

Declaration Before the Assize Court

Georges Etiévant

1920

Though I am a major criminal, it is no less true that I did no harm to anyone as long as I was left in peace. I worked as long as possible without bothering anyone, and I in all ways respected the rights and liberty of all.

Volney said in "Natural Law": "Preserve yourself, educate yourself, educate others." and though Volney wasn't an anarchist, since I didn't see anything in this aphorism that was bad or prejudicial to anyone I put it in practice as best I could. I worked not only for myself, not only to preserve and educate myself, but also to educate others. And so, considering that all natural phenomena are connected by numeric relations, the evening come I studied math in order to be better able to delve more deeply into the great problems that nature never ceases posing man, and to thus make myself more capable of spreading the truth. All this to say that I considered it an obligation to express my way of thinking on all matters both facts and theories. But since unfortunately despite my constant efforts my capacities are weak, I spent more time in growing than in using them and, in general, I abstained. In fact, in the three months during which I enjoyed relative freedom I never once spoke in public and I only wrote two articles.

But though I know of the existence of the laws qualified as "villanous" – I don't really know why, since in my opinion they all are – I was so persuaded that everyone has the right to freely express his thoughts, whatever they might be, especially while respecting those of others, that I always signed my articles, never using a pseudonym.

Such was my life for three months.

Now, suppose there were only rascals like myself in the world, working, studying, honestly expressing their ideas without their convictions needing to be manifested because of the thirst for gain, as is generally the case with the honest press and, finally, while respecting the rights and freedom of all, as I did. Suppose, I say, that there was no longer a single honest man, nor magistrate of integrity, nor brave general, nor honorable deputy; finally, not a single honest man. Tell me then what ill would be the results for humanity? Even though I had done harm to no man, it is no less clear that things could not go on in this way. Where would we be headed if it were possible to not have the same opinion as the leaders; if it were possible to raise one's voice for some other reason than that of joining in the choir of thuriferaires of the social order we have the good fortune of living under; if one could defend with impunity the defeated, the weak, those who are the victims of laws, and this with the aggravating circumstance of doing it for nothing, purely from conviction, without these unfortunates having a millionaire family to support them?

It was scandalous! Not only to not cry out against the ignorant, but to go so far as to claim that if the unfortunate Aliboron gave a few good kicks to those who want his death that this act of revolt would be an act of legitimate defense. Yes, I went so far as to say in an article that every act of revolt is an act of legitimate defense.

This was intolerable and even more intolerable because there was no way of demonstrating the contrary. I could accept this if I'd emitted an absurd idea that could have been refuted, but I allowed myself to be right. Such an act of daring couldn't go unpunished, for I was obviously wrong to be in the right and they made me see this by condemning me to end my days in the swamps of Guyana. But by some mischance it happened that that didn't please me, and the demonstration of my errors not having seemed clear and peremptory to me I didn't care to allow myself to be killed without defending myself. This was certainly a signal evil which all the lovers of order had to find scandalous. If those who decreed that all those individuals who don't think like them about certain facts should be put in prison or sent to the penal colonies in the name of freedom, equality, and fraternity had only expressed their opinions openly it would have been forgivable for me to rebel: it would have been arbitrary. But they had been careful to write it under the heading "law," and I had to let them do what they wanted.

Nevertheless, since neither my previous condemnation nor everything that has just been said seems very convincing to me, I think it would be good to lay out our respective positions in order to see in all this on which side lie logic, reason, right and justice lies. What do you expect? For we anarchists, similar in this regard to Rousseau, we need reason in order to make our reason submit. We don't have the kind of mentality that is happy compromises between contrary principles. We love clarity and honesty. We need them to tell us upon what precise, determined, scientifically known fact they base their claim that some have the right to command, to make the law for others? Where does this right come from? Who gave it to them? It must necessarily have been a being who possessed it himself. But what is this being? What certain fact can they base themselves on in order to claim that such a being exists? Has modern science not cast into the realm of fiction the metaphysical concepts of cause? Has God not become for them, in the expression of the famous geometrician Laplace a useless hypothesis? And even if you were to make us see for certain that there is a being of a nature superior to ours, with rights superior to ours, you would not be any further along, for you would have to show that he really gave you the right to command.

For, this right to make the law, did he give it to one or many? By what certain signs will we recognize those we must obey? If there are any who have positive and undeniable titles, let them appear and show them. Where is the legitimate power among all those that have succeeded each other? All have claimed to have the right to make laws: did they really have it? Does the right pass from one to another by the chance event of revolutions or coups d'état? God's judgment, which you have found absurd between two individuals, will you call it reasonable between two collectivities? And these collectivities having the right to enslave each other as a result of the chance outcome of combat, will they be two individuals or more? For in the end, we have to fix a limit at which oppression will be reputed legitimate. But what will we base ourselves on to say, for example, that twenty men don't have as much right to make the law for fifteen as 20 million do for 15 million.

Do you not see that instead of embarrassing oneself with these interminable difficulties it would be simpler, more in conformity with the nature of man who is, from the point of view of positive science, but a temporary aggregation of atoms of many simple bodies; that it would be,

I say, more logical and just to proclaim, like us, that no one has the right to command anyone, that oppression can never be legitimate, that subjection of one by 100 million is as unjust as the subjection of 100 million by only one? Who would dare to say that the vanquished, that the weak are always wrong, and that right is always with might and is intermingled with it?

I know well that if the leaders don't say this it's because they fear an explosion of indignation among their slaves, it's because they know that their empire is constructed of lies and that they are only strong because of the stupidity of the people, lulled by grand phrases, fooled by vain promises, tricked by odious comedies, stupefied by an inept morality.

When we want to go to the heart of the matter, when we want to examine the titles of the leaders, when we ask upon what their superior rights are based, they show their gendarmes the same way that Ximenes showed his cannons.

I will thus be allowed to think and say that, if humanity's masters have never, at any time and among any people, opposed any good reason to those who rose up against their will; if their "ultima ratio" has always been their machines of war, their prisons, their stakes and guillotines, it's not because the good will and talent was lacking for finding others, but rather because there are none.

You don't and you thus never will have positive titles conferring upon you rights superior to ours. We thus have, and we will always have the right to rebel against all forms of power they want to impose on us, against the whims of the legal will of whoever it may be. We always have the right to repel force by force, for we who respect the rights and freedom of all can legitimately have ours respected by whatever means necessary.

This is what several among us have attempted to do at various times, with more courage than luck, and it's what others, who will be increasingly numerous as the light of science spreads and as the truth becomes better known, will certainly attempt in the future. For we don't recognize and we will never recognize your so-called authority as long as you have not given a clear and precise demonstration of its existence, and long as you do not say upon what precise, determined, scientifically known facts you rely to claim that you have the right to make the law for us. These acts of legitimate revolt against pretensions that rest on no law, you have qualified as crimes. If it was your right to qualify them so, was it not ours to show that the crime didn't come from us? That the first attack on the inalienable rights of individuals didn't come from our side, but from yours?

But when, as partisans of free discussion we have wanted to defend ourselves, when we have wanted to make known to all that your accusations were all lies, you fled public debate, you forbade us any defense by a law that placed a seal on the iniquity of all the others. Has such a cynical trampling on rights and equity ever been seen before?

I sought to make known, in the article incriminated, that the act of oppression being necessarily prior to the act of revolt, the latter could only be an act of legitimate defense and that it is not we who began the tragic dispute.

And what did you oppose to these reasons? Nothing! Do you think a condemnation is so conclusively in your favor?

As long as humanity has existed there have been men who have claimed to have the right to command others, who have taken advantage of the naïveté of the latter to live at their expense. Who sometimes, under the fallacious pretext of making them happy, sometimes under that of having a divine mission, have imposed their will on them. Throughout history we have seen

them rest their power and base their authority on the most absurd prejudices, on the most vulgar superstitions, carefully maintained by them among their slaves.

But thanks to the progress of modern science, which has torn the rags from the metaphysical idols and which, the torch of truth in hand, has set in flight all the phantoms ignorance and error have given birth to, we have finally seen that you don't have, that you can't have the right to command us. It is uncontested that you don't have it. Yet despite this, you want to constrain us to obey by force!

And when we repel force with force, is it not obvious that it isn't we who began the violence; is it not obvious, as I said, that it isn't the anarchist hare that began?

You want to pitilessly crush the others, exploit them, subject them to your will, enjoy your beatitudes thanks to the contrast with their distress, insult them with your alms, trample on their human dignity, and if, by chance, a few of them, more enlightened concerning their rights, finally rebel against so much suffering and so many ignominies, you call them criminals! And if they want to protest against that lying accusation, you suppress them!

On which side is justice and equity in all this?

You have almost unlimited means of publicity in order to spread your accusations, but you know so well that they have no basis, you know so well that your so-called superior rights don't stand up under examination, that you want to forbid us any defense.

For finally, what had I done that my destruction should be so zealously pursued? I had simply sought to repel your accusations against us! Was this not my right? To tell me no, because the law prohibits it, means resolving the question by a question. What? Individuals have the sovereign right to prevent those who don't think like them from expressing their ideas? I ask you; on what do you base yourselves on in order to claim that people could have so exorbitant a right? They want to have the right to accuse us, to insult us, and if we raise our voices to defend ourselves, they shout at us: "You make excuses for acts qualified as crimes." They send us to die in prison or in the penal colonies, and they call this justice.

And see how in all this there is a partisan position to stifle the truth, since they fear the light, since they fear discussion of principle in broad daylight, in public. Not only do they not want to allow us to speak publicly, not only have they decided to sentence us in closed session so that our protests not reach the ears of the public, which implicitly supposes that they want to mislead them, but they even distrusted the jury itself! Even though its composition was exclusively bourgeois, even though it was composed solely of people having a direct interest in the maintenance of the current order of affairs, they were afraid of its independence and they sent us before a correctional tribunal, because they know that our condemnation there is assured in advance.

It is thus in these conditions and by virtue of such principles of justice that I was condemned to relegation for having wanted to repel the accusations they make against us without the least appearance of reason.

(Here Etievant read the incriminating and condemned article, published in LE LIBERTAIRE under the title "The Hare and the Hunter.")

To justify what I advanced in that article I will strictly rely on figures taken from works of partisans, of defenders of the current social order and from official statistics. For if our adversaries are unable to cite a single precise fact to support their pretensions to impose a yoke on us, we don't lack for those that legitimize our revolt.

Don't think I'm going to reproach you for the bloody hecatombs which, from time to time, leaders have carried out in order to maintain their supremacy. No! In sociology as in geology it is

the slow-working causes, or to phrase it better, regular causes that produce the most considerable effects. These are the ones whose constant action escapes us at first sight. In general we only pay attention to accidents which, by their very rarity, strike us the most.

And in fact, what are the 20,000 dead of June '48, the 40,000 of May '71 when we compare them to the annual number of victims of or social organization? Nothing, absolutely nothing! It's even almost nothing if we compare them to the number of victims every year in France alone.

An economist and statistician, M. Vaccaro, in a work entitled "Humanity's Fight for Life" says that between 1828 and 1846 infant mortality in working class families in Manchester was 97%; in Brussels infant mortality was 54% among the poor and 6% among the rich; and in Berlin the figures corresponded to 35% and 5.5%.

Another economist, Cooper, informs us that of 1,000 births there are 941 still alive among the rich after five years, and only 655 among the poor; after 20 years 855 and 556; after 50 years 557 and 283.

If I quote these figures it's because a partisan of the current order, M. Novicov, relies upon them in attempting to scientifically justify the economic order we are suffering under, and this by virtue of Darwin's theories. The author in question claims, in fact, to demonstrate in a passage in his book "The Future of the White Race" that social selection is made in the same way as natural selection and by identical means. Unfortunately, logic carries the day and the facts are too clear to be denied. And so M. Novicov destroys his own argument by a simple parenthetical remark when he says, in comparing social selection and natural selection: "As we see, elimination is carried out from below in both cases. Those who fall into the lower depths of society are those who have (all things being equal) the fewest psychic qualities: force of will, orderly spirit, activity, etc." And he doesn't see that it is precisely because things are never equal in current society that social selection differs in essence from natural selection. What is more, if he speaks to us of those who have fallen into the lower depths of society he says nothing of those who were born there, for it would be difficult to attribute this fact to their lack of an orderly spirit. We thus see that contrary to what the author claims, the economic process is not currently identical to the biological process. But whatever the case, the figures remain, and since I took them from the works of our adversaries I can't be accused of partisanship or exaggeration.

Thus, these figures show how deadly, for the majority of humanity, the current economic organization is. You claim, I know, that poverty isn't the result of this organization, but rather of the vices and laziness of the individuals sunk in it.

In order to see what is truly the case, it suffices to employ the reasoning used in geometry, in order to know if a given quantity is or isn't independent of another.

Let us suppose then that in place of the men who currently exist there fell from heaven a race having all possible and imaginable virtues. Let us suppose that these virtuous beings were all equally strong, equally intelligent, equally active, and let us suppose even more that they equally share all wealth.

I say, then, that by the sole fact of this sharing out, by the sole fact that they would not have left property undivided, by the sole fact that they would have preserved private property, poverty and its whole train of evils will re-appear in this society of perfect beings, even though all the causes assigned them by moralists were banished.

In fact, the laws of nature continuing to act there will be more births than deaths. But in the current state of affairs, where poverty kills a great number of individuals, the excess of births over deaths is annually 14-15 million.

Since we supposed capital equally shared among individuals equally strong, equally intelligent, equally active, it is clear that the capital of each would have received equal surplus value for his labor. But as a result of the excess of births over deaths some from among them must draw from this surplus value the expense for more human beings. Thus, at the beginning of the second year some would have more capital than others.

Thus, all qualities being equal, it would be those who have the least capital who would succumb in the struggle for existence and who, despite all their virtues, would fall into the lower depths of society since, as admitted by the author previously cited, it is necessary that all things be equal for the situation to be otherwise.

The inequality in the division of wealth, and consequently the poverty of some and the opulence of others, is thus independent of the virtues or vices of individuals, and has as its primary cause the regime of private property.

That being the case, let us take the latest figures, since it is they which show the least difference in mortality between classes. They show us that in 50 years there die 274 individuals more per thousand among the poor than among the rich. So, if we see that there are 30 million proletarians in France of about 40 million inhabitants, which means there are three proletarians out of every four individuals, and this figure is not exaggerated. And if we admit that ratio of the birth rate to the population is the same in all classes, though official statistics show that this ratio is appreciably higher in the poor class, we see that of the 850,000 annual births shown in these statistics, 635,000 are attributable to the working class and hence, a simple calculation shows us that 174,575 individuals on average die each year, victims of the social organization you defend.

That makes daily for around 480 deaths attributable to the economic conditions that result from the current property regime: 480 daily!

And you tell us to be patient, and you speak to us of wise and slow – especially slow – reforms; and you don't seem to realize that every three minutes of delay, from your stubbornness or indifference to social renovation on the basis of justice and solidarity, costs a man his life.

And if one of these unfortunates finally rebels against that organization that crushes him, you call him criminal.

And you don't want us to protest when we see the roles so audaciously reversed?

We proletarians, you enslave us from childhood to all sorts of arbitrary wishes, you force us to perpetual capitulations of conscience, you leave us no other positive rights than that of dying of hunger; you overload us with all kinds of obligations, each more fantastic than the others, and if, finally recognizing that you have no right to impose such a yoke on us we rebel against this organization that tortures us, which degrades us, which every year kills hundreds of thousands of ours, which ceaselessly puts our existence at risk, it is we the enslaved, the exploited who are the criminals!

Is it not for having claimed that none of this was true that I was condemned?

And yet precise, determined, scientifically known facts are there to prove that I was right. Is it not positively demonstrated that living beings differ from inanimate beings by their faculty to react against the influences of the surrounding milieu? Is it not certain that this faculty is the condition "sine qua non" of their existence? Is it not obvious that the social organization that annually causes the deaths of so many unfortunates is perpetuated by the spontaneous or consented cooperation of all! This being so, is it not as clear as possible that those whose existence the social order places in danger have the natural right to act against all those who, voluntarily or not, perpetuate it? I thus put forth nothing but the truth in the incriminated article.

After all, we have to see things as they are. Poverty means not only suffering for those plunged in it, it is also death. And in the end, what can you base the affirmation on that the 480 unfortunates that your social state kills daily don't have as much right to live as the others? And if, through selfishness or indifference they have the right to kill us more or less quickly with the assistance of physical privations and moral sufferings, why would we not have the right to kill the killers and their accomplices – conscious or not – by any other means? The social state that engendered such evils, did it not exist before us? Is it not then those who do all they can to maintain it who are the first to threaten the lives of their kind? And when the latter revolt and demand their right to existence by some means, when they render blow for blow, are they not acting in legitimate defense?

Why would you want these 170,000 individuals who your economic institutions kill each year to allow themselves to be killed without saying a word? It's honest to kill us by anonymous murder, but we're criminals in rebelling against such a pretention? And we don't even have the right to establish the facts, to make it known that all we are doing is defending ourselves?

You would like to prevent us from crying out to all: "But we're the ones who are being attacked, but we're the ones they kill." The facts attest to this, the official statistics proclaim it, our adversaries themselves, in their books, coldly do an accounting of our corpses. So we're not the ones who are criminals!

The propaganda by the deed that you attack us for is something that we practice by following your example. For in fact, it is in large part by acts, by tortures, by rewards, by examples that the leaders of the past inculcated in the minds of past generations the moral ideas they judged favorable to establishing their domination, and it's by the same procedures that you seek to perpetuate it in the minds of the present generations.

Do you think that we don't see this clearly? Do you think that we don't see that despite all your beautiful speeches on the superiority of human nature that you act as if you were convinced that man is nothing but an animal; that his acts, his ideas are fatally determined by the influence of the surrounding milieu? In fact you employ, in order to train your slaves to bring you your dividends, the same procedures that you use to train your dogs to bring you your prey. You whip, them, you caress them, you impose diets on them, you leave them a bone or the leftovers from your table. You give your deserving slaves medals or shining uniforms, just as you give dogs collars with ribbons and bells, because you know that both are stupid enough to kill each other in harness.

Among the leaders it is as if there is a vast conspiracy against good sense and reason. They take no account of the positive data of modern science. People receive subventions to teach the children of the people that the earth was created in six days six thousand years ago; that a whale swallowed a man and other things of the same caliber, and this despite the discoveries of geology and anatomy. They are officially taught spiritualism, though they know it is nothing but a mass of pure hypotheses, most of which do violence to the facts. Yet they know full well that this is a vast fraud for, in the higher teachings of science they have for some time ceased speaking of God, the soul, and other metaphysical foolishness. The physiologist, as Littré said, notes that the brain thinks, just as the physician notes that matter has weight, and one no more dares to speak of the soul to the former than one dares show the second, along with Chateaubriand "God lowering the solar orb to the Occident and raising the moo to the Orient, while all the while attentive to the prayers of his creature," for fear of having them burst out laughing.

Unfortunately, among the leaders, there are those who sometimes give the game away. Did Mr. E. Lepelletier not recently deplore in the ECHO DE PARIS the custom of giving scholarships to a few children of the people permitting them to pursue their studies, saying that this made for a breeding ground for anarchists. And in fact, he was right: those who know and who aren't blinded by interest are necessarily rebels. What Mr. E Lepelletier said is what all conscious leaders think. They would like us to speak the truth about things only to those who will keep quiet about them, for they know that science is the mother of revolt. They would like to prevent the poor from knowing and reasoning, for in order to enjoy themselves they need only beasts of burden and they feel that they will only preserve for themselves the material realm of humanity by reserving to themselves the exclusive possession of the intellectual realm.

It is in vain that biology and physiology demonstrate to us that all the phenomena accomplished by man are subject to the grand principle of determinism, which dominates all of modern science. They always speak to us of free will and responsibility, as if our acts of volition were not determined – as well as all the other natural phenomena – with the assistance of their conditions of existence. What do they base themselves on in affirming the existence of this free will? On nothing. They affirm it, and that's enough. Are laws not external to us? Doesn't their existence influence the acts of individuals? Doesn't this manifest influence prove that our acts are determined by conditions that are, in part, external to us and consequently independent of us? All of this is obvious, but they audaciously deny the facts, because the leaders can only maintain their supremacy by misleading.

And so it is that for having used the natural right all human beings have to express their ideas, for having answered the false accusations they make against us, for having told the truth that they want to once again impose upon me, and for good, the shameful yoke of prison; attacked in this way in my rights, in my freedom, in my life, in contempt of all justice; pursued by the agents of those in power, placed in the impossibility of surviving; placed before the alternative of dying of hunger here or of consumption in the deadly climate of the tropics, I gave blow for blow in proportion to my strength, by virtue of my right of legitimate defense. Having respected the rights of all, having answered words by words, writings by writings, I was perfectly within my rights in responding with acts for acts. For it is only right that, respecting the rights of others that I want them to respect mine; that leaving everyone free to express his ideas I claim the right to express mine; that causing harm to no one I would want to have my liberty and my life respected.

I had in any event put nothing forward than the truth, and speaking the truth, even when it is disagreeable to the leaders, means rendering a service to all. Humanity will never be too rich in truths, for ignorance and the false ideas that flow from it are the sources of all evil.

In fact, if these evils continue to afflict humanity, if the order of things that engenders them maintains itself even though the immense majority of individuals has an interest in their disappearance; if we even see a great number of individuals among those who have the greatest interest in social renovation do everything they can to hinder it it is because, trusting in appearances, they don't realize the ravages that deadly organization causes among them; it's that they don't know their rights as living beings, poor sheep whose shepherds lead them to believe that it is in their interest to allow themselves to be shorn and criminal to resist.

Well then, this blindness, cause of so much suffering, of so many deaths, we want to put an end to it. Behind the sickness that lays low 480 proletarians daily, we want to show the poverty, the privations, the excess of fatigue that prepare the way for the action of the pathogenic microbes, and behind the poverty we want to show the economic organization that engenders it and the

ceaseless actions of those in power and their agents, who perpetuate the latter and say: "There are the causes of our sufferings, of the premature deaths of those like us. Our natural right as living beings is to react against them and to suppress them, whatever they might be."

You claim to have the right to teach the children of the people, in the schools that you euphemistically call neutral, that Carnot died victim of a sect of criminals called anarchists. And we, for our part, claim the right to tell them that more than 170,000 proletarians die annually in France, victims of a social organization that you know to be murderous, but which you maintain all the same because it grants you privileges. Yes, we claim the right to speak out like you and to tell the truth to all.

You claim to have the right to preach submission and resignation to the victims of the social organization without telling them on what precise fact you rely to claim that they must submit to you; without telling them why they must resign themselves to suffering and prematurely dying in order to make your lives sweeter and longer. And it is for this reason that we say to them: There is no certain fact that proves that it's obligatory that it be you who perish; it is not more just, it is not more moral that it be one more than it is the other who succumbs, so don't allow yourselves to be crushed, defend your dignity, your rights, your liberty, your lives by all means necessary. They are all good, all honest, and the more strongly you strike the better it will be. And we claim the right to say this because, ourselves victims of this organization, we don't, by our silence, become accomplices of the evils it engenders. We claim the right to say this because it is true, because it is just, as history – that is, the experience of past centuries – teaches us this. We are accused of inciting murder because we tell the unfortunate not to allow themselves to be oppressed. But look at who accuses us! It is those who daily incite the hatred of people against people, who try to awaken racial and religious hatred; it is those who dream of vast hecatombs where millions of men armed with perfected rifles will kill each other; it is those who hypnotize their slaves so as to prevent them from thinking that our true enemies are our masters. Oh admirable logic of party spirit! When one of the unfortunates who the social organization tortures and kills revolts his victims are always innocent. But those who you lead to their death in your colonial expeditions in order to gather plumes, crosses and braids in the bloody mud of battlefields, are they not innocent too?

The figures we just saw teach us that in the first five years of existence 286 children per thousand die in the working class due to privations imposed on them by the social organization. Isn't it strange that it is precisely those who do all they can to perpetuate this state of affairs that so ironically reproach us for not appreciating life at its true value and of causing innocent victims?

And you want to forbid every cry of revolt before such a monstrosity veiled by such hypocrisy. Forbid us from crying out to fathers and mothers: "You don't see that this social order, the new Moloch, is devouring your children? Rebel!"

The theory of innocent victims is doubtless quite beautiful. Its development can allow for beautiful oratorical movements, but it must be remembered more often. It shouldn't only be remembered when one of us appears before "judges:" you must always have it in your memories. Every time, in the middle of your affairs or pleasures when you hear the hour sound you must say: "Twenty more of my kind have died, victims of the social organization, and not only did I do nothing to save them, but I did all I could to make them perish, I did all I could to perpetuate that organization that kills: in an hour twenty more will be dead, victims of the same anonymous murder, perpetrated by the indifferent, by all those who act like me."

Yes, you have to always tell yourselves this. And then if your hearts aren't cold and dry, if in your heart of hearts you don't say: "I could care less about who suffers and who dies," if you want to dissociate yourselves from the anonymous killers by an act of striking reprobation, then you'll have the right to speak of innocent victims. But I warn you that in this case you won't be coming to this room unless it will be like me, handcuffed, on the side of the accused.

The proletarian every day sees his children go pale, fade away and die, and if you sometimes deign to recognize, in order to get his votes, that things could be better, you still condemn what you call mad impatience, for you are in no hurry, having all you need.

And if it matters little to you, in fact, that a delay of a few years in social evolution costs the lives of a few million little poor people, it's not that way for us. And so we will not cease to cry out: "Don't vote; rebel, rebel! For the experience of centuries, written down in humanity's annals, shows us that nothing is obtained without that."

The night of August 4 only comes after July 14.

Social progress, reforms – even the most illusory – have only been able to be obtained through violence. They have never been the work of the obedient, of the resigned, but always that of rebels who, threatened by laws, in prisons, at the foot of the gallows, proudly answered humanity's masters: *non serviam!*

History also teaches us that the hindrances to progress have always come from those in power, and that consequently as long as there remains a vestige of power humanity, hindered in its natural evolution, hindered in its march to a better life, will be forced from time to time to overthrow by violent revolutions the barriers put up by the privileged of the moment, who want to see it indefinitely camped in an institution, made eternal in the adoration of an idea. And it is for this, to spare them many revolutions, many heartbreaks that we say to men: "Don't stop at the fourth of fifth step: go right on to the end, to liberty, to anarchy, for it is only then that humanity can evolve without violent shakeups towards ever retreating limits of perfectibility."

Editor's note: it is not for apologetic reasons that we are publishing this "declaration" delivered by the anarchist Etiévant before the Assize Court of Paris in 1897. Along with obvious truths, it contains definite errors and lovely concepts that are stained with utopianism. Nevertheless, it maintains all of its documentary value in the eyes of impartial researchers as well as all individuals who wish to come to their own opinions through the objective study of all doctrines and social systems.

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Georges Etiévant
Declaration Before the Assize Court
1920

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