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Michel Antoine

Byzantinism and Limpness

7 January 1909

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Article published by Michel Antoine (under the pseudonym 'LEVIEUX' ('THEOLD') here) in 1909 in *L'Anarchie*. Antoine wrote for this newspaper dozens of times – he generally defended European individualist anarchism and illegalism there. Here, one of his texts is part of his polemics with Jean Grave, the 'pope of Rue Mouffetard', who was strongly opposed to illegalism. Since illegalists generally wrote less than their opponents within the anarchist movement, this text is interesting – it's also one of the texts where the author reclaims and embraces the designation of "illegalism."

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Byzantinism and Limpness

Michel Antoine

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At the moment, as in all transition eras, a common phenomenon occurs among anarchists.

The revision of social values implied by the anarchist idea doesn't come without some misinterpretations.

The meaning of words and ideas is affected. Everyone interprets them according to their tendencies or interests without considering their logical coherence.

One can't ask a simple and clear question or make it public or debate it without a shadowy and convoluted casuistry coming to obscure and muddle it endlessly.

Ideas are reduced and belittled to the level of the current social necessities or the conventional interests of each individual.

Every clear and strong thought is immediately suffocated by their idiotic objections, their bullshit contestations, their vile hypotheses, their perfidious insinuations.

The 'buts', the 'ifs', the 'because' rain like the flood and the rising tide of stupidity and cowardness threatens to drown the whole logic.

They try to discuss questions through their most childish aspects. Thus, endlessly, they turn in the vicious and void circle of subtilities. There, everything is only talk.

This mindset bogs down every truth, stops every decision, paralyzes every energy, annihilates every action, and corrupts us to the point of making us as impotent as Byzantium's eunuchs.

How can we explain this stagnation and this chaos ? Simply by the inherent misoneism in every man, in every being, in varying proportions. The absolute rupture of habits, ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, acting, living, is always frightening. The most ferocious revolutionary never dares to follow his thought until its end. As for the timid, whose theoretical ambition is not very great to begin with, their effective courage disappears in face of the smallest praxis, and their theories, already limp, become even more so. They look around and find themselves reasons to justify their inertia and even magnify it, so great is the tendency in men to transform their weaknesses into virtues.

In reality, our revolutionaries don't like new things. Philoneism, only apparent, only stays skin-deep. Inside them, they are timid ; they are afraid by the deed.

A comrade wrote here a very exaggerated article about the exaggerations of the anarchists. Where are those exaggerations ? Most anarchists are content to say and profess ideas that they never practice. Hardly one among them tries to live his thought. If there is an exaggeration, it's rather in the discrepancy between ideas and acts.

As long as it's a matter of writing and speaking, painting the colours of a future paradise that nobody has ever seen and will never see — because future can only be seen in present — as long as they have to enumerate the probable felicities of this paradise, draw blueprints and build the systems that have to permit to conquer it ; everything is fine.

However, when it is needed to establish this paradise, right now, with the available elements, or to take it as it is, by hand, even if

it means improving it later — as we have always done — there is nobody left.

Pontiffs of moderantism, bureaucrats, stays-at-home, ankylosed in body and spirit, for most of them, they don't want to walk anymore. They cry out against theft, exploitation, illegalism, madness. They say to wait, again, wait forever.

What do they wait for ? It has been thousands of years that this shit has been going on and all those who waited got nothing. They died waiting. All those who wait will have nothing either: they will die waiting.

Thus, the truth is not there.

Moderantists lie, not for our interests, but for theirs. We don't have to believe them. We don't have to wait because life doesn't wait. We need to live. We need to live as fully, freely, and intensely as possible by all means.

We need to live without waiting for moderantists' permission ; they don't want us to serve ourselves because they hope, secretly, to be the providers, the ones called to serve the others by serving themselves first.

Above all, we need to live now, following our tastes, our aspirations, our needs, and to bravely risk — if necessary — putting our sacrilegious hand on the bourgeois Walhalla that we built for them, but which we will end up reclaiming for ourselves to make it bigger and inhabit it ourselves.

We want this paradise, right now, as it is and by fragment, for lack of anything better, because we know that we will only have what we will be able to take and we are determined to take as much as we can at all risks and perils. So much for troubling the dreams and calculations of moderantists.

Let them repeat their hybrid theories and let's understand that legal and honest anarchists, military anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, supporters of the good boss and the good wage, legislative and patriotic anarchists, aesthete anarchists, artistom-

anes, fantaisistes, futurist and fumist anarchists are all, in reality, nothing but negative anarchists.

Through the equivocation and ambiguity of their theses designed to facilitate their shameless metamorphoses, only one thing clearly emerges: the negation of anarchism.

A certain Grandjouan, a vain dauber himself, whose illustrations contribute so much to the success of *Les Temps Nouveaux*, wrote enormities in that anti-anarchist vein. (*The Social War* of 14 and 30 October)

This disciple of Jean Grave doesn't want the individual to try to resolve his social question himself and he writes : "*No brave man has the right to escape the current jail cell by letting his miserable companions in it.*"

Thus, we must die, in chorus, waiting for the total emancipation that will never happen. We must, with the whining flock, go docilely to the legal crowd, we must, without revolt, go to the slaughterhouse and, the eyes lost in the future paradise extasis, offer our neck to the legal slaughterers with resignation.

Thanks for the advice. But that artist who doesn't want us to escape our jail cell, seems to me to occupy a privileged and tolerable spot. His useless profession makes him a parasite whom we must feed and clothe at the expense of common work, really useful.

If by chance, bourgeois snobbery managed to give the basic works of this artist any kind of value — fictitious and conventional always — he wouldn't hesitate to erect, on that vain basis, a very bourgeois fortune — and to solve his social question this way himself. He would escape the jail cell in which, by the way, he doesn't seem to suffer much.

Moderantists permit escaping from the jail cell *legally* — escaping it *illegally* is cowardly and dishonest;

As long as the current and future Grandjouans haven't *resolved the question of land to give to everyone and the daily beefteck, an honest man can't be called an anarchist.*

In the name of their individual interest, they claim, while remaining anarchists, to have the right, very legally indeed, to execute us. When we protest, they call us authoritarians. On the other hand, when we claim, in the name of our own individual interest, the right to live modestly and to be free with or without the law, they say we are dishonest, and are on the verge of crying: Death to thieves!

Those people are strange anarchists and their liberty-killing liberalism doesn't inspire confidence.

LEVIEUX ('THEOLD')

This is a dilemma where I like to put the joker Grandjouan and all his fans. Let them extricate themselves from this crap.

If they find, in individual interest, reasons to legitimize an anarchist being soldier, sub-officer, gendarme, policeman, snitch, whatever... Those reasons should be enough to legitimate that he be, at least, anarchist and even illegal.

It seems that's not the case, and according to a legalist anarchist, legality is the most direct and safe way to reach anarchy.

One can ask oneself how, in the name of the anarchist principle, one can conclude to its own negation and come to say: As an anarchist, I claim the freedom to not be one and I refuse others the right to be.

The most ridiculous about it is that, when we laugh in the face of this species of dialectician, they accuse us of authoritarianism and cry excommunication. As if any criticism should lose itself in the adoration of their sacrosanct stupidity.

There is no authority in saying that military antimilitarists are illogical and dangerous and that they are the authoritarians, when they come to massacre us as in Villeneuve, in the name of their antimilitarist anarchism, military according to their hearts: this is the logic of legalists.

Anarchists following my idea will never execute their comrades, be sure of it. Whereas the others...

As for the excommunication, it is again on their side, inept, sneaky, brutal, because, according to the superior orders to which they consent — in principle and deed — to submit, they are ready, from a single pressure on the trigger of their rifles, to remove their brethren from the vital and great communion of beings, in which they still had much to share.

If this is not a major excommunication, I don't understand anything anymore.

The fallacious theories of the shameless legalists can be reduced to this:

Grandjouan claims that illegalist anarchists are parasites, robbers and criminals. He doesn't prove it.

What is without any doubt is that the economic and utilitarian value that all the shitty works of artists can bring to human heritage is translated by zero. The value for which they are paid comes, like any value, from really positive, effective and useful work by artisans. Thus, artists are all parasites economically, and Grandjouan is no exception to that rule. His caricatures, without useful value, don't even have an entertainment value. What does he give economically for what he receives ? Engraver ! Get lost !

The worst is that some people support him. There are people who, under cover of free discussion, support more or less hypocritically the same absurdities in anarchist newspapers where they thus engage in anti-anarchist propaganda.

In groups, the evil is far worse: they dare to say what they don't dare to write.

I heard aesthetes, complacently exhibiting their Van Dyck or Rubens faces, prophesying for hours, contemplating the whiteness of their hands, swooning in adoration at the music of their own voices.

They were saying the same bullshit as Grandjouan: demonstrating the impracticability of anarchist ideas, the uselessness of deserting the army and the absurdity of illegalism. Conclusion: Long live the law! Long live the army! Long live the bourgeoisie!

The crap they say — maybe with unconscious skill — raises few protests. Barely do some old companions, sniffing the dangers of this equivocal bullshit, risk an objection, immediately drowned under the orator's cataracts, when he restarts his endless speech and submerges everything under the tide of his volubility to which everyone agrees because nobody understands a single word of it anymore.

This is where we are after twenty years of anarchist propaganda.

They are at the point of subordinating the logical praxis of the anarchist idea to legal necessities whose constraint, far from impossible to break at all, is the very negation of the anarchist idea and deed.

They reject, *a priori*, anarchy in favor of these necessities, incompatible with the anarchist conception of life. For, when they admit the ineluctability of laws, they admit their power and consecrate their superiority.

By recognizing legal and customary tyranny as inevitable for the anarchist individual, they establish the impossibility of his relative and immediate liberation as a principle and they condemn the anarchist action as frivolous, useless and dishonest in the same breath.

This is the thesis of Grandjouan and a few others I have already mentioned too often.

What is the point, then, of promising the joys of the positive paradise to the damned of this earth if he must, like his mystical ancestors, always remain in the inaccessible landscapes of dream and theory.

According to which logical and legitimate right can they say to the individual not to take his share of paradise and to wait for it to be distributed to him equally, according to the needs of each ? Who will judge the needs ? Who will distribute ? Those who want to wait, naturally. Bunch of jokers !

Either anarchism is relatively and progressively achievable, right now, for all individuals who would want it, who would believe in it and who would act accordingly, or it will never be for anyone, if we must wait for the spontaneous consent of all to its integral realization.

Those who don't find anarchism advantageous and practicable in its essential tenets, which are, for the individual, the effective negation of the domination of laws that threaten his freedom and life most directly, don't understand or believe in it. Because anarchy can't be conceived of otherwise than as a vital necessity.

Come on, they need to have the courage to look those realities in the face and say frankly what they inspire in us. If anarchist ideas don't correspond to life's needs, if they don't serve the essential interests of the individual and the species, if they aren't the rigorous and supreme expression of these necessities, these interests, they have no reason to exist. It must be said clearly, and they must be abandoned.

If, on the contrary, as I believe, anarchist ideas are but, precisely, only the superior affirmation and incoercible tendency of these necessities and interests, we must conclude in favor of action and resist everything opposing those tendencies.

I thus conclude against legalist anarchists who ridicule insubordination and desertion from the army, who only talk about the dangers of revolt while systematically refusing to see those, greater, of submission.

I don't like anarchists whose specialty consists in manifesting their repugnancy for everything which isn't legal.

This disgust for illegalism, barely disguised, seems suspect to me and suppose as counterparty an unavowed taste for legalism.

I consider that those who say that an anarchist can be a soldier, meaning a slave and assassin, in the name of his individual interests, are dangerous and, taking liberties with the meaning of words, ideas and facts, they err and from consequence to consequence, they must reach the worst conclusions.

The most significant point of this reasoning, by which the trickery of those using it appears the most clearly, is that the same sophists who refuse to the individual the right to free himself alone, when and how he can, in the name of his individual interests, grant the *legal* individual, in the name of those same interests, the right to be a slave and assassin. They don't admit that individual interests can justify the *illegal* anarchist act ; and they proclaim that this same interest justifies, excuses and commands the bourgeois, idiotic, legal and criminal deed of being a soldier.