

The Search for a Libertarian Communism

Daniel Guérin and the “Synthesis” of Marxism and Anarchism

Mitchell Abidor

2017

Contents

Early Influences	4
The Bankruptcy of Stalinism and Social Democracy	5
The Break from Trotskyism	7
The “Mother of Us All”	8
The Developing Critique of Leninism	10
From Trotskyism to New Left to Anarchism	12
Guérin and Anarchism	15
Proudhon and the Fundamental Importance of Self-management	18
Stirner the “Father of Anarchism”?	19
For a “Synthesis” of Marxism and Anarchism	19
Conclusion	22

I have a horror of sects, of compartmentalisation, of people who are separated by virtually nothing and who nevertheless face each other as if across an abyss.

– Daniel Guérin¹

As he once wrote of the fate suffered by anarchism, Daniel Guérin (1904–1988) has himself been the victim of unwarranted neglect and, in some circles at least, of undeserved discredit. For although many people know of Guérin, relatively few seem aware of the breadth of his contribution. His writings cover a vast range of subjects, from fascism and the French Revolution to the history of the European and American labour movements; from Marxist and anarchist theory to homosexual liberation; from French colonialism to the Black Panthers; from Paul Gauguin to French nuclear tests in the Pacific—not to mention several autobiographical volumes. As an activist, Guérin was involved in various movements and campaigns: anticolonialism, antiracism, antimilitarism, and homosexual liberation. This is a man who counted among his personal friends Francois Mauriac, Simone Weil, C.L.R. James, and Richard Wright, to name but a few of the famous names which litter his autobiographies. His youthful literary efforts provoked a letter of congratulation from Colette; he met and corresponded with Leon Trotsky; and he had dinner “en tête-à-tête” with Ho Chi Minh. Jean-Paul Sartre judged his reinterpretation of the French Revolution to be “one of the only contributions by contemporary Marxists to have enriched historical studies.”² The gay liberation activist Pierre Hahn believed his own generation of homosexuals owed more to Guérin than to any other person, and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire paid tribute to his work on decolonization. Noam Chomsky considers Guérin’s writings on anarchism to be of great importance to the development of contemporary socialist thought.

Yet despite such assessments, and although there is widespread and enduring interest in Guérin among activists, he has been badly neglected by academic researchers in France and especially in the English-speaking world. This is doubtless due to a combination of factors: Guérin never held an academic post or any leadership position (except briefly at the Liberation as director of the Commission du Livre, a government agency that oversaw the book publishing industry); he was consistently anti-Stalinist during a period when the influence of the French Communist Party, both among intellectuals and within the labour movement, was overwhelming; he never fit easily into ideological or political pigeonholes and was often misunderstood and misrepresented; and in France in the 1960s and 1970s, his bisexuality was shocking even for many on the Left. Guérin was, in a word, a “troublemaker.”³

Concerned that his reinterpretation of the French Revolution, *La Lutte de classes sous la Première République, 1793–1797* (1946), had been misunderstood, in 1947, Daniel Guérin wrote to his friend, the socialist Marceau Pivert, that the book was to be seen as “an introduction to a synthesis of anarchism and Marxism-Leninism I would like to write one day.”⁴ What exactly did Guérin mean by this “synthesis,” and how and why had he come to be convinced of its necessity? For as

¹ Daniel Guérin, *Front populaire, Révolution manquée. Témoignage militant* (Aries: Editions Actes Sud, 1977), p. 29. All translations in this introduction are the present author’s, unless stated otherwise.

² In *Questions de méthode*, quoted in Ian Birchall, ‘Sartre’s Encounter with Daniel Guérin’, *Sartre Studies International* vol. 2, no. 1 (1996), p. 46.

³ See Louis Janover, ‘Daniel Guérin, le trouble-fetê’ in *L’Homme et la société* no. 94 (1989), thematic issue on ‘Dissonances dans la Revolution’, pp. 83–93.

⁴ Letter to Marceau Pivert, 18 November 1947, Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine (hereafter BDIC), Fonds Guérin, F” e. Res 688/10/2. *La Lutte de classes sous la Première République, 1793–1797* [Class

Alex Callinicos has commented, “genuinely innovative syntheses are rare and difficult to arrive at. Too often attempted syntheses amount merely to banality, incoherence, or eclecticism.”⁵

It must however be noted from the outset that Guérin had no pretensions to being a theorist: he saw himself first and foremost as an activist and secondly as a historian.⁶ Indeed, from the day in 1930 when he abandoned the poetry and novels of his youth, all his research and writings were concerned more or less directly with his political commitments.⁷ His developing critique of Marxism and his later interest in the relationship between Marxism and anarchism were motivated by his own direct experience of active participation in revolutionary struggles on a number of fronts; they can thus only be clarified when studied in relation to social and political developments.

Although Guérin, in some of his autobiographical or semi-autobiographical writings, had a tendency to divide his life into more or less distinct “phases,” and despite the fact that his political or ideological trajectory may seem to some to be rather protean, I would argue that there was in fact an underlying ideological consistency—even if changing circumstances meant that his “organisational options” (as he put it) changed in different periods of his life. A historical materialist all his life, he remained attached to a revolutionary socialism with a strong ethical or moral core. Although it was many years before he found an organisation which lived up to his expectations, he was always at heart a libertarian communist, developing an increasingly strong belief in the need for a “total revolution” which would attach as much importance to issues of race, gender, and sexuality as to workplace-based conflict. Whether specifically in his commitment to anticolonialism or to sexual liberation, or more generally in his emphasis on what today would be called intersectionality, Guérin was undoubtedly ahead of his time.

Early Influences

Despite coming from the “*grande bourgeoisie*”—a background which he would come to reject—Guérin owed much to the influence of his branch of the family: humanist, liberal and cultured, both his parents had been passionately pro-Dreyfus, both were influenced by Tolstoy’s ethical and social ideas, and his father’s library contained *The Communist Manifesto* as well as works by Benoît Malon, Proudhon, and Kropotkin.⁸ The young Daniel seems to have been particularly influenced by his father’s pacifism and was also deeply affected by his own reading of Tolstoy’s *Diaries* and *Resurrection*.⁹ In the context of the increasingly polarised debates of the inter-war period between the Far Right and Far Left (“Maurras *versus* Marx” as he put it), he identified

Struggle under the First Republic] (Paris: Gallimard, 1946; new edition 1968), 2 vols.

⁵ Alex Callinicos (ed.), *Marxist Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 108.

⁶ Daniel Guérin, *A la recherche d’un communisme libertaire* (Paris: Spartacus, 1984), pp. 10–1.

⁷ See D. Berry, ‘Metamorphosis: The Making of Daniel Guérin, 1904–1930’ in *Modern & Contemporary France* vol. 22, no. 3 (2014), pp. 32I–42, and ‘From Son of the Bourgeoisie to Servant of the Revolution: The Roots of Daniel Guérin’s Revolutionary Socialism’ in *Moving the Social-journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements* no. 51 (2014), pp. 283–311.

⁸ On Malon, see K. Steven Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoit Malon and French Reformist Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). On Proudhon and Kropotkin, see Iain McKay’s edited anthologies, both of which have useful introductions: *Property Is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Reader* (Oakland: AK Press, 2011) and *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014).

⁹ Cf. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, ‘Leo Tolstoy on the State: A Detailed Picture of Tolstoy’s Denunciation of State Violence and Deception’, in *Anarchist Studies* vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 20–47.

with the “Marxist extreme Left” from a relatively early age.¹⁰ His later “discovery” of the Parisian working class and of the concrete realities of their everyday existence (to a large extent through his homosexual relationships with young workers) reinforced a profound “workerism” which would stay with him for the rest of his life.¹¹

The Bankruptcy of Stalinism and Social Democracy

This workerism would lead him in 1930–1931 to join the syndicalists grouped around the veteran revolutionary Pierre Monatte: typically, perhaps, Guérin’s first real active involvement was in the campaign for the reunification of the two major syndicalist confederations, the CGT (dominated at that time by the PS-SFIO, the Socialist Party) and the CGTU (dominated by the PCF, the French Communist Party). His workerism was also responsible for a strong attraction towards the PCF, far more “proletarian” than the Socialist Party, despite his “visceral anti-Stalinism” and what he saw as the Party’s “crass ideological excesses, its inability to win over the majority of workers, and its mechanical submission to the Kremlin’s orders.”¹² Yet Guérin was no more impressed with the PS, which he found petty-bourgeois, narrow-minded, dogmatically anticommunist, and obsessed with electioneering:

The tragedy for many militants of our generation was our repugnance at having to opt for one or the other of the two main organisations which claimed, wrongly, to represent the working class. Stalinism and social democracy both repelled us, each in its own way. Yet those workers who were active politically were in one of these two parties. The smaller, intermediate groups and the extremist sects seemed to us to be doomed to impotence and marginalisation. The SFIO, despite the social conformism of its leadership, at least had the advantage over the Communist Party of enjoying a certain degree of internal democracy, and to some extent allowed revolutionaries to express themselves; whereas the monolithic automatism of Stalinism forbade any critics from opening their mouths and made it very difficult for them even to stay in the party.¹³

Hence his decision to rejoin the SFIO in 1935, shortly before the creation by Marceau Pivert of the *Gauche révolutionnaire* (Revolutionary Left) tendency within the party, of which he would become a leading member. Guérin was attracted by Pivert’s “Luxemburgist,” libertarian and syndicalist tendencies.¹⁴ He was consistently on the revolutionary wing of the *Gauche révolutionnaire*

¹⁰ Daniel Guérin, *Autobiographie de jeunesse, d’une dissidence sexuelle au socialisme* (Paris: Belfond, 1972), pp. 126–7. Charles Maurras was the leader of the right-wing, nationalist and royalist movement, *Action Française*.

¹¹ For more detail, see D. Berry, “‘Workers of the World, Embrace!’ Daniel Guérin, the Labour Movement and Homosexuality” in *Left History* vol. 9, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2004), pp. 11–43. See also Peter Sedgwick, ‘Out of Hiding: The Comradships of Daniel Guérin’, *Salmagundi* vol. 58, no. 9 (June 1982), pp. 197–220.

¹² Guérin, *A la recherche*, p. 9; Guérin, *Front populaire*, p. 23.

¹³ Guérin, *Front populaire*, p. 147.

¹⁴ See Thierry Hohl, ‘Daniel Guérin, ‘pivertiste’. Un parcours dans la Gauche révolutionnaire de la STIO (1935–1938)’ in *Dissidences* 2 (2007), pp. 133–49, and Jacques Kergoat, *Marceau Pivert, ‘socialiste de gauche’* (Paris: Les Editions de l’Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, 1994). ‘Luxembourgisme’ was an identifiable current on the French left opposed to both Bolshevism and social democracy from around 1928–31. See Alain Guillerm’s preface to the third edition of Rosa Luxembourg, *Marxisme et Dictature: La démocratie selon Unine et Luxembourg* (Paris: Spartacus, 1974).

and of its successor, the *Parti socialiste ouvrier et paysan* (PSOP, or Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party, created when the GR was expelled from the SFIO in 1938), and, in the Popular Front period, he drew a clear distinction between what he called the "Popular Front no. 1"—an electoral alliance between social democracy, Stalinism, and bourgeois liberalism—and the "Popular Front no. 2"—the powerful, extra-parliamentary, working-class movement, which came into conflict with the more moderate (and more bourgeois) Popular Front government.¹⁵ He viewed the "entryism" of the French Trotskyists in these years as a welcome counterbalance to the reformism of the majority of the Socialist Party.¹⁶

Indeed, in the 1930s, Guérin agreed with Trotsky's position on many issues: on the nature of fascism and how to stop it; on war and revolutionary proletarian internationalism; on opposition to the collusion between "social-patriotism" (i.e., mainstream social democracy) and "national-communism" (i.e., the PCF) as well as any pact with the bourgeois Radicals; and on the need to fight actively for the liberation of Europe's colonies. As Guérin comments after recounting in glowing terms his sole meeting with Trotsky in Barbizon (near Fontainebleau) in 1933: "On a theoretical level as well as on the level of political practice, Trotsky would remain, for many of us, both a stimulus to action and a teacher."¹⁷

Ultimately, Guérin's experience of the labour movement and of the Left in the 1930s—as well as his research on the nature and origins of fascism and Nazism¹⁸—led him to reject both social democracy and Stalinism as effective strategies for defeating fascism and preventing war. Indeed, the Left—"divided, ossified, negative, and narrow-minded" in Guérin's words—bore its share of responsibility and had made tragic errors.¹⁹ The SFIO was criticised by Guérin for its electoralism and for allowing its hands to be tied by the *Parti radical-socialiste*, "a bourgeois party whose corruption and bankruptcy were in large part responsible for the fascist explosion"; for its incomprehension of the nature of the capitalist state, which led to the impotence of Leon Blum's 1936 Popular Front government; for its failure to take fascism seriously (and to aid the Spanish Republicans), despite the warnings, until it was too late; and for its obsessive rivalry with the PCF. The PCF was equally harshly criticised by Guérin—for what seemed to him to be its blind obedience to the Comintern, the criminal stupidity of the Comintern's "third period" and for its counter-revolutionary strategy both in Spain and in France.²⁰

¹⁵ Guérin's *Front populaire* is a classic 'revolutionist' interpretation of the Popular Front experience.

¹⁶ What has since become known as 'entryism' ('entrisme' in French) was originally referred to as 'the French turn' ('le tournant français'). This was the new tactic proposed by Trotsky in 1934 in response to the growing fascist threat across Europe, and the first instance of it was the suggestion in June of that year that the French Trotskyists enter the PS in order to contribute to the development of a more radical current within the party. See Daniel Bensaid, *Les trotskysmes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), pp. 31–2 and Alex Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 18–9.

¹⁷ Guérin, *Front populaire*, p. 104. Guérin's *Fascisme et grand capital* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936) was inspired by Trotsky.

¹⁸ Guérin, *La Peste brune a passé par Iii* (Paris: Librairie du Travail, 1933), translated as *The Brown Plague: Travels in Late Weimar and Early Nazi Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); *Fascisme et grand capital* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), trans. *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Monad Press, 1973). *Fascism* has been criticised by some for tending towards reductionism: see Claude Lefort, 'L'analyse Marxiste et le fascisme', *Les Temps modernes* 2 (November 1945), pp. 357–62. Guérin defended himself vigorously against such criticisms, and many regard his analysis as fundamentally correct: see for example Alain Bihl's introduction to the 1999 edition of *Fascisme et grand capital* (Paris: Editions Syllepse and Phenix Editions), pp. 7–14.

¹⁹ Guérin, 'Quand le fascisme nous devan-ait', in *La Peste brune* (Paris: Spartacus, 1996), pp. 21–2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

As for Trotsky, Guérin disagreed with him over the creation of the Fourth International in 1938, which seemed to him premature and divisive. More generally, Guérin was critical of what he saw as Trotsky's tendency continually to transpose the experiences of the Russian Bolsheviks onto contemporary events in the West, and of his "authoritarian rigidity." Trotskyism, Guérin argued, represented "the ideology of the infallible leader who, in an authoritarian fashion, directs the policy of a fraction or of a party."²¹ What Guérin wanted to see was "the full development of the spontaneity of the working class."²² Writing in 1963, Guérin would conclude with regard to such disputes over revolutionary tactics:

The revolutionary organisation which was lacking in June 1936 was not, in my opinion, an authoritarian leadership emanating from a small group or sect, but an organ for the coordination of the workers' councils, growing directly out of the occupied workplaces. The mistake of the *Gauche révolutionnaire* was not so much that it was unable, because of its lack of preparation, to transform itself into a revolutionary party on the Leninist or Trotskyist model, but that it was unable ... to help the working class to find for itself its own form of power structure to confront the fraud that was the Popular Front no. 1.²³

So as Guérin summarised the state of the Left in the 1930s: "Everything made the renewal of the concepts and methods of struggle employed by the French Left both indispensable and urgent."²⁴ These debates on the Left regarding tactics (working-class autonomy or "Popular Frontism") and the role of the "avant-garde" or, in syndicalist terms, the "activist minority" (*minorité agissante*) would recur in the postwar years, and Guérin's position would vary little.

The Break from Trotskyism

Despite Guérin's reservations about Trotskyism, his analysis of the nature of the Vichy regime was very similar to that put forward by the Fourth International, and he was also impressed with Trotsky's manifesto of May 1940, "Laguerre imperialiste et la révolution prolétarienne mondiale" [Imperialist War and the World Proletarian Revolution], including it in a collection of Trotsky's writings on the Second World War he would edit in 1970.²⁵ He worked with the Trotskyists in the resistance, not least because they remained true to their internationalism and to their class politics.²⁶ They rejected, for instance, what Guérin saw as the PCF's demagogic nationalism. Guérin

²¹ Guérin, *Front populaire*, pp. 150, 156–7, 365.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁵ See Jean van Heijenoort, 'Manifeste: La France sous Hitler et Pétain', in Rodolphe Prager (ed.), *Les congrès de la quatrième internationale (manifestes, thèses, résolutions)* (Paris: La Breche, 1981) vol. II, pp. 35–44; L. Trotsky, 'La guerre imperialiste et la révolution prolétarienne mondiale' in D. Guérin (ed.), *Sur la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Brussels: Editions la Taupe, 1970), pp. 187–245. An English-language version of the manifesto is available on the Marxists Internet Archive at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etoV/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emergo2.htm>.

²⁶ Interview with Pierre Andre Boutang in *Guérin*, television documentary by Jean-Jose Marchand (1985; broadcast on FR3, 4 & 11 September 1989). For more details, see D. Berry, "Like a Wisp of Straw Amidst the Raging Elements": Daniel Guérin in the Second World War', in Hanna Diamond and Simon Kitson (eds.), *Vichy, Resistance, Lib-*

was thus closely involved with the Trotskyists' attempts to organise extremely dangerous anti-militarist and anti-Nazi propaganda among German soldiers. He also contributed to the activities of a group of Trotskyist workers producing newsletters carrying reports of workplace struggles against both French employers and the German authorities.

However, an extended study tour of the United States from 1946 to 1949, which included visits to branches or prominent militants of the Socialist Workers' Party and the breakaway Workers' Party, represented a turning point in Guérin's "Trotskyism." In a 1948 letter to Marceau Pivert, he commented on his unhappiness with the Trotskyists' tendency to "repeat mechanically old formulae without rethinking them, relying lazily and uncritically on the (undeniably admirable) writings of Trotsky."²⁷ Looking back thirty years later, he would conclude: "It was thanks to the American Trotskyists, despite their undeniable commitment, that I ceased forever believing in the virtues of revolutionary parties built on authoritarian, Leninist lines."²⁸

The "Mother of Us All"

Unlike many on the Left associated with postwar ideological renewal, most of whom would focus on a revision or reinterpretation of Marxism, often at a philosophical level (Sartre, Althusser, or Henri Lefebvre, for example), Guérin the historian began with a return to what he saw as the source of revolutionary theory and praxis: in 1946, he published his study of class struggle in the First French Republic (1793–1797).²⁹ The aim of the book was to "draw lessons from the greatest, longest and deepest revolutionary experience France has ever known, lessons which would help regenerate the revolutionary, libertarian socialism of today," and to "extract some ideas which would be applicable to our time and of direct use to the contemporary reader who has yet to fully digest the lessons of another revolution: the Russian Revolution."³⁰ Applying the concepts of permanent revolution and combined and uneven development, inspired by Trotsky's

eration: *New Perspectives on Wartime France (Festschrift in Honour of H.R. Kedward)* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp.143–54.

²⁷ Letter to Marceau Pivert, 2 January 1948, BDIC, Fonds Guérin, F°Δ Rés 688/9/1.

²⁸ Daniel Guérin, *Le Feu du Sang. Autobiographie politique et chamelle* (Paris: Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1977), p. 149. On Guérin's tour of the U.S., see *ibid.*, pp. 143–219. Guérin's researches led to the publication of the two-volume *Ou va le peuple américain?* (Paris: Julliard, 1950–51). Sections of this would be published separately as *Decolonisation du Noir américain* (Paris: Minuit, 1963), *Le Mouvement ouvrier aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Maspero, 1968), *La concentration économique aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Anthropos, 1971)—which included a 33pp. preface by the Trotskyist economist Ernest Mandel—and *De l'Oncle Tom aux Panthers: Le drame des Noirs américains* (Paris: UGE, 1973). Translations: *Negroes on the March: A Frenchman's Report on the American Negro Struggle*, trans. Duncan Ferguson (New York: George L. Weissman, 1956), and *100 Years of Labour in the USA*, trans. Alan Adler (London: Ink Links, 1979). For a discussion of Guérin's analysis, see also Larry Portis, 'Daniel Guérin et les Etats-Unis: l'optimisme et l'intelligence' in *Agone* 29–30 (2003), pp. 277–89.

²⁹ Guérin, *La Lutte de classes sous la Première République, 1793–1797*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1946; 2nd edition 1968). See also Denis Berger, 'La révolution plurielle (pour Daniel Guérin)' in E. Balibar, J.-s. Beek, D. Bensald et al., *Permanences de la Révolution. Pour un autre bicentenaire* (Paris: La Breche, 1989), pp. 195–208; David Berry, 'Daniel Guérin à la Libération. De l'historien de la Révolution au militant révolutionnaire: un tournant idéologique', *Agone* 29–30 (2003), pp. 257–73; Michel Lequenne, 'Daniel Guérin, l'homme de 93 et le problème de Robespierre', *Critique communiste* 130–1 (May 1993), pp. 31–4; Julia Guseva, 'La Terreur pendant la Révolution et l'interprétation de D. Guérin', *Dissidences* 2 (2007), pp. 77–88; Jean-Numa Ducange, 'Comment Daniel Guérin utilise-t-il l'œuvre de Karl Kautsky sur la Révolution française dans *La Lutte de classes sous la première République*, et pourquoi?', *ibid.*, pp. 89–m. Norah Carlin, 'Daniel Guérin and the working class in the French Revolution', *International Socialism* 47 (1990), pp. 197–223, discusses changes made by Guérin to *La Lutte de classes* for the 1968 edition.

³⁰ Guérin, *La Révolution française et nous* (Paris: Maspero, 1976), pp. 7–8. Note that the reference to 'libertarian

History of the Russian Revolution, Guérin argued that the beginnings of a conflict of class interest could already be detected within the revolutionary camp between an “embryonic” proletariat—the *bras nus* (manual workers), represented by the *Enragés*—and the bourgeoisie—represented by Robespierre and the Jacobin leadership. For Guérin, the French Revolution thus represented not only the birth of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, but also the emergence of “a new type of democracy,” a form of working-class direct democracy as seen, however imperfectly, in the “sections” (local popular assemblies), precursors of the Commune of 1871 and the Soviets of 1905 and 1917.³¹ In the second edition of the work (1968) he would add “the Commune of May 1968” to that genealogy.

Similarly, this interpretation tended to emphasise the political ambivalence of the bourgeois Jacobin leadership which “hesitated continually between the solidarity uniting it with the popular classes against the aristocracy and that uniting all the wealthy, property-owning classes against those who owned little or nothing.”³² For Guérin, the essential lesson to be drawn from the French Revolution was thus the conflict of class interest between the bourgeoisie and the working classes. Bourgeois, social democratic, and Stalinist interpretations of the Revolution—like those of Jean Jaures, Albert Mathiez, and so many others—which tended to maintain the “cult of Robespierre” and to reinforce the labour movement’s dependence on bourgeois democracy, were thus to be rejected.³³

Class Struggle in the First Republic has been described by Eric Hobsbawm, himself a long-standing Communist Party member, as “a curious combination of libertarian and Trotskyist ideas—not without a dash of Rosa Luxemburg.”³⁴ It not only shocked many academic historians of the Revolution—especially those with more or less close links to the PCF (Georges Lefebvre, and especially Albert Soboul and George Rude)—but also those politicians who, in Guérin’s words, “have been responsible for perverting and undermining true proletarian socialism.”³⁵ The fallout was intense and the ensuing debate lasted for many years; indeed, Guérin is still today regarded with distrust by many historians influenced by the Republican and mainstream Marxist (non-Trotskyist) interpretations of the Revolution as a bourgeois revolution.³⁶ Guérin brought that whole historiographical tradition into question. The political significance was that the Revolutionary Terror had been used as a parallel to justify Bolshevik repression of democratic freedoms and repression of more leftist movements. Stalin had been compared to Robespierre. The Jacobin tradition of patriotism and national unity in defence of the bourgeois democratic Republic has been one of the characteristics of the dominant tendencies within the French Left, and therefore central to the political mythologies of the Popular Front and the Resistance. Guérin, as Ian Bir-

socialism’ is in the preface to *La Revolution franfaise et nous*, written thirty years after the main text and after Guérin had moved closer to anarchism.

³¹ Cf. Murray Bookchin’s comments on the *sections* in ‘The Forms of Freedom’ (1968) in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1971), p.165.

³² Guérin, *La Lutte de classes* (1968), vol. I, p. 31.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁴ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marseillaise: Two Centuries Look Back on the French Revolution* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 53.

³⁵ Guérin, *La Revolutionfranfaise et nous*, p. 7.

³⁶ For an overview, see Olivier Betoume and Aglaia I. Hartig, *Penser l’histoire de la Revolution. Deux siecles de passionfranfaise* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1989), esp. pp. 110–4. For a recent reassessment of the long-running dispute between Guérin and G. Lefebvre, see Antonio de Francesco, ‘Daniel Guérin et Georges Lefebvre, une rencontre improbable’, *La Revolutionfranfaise*, <http://lrf.revues.org/index162.html>, date accessed 28 March 2011.

chall has put it, “was polemicizing against the notion of a Resistance uniting all classes against the foreign invader.”³⁷

What is more, the PCF had been campaigning since 1945 for unity at the top with the SFIO, and in the 1956 elections called for the re-establishment of a Popular Front government. Guérin, as we have seen, argued that alliance with the supposedly “progressive” bourgeoisie in the struggle against fascism was a contradiction at the heart of the Popular Front strategy. His conception of the way forward for the Left was very different. At a time when fascism in the form of Poujadism looked as if it might once more be a real threat, Guérin argued that what was needed was a “genuine” Popular Front, that is, a grassroots social movement rather than a governmental alliance, a truly popular movement centred on the working classes that would bring together the labour movement and all socialists who rejected both the pro-American SFIO and the pro-Soviet PCF:

And if we succeed in building this new Popular Front, let us not repeat the mistakes of the 1936 Popular Front, which because of its timidity and impotence ended up driving the middle classes towards fascism, rather than turning them away from it as had been its aim. Only a combative Popular Front, which dares to attack big business, will be able to halt our middle classes on the slope which leads to fascism and to their destruction.³⁸

The Developing Critique of Leninism

Guérin’s friend and translator, C.L.R. James, wrote in 1958 of the political significance of Guérin’s revisiting the history of the French Revolution:

Such a book had never yet been produced and could not have been produced in any epoch other than our own. It is impregnated with the experience and study of the greatest event of our time: the development and then degeneration of the Russian Revolution, and is animated implicitly by one central concern: how can the revolutionary masses avoid the dreadful pitfalls of bureaucratisation and the resurgence of a new oppressive state power, and instead establish a system of direct democracy?³⁹

It was in very similar terms that Guérin expressed the central question facing the Left in a 1959 essay, “La Revolution dejacobinisee.”⁴⁰ This is an important text in Guérin’s ideological itinerary, continuing the political analysis he began in *La Lutte de classes sous la Pemière République* and developed in *La Revolution française et nous* [The French Revolution and Us] (written in 1944 but

³⁷ Ian Birchall, ‘Sartre’s Encounter with Daniel Guérin’, *Sartre Studies International* vol. 2, no. 1 (1996), p. 46.

³⁸ Guérin, ‘Faisons le point’, *Le Libérateur politique et social pour la nouvelle gauche* (12 February 1956). A populist, reactionary and xenophobic anti-taxation movement of small shopkeepers, founded by Pierre Poujade in 1953, ‘Poujadisme’ had “more than a hint of fascism” as Rod Kedward has put it—see *La Vie en Bleu. France and the French since 1900* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 376. It was as a representative of Poujade’s party that Jean-Marie Le Pen was elected to the National Assembly in 1956.

³⁹ C.L.R. James, ‘L’actualite de la Revolution française’, *Perspectives socialistes: Revue bimensuelle de ‘Union de la Gauche Socialiste* 4 (15 February 1958), pp. 20–1.

⁴⁰ Guérin, ‘La Revolution dejacobinisee’, in *Jeunesse du socialisme libertaire* (Paris: Riviere, 1959), pp. 27–63. See ‘The French Revolution De-Jacobinized’ in the present collection.

not published until 1969) and “Quand le fascisme nous devançait” [When Fascism Was Winning] (1955).⁴¹

In “La Révolution déjacobinisée,” Guérin argued that the “Jacobin” traits in Marxism and particularly in Leninism were the result of an incomplete understanding on Marx and Engels’ part of the class nature of Jacobinism and the Jacobin dictatorship, to be distinguished according to Guérin from the democratically controlled *contrainte révolutionnaire* (“revolutionary coercion”) exercised by the popular *sections*. Thus by applying a historical materialist analysis to the experiences of the French revolutionary movement, Guérin came to argue, essentially, that “authentic” socialism (contrary to what had been argued by Blanqui or Lenin) arose spontaneously out of working-class struggle and that it was fundamentally libertarian. Authoritarian conceptions of party organisation and revolutionary strategy had their origins in bourgeois or even aristocratic modes of thought.

Guérin believed that when Marx and Engels referred—rather vaguely—to a “dictatorship of the proletariat” they envisaged it as a dictatorship exercised by the working class as a whole, rather than by an avant-garde. But, he continued, Marx and Engels did not adequately differentiate their interpretation from that of the Blanquists. This made possible Lenin’s later authoritarian conceptions: “Lenin, who saw himself as both a ‘Jacobin’ and a ‘Marxist,’ invented the idea of the dictatorship of a party substituting itself for the working class and acting by proxy in its name.”⁴² This, for Guérin, was where it all started to go badly wrong: “The double experience of the French and Russian Revolutions has taught us that this is where we touch upon the central mechanism whereby direct democracy, the self-government of the people, is transformed, gradually, by the introduction of the revolutionary ‘dictatorship; into the reconstitution of an apparatus for the oppression of the people.”⁴³

Guérin’s leftist, class-based critique of Jacobinism thus had three related implications for contemporary debates about political tactics and strategy. First, it implied a rejection of “class collaboration” and therefore of any type of alliance with the bourgeois Left (Popular Frontism). Second, it implied that the revolutionary movement should be uncompromising, that it should push for more radical social change and not stop halfway (which, as Saint-Just famously remarked, was to dig one’s own grave), rejecting the Stalinist emphasis on the unavoidability of separate historical “stages” in the long-term revolutionary process. Third, it implied a rejection both of the Leninist model of a centralised, hierarchical party dominating the labour movement and of the “substitutism” (substitution of the party for the proletariat) which had come to characterise the Bolshevik dictatorship.

This critique clearly had its sources both in Guérin’s reinterpretation of the French Revolution and in the social and political conditions of the time. *La Révolution française et nous* was informed by Guérin’s critique of social democratic and Stalinist strategies before, during, and after the war. “La révolution déjacobinisée” was written at a significant historic moment for socialists in France: after the artificial national unity of the immediate postwar years had given way to profound social and political conflict; as Guy Mollet’s SFIO became increasingly identified with the defence of the

⁴¹ *La Révolution française et nous* was originally intended as the preface to *La Lutte de classes*. ‘Quand le fascisme nous devançait’ was originally commissioned for a special issue of *Les Temps Modernes* on the state of the left, but was then rejected by Sartre for being too critical of the PCF, according to a letter from Guérin to C.L.R. James, 10 August 1955. BDIC, Fonds Guérin, F^oΔ f., 721/60/5.

⁴² Guérin, ‘La Révolution déjacobinisée’, p. 43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–4.

bourgeois status quo and the Western camp in the cold war; as the immensely powerful postwar PCF reeled under the effects of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and of the Khrushchev revelations the same year; and as the unpopular and politically unstable Fourth Republic collapsed in the face of a threatened military coup. It was this situation which made renewal of the Left so necessary. In 1959, Guérin also picked up on the results of a survey of the attitudes of French youth towards politics, which indicated to him two things: first, that what alienated the younger generation from “socialism” was “bureaucrats and purges,” and second, that, as one respondent put it, “French youth are becoming more and more anarchist.”⁴⁴ Ever the optimist, Guérin declared:

Far from allowing ourselves to sink into doubt, inaction, and despair, the time has come for the French Left to begin again from zero, to rethink its problems from their very foundations ... The necessary synthesis of the ideas of equality and liberty ... cannot and must not be attempted, in my opinion, in the framework and to the benefit of a bankrupt bourgeois democracy. It can and must only be done in the framework of socialist thought, which remains, despite everything, the only reliable value of our times. The failure of both reformism and Stalinism imposes on us the urgent duty to find a way of reconciling (proletarian) democracy with socialism, freedom with Revolution.⁴⁵

From Trotskyism to New Left to Anarchism

What Guérin would thus do which was quite remarkable in post-Liberation France was endeavour to separate Marxism from Bolshevism—his continued friendly and supportive contacts with a number of Trotskyists notwithstanding—and it is noteworthy that he had contact in this period with a number of prominent non-orthodox Marxists. After 1945, especially, he was involved (centrally or more peripherally) in a number of circles or networks, and according to the sociologist Michel Crozier (who, since their meeting in America, saw Guérin as something of a mentor) Guérin self-identified in the late 1940s and early 1950s—“the golden age of the Left intelligentsia”—as an “independent Marxist.”⁴⁶

C.L.R. James, for instance, has already been mentioned. He and Guérin appear to have met in the 1930s; they became good friends, Guérin visited him while in the USA in 1949, and they corresponded over many years. Convinced of the contemporary relevance and of the importance of Guérin’s analysis, James even began to translate *La Lutte de classes* into English, and described the book as “one of the most important modern textbooks in ... the study of Marxism” and “one of the great theoretical landmarks of our movement.”⁴⁷

Similarly, Guérin had first met Karl Korsch in Berlin in 1932, and visited him in his exile in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1947, where according to Guérin they spent many hours together.⁴⁸ The two would collaborate a decade later in their bibliographical researches on the relationship

⁴⁴ Guérin, ‘Preface’, in *Jeunesse du socialisme libertaire*, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁵ Guérin, ‘La Revolution dejacobinisee’, 30–1.

⁴⁶ Michel Crozier, *Ma Belle Epoque. Memoires. 1947–1969* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), pp. 79 et 86.

⁴⁷ Guérin, *Le Feu du sang*, p. 218; Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James. A Political Biography* (Albany: SUNY, 1996), p. 201; James, letter to Guérin, 24 May 1956, BDIC, Fonds Guérin, F°Δ 721/57/2.

⁴⁸ Guérin, *Le Feu du sang*, p. 189. In his account of these meetings, Guérin refers positively to the collection *La Contre-revolution bureaucratique* (Paris: UGE, 1973), which contained texts by Korsch, Pannekoek, Ruhle and others

between Marx and Bakunin.⁴⁹ Also during his time in the USA in 1947, Guérin became friendly with a group of refugee Germans in Washington, D.C., dissident Marxists, “as hospitable as they were brilliant,” connected with the so-called Frankfurt School: Franz Neumann, Otto Kirchheimer and Herbert Marcuse.⁵⁰

In France, Guérin already knew the leading figures in the Socialisme ou Barbarie group from their days in the Fourth International’s PCI (Internationalist Communist Party) together: Guérin’s papers contain a number of texts produced by the so-called Chaulieu-Montal Tendency in the late 1940s.⁵¹ It is interesting to note that the Socialisme ou Barbarie group’s theses on the Russian Revolution feature in the list of theories and authors discovered by the Algerian nationalist and revolutionary, Mohammed Harbi, thanks to his first meeting with Guérin (at a meeting of the PCI discussion group, the “Cercle Lenine”) in 1953.⁵² In 1965 Guérin took part, with Castoriadis, Lefort, and Edgar Morin, in a forum on “Marxism Today” organised by Socialisme ou Barbarie (whose work Morin would describe a few years later as representing “an original synthesis of Marxism and anarchism”⁵³). Guérin also contributed to Morin’s *Arguments* (1956–1962), an important journal launched in response to the events of 1956 with a view to a “reconsideration not only of Stalinist Marxism, but of the Marxist way of thinking,”⁵⁴ and he had been centrally involved with the French “Titoists” around Clara Malraux and the review *Contemporains* (1950–1951).⁵⁵

The present state of our knowledge of these relationships does not enable us to be precise regarding the nature, extent or direction of any influence which might have resulted, but the least we can say is that Guérin was at the heart of the Left-intellectual ferment which characterised these years, that he had an address book, as his daughter Anne recently put it,⁵⁶ as fat as a dictionary and that he shared many of the theoretical preoccupations of many leading Marxists in the twenty years or so following the Second World War, be it the party-form, bureaucracy, alienation or sexual repression.

taken from *International Council Correspondence*, *Living Marxism* and *International Socialism*. The councilists had previously republished in translation an article of Guérin’s from the French syndicalist journal *Revolution proletarienne*: ‘Fascist Corporatism’, in *International Council Correspondence* vol. 3, no. 2 (February 1937), pp. 14–26. (I am grateful to Saku Pinta for bringing this to my attention.) On Korsch, see Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), which includes a lengthy biographical study.

⁴⁹ Guérin/Korsch correspondence, April–June 1954. Karl Korsch Papers, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (hereafter USG), Boxes 1–24.

⁵⁰ Guérin, *Le Feu du sang*, p. 156.

⁵¹ Guérin Papers, USG, Box 1, Folder 14. Pierre Chaulieu and Claude Montal were the pseudonyms of Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort respectively.

⁵² The list also included James Guillaume’s history of the IWMA, Victor Serge’s *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, Voline’s *The Unknown Revolution*, Makhno, and the many publications of the Spartacus group created by Rene Lefevre. Mohammed Harbi, *Une Vie debout. Memoires politiques, Tome I: 1945–1962* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2001), pp. 109–12. Harbi incorrectly describes the Cercle Lenine as being connected to the PCF; see *La Verite*, 1 January 1954. On the different analyses of the nature of the USSR, see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union. A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates Since 1917* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007); on Castoriadis and Lefort, see pp. 116–8.

⁵³ Edgar Morin, ‘L’Anarchisme en 1968’, *Magazine litteraire* 19 (1968), available at www.magazine-litteraire.com/archives/ar_anar.htm, accessed 6 October 2002.

⁵⁴ See Edgar Morin, ‘La refome de pensee’, in *Arguments, 1956–1962* (Toulouse: Privat, 1983), vol. I, p. ix.

⁵⁵ For an explanation of why Yugoslavia’s break with the Soviet bloc in 1948 was so important to the extreme left in the west, see the semi-autobiographical account in chapter 5, ‘Les “annees yougoslaves”’, of *Le Trotskisme. Une histoire sansfard* (Paris: Editions Syllepse, 2005) by Guenn’s friend and comrade Michel Lequenne.

⁵⁶ Anne Guérin, ‘Les ruptures de Daniel Guérin. Notice biographique’, in Daniel Guérin, *De l’Oncle Tom aux*

In the mid-to-late 1950s, like other former or “critical” Trotskyists, as well as ex-members of the FCL (the Libertarian Communist Federation, banned in 1956⁵⁷), Guérin belonged—though “without much conviction”—to a series of Left-socialist organisations: the *Nouvelle Gauche* [New Left], the *Union de la Gauche Socialiste* [Union of the Socialist Left], and, briefly, the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* [Unified Socialist Party].⁵⁸ But it was also around 1956 that Guérin “discovered” anarchism. Looking back on a 1930 boat trip to Vietnam and the small library he had taken with him, Guérin commented that of all the authors he had studied—Marx, Proudhon, Georges Sorel, Hubert Lagardelle, Fernand Pelloutier, Lenin, Trotsky, Gandhi, and many others—“Marx had, without a doubt, been preponderant.”⁵⁹ But having become increasingly critical of Leninism, Guérin discovered the collected works of Bakunin, a “revelation” which rendered him forever “allergic to all versions of authoritarian socialism, whether Jacobin, Marxist, Leninist, or Trotskyist.”⁶⁰ Guérin would describe the following ten years or so (i.e., the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s)—which saw the publication notably of the popular anthology *Ni Dieu ni Maître* and of *L’Anarchisme*, which sold like hotcakes at the Sorbonne in May 1968—as his “classical anarchist phase.”⁶¹ He became especially interested in Proudhon, whom he admired as the first theorist of *autogestion*, or worker self-management;⁶² Bakunin, representative of revolutionary, working-class anarchism, close to Marxism, Guérin insisted, yet remarkably prescient about the dangers of statist communism; and Max Stirner, appreciated as a precursor of 1968 because of his determination to attack bourgeois prejudice and puritanism.

The discovery of Bakunin coincided with the appearance of the Hungarian workers’ committees and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. These events provoked Guérin into studying the councilist tradition, which had come to be seen by many as representing a form of revolutionary socialist direct democracy in contrast to the Bolshevik-controlled *soviets*.⁶³ It was also during the 1950s that Guérin, moving on from his study of the French Revolution, had begun to research the political debates and conflicts within the First International and more generally the relationship between Marxism and anarchism.

Pantheres noires (Pantin: Les bons caracteres, 2010), p. 9.

⁵⁷ On the FCL, see Georges Fontenis, *Changer le monde: Histoire du mouvement communiste libertaire, 1945–1997* (Paris: Alternative libertaire, 2000) and, for a more critical view, Philippe Dubacq, *Anarchisme et Marxisme au travers de la Federation communiste libertaire (1945–1956)*, *Noir et Rouge* 23 (1991).

⁵⁸ Guérin, *Le Feu du sang*, p. 233.

⁵⁹ Guérin, *A la recherche*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10. *L’Anarchisme, de la doctrine a la pratique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965); *Ni Dieu ni Maître, anthologie de l’anarchisme* (Lausanne: La Cite-Lausanne, 1965). Both have been republished several times since, and *L’Anarchisme* has been translated into more than 20 languages. They have been published in English as *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), with an introduction by Noam Chomsky, and *No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998).

⁶² This is not uncontentious—indeed Ernest Mandel takes issue with Guérin over this question in his anthology *Contrôle ouvrier, conseils ouvriers, autogestion* (Paris: Maspero, 1970), p. 7.

⁶³ See Guérin’s 1969 article, ‘Conseils ouvriers et syndicalisme révolutionnaire. L’exemple hongrois, 1956’ in *A la recherche*, pp. 111–5; the same piece was republished as ‘Syndicalisme révolutionnaire et conseilisme’ in *Pour le communisme libertaire*, pp. 155–62.

Guérin and Anarchism

Guérin had had no contact with the anarchist movement before the Second World War, other than to read E. Armand's individualist anarchist organ *L'en dehors*.⁶⁴ According to Georges Fontenis, a leading figure in the postwar anarchist movement, Guérin began to have direct contact with the then Anarchist Federation (FA) in 1945, when the second edition of his *Fascism and Big Business* was published. The FA's newspaper, *Le Libertaire*, reviewed Guérin's books favourably, and in the 1950s, he was invited to galas of the FA and (from 1953) of the FCL to do book signings. He got to know leading anarchist militants and would drop in at the FCL's offices on the Quai de Valmy in Paris. Fontenis described him as being "an active sympathiser" at that point.⁶⁵ His new-found sympathies certainly seem to have been sufficiently well-known for the US embassy in Paris to refuse him a visa to visit his wife and daughter in 1950 on the grounds that he was both a Trotskyist and an anarchist.⁶⁶ The ideological stance of the FCL ("libertarian Marxism") and its position on the Algerian war ("critical support" for the nationalist movement in the context of the struggle against French bourgeois imperialism) proved doubly attractive to the anticolonialist Guérin.⁶⁷ In part for these reasons, 1954 (the beginning of the Algerian war of independence) represented the beginning of a relationship, notably with Fontenis (leading light of the FCL), which as we shall see would ultimately take Guérin into the ranks of the "libertarian communist" movement.

In 1959, Guérin published a collection of articles entitled *jeunesse du socialisme libertaire*: literally the youth—or perhaps the rise, or invention-of libertarian socialism. This represented both a continuation of the critique of Marxism and Leninism begun during the war, and—as far as I am aware—Guérin's first analysis of the nineteenth-century anarchist tradition. Significantly, a copy of this collection has been found with a handwritten dedication to Maximilien Rubel, "to whom this little book owes so much."⁶⁸ A few years later, in 1965, he would publish both *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* and the two-volume anthology *No Gods No Masters*. The purpose was to "rehabilitate" anarchism, and the anthology represented the "dossier of evidence":

⁶⁴ Letters to the author, 12 and 26 February 1986. *L'en dehors* appeared weekly, 1922–39, and used to campaign for complete sexual freedom, regarding homosexuality as an entirely valid form of 'free love'. See Richard D. Sonn, *Sex, Violence, and the Avant-Garde: Anarchism in Interwar France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

⁶⁵ Georges Fontenis, 'Le long parcours de Daniel Guérin vers le communisme libertaire', special number of *Alternative Libertaire* on Guérin (1998), p. 37.

⁶⁶ Guérin, *Le Feu du sang*, p. 228.

⁶⁷ It is also noteworthy that Guérin would include a section on decolonisation in his *Anarchism* and found material from Proudhon and Bakunin which supported the FCL's position. See Sylvain Pattieu, *Les camarades des freres: Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algerie* (Paris: Syllepse, 2002); Sidi Mohammed Barkat (ed.), *Des Français contre la terreur d'état (Algerie 1954–1962)* (Paris: Editions Reflex, 2002); Sylvain Boulouque, *Les anarchistes français face aux guerres coloniales (1945–1962)* (Lyon: Atelier de creation libertaire, 2003).

⁶⁸ According to a note by the editors in Guérin, *Pour le communisme libertaire* (Paris: Spartacus, 2003), p. 5. Rubel (1905–96) had had links with the councilist movement and would publish the short text, 'Marx theoricien de l'anarchisme' [Marx, theoretician of anarchism] in his *Marx, critique du Marxisme* [Marx, critic of Marxism] (Paris: Editions Payot, 1974; new edition 2000), a collection of articles previously published between 1957 and 1973. The text has since been published as a booklet, *Marx theoricien de l'anarchisme* (Saint-Denis: Vent du ch'min, 1983; Geneva: Editions Entremonde, 2010). His argument in brief was that 'under the name communism, Marx developed a theory of anarchism; and further, that in fact it was he who was the first to provide a rational basis for the anarchist utopia and to put forward a project for achieving it: Marxists Internet Archive, www.Marxists.org/archive/rubeV1973fmarx-anarchism.htm, accessed 29 March 2011.

Anarchism has for many years suffered from an undeserved disrepute, from an injustice which has manifested itself in three ways.

Firstly, its detractors claim that it is simply a thing of the past. It did not survive the great revolutionary tests of our time: the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Revolution. It has no place in the modern world, a world characterised by centralisation, by large political and economic entities, by the idea of totalitarianism. There is nothing left for the anarchists to do but, “by force of circumstance” as Victor Serge put it, to “join the revolutionary Marxists.”

Secondly, the better to devalue it, those who would slander anarchism serve up a tendentious interpretation of its doctrine. Anarchism is essentially individualistic, particularistic, hostile to any form of organisation. It leads to fragmentation, to the egocentric withdrawal of small local units of administration and production. It is incapable of centralizing or of planning. It is nostalgic for the “golden age.” It tends to resurrect archaic social forms. It suffers from a childish optimism; its “idealism” takes no account of the solid realities of the material infrastructure. It is incurably petit-bourgeois; it places itself outside of the class movement of the modern proletariat. In a word, it is “reactionary.”

And finally, certain of its commentators take care to rescue from oblivion and to draw attention to only its most controversial deviations, such as terrorism, individual assassinations, propaganda by explosives and so on.⁶⁹

Although, as we have seen, he referred to the two books (*Anarchism* and *No Gods No Masters*) as representing his “classical anarchist” phase, and despite his assertion that the basics of anarchist doctrine were relatively homogeneous, elsewhere he was very clear that both books focussed on a particular *kind* of anarchism. To begin with, “the fundamental aspect of these doctrines” was, for Guérin, that “*anarchy*, is indeed, above all, synonymous with *socialism*. The anarchist is, first and foremost, a socialist whose aim is to put an end to the exploitation of man by man. Anarchism is no more than one of the branches of socialist thought ... For Adolph Fischer, one of the Chicago martyrs, ‘every anarchist is a socialist, but every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist.’”⁷⁰

In *Pour un Marxisme libertaire* (1969), Guérin described himself as coming from the school of “anti-Stalinist Marxism,” but as having for some time been in the habit of “delving into the treasury of libertarian thought.” Anarchism, he insisted, was still relevant and still very much alive, “provided that it is first divested of a great deal of childishness, utopianism and romanticism,”⁷¹ He went on to comment that because of this openness towards the contribution of anarchism, his book, *Anarchism*, had been misunderstood by some, and that it did not mean that he had become an “ecumenical” anarchist, to use Georges Fontenis’ term.⁷² In “Anarchisme et Marxisme” (written in 1973), Guérin emphasised that his book on anarchism had focussed on “social, con-

⁶⁹ Preface of 1970 to Guérin (ed.), *Ni Dieu ni Maître. Anthologie de l’anarchisme* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), vol. I, pp. 6–7. See pp. 41–3 in this volume.

⁷⁰ *L’Anarchisme*, p. 21.

⁷¹ Daniel Guérin, *Pour un Marxisme libertaire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1969), p. 7.

⁷² Georges Fontenis, ‘Le long parcours’, p. 38.

structive, collectivist or communist anarchism” because this was the kind of anarchism which had most in common with Marxism.⁷³

The reason Guérin gave for focussing on this kind of anarchism, as opposed to insurrectionist, individualist or illegalist anarchism or terrorism, was that it was entirely relevant to the problems faced by contemporary revolutionaries: “libertarian visions of the future ... invite serious consideration. It is clear that they fulfil to a very large extent the needs of our times, and that they can contribute to the building of our future.”⁷⁴

But is this really “classical anarchism,” as Guérin put it, given the insistence on “constructive anarchism, which depends on organisation, on self-discipline, on integration, on federalist and noncoercive centralisation”; the emphasis on experiments in workers’ control in Algeria, Yugoslavia and Cuba; the openness to the idea that such states could be seen as socialist and capable of reform in a libertarian direction?⁷⁵ This was not the conclusion of English anarchist Nicolas Walter, whose review of *Ni dieu ni maître* commented that “the selection of passages shows a consistent bias towards activism, and the more intellectual, theoretical and philosophical approach to anarchism is almost completely ignored ... There is a similar bias towards revolution, and the more moderate, pragmatic and reformist approach to anarchism is almost completely omitted as well.”⁷⁶ As for Guérin’s *L’Anarchisme*, Walter detected a similar bias towards Proudhon and Bakunin, and was surprised at the emphasis on Gramsci, “which might be expected in a Marxist account [of the Italian workers’ councils after the Great War] but is refreshing in an anarchist one.” Walter was also sceptical about the attention paid to Algeria and Yugoslavia. In summary, however, these two books were “the expression of an original and exciting view of anarchism.”⁷⁷

So Guérin’s two books arguably represented an original departure, and it is worth quoting some remarks made by Patrice Spadoni who worked alongside Guérin in different libertarian communist groups in the 1970s and 1980s:

It has to be said that Daniel Guérin’s non-dogmatism never ceased to amaze us. In the 1970s, a period in which there was so much blinkeredness and sectarianism, in our own ranks as well as among the Leninists, Daniel would often take us aback. The young libertarian communists that we were ... turned pale with shock when he sang the praises of a Proudhon, of whom he was saying “yes and no” while we said “no and no”; then we would go white with horror, when he started quoting Stirner whom we loathed-without having really read him; then we became livid, when he began a dialogue with social-democrats; and finally, we practically had a melt-down when he expressed respect, albeit without agreeing with them, for the revolt of the militants associated with *Action directe*.⁷⁸

Two of these taboos are worth picking up on when considering the extent to which Guérin’s take on anarchism was a novel one: Proudhon and Stirner.

⁷³ ‘Anarchisme et Marxisme’, p. 237, in *L’Anarchisme* (1981 edition), pp. 229–52. For an English-language version, see the booklet *Anarchism & Marxism* (Sanday, Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1981), or ‘Marxism and Anarchism’, in David Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 109–26.

⁷⁴ *L’Anarchisme*, pp. 13–4.

⁷⁵ *Anarchism*, p. 153.

⁷⁶ Nicolas Walter, ‘Daniel Guérin’s Anarchism’, *Anarchy* vol. 8, no. 94 (1968), p. 378.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁷⁸ Patrice Spadoni, ‘La synthèse entre l’anarchisme et le Marxisme: “Un point de ralliement vers l’avenir”’, *Alter-*

Proudhon and the Fundamental Importance of Self-management

Proudhon had already ceased to be an ideological reference for any section of the French anarchist movement by at least the time of the Great War, except for a small minority of individualists opposed to any kind of collective ownership of the means of production. Most anarchists referred to either Kropotkin or Bakunin. This was partly because of the ambiguities in Proudhon's own writings regarding property, and partly because of the increasingly reactionary positions adopted by some of his "Mutualist" followers after his death in 1865.

The fact that Proudhon is so central to Guérin's "rehabilitation" of anarchism is thus surprising and tells us something about what he was trying to do and how it is he came to study anarchism in such depth: whereas Proudhon had already for many years been commonly referred to as the "pere de l'anarchie," the "father of anarchy," Guérin refers to him as the "pere de l'autogestion," the "father of self-management." This is the crux of the matter: Guérin was looking for a way to guarantee that in any future revolution, control of the workplace, of the economy and of society as a whole would remain at the base, that spontaneous forms of democracy—like the soviets, in the beginning—would not be hijacked by any centralised power.⁷⁹ Marx, Guérin insisted, hardly mentioned workers' control or self-management at all, whereas Proudhon paid it a great deal of attention.⁸⁰ Workers' control was, for Guérin, "without any doubt the most original creation of anarchism, and goes right to the heart of contemporary realities."⁸¹ Proudhon had been one of the first to try to answer the question raised by other social reformers of the early nineteenth century. As Guérin put it: "Who should manage the economy? Private capitalism? The state? Workers' organisations? In other words, there were-and still are-three options: free enterprise, nationalisation, or socialisation (i.e., self-management)."⁸² From 1840 onwards, Proudhon had argued passionately for the third option, something which set him apart from most other socialists of the time, who, like Louis Blanc, argued for one form or another of state control (if only on a transitional basis). Unlike Marx, Engels and others, Guérin argued, Proudhon saw workers' control as a concrete problem to be raised now, rather than relegated to some distant future. As a consequence, he thought and wrote in detail about how it might function: "Almost all the issues which have caused such problems for present-day experiments in selfmanagement were already foreseen and described in Proudhon's writings."⁸³

native Libertaire special number (2000), p. 43. Guérin, *Proudhon oui et non* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978),

⁷⁹ See his '1917–1921, de l'autogestion à la bureaucratie soviétique', in *De la Révolution d'octobre à l'empire éclaté: 70 ans de réflexions sur la nature de l'URSS* (Paris: Alternative libertaire/UTCL, n.d.); 'Proudhon et l'autogestion ouvrière' in *L'Actualité de Proudhon* (Bruxelles: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1967), pp. 67–87; 'L'Espagne libertaire', editorial introduction to part of *Autogestion et socialisme*, special issue on 'Les anarchistes et l'autogestion' nos. 18/19 (janvier-avril 1972), pp. 81–2; 'L'autogestion contemporaine', *Nair et rouge* nos. 31/32 (octobre 1965-fevrier 1966), pp. 16–24.

⁸⁰ See similarly critical remarks about Marxism's neglect of this issue by Castoriadis in an interview for a special issue of the UTCL's magazine on the usefulness (or otherwise) of Marxism for libertarian communists: 'Marx aujourd'hui. Entretien avec Cornelius Castoriadis' *Lutter!* no. 5 (May 1983), pp. 15–8. Guérin's article on 'Marx et Engels militants' appeared in the same issue, pp. 19–20.

⁸¹ *L'Anarchisme*, p. 16.

⁸² 'Proudhon pere de l'autogestion' (1965) in *Proudhon oui et non* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 165.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Stirner the “Father of Anarchism”?

As for Stirner—generally anathema to the non-individualist wing of the anarchist movement—the answer lies in what Guérin perceived to be Stirner’s latent homosexuality, his concern with sexual liberation and his determination to attack bourgeois prejudice and puritanism: “Stirner was a precursor of May ’68.”⁸⁴ His “greatest claim to originality, his most memorable idea, was his discovery of the “unique” individual... Stirner became, as a consequence, the voice of all those who throw down a challenge to normality.”⁸⁵

What we can see here, underlying Guérin’s approving summary of the meaning and importance of Stirner, is someone who had for many years been forced to suffer in silence because of the endemic homophobia of the labour movement, someone who had been forced by society’s moral prejudices to live a near-schizoid existence, totally suppressing one half of his personality. It was Guérin’s personal experience of and outrage at the homophobia of many Marxists and what seemed to be classical Marxism’s exclusive concern with materialism and class that accounts in large part for his sympathy with Stirner.

So to the extent that Guérin insists that every anarchist is an individualist—at the same time as being a “social” anarchist (*anarchiste sociétaire*)—to the extent that he approves of Stirner’s emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual, it is because he admires the determination to resist social conformism and moral prejudice. Guérin certainly had no truck with the precious “freedom of the individual” which by the 1920s had already become the stock mantra of those anarchists who rejected any attempt to produce a more ideologically and organisationally coherent revolutionary movement or who wished to ground their action in a realistic (or in Guérin’s words “scientific”) analysis of social conditions.

For a “Synthesis” of Marxism and Anarchism

So having called himself a “libertarian socialist” in the late 1950s before going through an “anarchist phase” in the 1960s, by 1968 Guérin was advocating “libertarian Marxism,” a term he would later change to “libertarian communism” in order not to alienate some of his new anarchist friends (though the content remained the same). In 1969, with Georges Fontenis and others Guérin launched the *Mouvement communiste libertaire* (MCL), which attempted to bring together various groups such as supporters of Denis Berger’s *Voie communiste*, former members of the FCL and individuals such as Gabriel Cohn-Bendit who had been associated with Socialisme ou Barbarie.⁸⁶ Guérin was responsible for the organisation’s paper, *Guerre de classes* (*Class War*). In 1971, the MCL merged with another group to become the *Organisation communiste libertaire* (OCL). In 1980, after complex debates notably over the question of trade union activity, Guérin—who rejected ultra-Left forms of “*spontaneisme*” which condemned trade unionism as counter-

⁸⁴ Guérin, *Ni Dieu ni Maltre*, vol. I, p. 12. Guérin began his anthology of anarchist texts with the ‘precursor’ Stirner; he also added an appendix on Stirner to the 1981 edition of *L’Anarchisme*. See also D. Guérin, *Homosexualité et Révolution* (Saint-Denis: Le Vent du ch’min, 1983), p. 12, and ‘Stirner, “Père de l’anarchisme”’, *La Rue 26* (1er et 2eme trimestre 1979), pp. 76–89. Guérin also believed Proudhon to have been a repressed homosexual: see ‘Proudhon et l’amour “unisexual”’ in *Arcadie* nos. 133/134 (janvier/ fevrier 1965).

⁸⁵ ‘Stirner, “Père de l’anarchisme”’, p. 83.

⁸⁶ See Fontenis, *Changer le monde*, pp. r61-2 and 255–6.

revolutionary—would ultimately join the *Union des travailleurs communistes libertaires* (UTCL), created in 1978. He would remain a member until his death in 1988.⁸⁷

Looking back on those years, Georges Fontenis would write: “For us [the FCL], as for Guérin, ‘libertarian Marxism’ was never to be seen as a fusion or a marriage, but as a living synthesis very different from the sum of its parts.”⁸⁸ How should we interpret this?

Guérin was always keen to emphasise the commonalities in Marxism and anarchism, and underscored the fact that, in his view at least, they shared the same roots and the same objectives. Having said that, and despite the fact that Rubel seems to have influenced Guérin, Guérin’s study of Marx led him to suggest that those such as Rubel who saw Marx as a libertarian were exaggerating and/or being too selective.⁸⁹ Reviewing the ambivalent but predominantly hostile relations between Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and Stirner, Proudhon, and Bakunin, on the other, Guérin concluded that the disagreements between them were based to a great extent on misunderstanding and exaggeration on both sides: “Each of the two movements needs the theoretical and practical contribution of the other,” Guérin argued, and this is why he saw the expulsion of the Bakuninists from the International Working Men’s Association Congress at The Hague in 1872 as “a disastrous event for the working class.”⁹⁰

“Libertarian communism” was for Guérin an attempt to “revivify everything that was constructive in anarchism’s contribution in the past.” We have noted that his *Anarchism* focused on “social, constructive, collectivist, or communist anarchism.”⁹¹ Guérin was more critical of “traditional” anarchism, with what he saw as its knee-jerk rejection of organisation, and particularly what he considered to be its Manichean and simplistic approach to the question of the “state” in modern, industrial and increasingly internationalised societies. He became interested particularly in militants such as the Spanish anarchist Diego Abad de Santillan, whose ideas on “integrated” economic self-management contrasted with what Guérin insisted was the naive and backward-looking “libertarian communism” of the Spanish CNT advocated at its 1936 Saragossa conference by Isaac Puente and inspired, Guérin thought, by Kropotkin.⁹² Such a policy seemed to Guérin to take no account of the nature of modern consumer societies and the need for economic planning and coordination at national and transnational level. In this connection, Guérin also became interested in the ideas of the Belgian collectivist socialist Cesar de Paepe—who argued against the anarchists of the Jura Federation in favour of what he called an “an-archic state”—on the national and transnational organisation of public services within a libertarian framework.⁹³

On the other hand, Guérin’s libertarian Marxism or communism did not reject those aspects of Marxism which still seemed to Guérin valid and useful: (i) the notion of alienation, much dis-

⁸⁷ The UTCL’s manifesto, adopted at its Fourth Congress in 1986, was republished (with a dedication to Guérin) by the UTCL’s successor organisation, Alternative Libertaire: *Un projet de société communiste libertaire* (Paris: Alternative libertaire, 2002). See also Theo Rival, *Syndicalistes et libertaires: Une histoire de l’Union des travailleurs communistes libertaires (1974–1991)* (Paris: Editions d’Alternative libertaire, 2013).

⁸⁸ Fontenis, *Changer le monde*, p. 80, note i. See also David Berry, ‘Change the world without taking power? The libertarian communist tradition in France today’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 111–30.

⁸⁹ Guérin, ‘Anarchisme et Marxisme’, in *L’Anarchisme* (1981), p. 250.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁹² On Abad de Santillan, see the section on ‘L’Espagne libertaire’, in *Les anarchistes et l’autogestion*, special issue on ‘Autogestion et socialisme’ nos. 18–19 (1972), pp. 81–117, including an introduction by Guérin.

⁹³ See Guérin, *Ni Dieu ni Maltre*, vol. I, pp. 268–91.

cussed since Erich Fromm's 1941 *Fear of Freedom*, and which Guérin saw as being in accordance with the anarchist emphasis on the freedom and autonomy of the individual; (ii) the insistence that the workers shall be emancipated by the workers themselves; (iii) the analysis of capitalist society; and (iv) the historical materialist dialectic, which for Guérin remained

one of the guiding threads enabling us to understand the past and the present, on condition that the method not be applied rigidly, mechanically, or as an excuse not to fight on the false pretext that the material conditions for a revolution are absent, as the Stalinists claimed was the case in France in 1936, 1945 and 1968. Historical materialism must never be reduced to a determinism; the door must always be open to individual will and to the revolutionary spontaneity of the masses.⁹⁴

Indeed, following his focus on anarchism in the 1960s, Guérin returned in the 1970s to his earlier researches on Marxism, and in his new quest for a synthesis of the two ideologies he found a particularly fruitful source in Rosa Luxemburg, in whom he developed a particular interest and he played a role in the wider resurgence of interest in her ideas. She was for Guérin the only German social democrat who stayed true to what he called "original" Marxism, and in 1971 he published an anthology of her critical writings on the pre-1914 SFIO, as well as an important study of the notion of spontaneity in her work.⁹⁵ Guérin saw no significant difference between her conception of revolutionary working-class spontaneity and the anarchist one, nor between her conception of the "mass strike" and the syndicalist idea of the "general strike." Her criticisms of Lenin in 1904 and of the Bolshevik Party in the spring of 1918 (regarding the democratic freedoms of the working class) seemed to him very anarchistic, as did her conception of a socialism propelled from below by workers' councils. She was, he argued, "one of the links between anarchism and authentic Marxism," and for this reason she played an important role in the development of Guérin's thinking about convergences between certain forms of Marxism and certain forms of anarchism.⁹⁶

Guérin was convinced that a libertarian communism which represented such a synthesis of the best of Marxism and the best of anarchism would be much more attractive to progressive

⁹⁴ Guérin, 'Anarchisme et Marxisme', in *L'Anarchisme* (1981), p. 252.

⁹⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, *Le socialisme en France, 1898-1912* (Paris: Belfond, 1971), with an introduction by Guérin, pp. 7-48; *Rosa Luxemburg et la spontanéité révolutionnaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1971). Typically for Guérin, the second half of the latter volume brings together a number of texts representing different opinions on the subject. The following year he took part in a debate with Gilbert Badia, Michael Lowy, Madeleine Reberieux, Denis Vidal-Naquet and others on the contemporary relevance of Luxemburg's ideas. Gilbert Badia et al., 'Rosa Luxemburg et nous: Debat', *Politique aujourd'hui: Recherches et pratiques socialistes dans le monde* (1972), pp. 77-106. Looking back at the revival of interest in Luxemburg in the 1960s and 70s, Lowy recently commented: 'There seems to be a hidden connection between the rediscovery of Rosa Luxemburg and eras of heightened contestation.' Lowy, 'Rosa Luxemburg, un Marxisme pour le XXIe siècle', p. 59, *Contretemps* 8 (2010), pp. 59-63. This is a special issue devoted to Luxemburg's continuing relevance to revolutionary politics.

⁹⁶ Guérin, 'Anarchisme et Marxisme', p. 233. As the co-editor (with Jean-Jacques Lebel) of a collection entitled 'Changer la Vie' for the publisher Pierre Belfond, Guérin took the opportunity to republish Trotsky's *Our Political Tasks* (1904), in which the young Trotsky was very critical of Lenin's 'Jacobinism' and of what he called the 'dictatorship over the proletariat': Leon Trotsky, *Nos tâches politiques* (Paris: Belfond, 1970). Luxemburg's 'Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy' is also included in the volume as an appendix. It is noteworthy that the English-language version of *Our Political Tasks*, produced in the 1970s by the Trotskyist New Park Publications, omits the sections in which Trotsky was most critical of Lenin. (Unfortunately, the Marxists Internet Archive have used the same partial translation.)

workers than “degenerate, authoritarian Marxism or old, outdated, and fossilised anarchism.”⁹⁷ But he was adamant that he was not a theorist, that libertarian communism was, as yet, only an “approximation,” not a fixed dogma:

It cannot, it seems to me, be defined on paper, in absolute terms. It cannot be an endless raking over of the past, but must rather be a rallying point for the future. The only thing of which I am convinced is that the future social revolution will have nothing to do with either Muscovite despotism or anaemic social-democracy; that it will not be authoritarian, but libertarian and rooted in self-management, or, if you like, councilist.⁹⁸

Conclusion

To what extent, then, can we say that Guérin succeeded in producing a “synthesis”? Assessments by fellow revolutionaries have varied. Guérin himself used to complain that many militants were so attached to ideological pigeonholing and that quasi-tribal loyalties were so strong that his purpose was frequently misunderstood, with many who identified as anarchists criticising him for having “become a Marxist,” and vice versa.⁹⁹ Yet Guérin was always very clear that there have been many different Marxisms and many different anarchisms, and he also insisted that his understanding of “libertarian communism” went beyond or transcended (“*dépasse*”) both anarchism and Marxism.¹⁰⁰

Nicolas Walter, in a broadly positive review of Guérin’s work, and apparently struggling to characterise his politics, described him as “a veteran socialist who became an anarchist” and as “a Marxist writer of a more or less Trotskyist variety” who had gone on to attempt a synthesis between Marxism and anarchism before finally turning to “a syndicalist form of anarchism.”¹⁰¹

George Woodcock, in a review of Noam Chomsky’s introduction to the Monthly Review Press edition of Guérin’s *Anarchism*, insisted that “neither is an anarchist by any known criterion; they are both left-wing Marxists”—their failing having been to focus too narrowly on the economic, on workers’ control, on an “obsolete,” “anarchosyndicalist” perspective.¹⁰² Such a judgement is clearly based on a particular and not uncontentious conception of anarchism.

The opposite conclusion was drawn by another anarchist, Miguel Chueca, who has argued that if we look at all the major issues dividing anarchists from Marxists—namely, according to Guérin’s *Pour un Marxisme libertaire*, the post-revolutionary “withering away” of the state, the role of minorities (or vanguards or avant-gardes) and the resort to bourgeois democratic methods—then “the ‘synthesis’ results, in all cases, in a choice in favour of the anarchist position.”¹⁰³ Chueca seems to have based his conclusion on an essentialist view of anarchism (in the

⁹⁷ Guérin, ‘Anarchisme et Marxisme’, p. 252.

⁹⁸ Guérin, *A la recherche*, pp. 10–1.

⁹⁹ Guérin, ‘Pourquoi communiste libertaire?’, in *A la recherche*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁰ Guérin, ‘Un communisme libertaire, pour quoi?’, *A la recherche*, pp. 123–5. Cf. Bookchin’s remark that ‘the problem is not to “abandon” Marxism, or to “annul” it, but to transcend it dialectically’: Murray Bookchin, ‘Listen, Marxist.’ in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1971), p. 177.

¹⁰¹ Nicolas Walter, ‘Daniel Guérin’s Anarchism’, *Anarchy* vol. 8, no. 94 (1968), pp. 376–82. Guérin was not entirely unknown to English readers at the time. *Freedom* had published a translation of a 1966 interview on 30 September 1967.

¹⁰² George Woodcock, ‘Chomsky’s Anarchism’ in *Freedom*, 16 November 1974, pp. 4–5.

¹⁰³ Miguel Chueca, ‘Anarchisme et Marxisme. La tentative de Daniel Guérin d’unir les deux

singular) and of Marxism, and on an identification of Marxism with Leninism. He appears to disregard some significant issues, such as Guérin's insistence on the historical materialist dialectic, and the need for centralised (albeit "non-coercive") economic planning.

Writing from a sympathetic but not uncritical, Trotskyist perspective, Ian Birchall suggests that ultimately Guérin's greatest achievement was his practice as a militant:

Guérin's greatness lay in his role as a mediator rather than as a synthesist. Over six decades he had a record of willingness to cooperate with any section of the French left that shared his fundamental goals of proletarian self-emancipation, colonial liberation and sexual freedom. He was a vigorous polemicist, but saw no fragment of the left, however obscure, as beneath his attention ... He was also typically generous, never seeking to malign his opponents, however profoundly he disagreed with them ... He was always willing to challenge orthodoxy, whether Marxist or anarchist ... Yet behind the varying formulations one consistent principle remained: "The Revolution of our age will be made from below—or not at all."¹⁰⁴

Others have embraced Guérin's theoretical contribution and it is clear that his ideas on a "libertarian Marxism" or "libertarian communism" were enormously influential from the 1960s onwards, and many today (notably, but not only, those in France close to the organisation *Alternative libertaire*¹⁰⁵) see in him a precursor and are admiring of his theoretical and practical contribution to the search for a libertarian communism—albeit as a contribution which needed further development in the context of the social struggles of the 1980s and beyond. Indeed Guérin was the first to accept that he had not yet seen the "definitive crystallisation of such an unconventional and difficult synthesis," which would "emerge from social struggles" with "innovative forms which nobody today can claim to predict".¹⁰⁶

It would be pointless today to try to paper over the cracks in the more or less crumbling and rotting edifice of socialist doctrines, to plug away at patching together some of those fragments of traditional Marxism and anarchism which are still useful, to launch oneself into demonstrations of Marxian or Bakunian erudition, to

philosophies et 'l'anarchisme' de Marx vu par Maximilien Rubel' in *Refractions* no. 7, available at <http://www.plusloin.org/refractions/refractions7/chueca1.htm> (accessed 29 August 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Ian Birchall, 'Daniel Guérin's Dialogue with Leninism' in *Revolutionary History* vol. 9, no. 2 (2006), pp. 194–5.

¹⁰⁵ See Irene Pereira, *Un nouvel esprit contestataire. La grammaire pragmatiste du syndicalisme d'action directe libertaire* (Unpublished PhD, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2009; supervised by Luc Boltanski); Patrice Spadoni, 'Daniel Guérin ou le projet d'une synthèse entre l'anarchisme et le Marxisme' in Philippe Corcuff and Michael Lowy (eds.), *Changer le monde sans prendre le pouvoir? Nouveaux libertaires, nouveaux communistes*, special issue of *Contretemps*, no. 6 (February 2003), pp. 118–26; Olivier Besancenot and Michael Lowy, *Affinités révolutionnaires: Nos étoiles rouges et noires—Pour une solidarité entre marxistes et libertaires* (Paris: Editions Mille et Une Nuits, 2014). Guérin's daughter Anne has claimed recently that Guérin was the 'Maitre à penser' of both Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the Trotskyist Alain Krivine—Biographical preface to Daniel Guérin, *De l'Oncle Tom aux Pantheres noires* (Pantin: Les Bons caracteres, 2010), p. 8. See also Christophe Bourseiller's comment that "the politics of the *Mouvement communiste libertaire* derived largely from the theoretical reflexion of Daniel Guérin." *Histoire generale de "/>ultra-gauche"* (Paris: Editions Denoel, 2003), p. 484. In 1986 Guérin also contributed to the UTCL's 'Projet communiste libertaire', which was republished by Alternative Libertaire in 1993 and again in 2002: *Un projet de société communiste libertaire* (Paris: Alternative Libertaire, 2002). The 'Appel pour une alternative libertaire' of 1989 (which ultimately led to the creation of AL) was also co-written by Guérin: see Guérin, *Pour le communisme libertaire* (Paris: Spartacus, 2003), pp. 181–6.

¹⁰⁶ Guérin, *A la recherche*, p. 10.

attempt to trace, merely on paper, ingenious syntheses or tortuous reconciliations... To call oneself a libertarian communist today, does not mean looking backwards, but towards the future. The libertarian communist is not an exegete, but a militant.¹⁰⁷

A version of this introduction was first published in Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta, and David Berry (eds.), *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; 2nd edition, Oakland: PM Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁷ Guérin, 'Un communisme libertaire, pour quoi?', in *A la recherche*, p. 123.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Mitchell Abidor
The Search for a Libertarian Communism
Daniel Guérin and the “Synthesis” of Marxism and Anarchism
2017

Introduction of *For a Libertarian Communism*

usa.anarchistlibraries.net