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The Human Crisis and its Overcoming through Anarchism

Pierre Ramus

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1926

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Excellent reproduction of a lecture by Pierre Ramus, held on May
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then it will be easy for them to occupy the factories, cultivate the land and take it into communal ownership, since the capitalists and the state will recognize the futility of all resistance when they know that settled masses can no longer exploit, which would have rendered the existing system of exploitation and domination useless to them.

By maturing to this realization, by cultivating the spirit of solidarity among themselves so that they no longer allow their brothers and sisters to become unemployed, but instead introduce them into the production facilities and thereby break the capital monopoly, the proletariat proves itself to be at the level of culture at which it makes the continuation of the system of domination and wage slavery impossible.

Therefore — no despair, no despair! The human crisis of our time is the dull tolling of the bells of history, which assigns its mission to working humanity. The vitality and vitality of the proletariat will lead humanity to its liberation, as we anarcho-communists recognize as a given.

Through a general strike to social revolution — to overcome all domination, all pressure and servitude, all economic dependence on entrepreneurs and state parasites — down with every militaristic, violent organization — under the sign of these thoughts and ideas of anarchism, the new world order of anarchy will emerge and arise from the womb of today's human crisis, proclaiming and realizing: neither master nor slave — only the free man!

funds for the purposes of electing politicians. The funds should instead be used for their social and economic liberation goals. If the proletariat does not act in the direction outlined here, the crisis of humanity in which we find ourselves will end with the downfall of the present proletariat — simply because of the inexorability with which the next world war will otherwise break out. This is inevitable if monopoly capital, state authority, militarism and the armaments industry are not completely defeated; because one factor of production, apart from all others, is driving towards the Second World War (oil).

Oil in the form of gasoline, etc. is increasingly preparing the way for a world economic revolution, which must lead to a tremendous intensification of conflicts between individual states and continents. Almost three quarters of the entire world production of oil is in the hands of the United States. Oil is the indispensable factor for air travel, for military aircraft and ultimately for all production. If the social revolution of the international proletariat does not bring about a fair and peaceful distribution of this raw material for all productive humanity, purely economic and capitalist self-preservation interests will drive the states to a world war that is tantamount to the extermination of our generation of proletarians and that historical moment.

No God, no church will help the working class, no political party greedy for state power will help them to free themselves — if they do not help themselves to get out of the dilemma of the present. Only self-help will lead the proletariat to self-emancipation.

When the working masses learn, through communist anarchism, to use the method of action of the general strike in such a way as to destroy the possibility of concentrating the armed power of the state; when the workers are able to reject state money during the general strike because they can say: “We do not need your money, statesmen and capitalists! We have our flour, our food and we can wait to resume production as long as we like!” —

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towards an abyss from which only the social revolution can save us all: the destruction of the state, which, like Wagner's dragon, guards the gates of happiness and does not let people in. Everything else is just botched work, an extension of the current state of misery and hunger.

Let us dwell for a moment on the lessons that the English general strike has left us. It was defeated because the English proletariat was not trained in its leadership, because it is only possible to gain experience in the fight against a general strike through frequent, practical exercise. In addition, the English state saw itself supported by the states and governments of all countries, who understood that the success of the English general strike would mean a turning point in the workers' movement throughout the world: that the proletariat would recognize the uselessness and futility of parliamentarism and move towards economic self-emancipation through direct action.

While all states helped the English government, the International of the Proletariat did not undertake any solidarity strike actions for the English general strike. This enabled the state powers to enable the English state to hold out. The proletariat must be able to lead a general strike in such a way that it cannot be brought to the brink of starvation, but that the bourgeoisie and the state principle are instead plunged into starvation. If the workers no longer hand over their union funds to a "workers' bank" to be lent to large capitalist enterprises and financial banking groups at purely capitalist interest rates, but instead use these funds to purchase land and to let the same unemployed comrades settle there, or to use them to establish socialist, communist, co-operative, agrarian-industrial inland colonies, then an economic basis will be created for the workers who go on a general strike, enabling them to lead a general strike for weeks, thereby practically expropriating the bourgeoisie and allowing the occupation of factories to take place under the conditions of a new economy set by the working class. In order to achieve this, the workers must refuse to use the union

trade union organization is centralized and will have to go through many more battles to even reach the level of development that has been reached in England since the general strike.

In the English trade union movement, the principle of objective freedom of speech is a sacred principle; In the Austrian and German states, any objective freedom of speech is suppressed, in our case with the Republican Protection League, and the spokesmen of the fundamental opposition are excluded. This is why, after the unilateral termination of the general strike by the trade union council — which was unfortunately too much under the influence of social-democrat politicians, e.g. Thomas, Macdonald, etc. — the sharpest criticism is being raised against it and can be raised in the English trade union movement. But it is precisely this criticism that is likely to have an extremely fruitful effect on further developments in England, and in the case of a future general strike we can expect the leaders to have much more experience and less authority than was the case in the first general strike — every beginning is imperfect.

I maintain that the states are currently celebrating the lulling of the proletariat. They recognize it. The peoples have not yet awakened to independent thinking. It is no wonder that wars can be organized in the face of such a state of affairs. Italy is clearly arming for war. Turkey, which is allied with Russia, will be attacked. Italy wants a piece of Smyrna, Anatolia, and France is again involved in all of this. We can say that disaster is coming faster than we think. Three weeks ago America stipulated 34 billion dollars for war purposes. At the Genoa Conference, the states could not agree to halt war armaments for just 10 years. Germany, which is supposedly disarmed, is spending enormous sums on its armaments. So we know that it is just a fantasy to say that there is no army in America, or in Germany. The Treaty of Versailles has been torn and ripped apart by the events that have taken place in Poland, Italy, Greece, etc. In Germany, armies of enormous size can be created from the ground in just a few weeks. So that people are racing

I

In the process of illness, the phenomenon that results in a decision regarding the recovery or decline of the human organism is called a crisis. A crisis does not say anything about the outcome of an illness. The illness in the human body only produces certain symptoms.

Today, humanity in all countries is being whipped towards certain decisions that it will be able to cope with or that it will have to succumb to.

In contrast to all the claims made by Marxism in particular, we now have the fact before us that capitalism has shown itself to be able to cope with all the onslaughts and has not collapsed under them, as Marx and Engels claimed at the time that it would. Marxism already admits this indirectly, and within its own circles the bankruptcy of Marxist theory is admitted.

In this context, I would like to mention a book that is being ignored within the social democratic workers' movement, K. Renner's book: *The Economy as a Total Process*, in which Renner bids farewell to all Marxist postulates relating to the theory of crises, surplus value, etc., but also to socialism. This book shows that the entire developmental tendency of capitalism is necessary, that exploitation, the wage system, all forms of monopoly ownership, that all of this will be maintained even after the social democracy has seized state power, and that the entire theory of development of Marxism is no longer viable and can no longer be maintained! The leaders agree among themselves that capitalism is not heading for decline, but that it has the resilience to overcome those feverish symptoms that can be called the symptoms of a crisis.

In my opinion, there is no crisis in the existing system; it is lulling oneself into sleep and into a dream that will surely take its revenge if one tells the proletariat that capitalism is in crisis and must collapse. That is completely untrue and incorrect. For capitalism can overcome all of its symptoms at the expense of the

broad masses, at the expense of the proletariat. If this succeeds, one will be able to observe that broad sections of the people are being pushed to an even lower level of existence. We are therefore not currently dealing with a crisis of capitalism, but rather with a crisis of humanity, of the proletariat and within the proletariat. We are not dealing here with acts of the future, we are living in this crisis now, and because the proletariat has not yet demonstrated that it can become master of the situation, the situation is this: capitalism and human configurations are in a tremendous but still undecided wrestling match. The only hope that humanity will win this struggle and overcome the crisis of its existence is currently offered to us by the factor of the general strike, that most important means of struggle of the proletariat, which has just been used in England on a gigantic, albeit still undeveloped scale. We live in a crisis of humanity which requires a revolution to overcome.

If reforms are to be applied to this crisis, then we anarchists are pessimists in this respect. We say that it is not true when people promise you that any “reforms” can help the proletariat in its existential crisis, lead you proletarians out of your dilemma; every parliamentary-state reform is only an extension of the path of your misery, and you yourselves must pay for all reforms. In reality, state reforms cannot be implemented without the state burdening the broad masses with new taxes, which makes everything that is supposed to be achieved by these reforms illusory. Reforms, even if they are honestly meant, can under no circumstances reach the seat of the social disease, and this seat must be removed; you can observe over the last 30 to 40 years that the proletariat has only been misled by reforms, driven into world war, that it can no longer recognize its enemies, but has allowed these enemies to throw a cap over its head, and that the parliamentary-political and central trade union leaders of the proletariat have betrayed the proletariat in its ideals, hand in hand with the state.

If the European proletariat does not actively intervene to resolve the crisis of humanity, it will be passively destroyed. You will

and 45.5 percent in Austria. We are dealing with an average 50 percent disadvantage for our workers, and we must also remember that Austria and Germany have the strongest trade union movement and social democracy in the world! In England, the strictly Marxist Social Democrats have only 2,000 readers for their official publication. The leading, non-Marxist, but actually reformist-social democratic “Independent Workers’ Party” there has a membership of around 300,000 people, out of a population of around 50 million.

In fact, we will have a much more difficult struggle in Austria and Germany to bring the workers’ movement even up to the level it has in England. Because there, in the trade union movement, there is a principle of self-determination of the organized masses, which we do not have here. What I mean by this is that the trade union organizations are structured less in a centralist and more in a federalist-autonomist way. There is a concentration of forces there, but no mechanistic centralism to the extent that exists in our countries. In addition, in England, as a characteristic of the trade union movement there, they have the principle of absolute freedom of speech in all meetings of members. Non-anarchists there have no more freedom of speech than anarchists. So there is a real intellectual struggle in the trade unions there, while everyone is fighting the economic struggle together.

Another peculiarity is that each group keeps the majority of the money in its own custody and only a small part is paid to the central management. Union meetings of members determine the salary of an organizer on a district basis, which is therefore rarely higher than the wages of the worker in the company. Where in the centralized trade union movement in Germany or Austria do you find this? Have you ever been asked which employees you want? As organized workers, who have a high contribution deducted from their wages every week, do you know how much your officials get in salary? You have never determined this and are not asked about it. The centralized trade union movement in Germany and Austria lacks the principle of integrity. That is the only reason why this

This teaches us that the state must be seen as the protector of capital, and people must fight against the state, regardless of whether it is called a proletarian state or a “social” state; people must be roused against it, because the state is, according to Nietzsche, the coldest of all monsters. It is bent on murdering the masses at home and in foreign wars in order to maintain its rule. The crisis of humanity also consists in the fact that in all countries too much is produced, while at the same time the living conditions and consumption of the proletariat are being pushed down to an almost infamous level. Instead of the masses taking over production and no longer allowing themselves to be forced into the capitalist yoke, Marxism in Austria and Germany tells them: “It could be even worse, let us be satisfied with what we have. At the moment we cannot think of social liberation. We have a powerful workers’ movement here and have achieved a lot. At present nothing more can be achieved, we must first gain the majority and thereby government power.”

I want to show you first of all what social democracy has achieved. I have here the statistical figures that show how the standard of living in our country compares with that of other countries. When you hear this, you will understand that we are in a human crisis of increasing degeneration, in which there is only one course of action: in the spirit of anarchism! Or the proletariat will submit itself, gagged, to those who will destroy it en masse.

So how do workers in Austria and Germany live today? Compared to England, Germans earn only 44 percent of the wages of English workers. The English worker has therefore launched a general strike, although he lives 66 percent better than the German worker! Yet we are told that such action is not necessary here. The Austrian worker earns only 88 percent of what the English worker earns. These are official figures and numbers, not compiled by revolutionaries. So that people do not say that products are cheaper here than in England, I will tell you the facts as follows. The purchasing value of wages is 46 percent of what an English worker earns in Germany,

be told that what the anarchists are proposing — a general strike, the taking over of all natural resources, land, factories and means of production by the working class — would require sacrifices and that we must ensure that fascism does not come, and that we should therefore be satisfied with the alleged political achievements.

People who speak to you like this are paid to lull the proletariat to sleep. We anarchists claim that real struggle never demands as many sacrifices as not fighting; it is a slow death. The Austrian trade union movement is numerically declining because of its inaction; it has become a third weaker since 1921. I now ask you: do we not have fascism in Austria if we are already taking action against striking workers with bayonets and rifles? When one says: Fighting requires sacrifices! we say: Yes, of course; but these sacrifices are light as a feather compared to those that come when the masses have not fought!

When I told the masses before the war that a war was approaching, it was the social democratic leaders who shouted me down in their meetings because I wanted to point out that their party was not carrying out anti-militarist propaganda. They said that doing so would ruin the party. We anarchists dared, as individuals, to say to the state, to the masses: Look at this crisis of the approaching war! Overcome it, or you will be overcome! What was the result of not seeing? — The World War.

Would the fight against it have cost so many victims, the fight against the war, the fight against militarism, the fight against the state — would this fight have cost even a thousandth of the sacrifices that the workers did not have to make for their cause later in the World War?

If we bear this in mind, we will realise that it is absurd to scare people that a liberal revolutionary struggle will demand victims. These are nothing compared to those who will die by not fighting; they are a drop compared to an ocean of human blood that will be spilled by the masses not fighting for their own social liberation. If loyalty to conviction plays even the smallest role in the work-

ers' movement, then a new path must be taken. What happened in England must happen, where the leaders of the Social Democrats did everything they could to thwart the general strike, where these people — especially Macdonald, who was retired for life as a former minister — earned a lot of Judas' wages — but where the workers acted over the heads of the leaders. We can see how solidarity actively came to life for the first time in England. The workers' movement that brought this about was not as strongly organised as that in Austria and Germany. This can be an example for us. These countries are in first and second place in the Amsterdam International, England is only in fifth place. The situation in the English trade union movement is even more unfavourable when one compares the population of England.

Nevertheless, the general strike took place there and only because the workers of England are not a significant factor in political and parliamentary terms, because out of their healthy egoism they have built up their trade union movement in such a way that it can fight autonomously and in a federal manner. 4 million people were brought to their feet for a fight that was the first time in human history on such a scale. In this fight we could see what the political leaders are worth! Where has their help gone, what did they do when the government went about declaring a state of emergency? What did the workers' party members in parliament do about it? Did they have the character to say: We, the representatives of the workers, cannot identify with such villainous acts of state principle! We are leaving the house of parliamentary deceit in which only bad things are decided against the people! — None of this happened.

While the people were starving during the general strike, the government continued to pay them their fat allowances and in return they only carried out "parliamentary opposition", avoiding any active declaration of solidarity with the masses in the streets. This is precisely what the English general strike clearly showed: that politicians can only beguile the masses!

proportion as the situation of industry becomes more and more precarious.

The time is already foreseeable when Europe, since it will have too few industrial products within the monopoly economy to exchange for grain, will find itself in the necessity of developing its own agriculture much more intensively than has been done so far. This development will turn the flat land into an outstanding, socially, politically and economically decisive power, greatly reducing industrial influence. This will give rise to a new civilization, a "peasant civilization." What will arise is what Stoddart calls the "ruralization" of Europe and what Leo Toistoi foresaw.

There is no doubt that the peasant class has best withstood the general ruin. It is they who have gained the most from the great revolution of our time — especially from the Russian Revolution. The great masses of people who are being given new life in Russia will not remain without influence on the rest of Europe, and these masses are peasant masses. The American Stoddart speaks very little about this important factor, perhaps because he has neither sympathy for socialism nor for social revolution.

But this observation offers us anarchists the following confidence: Great social changes are taking place; they prove to us that humanity is also working from within to overcome the crisis of its existence. The masses do not yet recognize the crisis of their existence, that they must eliminate the current situation. If they recognize this, then the state potentates and monopolists will be stopped. The capitalists in England lay dead on the ground as a result of the general strike. Where was the violence of bestiality, where was the state, the government, which used the honorless in the proletariat to put down the strike? Their plan did not succeed, it would never have succeeded if the English workers had not allowed themselves to be duped and sold off by their leaders. Despite the political "freedoms" enjoyed in England, the English state acts ruthlessly against the working class's struggle for economic liberation.

the east. The war and the revolutions which followed it changed the eastern half of Europe much more than the western half; however, the social changes were very profound in these latter regions, which remained apparently quiet. The rapid growth of industry in the 19th century developed town life in Europe and put the countryside in second place. This movement continued until the war, but since then it has not only stood still, but has given way to a very clear counter-movement. The war dealt a terrible blow to European industry, a blow all the harder because America and Asia have become Europe's most ruthless competitors. The most industrial country in Europe, England, has seen its exports fall by a large percentage because of the enormous competition in its old markets. The working class is suffering greatly, but it is not the only one suffering. This situation is also impoverishing the industrial bourgeoisie, with the exception of a few categories who, on the contrary, have become richer during and thanks to the war! These "new rich", on the other hand, form the least cultivated part of the bourgeoisie, who have the least regard for the value of intellectual, scientific, literary and artistic life. Stoddart therefore compares the works of art of our time with the "latest fashions" that England has delivered to the rich blacks of Central Africa.

There are three social categories in Europe that have been deeply depressed by the war: the workers, the industrial and intelligentsia, and finally the very thin layer of the parasitic aristocracy, which the war fortunately almost completely wiped out in some countries. The rural inhabitants, on the other hand, have gained enormously as a result of the events. In Western Europe they were oppressed by the superiority of the cities, in Eastern Europe by the large landowners who had seized the land. In "agrarian" Europe the peasants are now often the sole owners and masters of the land and their social and political importance has become very great. As for "urban" Europe, the influence of the country over it is growing and will grow from year to year, in

The English workers belong to a country that was one of the victorious nations in the World War. And yet it is precisely from this that we anarchists are right when we say that humanity is in a crisis, not Germany or Austria alone. For the English workers must also fight if they want to avoid ruin. Ask yourself: where would we be today if the idea of a general strike had been propagated for ten years in the same way as parliamentarism and electoral fraud! This first ray from England can fill us with certainty: humanity will overcome the crisis, it will act in the spirit of anarchism, even if perhaps unconsciously at first, because it has no other way out and all the politicians have failed in their promises.

II

Let us take a closer look at the crisis phenomena, which are terribly threatening if one does not have a view of the anarchist ideal. The capitalist system existed in its economic form before the war, and it is only speculation on the younger generation to say that there were no such crises before the war. But one thing is a fact. Before the war, humanity had a form of production that no longer exists today.

The countries that won the World War have seized all the sales markets, Austria, Germany and Russia are cut off from the world market, the Entente states have to burden Germany and Austria with direct and indirect contributions, which often have to be paid for in raw materials. This leads to the markets of the victorious states being flooded with a certain percentage of forced delivery goods, and to production being depressed there.

This is precisely why we find ourselves in a permanently war-like situation. The state and capitalism require the elimination of a certain percentage of the population of all countries. But not in a natural way, but in an unnatural way. This ensures the continuation of capitalism, because an approximate balance between supply

and demand would be achieved. The states know that the economic conditions are disordered, because it has long been clear that although 12 million people were driven to their deaths in the First World War and just as many are confined to the sickbed, there has not been enough murder to ensure the stability of the states and capitalism!

During the last 5 years a technical revolution has taken place, but again it is capitalism that introduces a contradiction. In an anarchist-communist society one would be delighted by the achievements of the human spirit; in the capitalist system we see 35 percent of all means of production lying idle.

Last winter millions of tons of coal were stored in the Ruhr region, while poor people and the unemployed died in cold holes. In the realm of capitalism we see, on the one hand, wonderful inventions, and on the other, misery and hunger, because there is a state that says that the individual capitalist has the right to decide whether a factory over which he can swing his monopoly thumb should be put into operation or not.

Thanks to the state, the capitalist has the private right to decide whether this or that machine should stand still. The state thus maintains a private monopoly of economic authority over society. The capitalist is protected by it. The state says: sales must be created; if this cannot be done peacefully, then by force. There is no ethics, no morality between states. So there must be an animalistic fight between states if the proletariat misses the moment to break the neck of capitalism by saying: we want to produce for the needs of all people, we refuse to be bossed around by the leash of Mammon!

If the masses do not speak in this way, it is normal for the world of states to strive for a military selection. The inactivity of the working class is the most dangerous crisis for them; for it is the signal for the states that they can decide who is the stronger. That is not decided by the gentlemen in Geneva. States do not carry out their wars by having individual representatives in Geneva say that they want to fight a duel and the winner should have the upper hand.

That is not how states proceed. Instead, they say to themselves: If the working class does not recognize the crisis in its life, then we, the states, can use these intellectually immature people to kill each other in order to gain elbow room for the strongest capitalism.

In the 17th century there was a man called Malthus. His theory is wrong when applied to a free society because it is nonsense to claim that people must multiply faster than food — but in relation to the state economy, to the monopoly economy, Malthus was right. In the context of the state, the monopoly economy of capitalism, it is correct when Malthus said: people develop like 1 and 1 equals 2, 2 and 2 equals 4, 4 and 4 equals 8, etc., food only in the ratio of 1, 2, 3, 4. Every state knows that it has arrived at this imbalance with its economy and that the First World War is only the beginning of a series of world wars because it solved almost nothing of all the power problems in the world of states.

One of the main crisis phenomena of humanity, especially Europe, is a complete restructuring of its living conditions, to which it has not yet been able to adapt itself in freedom and the creation of a new economic basis for society. It is extremely important to consider this, because it may constitute a revolutionary factor in the impending fundamental change that will be brought about by the social revolution — the only salvation and recovery of humanity.

Since the war there has been no lack of writings, articles and books dealing with the fundamental changes that the social and political life of Europe will have to undergo in the future. They are based on the great events that we have experienced. One of these works is entitled: "The Social Classes in Europe after the War". Its author is an American and is called L. Stoddart, quite well known for his studies on the awakening of the Orient. "Before the war," he says, "Europe was divided into two very different parts — in one the city dominated the country, in the other the relationship was the other way round; the dividing line ran roughly from the Elbe to the Adriatic. One can guess that the industrial part of Europe was to the west of this line, while the agricultural part lay to