse to try *camaraderie amoureuse* if proposed by a male or female *camarade* that he or she likes or toward whom he or she feels enough affection,

² *L’en dehors*, n° 44, 1 October 1924.

³ *Le Combat contre la jalousie et le sexualisme révolutionnaire. Poèmes charnels et fantaisies sentimentales*, Orleans: published in *L’en dehors*, [1926], pp. 8–9.

⁴ *L’en dehors*, n° 61–62, 30 June 1925. The following anecdote addresses this subject. In several of my conversations with Jeanne Humbert, she told me: “Armand was quite extraordinary, but what a nuisance! Whenever he was invited to dinner, he would answer: ‘Thank you, but I do not dine with members of the bourgeoisie. If I share your bread and your wine, I must share your bed as well!’” She clearly expected a question from me. Each time I teased her by not asking whether Armand had dined with Humbert. It’s too late to find out now! [Note by Francis Ronsin]

⁵ *L’en dehors*, n° 40, 30 July 1924.

his willingness to rehabilitate forbidden pleasures, non-conformist caresses (he was personally inclined toward voyeurism), as well as sodomy. This led him allocate more and more space to what he called “the sexual non-conformists,” while excluding physical violence. Armand considered sensualist research on sexual relations justified only if the results of such practices did not deprive the one who lavished them — as well as the recipient — of self-control or permeate his or her personality.²¹ On incest, however, he was more outspoken: “Any view of freedom of sexual relations that condemns incest is freedom in name only [...]. [...] Nothing is more moral than engaging in incest with a view toward deriving mutual pleasure and nothing more immoral than acts intended to prohibit this pleasure, of which the consummation harms nobody.”²²

2. *Camaraderie amoureuse*: ‘les Compagnons de l’en dehors’

As a consistent individualist, Armand refused to participate in the groups established to deal with sexual issues. In France they included the Association d’Etudes sexologiques and internationally the Ligue mondiale pour la Réforme sexuelle sur une base scientifique. He gathered news and articles from the European and American press that he believed provided at least partial corroboration for his theses. He translated and reproduced writings by Kolontaï and Reich. He also published columns by Italian anarchist militants in exile, such as Ugo Treni (Ugo Fedeli) and especially Camillo Berneri, who wrote a series of studies for *L’en dehors* on religious and sexual issues, of which the most important one addressed incest.

Finally, Armand’s conception of sexual freedom lent itself to immediate “experimentation” between individuals sharing the same

²¹ Cf. *L’Homosexualité, l’onanisme et les individualistes*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²² *L’en dehors*, n° 270, mid-May 1934.

and on countless sexual prejudices shared by most of the libertarians. Among them, the contemporary ones were especially important and for good reason! He wrote that no anarchist individualist could be considered too young or too old to “want to experience all delights, all pleasures, all sensations.”¹⁷ Accused of legitimizing and condoning paedophilia, Armand was far from offended and invoked arguments from both sexology and Fourier to show how, parallel to paedophilic desires, similar sentiments were discernible among certain young girls attracted to old men – an attraction known as presbyophilia. Consequently, “in logically constituted surroundings,” rather than repressing these different inclinations, he recommended bringing together paedophiles and presbyophiles. Mastering the issue, he concluded, reveals that every passion can be reciprocated without causing any moral disturbances to the surroundings.”¹⁸

The importance of promoting a new sexual ethic also led him to broaden his field of concern in the course of several issues. In 1931 he published the pamphlet *L’homosexualité, l’onanisme et les individualistes on homosexuality*, which received little consideration in the early volumes of *L’en dehors*.¹⁹ As an advocate of greater tolerance in this field as in any other, Armand still viewed homosexuality (whether masculine or feminine) as a sexual anomaly. In a text from 1937, however, he mentioned among the individualist objectives the practice of forming voluntary associations for purely sexual purposes that might be comprised of heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual temperaments or of a combination thereof.²⁰ He also supported the right of individuals to change sex and stated

¹⁷ *Ibid.* n° 77–78, late April 1926.

¹⁸ *L’Emancipation sexuelle, l’amour en camaraderie et les mouvements d’avant-garde*, Paris, Limoges and Orleans: published by *L’en dehors*, [1934], p. 18.

¹⁹ Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, E. Armand, Abel Léger, *Des préjugés en matière sexuelle. L’Homosexualité, l’onanisme et les individualistes. La Honteuse hypocrisie*, Paris and Orleans: published in *L’en dehors*, 1931, p. 32

²⁰ *Notre individualisme, op. cit.*, p. 7.

warmth or intellectual admiration. Your counterpart will derive immense pleasure, and so will you.”⁶

Armand aimed to show that *camaraderie amoureuse* was simply the implementation in the specific area of sexual-affective relations of the contractual and associationist ideas he had elaborated in 1923 in his principal theoretical text *L’Initiation individualiste anarchiste*. He envisaged *camaraderie amoureuse* in the same context as other types of *camaraderie* between anarchist individualists: a voluntary association in which the constituents have agreed tacitly “to spare each other any avoidable suffering.”⁷ In keeping with his theses on the practice of providing guarantees, this interpretation of *camaraderie amoureuse* is an additional means for individualists, subject to constant “worries, (...) abuses, (...) assaults, and (...) persecutions from the ‘archists’ (who, as everybody knows, are the opposite of the anarchists), to protect, aid, and comfort each other.”⁸

“The *camaraderie amoureuse* thesis,” he explained, “entails a free contract of association (that may be annulled without notice, following prior agreement) reached between anarchist individualists of different genders, adhering to the necessary standards of sexual hygiene, with a view toward protecting the other parties to the contract from certain risks of the amorous experience, such as rejection, rupture, exclusivism, possessiveness, unicity, coquetry, whims, indifference, flirtatiousness, disregard for others, and prostitution.”⁹

This contractual interpretation of *camaraderie amoureuse* was undoubtedly Armand’s chief theoretical argument for including his theses in the field of anarchist individualism. From that point onward, he repeatedly expressed his support for *camaraderie amoureuse* and wrote several articles on the subject, most of which were published separately or in anthologies. In 1926 he published

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, n°39, 10 July 1924.

⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹ *Ibid.*, n° 136, mid-June 1928.

Le Combat contre la jalousie et le sexualisme révolutionnaire, followed over the years by *Ce que nous entendons par liberté de l'amour* (1928), *La Camaraderie amoureuse ou "chiennerie sexuelle"* (1930), and, finally, *La Révolution sexuelle et la camaraderie amoureuse* (1934), a book of nearly 350 pages comprising most of his writings on sexual issues.

These texts contain many redundancies. In each publication Armand added new input or qualified his theses. As a result, he modified his initial argument noticeably during the debate and, even if he preferred not to admit it, included a form of solidarity in his perspective on *camaraderie amoureuse* that was far closer to the mutual aid advocated by the anarchist communists than to the association of Stirner's egotists. In *L'Initiation individualiste anarchiste* in the chapter on reciprocity, he presented theses repudiating the links of solidarity that unite individuals as "the result of a simple calculation of accounting equivalence between what is given and received. [...] The notion of reciprocity no longer appeared as purely utilitarian in the gregarious and common sense of the word,"¹⁰ he explained. Errico Malatesta, in a review of Armand's work, wrote that Armand had supplied "a manual reflecting an anarchist morale — not simply individualist anarchist but anarchist in general. In addition to being anarchist, the morale was largely humane, as it was based on human sentiments that rendered anarchy desirable and possible."¹¹

Logically, Armand then described the associations of *camaraderie amoureuse* as "cooperatives of amorous production and consumption." "Producers and consumers," he wrote, "participate only to derive the expected benefits, with the understanding that they will bear any costs as well."¹² It is therefore inconceivable that the

¹⁰ *L'Initiation individualiste anarchiste*, Paris and Orleans: published in *L'en dehors*, 1923, p. 202.

¹¹ *L'en dehors*, n° 40, 30 July 1924.

¹² *La Camaraderie amoureuse*, Paris and Orleans: published in *L'en dehors*, 1930, p. 3.

"co-operator," except in the event of *force majeure*, would refuse to produce or abstain from consumption. Behind these rather strict requirements lies the Fourierist ideal of the universal right to enjoyment.

Camaderie amoureuse means not stopping at outside appearances. Armand was inexhaustible on this issue: "Like all serious comradeship, [*camaraderie amoureuse*] is not based on skin tone, shape of the nose, eye colour, a Grecian physical stature, or the share of grey or coloured hairs"¹³ (he was 58!). In *Notre individualisme*, a text from 1937, Armand mentioned a "compensation principle" intended to prevent the practice of free love from arbitrarily favouring those who were more intelligent, more beautiful, or stronger to the disadvantage of those less well-endowed externally."¹⁴

Finally, "sexual amorality destroys in human unity values of servitude, such as vice, virtue, purity, chastity, reserve, caution, fidelity, and many other attributes that necessitate the state or the church as guardians or teachers of morals. Wherever amorality figures in sexual relations, people who uphold moral traditions and good values are no longer required. That is what makes the sexualism we propagate revolutionary."¹⁵ Revolutionary and educational: "As individualists, we should explore a conception of inter-sexual relations that makes us more anarchist, more "neither gods nor masters," more ex-morality, more ex-legality, more ex-sociability — but also more sociable when we form associations."¹⁶

Based on these convictions, Armand elaborated multiple views in favour of adopting a new sexual ethic in *L'en dehors* from 1925 onward. Need led him to combine the defence of his theses on *camaraderie amoureuse* with increasingly direct attacks on the family

¹³ *L'en dehors*, n° 155, mid-March 1929.

¹⁴ *Notre individualisme: ses revendications et ses thèses par demandes et réponses*, [1937], pp. 6–7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, n° 79–80, mid-May 1926.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, n° 70, 15 November 1925.