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On the Terrain of the Economic Struggle

Iain McKay

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Introduction and other front matter (including the "Further Reading", "A Bibliographical Sketch", and "A Note on the Text" sections) to Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel* (translated and edited by Iain McKay, published by PM Press, 2022), pp. vii-xli.

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flects Proudhon's critique of the Utopian Socialists whose various schemes he labelled "Community" (*La Communauté*).⁹⁰

Finally, we must also note that Kropotkin often uses the term "England" and "English" to refer to "Britain" and "British." In this, he was reflecting current usage of the time, but it is fair to note that this confusion is sadly still common—particularly amongst non-British people (and, to be fair, amongst many English people as well).

⁹⁰ Kropotkin, likewise, was critical of such intentional communities. For a good summary, see Matthew Adams, "Rejecting the American Model: Peter Kropotkin's Radical Communalism," *History of Political Thought* 35:1 (2014).

Introduction: On the Terrain of the Economic Struggle

[T]he trade-union movement . . . will become a great power for laying the foundations of an anti-State communist society. If I were in France, where at this moment lies the centre of the industrial movement, and if I were in better health, I would be the first to rush headlong into this movement in favour of the First International—not the Second or the Third, which only represent the usurpation of the idea of the *workers'* International for the benefit of a party which is not half composed of workers.

—Peter Kropotkin, May 1920¹

Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) needs little introduction. Born into the Russian aristocracy, he rejected his privileged background to become an anarchist activist and, eventually, the most famous and influential anarchist theorist of his age—and beyond. *Words of a Rebel* was the first of his many anarchist books. Edited by his friend and comrade Elisée Reclus, it was published in 1885 while Kropotkin was in prison as a result of the Lyon show trial of 1883 and is made up of articles written between 1879 and 1882 for *Le Révolté* (*The Rebel*), the journal which Kropotkin edited.

This period was just one of many in an eventful life. After becoming an anarchist on a trip to Western Europe in 1872, Kropotkin returned to his native Russia and was arrested and imprisoned for his activism in 1874. Two years later, he escaped from the prison hospital and he went into exile, only returning to Russia after the February Revolution of 1917. For over five decades he was at the heart of the European anarchist movement and

¹ quoted by G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: a biographical study of Peter Kropotkin* (London: Boardman, 1950), 419.

contributed to all its debates, including championing libertarian communism and anarchist involvement in the labour movement. After the October Revolution, libertarians visiting Russia or deported there, like Emma Goldman, sought his opinions on the development of revolution. He died on 8 February 1921 and tens of thousands marched in his funeral procession along with anarchists carrying anti-Bolshevik banners, the last officially allowed protest against the regime until its fall in 1991.

Yet Kropotkin's life is not why *Words of a Rebel* is important and should be essential reading for today's revolutionaries. Rather, it is the message of the book which is key as its critique of capitalist society and its analysis of the flawed State socialist alternative to it are still relevant.

Le Révolté: Its Origins and Its Legacy

Using the privileges of his scientific position, Kropotkin visited Switzerland in 1872 and took the opportunity to seek out the International he had read so much about. He visited both factions of the Swiss IWA, first to the non-anarchist wing at the Temple Unique in Geneva, where he was horrified to see its leaders manipulate a mass meeting in order to stop a strike they considered harmful to the electoral chances of their candidate. He then visited the libertarian Jura Federation and the "separation between leaders and workers which I had noticed at Geneva in the Temple Unique did not exist in the Jura Mountains. There were a number of men who were more intelligent, and especially more active than the others; but that was all" and soon "my views upon socialism were settled. I was an anarchist."²

² Kropotkin, *Memoirs of Revolutionist* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1989), 262, 267. For a good anarchist account of the International, see Robert Graham's *We Do Not Fear Anarchy—We Invoke it: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement* (Oakland: AK Press, 2015).

Another translation issue relates to *commune*, which is used by Kropotkin in five distinct contexts:

1. The self-governing towns and cities of the Middle Ages;
2. The *Municipality*—the basic administrative unit of the modern French State;
3. The intentional communities advocated by the utopian socialists such as Owen and Fourier and created by small groups of their followers or, less often, by small groups of anarchists or other socialists;⁸⁸
4. A territorial organisation created in the process of a popular revolution (for example, the Paris Commune of 1871);
5. The basic (territorial) organisational unit of an anarchist society.

We have translated the term "commune" in line with these uses, retaining "commune" for the first, fourth, and fifth usages (i.e., the commune of the Middle Ages, the revolutionary grouping, and the future communes of an anarchist society⁸⁹) while using "municipality" for the administrative body of the Modern State, and "community" for intentional groups. The latter, we must note, also re-

⁸⁸ Or, more recently, the "communes" attempted in the 1960s and 1970s by people "dropping out" of mainstream society.

⁸⁹ It *should* go without saying that the future anarchist commune is not a return to the Middle Ages, however some Marxists—and some other commentators—have tried to link the two and assert Kropotkin (and anarchists in general) wished to return to an idealised vision of the Medieval Commune. Obviously, anarchist communes relate to the organisations created in revolution and was used precisely under the impact of the Paris Commune of 1871. For a discussion, see Kropotkin's essay "The Commune" in *Words of a Rebel*.

twenty-first century onto the nineteenth and so would be misleading.

Kropotkin occasionally uses the term “negro” as a synonym for “slave” (as in, “the negro of the factory”), indicating that workers were being treated like the slaves of the American South. This reflects his use of the word *serf* (and occasionally *Helot*) to describe the status of rural workers, whether peasants working their own small patch of land or those employed by landlords. Both terms may be a rhetorical exaggeration, but indicative of conditions and treatment suffered—perhaps unsurprisingly, with the rise of neoliberalism since the 1980s workers have, once again, been subjected to similar conditions and treatment as under the original liberalism of the nineteenth century.

Kropotkin’s writings on the labour movement reflected the terminology of the time, as used in the libertarian sections of the International: *le corps de metier* and *sociétés de résistance*. We have translated the first as “trades union” and the latter as “resistance societies.”⁸⁶ However, it must be noted that in *Le Revolté*, when referring to the reformist British unions, he used the English words “trade-unions,” presumably to avoid confusing these with the militant unions he was advocating. Caroline Cahm noted the same issue when translating these articles, having “had particular difficulty, for example, with such words as *corps de metier*, *syndicat* and *société de resistance* because the term ‘trade unions’ is so often used and understood to mean the reformist form of trade unionism with which the labour movement in Britain has so often been closely associated.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The word “syndicate” came into use over a decade after these articles were written (hence revolutionary syndicalism) and Kropotkin continued to use these older terms long after *syndicat* and its derivatives had become commonplace in libertarian circles (for example, in *Modern Science and Anarchy*).

⁸⁷ Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886*, xi.

He then returned to Russia and took an active part of the blossoming populist movement. The group he joined—the Chaikovsky Circle—was discussing their future direction and whether it should be further socialist propaganda amongst the educated youth or to make contact with the workers and peasants. Kropotkin advocated the latter, for propaganda must be made “unquestionably among the peasantry and urban workers” for “the insurrection must proceed among the peasantry and urban workers themselves” if it were to succeed. Revolutionaries “must not stand outside the people but among them, must serve not as a champion of some alien opinions worked out in isolation, but only as a more distinct, more complete expression of the demands of the people themselves.” Moreover, a strike “trains the participants for a common management of affairs and for distribution of responsibilities, distinguishes the people most talented and devoted to a common cause, and finally, forces the others to get to know these people and strengthens their influence.”³

This activity was cut short when he was arrested in 1874 and (like Bakunin before him) imprisoned in the infamous Peter-and-Paul Fortress. After two years his health failed, and he was transferred to the prison block of the St. Petersburg military prison. This was the opportunity he and his populist comrades were waiting for, and they organised his escape. Leaving Russia, he joined his comrades in Switzerland.

When Kropotkin had first encountered the Jura Federation it was during its peak in terms of activity and theory. Now, in 1877, its best days were behind it and it was essentially moribund. It still met, but the dynamic union organising and innovative thinking of the late 1860s and early 1870s were no more than an inspiration to remaining activists such as Kropotkin. However, he got involved

³ Kropotkin, “Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System,” *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 85–86, 113.

in the movement and wrote articles for *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne* and *L'Avant-garde*. When these ended (in May 1878 and December 1878, respectively) he took the initiative in establishing with Georges Herzig and François Dumartheray a new paper as the voice of the Francophone libertarian movement: *Le Revolté*.

Launched on 22 February 1879, it was an immediate success, selling in a few days all two thousand copies (compared to a maximum of six hundred copies per issue for previous papers). This undoubtedly reflected it being “moderate in tone, but revolutionary in substance, and I did my best to write it in such a style that complex historical and economic questions should be comprehensible to every intelligent worker.” Kropotkin rejected the idea that a socialist paper should be “mere annals of complaints about existing conditions,” the “oppression of the workers,” and describing a “succession of hopeless efforts” to change these as this would produce “a most depressing influence upon the reader” which the “burning words” of the editor tries to counteract. Instead “a revolutionary paper must be, above all, a record of those symptoms which everywhere announce the coming of a new era, the germination of new forms of social life, the growing revolt against antiquated forms of social life”. Ultimately, it “is hope, not despair, which makes successful revolutions.”⁴

Le Revolté was “destined to be the most influential anarchist paper since the disappearance of Proudhon’s *Le Peuple* in 1850”⁵ and played a key role in developing and popularising communist anarchism. Yet it must be stressed that while its most famous and persuasive advocate, Kropotkin did not invent anarchist communism—it had developed within the libertarian wing of International while

⁴ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 389–90.

⁵ George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of libertarian Ideas and Movements* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 164.

anarchists before the Lyon Criminal Court,”⁸⁵ and “The Lyon Trial” were translated by Nicolas Walter for *Freedom: Anarchist Weekly* (24 June 1967, 25 February 1967, 24 June 1967, and 29 April 1967). The second, fourth, and fifth articles were included in *Direct Struggle against Capital* (the last being slightly abridged).

The articles “Enemies of the People,” “The Workers’ Movement in Spain,” and “Workers’ Organisation” all appeared in English for the first time in *Direct Struggle against Capital*. The versions here are all new translations. “The League and the Trade Unions,” “Congress of the Jura Federation of the International Workers’ Association,” and “A Letter to Georges Herzig” all appear in English translation for the first time.

A Note on the Text

The text has been translated into British-English.

We have resisted the temptation to translate Kropotkin’s text in a more gender-neutral manner, as this would give the false impression that he was a committed feminist in his use of language. The reality is that like almost every one of his time—including female anarchists such as Emma Goldman—Kropotkin used words such as “Man,” “he,” “his” to refer to humanity as a whole. Kropotkin, though, was committed to equality between the sexes even if, at times, he expressed himself in ways we would now consider sexist. So while he notes and celebrates women rebels—particularly those within the Russian populist movement—he tends to portray the role of woman as one supporting militant men. Likewise, he focused primarily on the struggle against political and economic exploitation and, sadly, addressed sexual oppression only in passing. As such, it would be projecting back the sensibilities of the

⁸⁵ This was also issued as a leaflet on 23 January 1883 in London by the International Socialist Federation while a different translation appeared in *Liberty* (Boston) on 17 February 1883.

the final articles to appear in *Le Révolté* before Kropotkin's arrest in December 1882. The third section was translated into English in *The Alarm* (Chicago) on 20 March 1886 (and again on 28 April 1887).

Afterword to the Russia Edition (1919)

This appeared in French translation as a two-part article in *Le Réveil anarchiste* in May 1930 under the title "Social Revolution and Economic Reconstruction" ("Révolution sociale et reconstruction économique," *Le Réveil anarchiste*, 1 May and 17 May 1930). A corrected version later appeared in *Œuvres de Pierre Kropotkine* (F. Maspero, 1976) and included in *Paroles d'un révolté* (Anthony: TOPS, 2013).

Extracts first appeared in English in an "Additional Note" included by Baldwin to Kropotkin's pamphlet *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles* in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*. George Woodcock likewise included extracts in his introduction to the 1992 edition of *Works of a Rebel*. This edition includes the full afterword and uses the translation by Nicolas Walter which was first published in book form in *Direct Struggle against Capital*. However, this was based on the version published in 1930 and we have taken the opportunity to revise it in line with the 1976/2013 version.

Supplementary Material

The articles "International Workers' Association: General Assembly of the Jura Federation," "The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of its Practical Realisation," "International Workers' Association: Jura Federation," "Declaration of the accused

he was in prison in Russia.⁶ The term was first used in print by Dumartheray in the 1876 pamphlet *Aux travailleurs manuels partisans de l'action politique* (*To Manual Workers who Support Political Action*)—although James Guillaume had in 1874 foreseen the possibility that eventually "everyone will draw what he needs from the abundant social reserve of commodities, without fear of depletion".⁷ The concept was swiftly championed by Élisée Reclus and members of the Italian section of the International such as Errico Malatesta and Carlo Cafero.⁸

Indeed, Kropotkin's earliest articles in *Le Révolté* saw him use the term collectivism and it was only in 1880 that he fully embraced the term communism.⁹ He later recalled, that, "[t]hus, without knowing that the Italians had done this already at their last congress, I worked for the Jura Federation to call itself *communist* at its Congress of 1880 [on 9–10 October at La Chaux-de-Fonds]. Elisée, Cafiero, and I got in touch over this; it was accepted, and from then onwards our paper, *Le Révolté*, became communist anarchist. From that moment onwards dated the successes of anarchism in France."¹⁰

⁶ The first person to draw anarchist communist conclusions was Joseph Déjacque (1821–1864) in an Open Letter to Proudhon in 1857 ("On the Male and Female Human-Being," *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* no. 71–72 [Fall 2017]).

⁷ "Ideas on Social Organisation," *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 361.

⁸ As Malatesta later recalled: "Then we were 'kropotkinians' even before Kropotkin (in fact Kropotkin found those ideas which he made his own, already widely held by us before he entered the 'bakuninist' wing of the international movement)." (Vernon Richards, ed., *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* [London: Freedom Press, 1993], 210).

⁹ Somewhat ironically, if the period 1868 to 1877 was a conflict between collectivists (libertarians) and communists (Marxists) within the socialist movement, that of 1878 to 1882 saw the terms used by both sides swap—the libertarians embraced communism while the Marxists in France started to call themselves collectivists. (the Third Congress of the French socialists held in Marseille during October 1879 pass resolution in favour of both "political action" and collectivism).

¹⁰ Quoted in Woodcock and Avakumovic, 317–18; Kropotkin's speech was published as part of the Congress report in *Le Révolté*, 17 October 1880.

Kropotkin rose to international note as a result of the Lyon show trial of 1883. An increase of anarchist activity in the Lyon region, as well as the outbreak of a bitter labour dispute in the mining town of Montceau-les-Mines, saw the authorities seek to clamp down on the rebels. The miners' struggle was marked by a secret organisation calling itself the Black Gang (*Bande Noir*) which threatened to attack the bosses and which, in August, blew up religious symbols such as roadside crosses. The trial of twenty-three alleged members of the gang started in October 1882 but only nine were found guilty in December. No link was found to the anarchist movement. Then, in Lyon, two more explosions took place on 22 and 23 October and gave the authorities an excuse to blame the anarchists. Kropotkin summarised the situation:

Montceau and all neighbouring regions are under siege. And the Chagots, scoundrels of every description . . . walk with their heads held high, refusing work to those who displease them, arresting those they fear, treating the workers as conquered slaves. In all the major industrial centres, and especially in the mining basins, the troops are massed, ready to fire if the people move. Everywhere the bourgeoisie is preparing to order new arrests. The pretext? It is as simple as it is convenient. It is the affiliation to the International Workers' Association. Affiliated or not, as long as you are a socialist and a man of action—that suffices for you to be dragged to prison. . . . And then, it is so convenient. No Jury, therefore no possible acquittal . . .

As long as the socialist agitation was confined to theories, words, phrases—as long as *it was not acted upon*, as they say themselves, they let it go. But, as soon as they realised that the propaganda was being *acted upon*, that it led to the constitution of a party which

September and 14 October 1882. It appeared in English between 23 August and 6 September 1890 in *The Commonweal* (London) and was later republished between 6 and 20 August 1892 in the same journal before being issued as a pamphlet entitled *Revolutionary Government* (London: Office of “The Commonweal,” 1892). A new edition was published by Freedom Press in 1923 and was included by Baldwin in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*. This edition uses the translation by Nicolas Walter which was published in *The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly* No. 14 (April–June 1991).

XVI All Socialists!

This first appeared as “Tous socialistes!” on 17 September 1881 and appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel* (as “All of us Socialists!”).

XVII The Spirit of Revolt

This chapter first appeared in 14, 28 May, 25 June, and 9 July 1881, and was first translated into English in *The Commonweal* (London) between 19 March and 16 April 1892. A new translation by anarchist Arnold Roller (1878–1956) of the first two parts was included by Baldwin in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*.

XVIII Theory and Practice

This was first published under the title “Théorie et pratique” on 4 March 1882 and appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel*.

XIX Expropriation

While the book chapter comprises three sections, only two appeared in *Le Révolté* under the title “L'expropriation”—section I (25 November 1882) and section III (23 December 1882). These were

presumably to reflect the different circumstances in Britain (lacking, as it did, France's peasant population). This edition uses the translation by Nicolas Walter included in volume two of *Fighting the Revolution*.

XII The Agrarian Question

This chapter is made up of three articles: "La Question agraire" (18 September 1880), "La Prochain Révolution agraire" (11 December 1880), and "La Prochain Révolution agraire" (19 February 1881). It appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel*.

XIII Representative Government

Only the first section of this chapter appeared in *Le Révolté* as "Le gouvernement représentatif" on 6 March 1880. The chapter was first translated into English in *The Commonweal* (London) between 7 May and 9 July 1892.

XIV Law and Authority

This chapter originally appeared in *Le Révolté* on 13, 27 May and 5, 9 August 1882 before being translated into English as a slightly abridged pamphlet entitled *Law and Authority: An Anarchist Essay* (London: William Reeves, 1886). This was included by Rodger N. Baldwin (1884–1981) in his collection *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927).⁸⁴

XV Revolutionary Government

This chapter was first published as "Le Gouvernement pendant la Révolution" ("Government during the Revolution") on 2, 16

⁸⁴ Now reissued as *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (New York: Dover, 2002).

has vowed hatred on the capitalist and which is organised to fight hand to hand with the one who derives the worker of the fruits of his labour; as soon as acts proved that for this party socialism is not an electoral manoeuvre, but a conviction—oh, then, they started the hunt for men of action, and if they are allowed to do so, they do not will not be stopped by the numbers: they will send thousands of men to prison, they will guillotine, they will shoot if they find it useful for the maintenance of their domination . . .

But, if the French workers accept the challenge, if in all the big cities of France they rise as one man to vigorously protest by speech, by writings, by demonstrations, by actions, against the vile methods of their exploiters—the bourgeoisie will be forced to retreat, to declare themselves defeated.¹¹

This did not happen and soon fifty-one anarchists, including Kropotkin, were arrested (fourteen escaped arrest). That this was no more than an attempt to repress a growing anarchist influence can be seen from the lack of evidence against the accused (even with the involvement of agent provocateurs) and the charges brought against them:

[T]here was no possibility of prosecuting the arrested anarchists for the explosions. It would have required bringing us before a jury, which in all probability would have acquitted us. Consequently, the government adopted the Machiavellian course of prosecuting us for having belonged to the International Workingmen's Association. There is in France a law, passed

¹¹ Kropotkin, "La Situation en France," *Le Révolté*, 9 December 1882. Chagot was the director of mines in Blanzy and was the object of particular hatred by the miners.

immediately after the fall of the [Paris] Commune, under which men can be brought before a simple police court for having belonged to that association. The maximum penalty is five years' imprisonment; and a police court is always sure to pronounce the sentences which are wanted by the government. . . . Not a word was said about the explosions; and when one or two of the Lyons comrades wanted to clear this point, they were bluntly told that they were not prosecuted for that but for having belonged to the International—to which I alone belonged.¹²

The trial took place between 8 and 19 January 1883 and was used very effectively by the defendants to propagate anarchist ideas. Unsurprisingly, the Police Correctional Court found them guilty and they were given a range of sentences, with Kropotkin receiving five years in prison along with a two thousand franc fine as well as ten years of surveillance and deprivation of civil rights for four years after release. The trial was reported internationally and *Le Révolté* dedicated a double issue to the trial on 20 January 1883 which included defendant testimony and their declaration on anarchism (drafted by Kropotkin). A pamphlet *Compte-rendu du procès de Lyon* was immediately issued, and a more detailed account appeared later in the year in the form of a book by John Grave entitled *Le Procès des anarchistes devant la police correctionnelle et la Cour d'Appel de Lyon*.¹³

Words of a Rebel was published in 1885 by Reclus, while Kropotkin was in prison, a few months before domestic and international pressure resulted in the four remaining imprisoned defendants—along with anarchists Louise Michel and Émile

¹² Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 419–21.

¹³ For more details, see Nicolas Walter's "The Lyon Trial" in *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2007).

VIII Revolutionary Minorities

This appeared as "Les minorités révolutionnaires" on 26 November 1881 and was first translated into English as "Power of Minorities" in *The Alarm* (Chicago) on 30 June 1888.

IX Order

This chapter originally appeared in *Le Révolté* on 1 October 1881 and was first translated into English as "Order and Anarchy: A Statement of the Principles of Capitalism and Anarchism" in *The Alarm* (Chicago) on 13 December 1884 and again, as "Order and Disorder", on 23 June 1888. The version in this edition was translated by Nicolas Walter as a supplement to *Freedom* on 26 September 1970 and was later included in volume two of *Fighting the Revolution*.

X The Commune

This chapter originally appeared in *Le Révolté* as two articles: "La Commune", *Le Révolté* (1 and 15 May 1880). It appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel*.

XI The Paris Commune

This chapter originally appeared in *Le Révolté* as three articles in three different years to mark the anniversary of the revolt: "La Commune de Paris" (20 March 1880), "La Commune de Paris" (18 March 1881), and "L'Anniversaire du 18 Mars" (1 April 1882).⁸³ It was translated as a pamphlet in 1891 entitled *The Commune of Paris* (London: Freedom Press, 1891), although this had a different end,

⁸³ The paper's first anniversary article on the Paris Commune ("Le 18 Mars 1871," 22 March 1879) was not included although it may have been written by Kropotkin.

VII War

This did not appear in *Le Révolté* but was rather first published as a pamphlet entitled *Guerre* (Geneva: *Le Révolté*, 1882). Its core message—that modern wars were caused by capitalism and so workers had no interest in fighting for their masters—was one Kropotkin reiterated on many occasions (at least until 1914). It was translated into English by individualist anarchist Henry Seymour (1861–1938) four years later as the pamphlet *War!* (London: H. Seymour, 1886).

This work should not be confused with a pamphlet of the same name (*La Guerre*) published thirty years later, with the same message. This was originally serialised in *Les Temps Nouveaux* in March 1912 and issued as the pamphlet *La Guerre* (Paris: Publications des “Temps Nouveaux,” 1912) before being included the following year as two chapters of Part IV of *Modern Science and Anarchy*. It appeared under the title “Modern Wars and Capitalism” in *Freedom* between May and August 1913, before being issued the following year as a pamphlet entitled *Wars and Capitalism* (London: Freedom Press, 1914). Ironically, this appeared after Kropotkin, ignoring his own arguments in both pamphlets, sided with the Allies in the First World War. This did not stop leading American anarchist Emma Goldman (1869–1940) from reprinting it in *Mother Earth*⁸¹ due to it “embodying a logical and convincing refutation of his new position.”⁸²

⁸¹ This was serialised beginning in the November 1914 issue of *Mother Earth* with the comment that “[n]o better answer can be made to Kropotkin’s changed attitude than his own argument against war written in 1913”; also see Alexander Berkman’s “In Reply to Kropotkin,” in *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth* (Washington: Counterpoint, 2001), edited by Peter Glassgold, 380–81.

⁸² Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1970), 565.

Pouget who had been arrested for other reasons¹⁴—being released in January 1886. Once released, Kropotkin wrote about his experience in the article “In French Prisons” for *The Nineteenth Century* (March 1886)¹⁵ and then took up the invite to help work on an anarchist journal in London, co-founding *Freedom* in October 1886. In stark contrast to the tiny meetings Kropotkin had attended in 1887, on the eve of his leaving France for London he gave a talk in Paris to thousands on 28 February 1886.¹⁶

Le Révolté continued publication first with Herzig as editor and then Jean Grave but in September 1887 “[o]ur ‘boy,’ *Le Révolté*, prosecuted for anti-militarist propaganda, was compelled to change its title-page and now appeared under a feminine name,” *La Révolte* (*Revolt*).¹⁷ It, too, was closed by the State in March 1894 after Grave was arrested as part of the repressions associated with the “Trial of the Thirty.” After the jury acquitted the accused anarchists, Grave sought to re-launch *La Révolte* but Elisée Reclus persuaded him to call the proposed paper *Les Temps Nouveaux* (*New Times*). This journal ran from 4 May 1895 to 8 August 1914. In his *Memoirs* Kropotkin stressed the continuity of all three papers by writing how *Le Révolté* “continues, at Paris, under the name of [*Les*] *Temps Nouveaux*.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Both had taken part in a demonstration of unemployed workers in Paris on 9 March 1883 under the slogan “work or bread” which ended with the pillaging of a bakers’ shop. This event is of note because Michel had raised the Black Flag—“the flag of strikes and the flag of those who are hungry,” to use her words—at its front and so helped make it become the anarchist symbol *par excellence* (see the Appendix on “The Symbols of Anarchy” in volume 1 of *An Anarchist FAQ* [Edinburgh: AK Press, 2008]).

¹⁵ Included in Kropotkin’s 1887 book *In Russian and French Prisons* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991).

¹⁶ This talk, “The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution,” was published in *Le Révolté* between 28 March and 9 May 1886 before being translated by Henry Glasse in 1887 and published as a pamphlet. It is included in *Direct Struggle against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 463.

¹⁸ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 390.

Continuity and Change in Anarchist Communism

Words of a Rebel was “the critical part” of Kropotkin’s “work on anarchism” which he had “to interrupt” when he was arrested. On his release in 1886, he “began to work out the constructive part of an anarchist-communist society—so far as it can now be forecast—in a series of articles” which were later revised and incorporated into *The Conquest of Bread* in 1892.¹⁹ As such, *La Révolte*’s main legacy was *Words of a Rebel* which laid the foundations for Kropotkin’s later work and presented—at least to French readers as an English-language translation of the 1885 edition did not appear until 1992 although a number of chapters were published as pamphlets—a summation of what anarchists thought was wrong about the current system and the wrong ways (Parliamentarianism and Revolutionary Government) of ending it.

Reading *Words of a Rebel* shows the continuity in Kropotkin’s ideas and how many of its themes were explored and built upon in later work. Thus his critique of capitalism and the State is joined with discussions of ethics, the lessons of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, as well as the rise of the State on the ruins of the Medieval Commune—all subjects discussed throughout his political career and included in his final book, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, published in 1913. Indeed, that work has a chapter entitled “The Means of Action” which repeats the same arguments and vision of the revolutionary process postulated in “The Spirit of Revolt.”

This does not mean that there were no changes, far from it. The major change between *Words of a Rebel* and subsequent works by Kropotkin is that in the early 1880s he underestimated the stocks of food, products, and raw materials held in storage under capitalism which would immediately be available for use during a revolutionary situation. As he recounts in the Afterword written for

¹⁹ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 463.

IV The Next Revolution

This appeared as “La prochaine Révolution” 7 February 1880 and appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel* (as “The Coming Revolution”).

V Political Rights

This appeared as “Les droits politiques” on 18 February 1882 and appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel*.

VI To the Young

This chapter was published in four parts (26 June, 10 July, 7 and 21 August 1880) and was issued as a pamphlet the following year. Translated into many languages, it was one of Kropotkin’s most influential and popular works.⁷⁹ It is better known in English as “Appeal to the Young” after its translation by leading British Marxist Henry M. Hyndman (1842–1921) in the Social Democratic Federation’s paper *Justice* between 23 August and 11 October 1884. It was published as a pamphlet the following year (*Appeal to the Young* [London: Modern Press, 1885]). Hyndman considered it “the best propagandist pamphlet that was every penned. . . . The thing is a masterpiece, alike in conception and execution. Nothing ever written so completely combines the scientific with the popular, the revolutionary with the ethical.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Barry Pateman, “An Appeal to the Young: Some thoughts on a best seller,” *Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* no. 82–83 (July 2015).

⁸⁰ H.M. Hyndman, *The Record of an Adventurous Life* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 244–45.

Preface to the Italian Edition (1904)

This appeared in *Le Réveil anarchiste* on 4 June 1904 (in French) and included in *Paroles d'un révolté* (Antony: TOPS, 2013). This edition uses the translation by Nicolas Walter which was first published in book form in *Direct Struggle against Capital* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014).

Preface to the Russia Edition (1919)

This was included in French translation in *Paroles d'un révolté* (Antony: TOPS, 2013) and appears here in English for the first time.

I The Situation

This appeared as “La situation” in the second issue of *Le Révolté* on 8 March 1879 and was first translated into English on 7 July 1888 in *The Alarm* (Chicago) under the title “The Situation Today”. The version in this edition was translated by Nicolas Walter and published as a supplement to *Freedom* on 26 September 1970 and was later included in volume two of *Fighting the Revolution*.

II The Breakdown of the State

This appeared as “La décomposition des États” on 5 April 1879, and appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel*.

III The Necessity of Revolution

This appeared as “La nécessité de la Révolution” on 5 March 1881 and appears to have never been translated into English before the 1992 edition of *Words of a Rebel* (under the somewhat misleading title of “The Inevitability of Revolution”).

the 1919 Russian edition, he only studied this issue in 1891;²⁰ yet this did not undermine his arguments for he also argued in *Words of a Rebel* that workers had to restart production under their own management as an essential part of a successful social revolution.

Thus we find Kropotkin noting that during the great railway strike in America of 1877 that it showed both the power of a general strike and the need to turn it as soon as possible into a general expropriation in order to *restart* production and distribution under workers’ control:

So, when these days come—and it is for you to hasten their coming—in which a whole region and great cities with their suburbs will have got rid of their governments, our work is marked out; all industrial and other plants must be returned to the community, social property held by individuals must be returned to its true master—which is all of us, so that each can have his full share of the goods available for consumption, so that production of all that is necessary and useful can continue, and that social life, far from being interrupted, can be carried on with the greatest energy. Without the gardens and fields that give us produce indispensable for life, without the granaries, the warehouses, the shops that gather together the products of work, without the factories and workshops that provide textiles and metalwork, without the means of defence, without the railways and other ways of communication that allow us to exchange our products with the neighbouring free communes and combine our ef-

²⁰ Kropotkin, “Le Capital de la Révolution,” *La Révolte*, 7 March 1891.

forts for resistance and attack, we are condemned in advance to perish.²¹

He also noted that public support was lost when the strike disrupted the supply of essential goods and so stressed that a general strike was only the start of the revolution, for, as well as supplies, there was the pressing need for “means of defence” and to “combine our efforts for resistance and attack.” Which, incidentally, belies Marxist claims—repeating Marx and Lenin as if they were disinterested seekers after truth rather than polemicists seeking to win by any means—that anarchists do not recognise the threat of counter-revolution. Rather than build a new State (with all the flaws inherent in centralised, hierarchical, top-down structures) anarchists “find new forms of organisation for the social functions that the State apportioned between its functionaries” based on “independent communes for the *territorial* groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings *by social functions*,” both “interwoven and providing support to each [other] to meet the needs of society,” including “mutual protection against aggression, mutual aid, territorial defence.”²² Unsurprisingly, Kropotkin stressed the need to go beyond the general strike into insurrection in his analysis of the lessons of the 1905 Russian Revolution.²³

This means that we must be careful to differentiate between anarchist communism as a means and as a goal. The latter is the free, classless society which has moved beyond the legacies of class society (what is sometimes misleadingly termed a “utopia”). The former is how this is achieved, namely by the expropriation and socialisation of private property and the destruction of the State

²¹ “Expropriation,” *Words of a Rebel* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 219–220. As he later put it, this uprising shows that “the general strike was already asserting itself” (“L’Entente” II, *La Révolte*, 18 April 1891).

²² Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, 169, 164, 165.

²³ “The Russian Revolution and Anarchism,” *Direct Struggle against Capital*, 477.

The following articles have also been identified as by Kropotkin, and almost all have so far not been translated into English:

- “L’Année 1879,” *Le Révolté*, 10 January 1880
- “Les Pendaïsons en Russie,” *Le Révolté*, 27 March 1880
- “Les Élections,” *Le Révolté*, 25 December 1880
- “L’Année 1880,” *Le Révolté*, 8 January 1881
- Letter on the right of asylum, *Le Révolté*, 2 April 1881⁷⁷
- “Charles Darwin,” *Le Révolté*, 29 April 1881⁷⁸
- “Les Préludes de la révolution,” *Le Révolté*, 28 October 1882
- “La Situation en France,” *Le Révolté*, 9 December 1882

Obviously, there may be other articles by Kropotkin published between 1879 and 1882, but as his contributions were usually not signed, identifying these can be difficult.

Unless otherwise indicated, the translation is by the editor. Those translated by Nicolas Walter have been revised and so have some minor differences to those originally published.

Preface (1885)

By the original editor, Elisée Reclus, this edition uses the translation by Nicolas Walter which appeared in a supplement to *Freedom* (26 September 1970) and was later included in volume two of *Fighting the Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1985).

⁷⁷ This letter originally appeared in the *Gazette of Lausanne* (Cahm, 317).

⁷⁸ Included in *Modern Science and Anarchy* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2018).

publish it fell through in the 1970s and it was 1992 before an edition appeared. Translated by George Woodcock as part of Kropotkin's *Collected Works* series, like the wider project it was incomplete—limiting itself to the original 1885 edition and excluding the 1904 and 1919 prefaces and 1919 afterward. In addition, as Walters noted, it is “rather badly translated . . . the language is sometimes so crude as to become a sort of Frenghish” and as well as the missing prefaces and afterword, “it isn't actually quite complete; some short passages have been omitted from the original text, presumably by mistake, as well as a couple of long footnotes, presumably on purpose.”⁷³ This edition includes all missing material as part of a complete new translation.

While it remained untranslated until 1992, various chapters had appeared in English as pamphlets or in libertarian journals and newspapers. We have drawn upon *Bibliographie de l'anarchie* (Brussels/Paris: Temps Nouveaux/Stock, 1897) by anarchist historian Max Nettlau (1865–1944), amongst other sources, to indicate when the various chapters first appeared in French and in English.⁷⁴ This edition includes articles and speeches published during this period which were either identified as being by Kropotkin, written under a known alias (Levachoff), or have been subsequently identified as being written by him.⁷⁵ We have also included a letter written on 30 June 1886 to Georges Herzig, who helped start *Le Révolté*, shortly before leaving for Britain, which was later published in *Le Réveil communiste-anarchiste* (3 January 1925).⁷⁶

⁷³ “Raven Review: *Words of a Rebel*,” *The Raven: An Anarchist Quarterly* no. 20 (October–December 1992), 324–25, 326.

⁷⁴ Almost every chapter in this book was translated into many languages, (including most Western European ones as well as Japanese and Chinese) reflecting the international nature of the anarchist movement. Space precludes listing all translations, although Nettlau does indicate these as of 1897.

⁷⁵ Primarily by Caroline Cahm.

⁷⁶ This was later published with a few differences in “Une lettre de Kropotkine” (*Le Réveil anarchiste*, 9 January 1932).

by means of communal and workplace federations as well as the defence of a free people against those seeking to re-enslave them. Both are related but distinct, for while the future society of our dreams guides how we achieve it, anarchists are well aware that this would take years to fully create: The legacies of thousands of years of class and statist systems cannot be removed in the space of a few hours, days, or even years.

Thus, “the sole fact of having laid hands on middle-class property implies the necessity of completely reorganising the whole of economic life in workshops, in dockyards, and in factories.”²⁴ The structure of industry, for example, reflects the decisions of the capitalist class to secure and maximise its profits and power, and while a revolution would inherit this and have to set it going under workers' control, this is not all it will do—a free people would seek to transform this heritage of wage slavery from the start. Initially, this would be transforming working conditions and processes to make them fit for people rather than profit, but it will not stop there. In other words, expropriation is the *start* not the end of the social revolution, it is “the beginning of social reorganisation.”²⁵

Words of a Rebel may, at times, express the enthusiasm—and often impatience—of those who first embrace an idea, but alongside are more realistic perspectives which come to the fore in Kropotkin's later, more mature, works. So there is an occasional rhetorical flourish which, taken in isolation, could suggest that Kropotkin saw anarchist communism being introduced immediately after a revolution. However, looking at his writings as a whole—and this includes *Words of a Rebel* as a whole—these few comments are not representative of his views.

Thus, in 1879, he was well aware that “the revolution [had] to last several years” to “bear its fruits” and that “it is necessary that

²⁴ Kropotkin, “The Decentralisation of Industry,” *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.), 177.

²⁵ “Expropriation,” *Words of a Rebel*, 219.

the revolutionary period should last several years, so that the propagation of new ideas is not confined solely to the great intellectual centres but penetrates to the most isolated hamlets.”²⁶ This is echoed in *Words of a Rebel*: “It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation.”²⁷

The notion of an overnight revolution is one alien to anarchism: “No fallacy more harmful has ever been spread than the fallacy of a ‘one-day revolution.’” For Kropotkin such a perspective was only applicable for a political revolution and not for the social revolution envisioned by anarchists, as “we do not believe that in any one country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of an eye, as some socialists dream.”²⁸ This was for very obvious reasons:

It is evident, as Proudhon has already pointed out, that the smallest attack upon property will bring in its train the complete disorganisation of the system based upon private enterprise and wage labour. Society itself will be forced to take production in hand, in its entirety, and to reorganise it to meet the needs of the whole people. But this cannot be accomplished in a day or a month; it must take a certain time thus to reorganise the system of production, and during this time millions of men will be deprived of the means of subsistence. . . . There is only one really *practical* solution of the problem—boldly to face the great task which awaits us, and instead of trying to patch up a situation which

²⁶ Kropotkin, “The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of Its Practical Realisation,” *Direct Struggle against Capital*, 502, 501.

²⁷ Kropotkin, “Revolutionary Minorities,” *Words of a Rebel*, 72.

²⁸ Kropotkin, “Food,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 67.

ideas when the articles included in *Words of a Rebel* were written and provides essential context for this period. Both these works cover only part of his eventful life, so for those interested in an overview there are three biographies available. The one by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic (*The Anarchist Prince: a biographical study of Peter Kropotkin*) has been republished as *Kropotkin: From Prince to Rebel* (Black Rose Books, 1989) as a supplement to the *Collected Works* project. As this dates from 1950, it should be supplemented by Martin A. Miller’s biography *Kropotkin* (University of Chicago Press, 1976). *The anarchist-geographer: an introduction to the life of Peter Kropotkin* (Genge, 2007) by Brian Morris is also a useful, if short, work on this subject.

For good introductions to Kropotkin’s ideas by anarchists, *Evolution and Revolution: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Peter Kropotkin* (Jura Books, 1996) by Graham Purchase and *Kropotkin: The Politics of Community* (PM Press, 2018) by Brian Morris should be consulted.

A Bibliographical Sketch

Words of a Rebel is mostly made up of articles published in *Le Révolté* between 1879 and 1882. A few chapters (notably “Representative Government” and “Expropriation”) had substantial material added for publication in book form, while many had already been published as pamphlets. Only one chapter (“War”) did not appear in the pages of *Le Révolté*, being written as a pamphlet entitled *La Guerre* (Geneva: *Le Révolté*, 1882). The book is somewhat inconsistent in informing its readers when the chapters were originally written—some do indicate initial publication dates, most do not, and those that do are not consistent in terms of where in the chapter these dates are provided.

While Kropotkin’s first anarchist book, ironically it was the last to be fully translated into English. An attempt by Nicolas Walter to

form.⁷² Nor does it contain the expanded 1913 French edition of his final book published in his lifetime, *La Science moderne et l'anarchie*, but this is now available as *Modern Science and Anarchy* (AK Press, 2018). Many other editions of his most famous works—such as *The Conquest of Bread* and *Mutual Aid*—are also available.

Direct Struggle against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology (AK Press, 2014) contains the most comprehensive selection of his writings. It includes extracts from all but one of his books as well as numerous newspaper articles and pamphlets (some available in book form or in English for the first time). It also includes a lengthy introduction discussing all aspects of Kropotkin's ideas, as well as a biographical sketch. A shorter collection of his pamphlets is available in *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (Dover, 2002). This was formerly published as *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* and contains much of his best short work, although most are abridged without indication of the edits.

Many general anarchist anthologies include works by Kropotkin. However, special notice must be given to Daniel Guérin's essential *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (AK Press, 2005) which has a section on Kropotkin, and volume one of Robert Graham's *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* (Black Rose Books, 2005), which has numerous extracts from his works.

In terms of Kropotkin's life, the most obvious starting place must be his own autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, first published in 1899, which recounts his time in the Jura Federation, the creation of *Le Révolté*, and the Lyon trial of 1883. Caroline Cahm's *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) is essential reading, as it covers the development of Kropotkin's communist anarchist

⁷² See my "Sages and Movements: An Incomplete Peter Kropotkin Bibliography," *Anarchist Studies* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2014).

we ourselves have made untenable, to proceed to reorganise production on a new basis.²⁹

Kropotkin, then, was an anarchist not because he saw the social revolution as easy, but precisely because he recognised how difficult it would be. As he indicated in *Words of a Rebel*—in "Revolutionary Government" and the 1919 Afterward written while the Bolshevik regime was confirming his analysis—concentrating power into the hands of a few in a State would never solve the challenges and difficulties a revolution would face—but it would create a new class system centred around the bureaucracy it would inevitably spawn.

However, as in 1885, the preconditions for creating such a society—namely, the expropriation of the means of life—has to be started as soon as possible by the people themselves so that a revolution becomes a social revolution which, in turn, would eventually produce full libertarian communism: "As regards the substance of anarchism itself, it was [my] aim to prove that communism—at least partial—has more chances of being established than collectivism, especially in communes taking the lead, and that free, or anarchist-communism is the only form of communism that has any chance of being accepted in civilised societies."³⁰

So "we know that an *uprising* may well topple and change a government in one day, whereas a *revolution*, if it is to achieve a tangible outcome—a serious, lasting change in the distribution of economic forces—*takes three or four years of revolutionary upheaval*" and "were we to wait for the Revolution to display an openly communist or indeed collectivist character right from its initial insurrections, that would be tantamount to throwing the idea of Revolution overboard once and for all. For that to be a possibility, it would

²⁹ Kropotkin, op. cit., 56–57.

³⁰ Kropotkin, "Anarchism," *Direct Struggle against Capital*, 173.

require that a large majority be already in agreement upon effecting a communist change, which is generally not the case, since it is primarily the turns taken by a revolution that can draw the masses over to communism.”³¹ Hence Kropotkin’s comments from 1913 when he suggested that “the *political* form of the next revolution” would be “THE COMMUNE—*free, independent and, very probably, communist.*”³² Whether it was or not—and how extensive the application of communist principles in every aspect of society—was recognised as being dependent on numerous factors, not least the material conditions and the popular consciousness.³³

This can be seen in *Words of a Rebel* in which the general vision of revolution presented—drawing upon the experience of the Great French Revolution— goes through stages. Initially, conditions are such that most people accept the current regime as inevitable, even just, and there are a few critics and struggles against it. However, over time more and more people start to oppose aspects of the system. This provokes individual acts and a few minor revolts, but these fan the flames of discontent, get more and more people to question more and more aspects of what they formerly took for granted. These rebellions grow in number and size as revolutionaries encourage the spirit of revolt until such time as a crisis comes and the State machine is effectively paralysed by mass disobedience. This stage was expected to last years, and during it the new

³¹ “Insurrections and Revolution,” *Direct Struggle against Capital*, 553, 554–55.

³² *Modern Science and Anarchy*, 148.

³³ Errico Malatesta had likewise argued in 1884 that “the immediate implementation of communism” was possible “only in those areas and to the extent that circumstances allow while collectivism is applied to the rest, but only *on a transitional basis.*” This was because “communism requires a huge moral improvement in the members of society” and a “deep-seated sense of solidarity that the thrust of the revolution may well not be enough to bring about” particularly if there is not “an abundance of production” and favourable working arrangements. (“Program and Organization of the International Working Men’s Association,” *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* [Oakland: AK Press, 2014], 47).

belonging to the exploiters, without waiting for this benefit to be granted by some government or other.⁷⁰

This means that works such as *Words of a Rebel* should not allowed to gather dust in libraries. We can learn from it—particularly as we have over a hundred years of extra experiences to draw upon—and, as Kropotkin would have been the first to stress, it is to be built upon rather than idolised and regurgitated. As with Kropotkin in 1879, our task is to create a libertarian movement and theory fit for the times we live in. While his works can help us to this, this task is ours alone—whether we do or not is in our hands.

Iain McKay

www.anarchistfaq.org

Further Reading

A great many of Kropotkin’s works are available online. In terms of published works, George Woodcock edited Kropotkin’s *Collected Works* shortly before his death in 1995. In eleven volumes, it includes all his major writings as well as numerous important essays (although some are edited).⁷¹ This collection is by no means complete, missing the articles collated in *Act for Yourself!* (Freedom Press, 1988) for example. It is also missing a very large number of articles in French and Russian anarchist papers which have never been translated, as well as many in *Freedom* and other English language papers which have never appeared in book

⁷⁰ Quoted in Cahm, 153–54.

⁷¹ Published by Black Rose, it includes *The Conquest of Bread; Ethics; Fugitive Writings; Evolution and Environment; Fields, Factories and Workshops; In Russian and French Prisons; Great French Revolution; Memoirs of a Revolutionist; Mutual Aid; Russian Literature;* and *Words of a Rebel.*

while retaining the machine of the State and only changing the men in power; to prevent, instead of aiding, the mind of the workers progressing towards *the search for new forms of life* that would be *their own*—that is in our eyes a historic mistake which borders on the criminal.”⁶⁹

Ultimately, Marxism has done more than any other ideology to secure capitalism, whether directly (by social democracy, by saving capitalism from itself) or indirectly (by Bolshevism, by creating something even worse). It is time for socialists to learn from history rather than repeat it. Here Kropotkin remains essential for his analysis of previous revolutions—particularly the Paris Commune—allowed him to sketch a viable strategy of a future social revolution. While supporting the initial revolution, anarchists would then encourage the creation of popular self-organisation in the community and workplace rather than seeking to focus the struggle onto electing a few leaders to act on behalf of the working class. In other words, workers had to build their own *class* organisations to influence events towards socialist goals directly rather than waiting for representatives to act on their behalf from within bourgeois institutions—or ostensibly new social institutions organised in a similar manner as in the Russian Revolution. As he put it in the early 1880s:

We believe that, if the next revolution is not to be conjured away by the bourgeoisie, a decisive blow will have to be administered to private property: from the beginning, the workers will have to proceed to take over all social wealth so as to put it into common ownership. This revolution can only be carried out by the workers themselves: it can only be made when the workers of the towns and the peasants, in revolt against any government, in each locality, in each town, in each village, take over *themselves* the wealth

⁶⁹ Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, 189–90.

social organisation created by the struggle, would spread and establish itself as the masses start to expropriate property and seize more and more functions monopolised by the State. Then a revolution takes place and ends both, allowing a free people to create a new society without the shackles of hierarchy holding them back, and transform the legacy left it by class society into one suitable for human beings to thrive in.

Thus, for Kropotkin, revolution was not an event—albeit one undoubtedly marked by specific events such as general strikes and uprisings—but a process. In a sense, then, the transition period started at that time, and so the “great mass of workers will not only have to constitute itself outside the bourgeoisie, but it will have to take action of its own during the period which will precede the revolution,” and “this sort of action can only be carried out when a strong *workers’ organisation* exists.”³⁴ This also explains the importance of local revolts in Kropotkin’s theory of revolution and within the context of the socialist movement of the time which, in its Marxist form, urged restraint and discipline at all times and so disparaged local actions—revolts, of course, but also at times strikes. For Kropotkin, such a position completely ignored the lessons of previous revolutions and so ensured that no future revolution would ever take place. In this he was completely right—no revolution has ever occurred without local strikes and revolts which to engulf the regime (and the hostility and opposition of the “professional” revolutionaries who then struggle to catch up with the popular movement they had dismissed and discouraged).

All told, Kropotkin’s ideas remained remarkably consistent during his time within the anarchist movement: in favour of organised anarchist participation within the labour and other popular movements, with the aim to paralyse the State in order to secure a gen-

³⁴ Kropotkin, quoted in Cahm, 154.

eral expropriation and placing economic and social power into the hands of the working masses.³⁵

From Here to There: Resistance Is Fertile

Words of a Rebel lays out a systematic critique of capitalist society along with lessons from previous revolts. If it has a significant lack, it is that it does not explicitly address what had to be done to facilitate the arrival of the social revolution—a complaint which also applies to *The Conquest of Bread*. As such it fails to discuss anarchist involvement in the labour movement and at best it is mentioned in passing.³⁶

This edition seeks to rectify this omission by including relevant articles from *Le Révolté* by Kropotkin which address anarchist participation in the labour movement.³⁷ However, it is wise to discuss this matter here as it is critical to understanding Kropotkin's ideas and debunking the all too common notion that he was an idealist with no notion of how to get to the society of his hopes, or that he—indeed, anarchists in general—advocated “propaganda by the deed” (i.e. individual acts of terrorism such as assassinations and bombings) as the means.

Kropotkin's most general—most visionary, if you like—writings were turned into pamphlets and included in books and later anthologies while those focused on tactics and the day-to-day struggles remained in the pages of newspapers, gathering dust in the

³⁵ Those such as George Woodcock who suggest that Kropotkin became reformist while in exile in Britain have little evidence to support their case, as I discuss in “Kropotkin, Woodcock and *Les Temps Nouveaux*,” *Anarchist Studies* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2015).

³⁶ “Theory and Practice,” *Words of a Rebel*, 204.

³⁷ All the original articles were unsigned, with Kropotkin being one comrade amongst many (indeed, this remained the case until the 1890s, making it difficult to identify his contributions to *Le Révolté* and its successor papers). However, stylistic and subject clues have been used to identify articles which seem almost certainly to have been written by him.

unions and other mass movements. Leading anarchists, including Kropotkin and Malatesta, had yet again raised the need for anarchist activity within the labour movement, using the 1889 London dock strike as an example of its revolutionary potential.⁶⁸ The focus was again on revolutionary minorities working amongst the masses to develop the spirit of revolt—above all in the labour movement as Kropotkin had stressed all along.

Conclusions

As *Words of a Rebel* shows, Kropotkin's ideas are still relevant for revolutionaries today. Capitalism still has the problems he highlights in its pages—more, as the ecological crisis we face is not touched upon in this work. Likewise, the alternative that he sketches is still appealing and remains the only viable means of creating a society fit for humans to flourish and thrive in. Merely surviving under the shackles of capital and State is not only bad for us, it may end up destroying the Earth as an inhabitable planet.

It may be objected that while the anarchist movement in Kropotkin's time was—and remains—small, the social-democratic parties were—and are—much larger in terms of membership and support. True, but these parties did not remain socialist and ended up simply seeking—easily reversible—changes to make capitalism nicer rather than seek its abolition. Kropotkin's predictions have been proven true. While it is far easier to organise a political party and urge people to vote once every few years than it is to organise a union and wage constant resistance to governmental and employer power, it does not mean that this is not the best—indeed sole—means of transforming society. More: “To tell the workers that they will be able to introduce the socialist system

⁶⁸ For a short account of this landmark strike and how anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin and Errico Malatesta saw it as support for their arguments for anarchist involvement in the trade unions, see my “The London Dock Strike of 1889,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 63 (Winter 2015).

individuals involved as propaganda or as an inspiration for a popular insurrection.⁶⁷ Nor should we forget that the victims of “propaganda by the deed” are *tiny* compared to the victims of both State and capital. The few violent acts of anarchists pales in comparison to the systemic violence of capitalism—whether the direct violence of repressing strikes, protests, and revolts or the indirect violence (harm) caused by the hierarchies and inequalities which the direct violence maintains. Yet the systemic violence of State and capital goes unmentioned but that of a few anarchists is remembered.

This association of anarchism with “propaganda by the deed” ignores both that it was a short period and the other tendencies within the movement which coincided with it as well as predated and survived it. Thus, for example, the syndicalism of the International Working People’s Association is ignored, downplayed, or (at worse) suggested to be non-anarchist in spite of its very obvious similarities with Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s ideas. So while this period—the early 1880s—is often represented as one marked by “propaganda by the deed” by anarchists and is used by some to conflate communist anarchism with it, the reality is different. While certain parts of the anarchist movement indulged in ultra-radical and ultra-violent rhetoric, others—with Kropotkin at their head—were pointing to a different path, one whose success can be seen from the rise of revolutionary syndicalism beginning in the early 1890s and then spreading across the globe.

Ironically, by the time the most well-known acts of “propaganda by the deed” occurred, the period of infatuation with it in certain libertarian circles had mostly passed in favour of working within

⁶⁷ For example, the assassination of the Italian King in 1901 by Gaetano Bresci is recalled, but not the deaths of over eighty protesting workers at the hands of King’s military and whose commanding officer he honoured. Simply put, rebel violence is denounced and remembered, but the much larger State violence is forgotten—which suggests in bourgeois morality twenty thousand dead Parisians slaughtered crushing the Commune are considered of far less import than a few royals and politicians.

archives. However, without these articles there is a significant gap in our understanding of his politics which corresponds to the gap between criticism of the current system and its revolutionary transformation. Sadly, this gap has all too often been filled by those whose grasp of anarchism is weak or simply reflects their prejudices.

Indeed, ignorance of these articles and lacking an awareness of how the notion of “propaganda by the deed” changed over time, making it far easier to accept the myth of Kropotkin (and anarchists in general) advocating terrorism as means of achieving anarchy. This is particularly important given how often it is repeated by opponents of anarchism, particularly Marxists, as a truism which apparently requires no research to assert. Indeed, Marxists rarely discuss anarchism; rather they discuss their assumptions about anarchism—as gleaned, at best, from reading what Marx, Engels, and Lenin have asserted about it. Thus, for example, Trotskyist Tariq Ali³⁸ uncritically repeats an account of a meeting in 1919 between Lenin and Kropotkin in which the former lectured the latter on the need to reject individual terrorism in favour of working within the masses—both Lenin and Ali seem blissfully unaware that what they consider to be the “Marxist” position was in fact the *anarchist* one raised by Bakunin in the International and which Kropotkin had been arguing for while Lenin was still at primary school.

The Terrain of the Direct Struggle against Capital

As Kropotkin later recounted in *Freedom*, “[r]evolutionary Anarchist Communist propaganda within the Labour Unions had always been a favourite mode of action in the Federalist or ‘Bakunist’ section of the International Working Men’s Association,” and *Le Révolté* followed this tradition as did the other newspapers he

³⁸ Tariq Ali, *The Dilemmas of Lenin: Terrorism, War, Empire, Love, Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017).

was associated with.³⁹ This was expressed in Kropotkin's first major theoretical contribution in exile which saw him argue that "the best method of shaking this edifice [of the State] would be to stir up the economic struggle" while also taking "advantage of every favourable opportunity to point out the incapacity, hypocrisy and class egoism of present governments."⁴⁰ Subsequent articles built on this:

We have to organise the workers' forces—not to make them a fourth party in Parliament but to make them a formidable ENGINE OF STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITAL. We have to group workers of all trades with this single purpose: "war on capitalist exploitation!" And we must prosecute this war relentlessly, every day, by the strike, by agitation, *by every revolutionary means* . . . once the workers of every land have seen this organisation at work, taking in its hands the defence of the workers' interests, waging an unrelenting war on capital . . . once the workers from all trades, from villages and towns alike, are united into a single union. . . . Then, but only then, will [they] emerge victorious, having crushed the tyranny of capital and State for good.⁴¹

Unlike parliamentarianism, this direct struggle against capital and State had a radicalising effect:

[H]owever moderate the battle-cry may be—provided that it is in the domain of the relations between

³⁹ "1886–1907: Glimpses into the Labour Movement in this Country," *Direct Struggle against Capital*, 398. For a discussion of Bakunin's syndicalism, see my "Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism," *Anarchist Studies* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2012).

⁴⁰ "The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of Its Practical Realisation," *Direct Struggle against Capital*, 504.

⁴¹ "Enemies of the People," *Le Révolté*, 5 February 1881.

is a popular movement . . . an edifice founded on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives." Moreover, given that few people wish to die such heroic deaths "nevertheless *all* can contribute, in accordance with their strength, to fuelling the agitation (as we have tried to make clear in *The Spirit of Revolt*)."⁶³ He stressed to the Russian anarchists after the 1905 Revolution that the "main difference between us and the political parties on the question of terror is that we do not think that terror can be used as a means to change the existing order, but see it as a natural feeling of an angry conscience, or of self-defence."⁶⁴

The notion of Kropotkin having, to quote George Woodcock, a "repute as a 'gentle' anarchist"⁶⁵ is a product of the likes of Woodcock himself painting a picture of Kropotkin more suited to *his* changing politics (from revolutionary anarchist activist in London during the Second World War to a respected academic in Canada) than an accurate account of Kropotkin's ideas. For while the fiery language of the *Le Révolté* period does tend to disappear—particularly in his English-language writings—the underlying ideas are the same. Likewise, because he considered isolated acts of anger or revenge as an inevitable aspect of a rising revolutionary situation, he did not condemn them and so he could not publicly clarify his position in response to specific events: "The problem is that he refused to denounce 'propaganda by deed'; because of the fear that such a denunciation would be interpreted as a condemnation of acts which though genuine acts of revolt had been *wrongly described* as 'propaganda by deed.'"⁶⁶

Indeed, most such acts were driven purely by revenge for legally approved crimes by those in authority and *not* considered by the

⁶³ Kropotkin, "L'Entente" II, *La Révolte*, 18 Avril 1891.

⁶⁴ Kropotkin, "The Russian Revolution and Anarchism," *Direct Struggle against Capital*, 474.

⁶⁵ "An Introduction" *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1973* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), xxvii.

⁶⁶ Cahm, 272.

person most associated with “propaganda by the deed,” soon ended up embracing another “from above” tactic, namely electoral socialism.

Thus, violent acts were not to be encouraged by extreme rhetoric but neither were they to be disowned or dismissed, for they were an inevitable expression of popular revolt and discontent: “All really popular revolutions started in the same way: with isolated acts, such as those of Florian and Fournier, and with partial uprisings, such as those of Montceau and Blanzey.”⁶¹ However, the focus was to fan the flames of discontent from within the masses rather than inspiring them by acts made in their name:

It is the mass of workers we have to seek to organise. We, the little revolutionary groups, have to submerge ourselves in the organisation of the people, be inspired by their hatreds, their aspirations, and help them to translate those aspirations and hatreds into actions. When the mass of workers is organised and we are with it to strengthen its revolutionary idea, to make the spirit of revolt against capital germinate there—and the opportunities for that will not be wanting—then we shall be entitled to hope that the next revolution will not be conjured away as the revolutions of the past have been: then it will be the social revolution.⁶²

As Kropotkin put in 1891, “if the development of the revolutionary spirit gains immensely by the deeds of heroic individuals, it is no less true (whatever the historians say) that it is not by these heroic deeds that revolutions are made. . . . Revolution, above all,

⁶¹ Kropotkin, “Les Préludes de la Révolution,” *Le Révolté* 28 October 1882; also see Cahm 182–83.

⁶² Kropotkin, quoted in Cahm, 154.

capital and labour—as soon as it is put into practice by revolutionary means, it will eventually deepen and inevitably lead to demanding the overthrow of the regime of property. Whereas a party which confines itself within parliamentary politics ends up abandoning its programme, however advanced it was in the beginning: it ends up merged with the parties of bourgeois opportunism.⁴²

As an alternative, he pointed to the Spanish anarchists as remaining “[f]aithful to the anarchist traditions of the International, clever, active, energetic men are not about to set up a group to pursue *their* petty ends: they remain within the working class, they struggle with it, for it. They bring the contribution of their energy to the workers’ organisation and work to build up a force that will crush capital, come the day of revolution: the revolutionary trades association.”⁴³ Only this could create the potential for a revolution:

The enemy on whom we declare war being capital, it is against it that we will direct all our efforts, without letting ourselves be distracted from our goal by the phony agitation of political parties. The great struggle we are preparing for being an essentially *economic* struggle, it is on the economic terrain that our agitation must take place. . . . To be able to make the revolution, the mass of workers must be organised, and resistance and the strike are excellent means for organising workers. They have an immense advantage over those advocated at present (worker candidates, forming a workers’ political party, etc.), namely not diverting the movement, but keeping it in constant struggle with the principal enemy, the capitalist. . . . It is

⁴² “The League and the Trade Unions,” *Le Révolté*, 1 October 1881.

⁴³ “The Workers’ Movement in Spain,” *Le Révolté*, 11 November 1881.

a question of organising in every town resistance societies for all trades, to create resistance funds and to fight against the exploiters, to unify the workers' organisations of each town and trade and to put them in contact with those of other towns, to federate them across France, to federate them across borders, internationally. . . . It was by organising resistance against the boss that the International managed to group more than two million workers and to build up that force before which the bourgeoisie and governments trembled.⁴⁴

As well as including articles on current developments and the future of the labour and socialist movements, every issue *Le Révolté* had a column entitled *Mouvement Social* which reported on the labour movement across the world, discussing the strikes, protests, and revolts which it saw as the means of creating a revolutionary situation and evidence that its position was no idle dream. Along with the articles on the labour movement, these are missing from Kropotkin's books and pamphlets, and so important context is lost. In addition, like other anarchists, Kropotkin supplemented his written propaganda with speeches at workers' organisations and events (he continued to do this in Britain when his ill health did not stop him). Unsurprisingly, then, *Le Révolté* reported a talk given by Kropotkin to the Geneva Carpenters Union on 1 December 1880:

The speaker, comrade Kropotkin, made an overview of the economic situation in Europe and . . . showed . . . the terrible situation of the workers, and he

⁴⁴ "Workers' Organisation," *Le Révolté*, 10 and 24 December 1881. It should be noted that this echoes many of Bakunin's arguments in "The Policy of the International" (*The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869–1871*, ed. Robert M. Cutler [Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1994]).

tional as an organisation for aggressive strike action to counteract the influence of parliamentary socialists on the labour movement." Indeed, Kropotkin was indignant when, in 1909, a Swiss-Italian anarchist paper (*Il Risveglio-Le Réveil*) republished Paul Brousse's article on propaganda by deed under his name: he wrote two letters to the editor denying he had anything to do with it.⁵⁹ As he later recounted: "I have always been against . . . this idea of propaganda by deed . . . which I have always found false."⁶⁰ Indeed, the fact that *Le Révolté* existed at all showed that Kropotkin did not discount the impact of propaganda by the word which advocates of propaganda by the deed disparaged.

Significantly, Kropotkin never embraced the term, and in fact coined "the Spirit of Revolt" as an alternative. This did not exclude violence acts. This is unsurprising as, being a realistic revolutionary, he was fully aware that the bourgeoisie would seek to maintain its position by any means possible. As such, any movement which sought to free humanity from the shackles of capital would need to use violence, as the organised violence of its State would be used against it. Likewise, any revolution would require defending by the people armed.

The difference between "propaganda by the deed" and the "spirit of revolt" does not rest in violence. Rather, it lies in their dynamics. The former sought to inspire revolt by the actions of a few heroic individuals outwith the social struggle. The latter aimed to encourage popular revolt from within the people, with any actions an expression of the social movement rather than seeking to create it. In short, the former is "from above" while the latter is "from below"—perhaps unsurprisingly Brousse, the

⁵⁹ Cahm 139–40, 257, 103–4. This article originally appeared as "La Propagande par le fait," *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne*, 5 August 1877. The ideas expressed "are so close to those Brousse expressed in his article in 1873 for *La Solidarité Révolutionnaire* as to leave no doubt that he was the sole author." (Cahm, 303)

⁶⁰ Quoted in Cahm, 160

with terrorism.⁵⁵ For Marxists, this is for an obvious reason—to discredit a rival and more appealing socialist theory—and opponents of anarchism, whether Marxist or Liberal, follow Marx and Engels in attributing authorship of works written by Russian populist-Jacobin Sergey Nechayev to Bakunin, particularly the former’s infamous *Catechism of a Revolutionary*.⁵⁶ In reality, terrorism was never advocated by Bakunin, and in a letter to Nechayev he refers to “your catechism” while denouncing its amoral, Machiavellian, and Jesuitical notions. Moreover, Bakunin rejected the logic which underlay “propaganda by the deed” by arguing that it was “impossible to arouse the people artificially. People’s revolutions are born from the course of events” and “cannot be artificially induced.”⁵⁷ These and other awkward facts will, undoubtedly, not stop Bakunin being held responsible for a series of assassinations and bombings which started years after his death while his syndicalism goes unmentioned.

Similarly, Kropotkin has often been presented as an early advocate of “propaganda by the deed.” Daniel Guérin, for example, mistakenly attributes “L’Action” (*Le Révolté*, 25 December 1880) to Kropotkin before stating he “deserves credit for being one of the first to confess his errors and to recognise the sterility” of individual action and “proposed a return to mass trade unionism like . . . the First International.”⁵⁸ Carlo Cafiero, however, wrote this article, while Kropotkin, at this time, “was anxious to revive the Interna-

⁵⁵ We are often given credit for assassinations and bombings which were conducted by others, most notably Russian populists who assassinated a Tsar along with countless tyrannical nobles and State officials before 1917.

⁵⁶ Needless to say, Tariq Ali in *The Dilemmas of Lenin* proclaims that the *Catechism* was probably written by Bakunin and so ignores the long-standing and careful research which shows that it was not.

⁵⁷ “M. Bakunin to Sergey Nechayev,” *Daughter of a Revolutionary: Natalie Herzen and the Bakunin-Nechayev Circle* (LaSalle Illinois: Library Press, 1973) 243, 250.

⁵⁸ *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 74–75, 78.

contrasted these figures to the fabulous incomes and the scandalous spending of the holders of the capital. Large-scale industry, far from improving the lot of the masses, has only made it harder, and this situation will last as long as the worker does not render himself master of the workshops and factories.

The speaker ends with a call for the organisation of the workers’ forces, for the struggle against capital and for the study of social questions. If the bourgeoisie continues, as it does today, to obstruct the workers’ groups by persecuting the active members of the groups, then the workers will be forced to resort to the secret organisations. But in any case, the workers’ forces must be organised in anticipation of the political and economic revolutions that will certainly break out in a few years in Europe.⁴⁵

Thus, like Bakunin, Kropotkin advocated what would later be called syndicalism and rejected the idea that socialists should take part in elections to further the socialist cause or as the means to introduce socialism. This would only push the workers into a dead-end for it meant “abandon[ing] the terrain of the economic struggle, of the worker against the capitalist, in order to become a docile tool in the hands of the politicians.”⁴⁶ As the subsequent evolution of Marxist parties across the world showed, this was a prescient analysis which he reiterated in numerous articles, pamphlets, and books. Needless to say, he warmly welcomed the rise of revolutionary syndicalism—albeit with a few reservations.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Le Révolté*, 11 December 1880.

⁴⁶ “Enemies of the People,” *Le Révolté*, 5 February 1881.

⁴⁷ Space precludes a detailed discussion of the differences between anarchist communism and revolutionary syndicalism beyond noting that while the likes of Kropotkin and Malatesta were happy to see anarchists take a renewed interest in the labour movement, syndicalists went too far in submerging the former

The Role of Revolutionary Minorities

So, in terms of tactics, communist anarchism initially saw no major change from collectivism and it advocated the “Bakuninist” tactics of labour struggle and insurrection. This, however, did not mean that there was no need for anarchist federations and propaganda (meetings, leaflets, journals, pamphlets, books) both within and outwith the labour movement to spread libertarian ideas and keep mass movements from pursuing tactics which would inevitably turn them reformist.

The collectivists recognised that there was a pressing need for revolutionaries to organise in order to influence the class struggle and workers’ unions towards libertarian tactics and structures. Such was the Alliance of Socialist Democracy, an anarchist organisation Bakunin helped create in 1868 and whose (former) members played a key role in the development of the International in Switzerland, Italy, France, and above all Spain. Kropotkin embraced this perspective on the need for both a militant labour movement and a grouping of revolutionaries to influence it:

My opinion is absolutely that which was expressed by Malatesta. . . . The syndicate is absolutely necessary. It is the only form of worker’s association which allows the direct struggle against capital to be carried on without a plunge into parliamentarianism. But, evidently, it does not achieve this goal automatically, since in Germany, in France and in England, we have the example of syndicates linked to the parliamentary struggle, while in Germany the Catholic syndicates are very powerful, and so on. There is need of the other element

into the latter. For further discussion, see my “Precursors of Syndicalism IV: The Anarchist-Communist Critique,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* (Winter 2020).

The question arises, though, of the relation of Kropotkin to the rhetoric of this period—a rhetoric sometimes encouraged by the police themselves. Thus, for example, a certain Serreaux was a Belgian agent provocateur within the French anarchist movement who, between September 1880 and September 1881, edited the Paris-based weekly journal *La Révolution Sociale*, which was financed by the Paris prefect of police (who also wrote articles for it). Unsurprisingly, it advocated extreme violence and although many anarchists, including Kropotkin, were suspicious of Serreaux and his paper, a few well-known anarchists did write for it.

As *Words of a Rebel* shows, Kropotkin eschewed the rhetoric and tactics associated with “propaganda by the deed.” Yet we should remember that this term was originally associated with organising mass acts of revolt, with the Paris Commune initially used as an example (as it was argued that it had made the idea of communal federalism far better known than all of Proudhon’s books on the subject). The best-known example of this initial version of the concept is the Benevento Uprising of April 1877 which saw around thirty armed Internationalists, including Malatesta and Cafiero, roam the Italian countryside unsuccessfully trying to inspire the peasants to join them in insurrection. When eventually brought to trial, the defendants used the opportunity to spread their ideas before being found not guilty by the jury.⁵⁴ Under the influence of Paul Brousse, the concept became wider and eventually embraced every and all kinds of activity—including acts of individual violence (assassinations or bombings).

While almost every political theory—including Marxism, republicanism, and nationalism—has seen its adherents commit such acts, anarchism has habitually been linked by its opponents

⁵⁴ Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism: 1864–1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 118–28, 141–45.

“propaganda by the deed” (acts of individual terrorism) by the early 1890s that anarchists turned towards working within the labour movement. This narrative is reflected in George Woodcock’s influential history of anarchism:

The period from 1881 to 1894 had been a time of isolation, when the [French] anarchists wandered in a wilderness of marginal social groups and sought the way to a millennium in desperate acts on the one hand and idyllic visions on the other. The period from 1894 to 1914 saw a fruitful equilibrium between the visionary and the practical. . . . Anarcho-syndicalism . . . showed anarchism seeking constructive solutions.⁵¹

The rise of syndicalism is often portrayed (usually by Marxists) as being inconsistent, or fundamentally incompatible, with anarchism, as individual acts are asserted to be the quintessential anarchist tactic.⁵² Yet even Woodcock had to admit that “Varlin and the French Bakuninists had also recognised before the Paris Commune the role of the trade unions in the social struggle, and the general strike had been supported by the non-Marxist collectivists within the International.”⁵³

⁵¹ Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 260

⁵² For example, an account of the Haymarket events of 1886 by a Marxist proclaims that Johann Most was a “disciple of Bakunin” and while in theory he “was not a pure anarchist . . . in practice advocated the anarchist tactics of terroristic action against Church and State by the individual on his own initiative.” Within the International Working People’s Association, the Eastern city groups, “led by Most, favoured the individualistic tactics of anarchism” while Chicago and the Western cities “held for a mixture of anarchism and syndicalism” which “actually approached syndicalism closer than it did anarchism.” He seems as unaware of Bakunin’s syndicalism as the awkward fact he never advocated terrorism. (Samuel Yellen, *American Labor Struggles, 1877–1934* [New York: Pathfinder, 1974], 46).

⁵³ Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 263.

which Malatesta speaks of *and which Bakunin always professed*.⁴⁸

As can be seen from *Words of a Rebel*, Kropotkin regularly uses the term “party,” a word anarchists later tended to avoid. However, he used the word in a wide sense to mean an organisation of those with similar ideas. Part of the conflict within the French socialist movement when he was writing was over whether, as urged by Marxists and others, to convert the existing socialist movement into an organisation which stood in elections (i.e., a party in the usual sense of the word). Kropotkin rejected this in favour of encouraging mass struggle—particularly, but not exclusively, on the economic terrain—along with the need for anarchists to work within popular movements in an organised fashion. As he suggested in his report on the 1877 railway strikes in America, this was essential for a successful revolutionary movement:

That it was not successful was to be expected. It is not by a single insurrection that the people will be able to overcome today’s society . . . They act wonderfully but they do not set a marker for the future.

Why?—Because let us note it well—the American trades organisations . . . *do not express all the aspirations of the people*. Confining themselves to the exclusive domain of wage questions, they are no longer the representatives of the main aspiration which is already penetrating the mass of the people, the aspiration for the fundamental reorganisation of society through social revolution.

On the other hand, we wonder what role the American Workingmen’s Party has played in this movement

⁴⁸ Quoted in Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1995), 280–81.

. . . which, while propagating socialist *ideas*, neglects their application and persists in eliciting in America, despite the general disgust of the *people* for politics, a parliamentary movement? On the eve of the movement it spoke, as usual, of elections, of action on the legal terrain—when a spark had already lit a revolutionary fire! Of elections when it was a question of organising the insurrection that was already roaring around them!

Hence—on the one hand, the organisation for revolutionary action *without* broadly posing the principles of socialism; on the other—the principle, but without revolutionary *action* and with an organisation made to stop every affirmation of the revolutionary act: such are the causes which have prevented the American movement bearing all the fruits which it could have done, if the American workers’ organisation had been a synthesis of the two present organisations: the principle *with* the organisation necessary for achieving as much of it as possible, whenever the opportunity presents itself.⁴⁹

The need, then, was a “party” which worked within the labour movement to infuse it with socialist aims and tactics. One without the other would never produce a social revolution particularly if that party was organised for electoral activity:

In Chicago, communists of the democratic-socialist school tried to propagate their principles—by words, when now it required to realise them in actions. Here is proof of what we have always reiterated, that everything that is organised on the terrain of legal agitation

⁴⁹ “Affaires d’Amérique,” *Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne*, 5 August 1877.

becomes a useless weapon, finds itself disorientated, the day when tired of waiting the people rises.

Suppose that, on the contrary, that we had had the good fortune to have anarchist sections of the International Workers’ Association in America, in the places which had seen the momentarily triumphant of the popular insurrection? What would have happened? This: the people master of capital, factories, workshops, would have organised work for their own benefit; as master of the palaces, bourgeois houses, they would have installed the families of workers in them; they would have created, in a word, a ‘Commune’ as we understand it, and if they had suffered defeat, there would at least remain an immensely resounding act of propaganda for socialism.⁵⁰

The role of revolutionary minorities was clear—to work within the mass movements of the working class to encourage struggle outside parliament in order to create the consciousness and power to overthrow capitalism and its State.

The Spirit of Revolt against Propaganda by the Deed

The period of the early 1880s still influences some accounts about anarchism, particularly most Marxist diatribes about it. This narrative is simple and suggests that it was only after the failure of

⁵⁰ “Bulletin International,” *L’Avant-garde* 11 August 1877. Interestingly, many socialists in America came to the same conclusions and turned from Marxism to anarchism with the founding of the International Working People’s Association in 1883; see my “Precursors of Syndicalism II: The ‘Chicago Idea,’” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* no. 79 (Summer 2019). Some Marxists utilise Carolyn Ashbaugh’s biography *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012) to assert that the Haymarket Martyrs were, in fact, anarchists. For a debunking of this nonsense, see my “Lucy Parsons: American Anarchist,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* no. 60 (Summer 2013).