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# The First International and the Birth of the Anarchist Movement

Robert Graham & The Final Straw Radio

23 October 2022

**TFSR:** So I'm speaking with Robert Graham, anarchist, historian and author of many books and articles, including the three volume collection from Black Rose Books and titled *Anarchism: a Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*. And more recently, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement* from AK Press in 2015. Thanks for joining us, Robert.

**Robert Graham:** Thanks for having me.

**TFSR:** So I wonder if you'd be willing to say a bit about yourself, maybe how you became an anarchist? And if you do any organizing, what sort of organizing do you do?

**RG:** Sure. Well, I was a college student back in the late 1970s. So I got involved in a local anarchist publication called *Open Road*, which was an anarchist news journal that came out from 1976 to 1990. It was meant to be informal, non dogmatic and in tune with the times, and there's actually a Facebook web page, you can go

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find their back issues. So I think just Google: “Open Road, anarchists, news journal” and you’ll probably find it.

Mainly I’ve been doing research and writing about historical stuff. Since then, I edited a three volume anthology of anarchist writings from ancient China to 2012 — when the last volume came out — covering anarchists movements, well, ideas really, across the globe. So not just your standard European kind of North American stuff, but also material from Japan and Korea, in China, India, and Africa, and in Latin America. So, I mean, there were interesting anarchist ideas popping up all over the place, and of course, anarchists movements across the globe. And up until the Russian Revolution, the anarchists were actually the most significant revolutionary socialist group. The Bolsheviks were a minority until after the Russian Revolution, so the anarchists basically were the far left of the socialist movement, up until then, despite historical misrepresentations by a variety of people that try to make it sound like anarchism was a petit bourgeois ideology and all that other stuff. Yeah.

I also have a blog, [robertgraham.wordpress.com](http://robertgraham.wordpress.com), where I added a bunch of stuff that I was unable to include in my anthology, and occasionally update. And currently, I’m working on an intellectual history of anarchist ideas, again, going back to ancient times and bringing it up to the 21st century,

**TFSR:** Do you have an idea of who you’re going to be publishing that through? Or what the sort of timeframe is on that?

**RG:** Hoping to publish that through AK press. And unfortunately, I haven’t finished it yet. So I’m not sure when I will. I have not had as much time to spend on it as I would like, but it is going more slowly than anticipated.

**TFSR:** It sounds like a daunting task, trying to grab that many ideas from such a timeframe.

So, I reached out to you because a network that I’m involved with, the A-Radio Network, which produces the monthly Bad News podcast, was talking about attending the 150th anniversary of the

**RG:** Yeah, that’s right.

**TFSR:** Well, thanks again so much for all the work that you put in and for having this conversation. I really appreciate it.

**RG:** Okay, well, thanks for talking to me. See you later.

**TFSR:** Yeah.

**RG:** But I have been posting some early chapters from the current book I've been working on. And I have a summary of my book *We Do Not Fear Anarchy* on my blog as well. Recently I posted something about Gerrard Winstanley on my blog that I wrote. He was a radical during the English revolution in the 1640's, who I think advocated anarchist communism, some people disagree with that.

**TFSR:** The Levellers?

**RG:** He was more radical in the Levellers, he was part of the group called-

**TFSR:** The Diggers!

**RG:** The Diggers. They advocated direct action, they said, "look, there's all this land that we're not allowed to farm or occupy" usually because it's owned by the nobility, but they're also there were these things called "wastelands" that would be in a town or a village that weren't being cultivated, and he and they just advocated, "okay, we're just gonna go into that land, we're gonna clear it, we're gonna start digging it, we're gonna plant crops, and we're just going to share everything". He talked about how everyone should be free to "take from the common treasury what they need." Yeah, so he's quite a radical guy. Anyway, yeah. So that's one of the things I put up on my blog recently.

**TFSR:** That's so cool. Can people still get — I know there's going to be a lot of what's in the new book and the chapters that you're posing now, that was in the Black Rose three volume series — is that still available?

**RG:** Yeah, that's still available. I think it might be hard to find Volume One, but of course you can find it on the internet. Someone's done a PDF version that's pretty easy to find. But as far as a paperback version, definitely Volumes Two and Three are readily available. Volume Three has a 100 page essay, by me, at the end of it, an afterward where I kind of sketch out my views regarding the evolution and development of anarchist ideas from, basically, ancient times up until 2012 when I published it.

**TFSR:** [sarcastically] Just a little thing [cracks up].

gathering in St-Imier in Switzerland, of the Anti-Authoritarian International. Organized by the Jura Federation — which this event actually just passed. As I understand the events were scaled back a bit this year, because of COVID concerns, but there's a hope to have a larger event in 2023. And I'm hoping to attend. But because of this, I thought I'd learn a bit more and I reached out to Mark Bray, who suggested reaching out to you about the first International because of your book, which I already mentioned, the *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It*.

First up, could you kind of describe what the International Working Men's Association or the IWMA was, who participated in it and what its founding purpose was? For instance: was it a group of organized worker groups seeking to network, or was it revolutionaries seeking to institute themselves as a vanguard? Or some sort of mixture in-between?

**RG:** Right, yeah, it was basically a broad coalition of working class European people. There were some women involved in the International, but as with many 19th century organizations, it was effectively run by male workers and intellectuals.

They came from primarily two groups: the English trade union movement, which had been going on since at least the Napoleonic era. In fact, it was in the 1790s in England, they brought in legislation essentially banning trade unions and strikes. And that was still the case in the 18th...well, it was starting to liberalize a little bit in both France and England in the 1860s. But trade unions were originally considered to be "illegal combinations against trade." And in England, they had something called the Chartist Movement in the 1830's and 40's, which was really quite radical. That's when the idea of the general strike was proposed. It was called the Grand National Holiday, and some of the Chartists as they were called, wanted to abolish the monarchy and bring in a republican form of government.

And so there were veteran Chartists involved in founding the IWMA, but also younger trade unionists who were interested

in creating a network for international working class solidarity, where the international organization would provide things like strike funds, and other financial support and political support to workers, across the world but primarily it was being organized in Europe.

Then the other major group was the French workers, who were predominantly followers of the French anarchist socialist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who had advocated something called “mutualism”. Mutualism is a form of socialism where, in contrast to state forms of socialism — where it’s the state that kind of owns everything and controls the economy — in a mutualist system it’s an interlocking federation of worker and producer and geographical groups.

So the idea was that the workers would create their own credit unions, so that they wouldn’t have to deal with national and capitalist financial institutions. And they would pool their resources to create their own cooperative enterprises. And they would exchange goods between themselves through these cooperative enterprises and arrange for their distribution and sale, with everyone getting fair compensation for their work. And essentially, everything being collectively owned, and then managed by the workers themselves.

Those were the French mutualists. And they really wanted the International to serve as a vehicle for creating mutualist organizations and associations throughout Europe, so that they could eventually abolish capitalism, but through this gradual process, where the workers would — through mutual solidarity, sharing of their resources — create their own kind of alternative political economic system. And eventually, the state and capitalism would kind of just collapse.

That was their approach. And it took many years for the International to finally be founded. There were attempts to create an International in the 1850s, and there was a predecessor organization, but it didn’t last very long. And then these attempts were renewed

constituted it in St. Imier, that any policy that was endorsed at an International Congress would have to be endorsed by the individual Federation’s. Even at a congress with recall-able delegates, those delegates couldn’t dictate or make a decision that was binding on the regional and national federations. It was up to each one to decide.

Some of the organizations you mentioned, I believe, still follow that approach. And others are more Platformists and say “no, we have to have ideological unity, otherwise we’ll be ineffective” and all that other stuff. I have my own personal views that Malatesta was right, that just leads to a whole bunch of schisms and splits. The important thing is just: you do what you got to do, and we’ll do what we got to do. I’m not gonna force you to believe what I believe. I always thought Murray Bookchin’s writings against anarcho-syndicalism are so pointless. One, because anarcho-syndicalism didn’t really exist much as a movement when he was writing this stuff in the 70’s and 80’s against anarcho-syndicalism. And even up until he died, basically. But “okay, Murray, you do your thing and let the syndicalists do theirs and we’ll see what works”, you know? Throw some spaghetti on the wall and hope for the best. That’s kind of my view of things.

**TFSR:** Yeah, that seems like a really reasonable approach, assuming that we all don’t know the answer, like the big capital “a” Answer.

**RG:** Right.

**TFSR:** Robert, thank you so much for this conversation. I’ve really enjoyed it. I think the listeners are gonna get a lot out of it. So you mentioned your blog where people can find your writings, you’ve got that upcoming book that doesn’t have a release date yet, but people can pay attention to AK Press for that.

**RG:** Yeah. Mostly my blog is where I post translations of stuff by other people that didn’t make it into my book.

**TFSR:** Okay, that’s helpful.

have, like, an executive body, or even a corresponding bureau. But they're still a kind of organization, it's an organization which is like a network.

It's very similar to what more contemporary anarchists like Colin Ward advocate, which is that instead of a kind of pyramidal, bottom up kind of structure — where you've got the base units who are supposed to make all the policy decisions, and then have these recall-able delegates going up to the national and international congresses — you just have an interlocking web of people and organizations who coordinate their activities. This can also form the model for a post revolutionary society: basically an interlocking web of voluntary associations, which will arise and disappear as people's needs and wants change.

That's basically what Kropotkin also advocated. He also supported the anarcho-syndicalist kind of activity, but both he and Malatesta said what anarchists need to do is just to be involved in any kind of emancipatory movement. They were focusing on the workers movement back then, because it was still the most radical and largest anti-capitalist movement.

He said work with people and help them to create their own organizations because that's what's going to happen after the revolution: people have to work together, create their own organizations, and to ensure that you actually achieve something called self management. Where people through their own voluntary discussions and agreements come up with ways of reorganizing life so that people can live without starving and being exploited and all those other shitty things [laughs] that happen under capitalism.

That's kind of the contrary approach. Within the people who like having International organizations there is a big difference between, say, a Platformist who wants to have a unitary program that everyone's supposed to follow — I think they call it collective responsibility and all that other stuff — and one's who are in favor of an International organization that's more like the anti-authoritarian International. Which was quite clear, when they re-

in the early 1860's, resulting in the foundation of the International in 1864.

There weren't really any vanguardists in the International when it was founded. At the time the most significant vanguardist group were the followers of Auguste Blanqui in France. He was a French revolutionary veteran of the French Revolutions of 1830-31, and 1848 who was kind of like a Jacobin. The Jacobins were the French revolutionaries during the French Revolution in late 1780s and early 1790's, who, for a time had control of the French state, but people who were called Jacobin's by the 1860's were the ones who agreed with the Jacobin approach of having a centralized leadership and political organization. And also they were quite in favor of having a Committee of Public Safety, and this comes up again later during the Paris Commune, which would suppress subversives and counter revolutionaries by force.

And so the followers of Auguste Blanqui believed in that approach with a vanguard group that would foment and create a revolution. They would establish a revolutionary dictatorship that would then go about transforming society. But they didn't get involved in the International until about five years after it was founded. And then interestingly, they allied with Karl Marx, in order to basically neutralize or force out the anarchists and Proudhonist elements and the International.

**TFSR:** So the Blanquists kind of strike me as like the Bolsheviks before they were Marxists sort of.

**RG:** Yeah.

**TFSR:** Yeah. And so at that point, then, of those three elements: the Blanquist and the mutualists and the trade unions out of the UK, or from that influence from the Chartists, none of them — I guess, maybe the Blanquists might be called revolutionary — but the other two don't necessarily sound like they would be considered revolutionary in the sense of overthrowing state power as much as. Unless I'm misunderstanding — the mutualists were more trying to

overthrow the state from within, build counter institutions from within dual power and then just sort of dissolve the state.

**RG:** That's right. The mutualists were really gradualist. But they did regard what they were advocating as a form of social revolution. But they thought that it could be achieved through nonviolent means. And that was something that Proudhon had argued after the 1848 revolutions, which he participated in, in France, basically that the workers couldn't defeat the capitalists and the state by force of arms. And that was based on the experience of the revolutions of 1848, which were across Europe, they had revolutions in France, in Italy, various parts of what's now called Germany and the old Austro-Hungarian empire, all of which were defeated by the power of the state.

In France, there was a worker's insurrection in June 1848 that was very violently suppressed by the now Republican French military forces. And this caused a couple of different responses. So, for Proudhon, the answer was: we have to destroy the system from within gradually, by organizing ourselves into counter institutions.

For other people the answer was: we have to smash the state and expropriate the capitalists because otherwise they're just going to crush us. And so there's going to have to be a revolutionary contest. And within those groups, which included Marx and Engels, and Blanqui and other people, but it also included future anarchists like Mikhail Bakunin... Bakunin did not agree with the concept of revolutionary dictatorship, he was opposed to it. He felt it would become self-perpetuating, and that this so-called, you know, "dictatorship of the proletariat" would become the dictatorship of the Blanquists or the Marxists and that what would happen would be what he described as a barracks regime where people would eat, live and breathe by the drumbeat of the state.

So, there were a number of people, not just Bakunin, but a number of people who drew a revolutionary anarchist lesson from the defeat of the 1848 revolutions. Which was: one, there has to be a revolutionary contest with the state and the capitalist. The work-

disagreements, then people will have to quit. You'll have splits, and either you're gonna have to adopt authoritarian means like the Marxist did to ensure ideological uniformity, and then everybody does what the congresses mandated, or you're gonna have a multiplicity of organizations". And so basically said, "Well, we'll just have to have a multiplicity of organizations. No one organization is going to be able to claim paramountcy".

So, that debate I included in Volume One of my anthology, the debate between Malatesta and Pierre Monatte. There was an International Anarchists Congress in Amsterdam in 1907. It didn't lead to the creation of formal organization, but it didn't really need to because anarchists already organize themselves internationally, right? [chuckles] They were in constant communication with each other.

To give you an example: in 1905, I think it was a kind of anarcho-syndicalist type fellow who wrote a pamphlet about the social general strike and how it was different from a general strike that was just limited to achieving something like, say, manhood suffrage. And that pamphlet ended up getting translated into Japanese and Chinese and Spanish. And I think it was written in German to start off with. And so the stuff that the anarchist press was putting out would be distributed all over the place, translated all over the place. And the people who are writing these ideas were corresponding with each other.

In China, Ba Jin, who was a famous writer — who wrote a book called *Family* which is considered a classic of Chinese literature — he was in correspondence with Emma Goldman, right? There was something like an international organization, it just wasn't a formal one. So when something big happened, like World War I, it wasn't that difficult for Malatesta and Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman and Luigi Fabbri, in Italy, and a whole bunch of other people to organize an anti-war statement and put out a manifesto against the war. Because they had these networks, these informal networks — which are a form of organization — they just don't

China, primarily. So, I mean, syndicalism was becoming a worldwide phenomenon before the war. Then there was this horrible split during the war with Kropotkin, and Jean Grave, and a few other people, about 15 or 16 of them, signing this kind of pro-war manifesto. Far more accepted the anti-war manifesto that was signed by people like Malatesta and Emma Goldman, which came out saying that there's no way we should support any side in this case. It's basically a class struggle, why should the workers kill themselves fighting to protect a capitalist economic system with one form of government or the other.

And so the syndicalist movement in France just kind of destroyed by that. And then after the Russian Revolution was taken over the CGT, which is the pre-war syndicalist organization, was taken over by the communists. But there was a big minority who wanted to continue a revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist type path. And then there were, as I said, syndicalists all over the place. So they had their own International Congress in 1922 and they created a kind of anarchists syndicalist International. And that is what is now known as the IWA-AIT. And I can't get into debates as to whether they're truly representative of the original IWA-AIT that was founded in 1922. But they still adopt the same principles as were adopted back in 1922.

But they're, as you said there's a bunch of different groups that advocate creating International organizations of one kind or another. And the problem is that there's a multiplicity of them. And then it's like Malatesta, said, when he was debating Peter Arshinov and Nestor Makhno after the Russian Revolution, with respect to something called the "Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists", I think was the title of the pamphlet, it's fairly well known.

Malatesta engaged them in a debate and he said "yeah, I supported the International and stuff like that. But the problem is you can't hope to create some kind of unitary, international organization, because then you get into fights over the policy. You'll have

ers must organize themselves into bodies that are capable of taking on the state by a variety of means, general strikes, also expropriation and unfortunately, armed struggle. And that the capitalist state system could never be gradually destroyed just through the establishment of cooperatives and credit unions and so forth.

And so in addition to Bakunin, there were some self-identified anarchists who agreed with that approach. Certainly they were a significant minority among the French refugees who had to leave France after the early 1850s, when Napoleon III, essentially established a dictatorship in France, and they went to England, some would go to Belgium and Holland and then a few went to the United States.

The most significant of that group was a fellow named Joseph Déjacque, who ended up in the US for many years. And he wrote a number of very interesting pamphlets, including a critique of Proudhon who was a patriarchal, anti-feminist. Joseph Déjacque was firmly in favor of women's liberation and was also a proto-anarchist communist. He believed that the wage system should be abolished and that there shouldn't be any private property, whereas the mutualists believed in some kind of market exchange system. Which today would be described as a form of market socialism. And so I mean, the French refugees in London rejected any cooperation with the Republicans because of the June 1848 massacre of the workers when they rose up against the provisional republican government. And this was an approach that was also endorsed by Bakunin and which he championed when he joined the International in 1868.

**TFSR:** You've drawn out some of the beliefs at the time of Proudhon and people that might be called Proudhonists, Bakunin's sort of political development around this time, we've talked about Blanqui...if you would talk about I mean, just give a very basic rundown, just to set the other pieces on this side of the board, so to speak, of what Marx and Engels were arguing at this phase of the early phases of the International? Of what they were proposing,

at least publicly, would be the development of a revolutionary International Workers organization?

**RG:** Yeah. And so this brings up kind of, we could call it a third current or faction, which I haven't really spoken of yet. People later became called Social Democrats. And they believed that you could run candidates in elections, where elections were held and where workers had the vote [laughs] — and one thing to remember is that in the 1860's working class people didn't have a right to vote. I mean, women didn't get the right to vote until the 20th century, but working class men didn't have a right to vote either in the 1860's. And so, there were campaigns for universal manhood suffrage, and you have to include the manhood part because they were campaigns for a right to vote for working class men, not women. I mean, of course, there were other people who were campaigning for actual universal suffrage where everybody would get to vote, but the predominant campaigns were for working class men to be able to vote.

Some of the mutualists were prepared to engage in that activity. They ran candidates in the elections in France in the early 18th and mid 1860's. Proudhon himself was still alive and wrote a lengthy open letter to them saying that this was the wrong way to go, that they would accomplish nothing through the electoral process. And that was a view shared by Bakunin.

But some of them were willing to run for office, they weren't very successful initially. And they wouldn't have had much power because even though they had elections in France, Napoleon III was still firmly in charge. But Marx and Engels, they had a kind of ambivalent approach. They supported electoral activity from the beginning of the International. Marx, in his correspondence and his other writings, clearly was in favor of creating working class political parties that would run candidates and elections. And the hope — I mean, for him it was the destiny based on his theory of historical materialism — was that the working class would eventually obtain a majority control of the government, and then they

So in Spain, there was basically one kind of anarchist trade union type Federation or another from the time of the International through the 1890's. Ultimately resulting in the creation of the CNT in 1911. This was going on all over the world. You had anarcho-syndicalist type organizations in Latin America. Malatesta lived in Argentina for a while, and he organized some of the first trade unions there. So that wasn't something that was new or invented by the French syndicalists. It had continued on from the International by people who had been veterans of the International.

There were other Internationalists, Spanish ones who ended up in Latin America who helped organize trade unions in all kinds of different countries, Cuba and Brazil, in addition to Argentina. You had these working class movements, anarchists movements, developing all over the place and they tried to create another International. There was an attempt before World War I to create a new kind of syndicalist anarchist International...that didn't pan out, then the war interrupted everything. Basically destroyed the syndicalist movement in France. There was a big split between those who said, "Well, we have to defend the country against the Germans" and others who said, "No, we're not going to support the war effort of the French state".

And then there was a split within the International anarchist movement. I mean, they weren't holding congresses, but there was an international anarchist movement where people were very familiar with each other, they would share their newspapers and write letters to each other. And then during World War I, Kropotkin, and Jean Grave — who was a prominent French anarchist communist — said, "Oh, we have to support all the countries fighting Germany, because the Germans are going to impose an autocratic, authoritarian state that's even worse than what they've got now". But a majority of the anarchists in Europe said, "No, we're not going to support that".

Oh, I should also say there were anarchists in Asia who were organizing trade unions as well, before World War I, in Japan, and



wasn't going to work. So, it was more like an antiparliamentarian socialist congress than an anarchist one. It didn't pan out, nothing really came of it.

You can see that despite Malatesta's hopes that people who all wanted to abolish capitalism, through some kind of revolutionary activity would still have some pretty significant disagreements about anything. It was kind of an abortive enterprise, in my view. And then after the attempts to at least have a presence in the so-called Second International — based on the anarchists solid revolutionary socialist credentials, despite everything that Marxists were saying — there then began attempts to organize internationally, coming out of what I call the renewed kind of syndicalist movement.

A lot of history's referred to it as the emergence of the syndicalist movement but in the 1890s, in France, you had people like Fernand Pelloutier who said, "Look, having anarchist action groups, underground cells and stuff like that which had become popular, or engaging in individual acts of propaganda by the deed", as some people call it, assassinating political figures and so forth. And this had begun to happen in the 1890s in Europe,... [Pelloutier said] "we need to go back to the workshops, and organize the workers into revolutionary trade unions". Which was what had been advocated by a significant number of Internationalists back in the late 1860s and then during the reconstituted International.

And so what we had was basically the creation of a syndicalist movement in France. But in places like Spain, they had never given up on that idea. There were various versions of workers Federation's in Spain that were revolutionary and anarchists from the end of the reconstituted International, which was around 1881, throughout the 1880's, and into the 1890's. They would have to go underground at times, but they wouldn't just go into revolutionary cells and stuff like that. Of course they would have to maintain a network of communication, but they would continue their work within the labor movement.

would be able to create socialism, using the state which they now controlled as a result of their electoral victories.

And so on the other hand, Marx and Engels like to pretend that they were still in favor of revolution, as they had been back in 1848. And they were very active in the 1848 revolutions in Germany. And so it was kind of an ambivalent stance that they took. They seem to think that revolutionary activity was justified. Marx was publicly a big supporter of the Paris Commune, and that created a lot of conflict between him and the British trade unionists and the International who were not revolutionaries by any stretch of the imagination.

But at the same time, Marx was campaigning to impose on the International an obligatory policy, that the International sections in the various nation states would create working class political parties which would then strive to achieve state power. And whether it was through elections or revolutionary means was unclear in Marx's writings. In his essay on the Paris Commune, he seems to be in favor of revolution. But in much of his other discussions, particularly within the International, it appeared that he was advocating a social democratic approach of obtaining power through electoral participation.

**TFSR:** I was trying to find in the book where it referenced it, but it's kind of funny, just to jump back to Proudhon would be advocating that gaining electoral status wouldn't make a change, because didn't he hold public office at least a couple of times?

**RG:** [laughs] Yeah, that's right. And it was based on his experience as a... During the 1848 revolution he actually got elected to the new Republican National Assembly, and found that he was completely incapacitated, he referred it to being exiled into the Sinai desert or something like that. And that he was completely cut off from what was going on on the streets. When they had the 1848 June workers uprising in Paris, Proudhon didn't know anything about it because he was busy in the National Assembly trying to make speeches and get motions passed. I mean, he did try to get the

assembly to vote in favor of a kind of mutual assistance. And then he gave a famous speech where he said if they didn't vote in favor then the workers would go ahead with the so-called social liquidation without them. And then there were very outraged cries, "this means class war!", and you know, "who are you speaking of when you say 'we'?" And Proudhon said "when I say 'we' I mean the working class, and when I say 'you', I mean the capitalists' ". And so, you know, he was able to make a few speeches, but he was unable to accomplish anything positive, his motion was voted down by like over 600 votes to 2, him and another guy [chuckles].

So, his opposition to electoral activity, running candidates and voting, was based on his own personal experience of how ineffective he was as an elected representative. And also, people don't know but Napoleon III became the dictator — and Emperor, later he called himself a France — by holding a referendum. So he had a referendum, and at the time they had a kind of close to universal manhood suffrage at the beginning of the 1848 French Revolution into around the time of his referendum. And he got a big majority in favor of basically making him the dictator. And so that's why Proudhon at the time made a quip that universal suffrage is the counter revolution, because Napoleon III manipulated that broadening of the voting base, to basically trick and bribe the workers into voting for him to give him dictatorial powers.

**TFSR:** [sighs] Politics hasn't changed.

**RG:** [clicks tongue and laughs] Yeah.

**TFSR:** [laughing] So I want to get back to the electoralism that was being pushed by the Marxists in the International, but because we brought it up and because there's a lot of moving parts and ideas and events occurring simultaneously: you brought up the Paris Commune, can you talk a little bit about that? Who participated and sort of setting context on its impact on the International?

**RG:** Sure. So the Paris Commune was in 1871. And prior to the Paris Commune you have to take into account the Franco Prussian war which started in 1870. And Napoleon managed to get himself

refrain about Proudhon, that he was petty bourgeois. In fact he was actually way more proletarian than Marx, he worked as a printer by trade before he was able to kind of support himself through his writings. He would tramp from town to town trying to get work and in different printing presses and so forth. In fact he helped typeset the work by Charles Fourier, who's one of the so called Utopian Socialists.

Anyway, the people like Malatesta thought "we can't let the Social Democrats hijack the concept of socialism by saying, one: anarchists aren't socialists. And two: creating this organization, supposedly, of socialist groups and parties, and excluding us from it". So, he was an advocate of participation in the Second International. And the anarchists like him tried to participate up until 1896, when they were officially banned [chuckles] from the Second International because [mimicking in a snooty voice] "you're not really socialists and you have to be in favor of electoralism if you want to belong to this organization". That's what happened with the Second International.

Malatesta also continued to try and kind of keep the reconstituted International going, along with others, particularly the Spanish Internationalists, but some of the Italians and the French. They had a congress in 1881 in London, which is sometimes referred to as an anarchist congress, the so called Black International. That's not accurate, because the congress actually included people who did not consider themselves anarchists, but rather revolutionary socialists, some of whom were in favor of revolutionary dictatorship.

At that congress, what Malatesta participated in that congress and what he wanted to do was try to create something sort of like the reconstituted International, a pluralist organization, but this time of revolutionary Socialists who may or may not be Blanquists, may or may not be anarchists, but revolutionary Socialists who were united, at least, in their view that capitalism could only be abolished through revolutionary activity, and that electoralism

**TFSR:** So since the authoritarian International, as it became, sort of toddled on for a little while and then expired, there were various other Internationals that were called the Second, Third, whatever, afterwards. I wonder if you could kind of address like the legacy of those? Because people will have heard “Oh, the annoying person in my class claims ascendancy from the Fourth International”, or whatever. And then simultaneously, the anti-authoritarian International didn’t continue in that form afterwards. There were some attempts to sort of create new fusion spaces where authoritarians and anti-authoritarians as anti-capitalist could organize together in that same sort of format. But also since then there have been things, like currently there’s the International Workers Association, IWA-AIT; there’s Anarkismo; there’s the International Confederation of Labor; Rosa Negra; there’s an International of Anarchist Federations. There’s all these other formations that are around that come from the anarchists tendency too. Can you talk a little bit — you don’t have to go through each of these examples if you don’t want to — but just about sort of that trajectory and the attempts at international anti-capitalist organizing today?

**RG:** Well, just for the history the anti-authoritarian International’s last congress that had participation from the various national federations was in 1877. And then things just kind of petered out a bit, mainly because the Belgians decided to get involved in electoralism. And they ended up participating in a Congress — I think it was in 1878 — which was to reconstitute or create a kind of social democratic International of socialists who were interested in electoral activity. And that’s what became the so-called “Second International”.

Some anarchists thought it was important to participate in the so-called Second International because, by this time, the Marxists were becoming fairly successful in their propaganda to claim that the anarchists weren’t even socialists, that they were either individualist or they were just *petit bourgeois*. That was the common

into a war with Prussia. Prussia quickly defeated the French forces and then there were different reactions to that among the various camps within the International. Marx, for example, thought that the workers should support a provisional republican government that was essentially controlled by the bourgeoisie. Bakunin argued that the Internationalist and revolutionary socialist in France should take advantage of the chaos that was being created by the Prussian invasion, to create popular militias, to seize power on a commune by commune basis, and to basically have an insurrectionary guerrilla war against the Prussians, and at the same time against the French bourgeoisie.

And he’d been making these kinds of arguments for quite a while, he said that there was no point in the workers allying with the Republicans and the capitalists to drive out the Prussian invaders because, at the end, they would be left exactly where they were at the time: exploited wage slaves. And that they needed to use this opportunity to create a real social revolution and popular movement that would not only fight against the Prussians, but would seize control of the means of production and create a Federalist socialist system based on the Proudhon-and-Bakunin-advocated organization from the bottom upward, they called it.

You would have base units, like a factory or cooperative and local town or a district in a bigger city, and voluntary associations of different trades and professionals and so forth. And that this would create a complex interlocking network of organizations that would create the new economy. But in order to achieve that, he was of the view that the workers needed to arm themselves and engage in armed struggle against not just the Prussian invaders but also against the French bourgeoisie. And it was only through that process that you could actually abolish capitalism and the state.

So that was kind of the scene. And there were a number of Internationalists, predominantly at this time, the French ones, who were advocating pushing the struggle against the Prussians into more of a social revolutionary direction. They created committees

in Paris. So Paris was under siege by the Prussians and the Internationalist's created councils and neighborhood kind of committees throughout Paris, to organize war relief and to prepare to defend Paris against the Prussian invaders. But also they issued a number of manifestos before the Paris Commune was created, advocating that the workers take over the workshops and take control of them, and begin the transformation to a socialist economy through their own direct action.

Then, we get to March 1871 and there was a skirmish between the National Guard and a group of Parisian revolutionaries over some cannons. An officer, or I think he might even have been a general, got shot and killed. And then that was it, now Paris was in conflict with the national government, which had moved to Versailles, France, which was the seat of the old royal palaces, and it was kind of like the royal capital of France. It's very close to Paris, basically a suburb of Paris now, but the Provisional Government of France had moved there and controlled the National Guard and the Army, which had been largely defeated by the Prussians. But in any event, the Prussians were happy to leave the Provisional Government in control of their National Guard so that they could suppress any kind of revolutionary activity, which they let them do.

The Paris Commune was proclaimed. The manifesto was largely written by a French Proudhonist, and therefore it includes within it an advocacy of a Federalist system. And the important thing about federalism is this notion of organization from the bottom up. And so the manifesto proclaiming the Paris Commune advocated the creation of revolutionary communes throughout France, and that they federate with one another and create a new system with basically a mutualist kind of economy. And that's something that Bakunin had been advocating since the beginning of the Franco Prussian war.

And so it was starting to happen. There were attempts to establish revolutionary communes in other parts of France, including

how best to meet the needs of those people in most desperate need first?"

**TFSR:** Yeah. And the approach also undermines the valorization of certain kinds of labor over others. For instance gendered sorts of labor. The wage system gives wages to people for doing certain kinds of work but the people that do the reproductive labor in our society aren't paid for tending to kids or cooking the food or doing the wash at home unless it's a privatized approach.

**RG:** Right. Yeah, that's right. And just as an aside, Kropotkin wrote a book about anarchist communism, called *The Conquest of Bread*, and really the genesis of that book was the debates in International about socialism and communism, and what kind of economy people wanted to create after the revolution. And in that book he took on Marx — if you read *Capital* and other works by Marx — he argued that the wage differential between, say, an engineer and a janitor was justified. And he had a theory, using his theory of surplus value, was able to say why this was so. And Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread* just says, "no". He compares the work between the coal miner and the engineer. He says, "Why should the coal miners endangering his life everyday and getting black lung disease get paid less than the engineer?" And he said access to that kind of higher education right now is clearly class based. But in any event, the idea that somehow the white collar jobs have greater value than the blue collar jobs is nonsense.

**TFSR:** As a sort of wrap up, because we've been speaking for a while — and thank you so much for that wealth of information — I can see that some of this has bled out of the book that I initially started talking about to the one that you're still working on for AK Press, the development of anarchist ideas, or at least some of the thoughts, some of the ideas and some of the history are not stuff that I had come across in the 2015 book, so I'm excited to get to hear this.

**RG:** Great.

communism? Some advocated a transitional period, but it's different from the Marxist one. You don't have a transitional state doing it, but the workers agree to maintain some kind of way of remunerating people based on their contribution to the economy. But as production increases, and goods become more abundant, then it will be possible to transition to a system where people will be free to satisfy their needs without having to earn a wage or have their contribution to the economy measured and doled out to them.

James Guillaume was one of the advocates of a transitional period. And then other people, including ones who ended up becoming reformist socialists like Paul Bruce and Andrea Còsta, who was in Italy. They said, "well, we should just move to a communist system right away". Malatesta at one time felt that way, but quickly came along to the arms view that there would have to be a transitional period. And Peter Kropotkin, who was famous as a Russian anarchist, joined the reconstituted International in about 1876 after he made a spectacular escape from Russian prison. And he initially agreed with Guillaume's approach of having a transitional period, but then joined with the more radical anarchists communists, which I think at that time also included Cafiero, in saying, "Look, there can't be any transitional period, it's not going to work. It'll end up becoming interminable. We need to introduce anarchist communism immediately".

Cafiero's solution to the problem with some goods that would not be abundant was that "well, then we still share based on need, who has the greatest need?" His example was in a family where you have an old person incapable of any physical labor, like an elderly grandparent, well that person needs food just as much as anybody else, and because of their frail health we should give them the food first. They're the one who is most likely to expire if we don't feed them first. So, he said we still do things on the basis of need, but we just agree that some people's needs are greater. It's all through voluntary agreement, no one's imposing these views. You just say, "Okay, we have to decide if there's a shortage in something,

Lyon and Bakunin went there to try and do that. That was very unsuccessful. But contrary to Marxist myths, Bakunin didn't show up one day and proclaim the abolition of the state. He actually had been working with his confederates for quite some time before he showed up, and he'd spent a couple of weeks there. But the attempt to create a revolutionary commune was quickly suppressed, as it was in a variety of other cities throughout France, but it wasn't just in Paris.

So after that commune was proclaimed, the majority of the Internationalist were Proudhonists — although more revolutionary than Proudhon, obviously, because now they were participating in a kind of revolution and they weren't taking a pacifist or gradualist approach — but the commune itself had a fairly conventional form of government. They elected deputies to the Paris Commune. So it was a representative form of government. It wasn't a direct democracy.

And that's the other thing I should contrast at this point. Is that the Proudhonists and the more revolutionary Internationalists, in France for sure, their organizations were directly democratic. So the concept of organizing from below upward isn't just about how you organize the groups from the local level and the factory level up to regional and national and international level. But it was also about how the base organizations were organized. And they would have assemblies of the workers where they would all get to vote on the policies to be adopted. And then they would elect delegates who would then have meetings with workers from other factories or neighborhoods, so at regional and national conferences.

And this is also how they organize their delegates for the International congresses, which continued up until 1869. And there was a three year interregnum because of the Franco Prussian war in the Paris Commune. But they would elect delegates with something called "irrevocable mandates", that is they would tell their delegates, "you have a mandate, when you go to the Congress" or conference with the groups from the neighboring municipalities

or workers from other areas or the International itself, “you have a mandate to vote in favor of these policies, and none other. And if you don’t follow the mandate, we can immediately revoke your mandate and recall you as a delegate and replace you with somebody else.” This was an idea that was meant to ensure that the workers at the local level actually made the decisions affecting them, rather than electing a representative or delegate who would then be free to politic and adopt whatever position that person thought was best for the workers he was representing.

This was also a conflict within the International, which came to the fore after the Paris Commune, but the seeds of it had been planted much earlier. But after the Paris Commune, a number of the French refugees tried to make clear that the International should have a system of delegates with revocable mandates; they could be recalled if they didn’t adhere to their mandates from their local organization. Marx opposed this, as did Engles. They were on what was called the General Counsel of the International, which they wanted to function like an executive government. And they were quite clear in the internal debates on the General Council, that they were opposed to having a system of direct democracy, where the delegates from the national federations of the International could mandate what their members on the General Council could do. And so that’s a very important distinction between the Marxist approach at the time and the mutualist and anarchist approach regarding how the base units are going to function.

So getting back to the Paris Commune, you had the majority of the Internationalists who were in favor of that form of organization with delegates with irrevocable mandates. And then you had the Blanquist, and other kind of, we’ll call them Neo-Jacobins, who unfortunately formed a majority on the Paris Commune Council. And of course, they weren’t in favor of recall-able delegates, they believed that they acted as representatives of the people, many of them still believed in the concept of a revolutionary dictatorship. They established a committee of public safety, which the French

a debate between at that time they are called “collectivists”, but today they wouldn’t be called socialists, or market socialists, who believed in keeping some kind of system of individual remuneration. People would get paid somehow, based on what they’ve contributed to the economy, we’ll say, because you can be involved in production and distribution and all kinds of things. You can be a school teacher, and all that stuff.

So there is a debate between those who felt there has to be some system of remunerating people for the work that they perform, and then there were the anarchists communists who said, “No, that’ll still lead to inequality and conflict, because some people will be in a better location. If you look at it from an agricultural point of view, somebody could be in an area where it’s very easy to grow things. And so their productive activity would generate much more economic benefit than somebody else. And other people, it wasn’t their fault that they lived in a more arid area”, and that sort of thing.

They didn’t want to have a division arising between the haves and the have-nots, and they said, “Look, everybody makes their contribution to the productive process, to the economy, as best they can and in accordance with your own talents and inclinations. It’s really impossible to put any kind of moral value on each person’s contribution because it’s a collective process”. And other than using a wage system, which itself is something that they weren’t prepared to support, there’s really no way of providing a fair determination of the value of each person’s contribution to the economy. So, we should have a communist system where basically people should be free to take what they need from whatever has been produced in order to feed and clothe themselves and provide themselves with housing and so forth. It shouldn’t be based on how much you’ve been able to earn through your individual economic activity. So that was the big economic debate.

There were also debates about the transition. Okay, well, even if you want communism, right now we’ve got this capitalist system, so how are we going to transition from a capitalist wage system to

for their political activities would be nominated to run for office [chuckles], to illustrate the repressive nature of the current system. In fact, I think Blanqui himself, they tried to put him forward as a candidate in France during the Napoleon III Era because he was in prison for most of that time for his revolutionary activities.

So what Cafiero basically advocated was now called illegalism and going underground. And then you had the anarcho-syndicalist kind of groups within the reconstituted International who advocated the general strike, sometimes insurrection to go with that. And that's certainly what the Spanish anarchists advocated, not one or the other but both, and attempted it in Spain in the early 1870's. And you had the communalists, one's who wanted to focus more on organizing on a commune-by-commune basis, which is really a town-by-town basis. We're not talking about hippie communes, if anybody remembers those [laughs].

Revolutionary communes are basically municipal geographical units and the idea is to create socialism on a kind of commune-by-commune basis and have a general uprising of the towns and create the revolutionary commune. One of the big advocates of that was Paul Bruce, he eventually ended up advocating something similar to Murray Bookchin's libertarian municipalism. That they should try and achieve power on a local basis and then as people saw what they could do on a local basis, this would lead to people adopting radical socialists getting elected all across these different cities, and then they'd be able to abolish the state.

But the anarcho-syndicalist advocated trade union organization. Federation's of trade unions and the trade unions themselves would be revolutionary organizations, so they wouldn't just be trying to get better working conditions and higher wages, but they would be trying to abolish capitalism and organize themselves for the great revolutionary contest, or the social revolution.

The other thing that was important in the debates within the reconstituted International was what kind of social organization or economy would be achieved through the revolution. There was

Internationalist, or the majority of them actually denounced as counter-revolutionary.

There were internal conflicts in the commune between the Federalist socialists, and mutualists, against the Blanquist and the other Neo-Jacobins who were in favor of establishing a committee of public safety and essentially, a revolutionary dictatorship. They would suppress the counter revolution within the commune and, you know, organize the defense of the commune against the French state and the national guard.

Unfortunately, for all concerned, the commune was brutally suppressed. Tens of thousands of people were killed. And then the French International was decimated. The Internationalists who'd been in Paris during the commune, most of them were killed. So some of them were able to escape. And many of the ones who escaped many of them became anarchists. Quite a few of them ended up in Switzerland, where they established or tried to establish their own section of the International as a kind of refugee section of the International. And they took away from the lessons of the Paris Commune, the idea that Proudhon had already expressed based on his experience of 1848, that spending time creating an electoral system and holding elections, and then having basically an executive authority directing the revolutionary forces is actually counterproductive. And that the approach that should be taken is a direct action approach, where the workers don't spend time in committees and arguing about stuff, but actually do things like take over their workshops, and set up revolutionary committees to organize distribution of food, which is what they did during the Paris Commune.

Nathalie Lemel, who was a female member of the French International, she was very much involved in the cooperative movement. She and Eugène Varlin, had established a cooperative workers restaurant, and during the commune they used it to distribute free food to people and farmland. He was an advocate of what he called "non-authoritarian communism", which was essentially this

idea of a federalist socialism without a central authority controlling the economy or any kind of political system but organized from the bottom upward. He was executed during the commune. So the refugees, the survivors of the commune, who became anarchists said, “this is what we needed to do. We had to, through our own efforts, seize arms, defend ourselves and take over the workshops and have a social revolution”. That was the lesson that they took from it.

It was the same lesson Bakunin took from it. Of course, he already was in favor of that approach. But he was quite clear that the problem was that, essentially, the revolutionary activity was dissipated and incapacitated, even, by people focusing on the electoral activity. Trying to get a majority on the Paris Commune Council, and then passing legislative measures, instead of, the basically, the idea of Bakunin and the French refugees is “we don’t need to ask a Council to pass an order or a directive saying that we can take over the workshops, we’re just going to take them over”. That was their approach.

And, on the other hand, you had the Marxist. And again, it’s kind of contradictory. Marx writes this essay about the Paris Commune where he says “you can’t just seize the state, you have to kind of smash the state bureaucracy,” which was the anarchist view. And then he pretended that he was in favor of recallable delegates with revocable mandates, well irrevocable mandates, but then you would be recalled if you didn’t follow the mandate. But within the International itself, he was completely opposed to that kind of an organization, and Engels was even more clear, he basically said that a revolution is the most authoritarian thing you can think of, and the only way you can defeat the counter revolution is by having a centralized political apparatus that will organize the forces of the proletariat to crush the bourgeoisie.

So, that was their real view, which came out after the Paris Commune, when they held a conference in London in September of 1871, which Marx and Engels have packed with people in support

archist tendency that’s followed since. You had the organizationalists who continued to advocate Federalist bottom up organization; you had anti-organizationalists who are worried that even those kinds of organizations would somehow be corrupted, and would end up becoming top down organizations. You had ones who advocate insurrection, others who thought the General Strike would be sufficient unto itself to achieve the social revolution, including the Belgian Internationals. That was their position until De Paepe convinced a majority of them that they should actually try and create a public service state through electoral means. And you had advocates of legalism, Cafiero who I’ve mentioned a few times, he advocated insurrection, along with Malatesta and many of the Italian delegates for many years, but then ended up as result of persecution... So the Italians, they did try an insurrection in Veneto Italy, in 1874 I think it was, which was quite unsuccessful, very poorly organized. But not because they’re anti-organizationalists, they were organizationalists at that time.

As a result of that, and other activities, the Italian authorities started really clamping down on the anarchists, they were arrested and persecuted, put in jails and in exile and stuff like that. So, Cafiero said, “Look, even having an international organization is counterproductive, because it simply publicizes our involvement in these revolutionary activities. We should go underground, like the Narodnik radicals in Russia” who at that time were basically mounting assassination campaigns against the Tsar and the Russian police state and the aristocracy. He said, “we should go underground like them. We’ll have these decentralized kind of cells or units, and we’ll just use whatever methods we can to achieve our ends”. So he basically was advocating an ends-justify-the-means type thing. He said “it could be illegal activity, but we could even run candidates just as a protest against the electoral system”.

The idea was — and this went back to what happened in France during the Napoleon III era — that people who were imprisoned



would basically be this central government that was going to dictate to people how they were going to live their lives. This would create a new class of political functionaries and bureaucrats who would then seek to maintain their privileged status, even if you abolish capitalism.

That was an idea that was developed even before they got kicked out of the Marxist-controlled version of the International. And it was also one that was debated within the post Hague Congress and St. Imier Congress, congresses of the anti-authoritarian International. And so that gave rise to the debate between what Malatesta and others described as the “organization-ists” and the “antiorganizationalists”. And so there were some people who said, “Look, we shouldn’t even have like a central bureau of communications to coordinate our activities, because it will end up basically making itself into a governing council like Marx and Engels did with the General Counsel in the original International”. And then there are others who are saying, “well we have to coordinate our activities. Somehow we can set things up so that some kind of central correspondents bureau doesn’t become a political power unto itself, by making sure that we rotate its location between Federation’s every year and that the people on it are themselves recallable, mandated delegates from the from the different Federation’s”.

This also led to debates about trade unions and their usefulness. And whether strike activity served any purpose if it didn’t amount to a general strike, with some saying we should focus on insurrectionary activities, Guillaume argued that just being involved in a trade union and fighting for better working conditions and having to go on strike would increase class consciousness amongst the workers, and that this would make them more radical rather than less radical. And I mean, those debates have gone on for decades now. But it was something that happened within the International.

If you look at the debates within the anti-authoritarian, reconstituted International, they basically gave rise to virtually every an-

of their position. There were a few Federalists there, who tried to argue in favor of having a delegate system of people with irrevocable mandates, subject to recall, representing the various sections and Federation’s of the International. That was shot down and Marx and Engels had a motion passed that requiring the Internationals members and organizations to create working class- when I say political parties, really what they’re advocating was the creation of **one** working class political party in each country. And that **one** party would then somehow seize power either through the electoral process or possibly through more revolutionary means. And that’s the policy they forced through at the London conference in September 1871. That was clearly different from the approach that had been advocated by the Federalists and anarchists and the International, both before and after the Paris Commune.

And just going back, the last Congress of the International before the Paris Commune was in 1869, in Basel, Switzerland, and there essentially a majority of the delegates voted in favor of a form of anarchists syndicalism. They said, “we should have dual organizations, workers should organize by trade, and industry, and then we should also have local communal organizations. And through these dual organizations, we will abolish the wage system and create the free Federation of free producers”. That was the motion that was passed at the Basel Congress. And so that was essentially revolutionary socialist Federalist anarchist kind of position that was agreed to by a majority of the delegates to the Basel Congress.

Before the Paris Commune, and after, the Federalist socialists and the anarchists were advocating that kind of a system. Marx was opposed, despite his essay after the commune. As Bakunin said, he had to say good things about the commune, because otherwise people would have thought him to be a monster. But in reality, he wasn’t really in favor of any of that stuff, as he proved a few months later at the September 1871 London conference where he pushed forward this kind of amalgam of a social democratic and Blanquist approach, where you have more of a centralized organization with

representatives rather than delegates, making the decisions with an executive form of government and creating parties to contest elections and trying to achieve power through those means.

**TFSR:** So yeah, there's a lot in there in terms of... The remnants of the French sections, the sections, which were mostly at some point deeply influenced by Proudhon, that were based out of France and were some of the most militant had been greatly repressed, because of the aftermath of the commune and the repression of the commune. Also, it's notable that while the Franco-Prussian War was pitting these two nation states against each other, when the threat of a working class uprising that would undermine the highly centralized, bourgeois government and ruling method in France, when that posed a threat in the form of the Commune, both those governments were willing to work together to allow for the suppression of the radical Parisians.

One thing that, when people think about or when I've thought about the International and the split between the Marxists and the anarchists, for years I've heard from people on both sides of that, the schism that happens in the left that can be pointed back to the IWMA, was sort of an interpersonal conflict between Bakunin and the Bakuninists on one side, and Marx, Engels and the Marxists on the other that 150 years later, we should *really* get over.

But what you're what you're talking about when you're referencing the Jacobins, Blanquists and the Marxist saw sort of engaging with this position that there should be mandatory leadership that is not revocable, so that they can make the right decisions, and that all of this authority needs to be centralized. That instead of having it as it had been before the Central Committee had pushed this mandate that countries sections be involved in political parties beforehand, there had been an openness to different sections could participate in politics if they wanted to, but there was no mandatory position from the International that that everyone had to it was sort of left up to the locals.

a kind of public service state that's going to organize everything. And then the anarchists said, "No, the workers can manage things on their own. We don't need to create a state bureaucracy to do it, that will just lead to more conflict, again, between the state bureaucracy and the workers. So instead of the conflict being between the capitalist class and the workers, it will be between the state and the workers." And so they were completely opposed to that idea. And this is a thing that I should mention, it came up at the Hague Congress, it was a concept that Bakunin really originated in his critique of Marx, is the concept of the new class.

**TFSR:** The "Red Bureaucracy."

**RG:** Yeah, the Red Bureaucracy. And it was Bakunin, not Marxist dissident intellectuals in the 20th century disillusioned with the Russian Revolution, it was Bakunin in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, and his ideological disagreements with Marx. And even before the Paris Commune he was writing about if you set up a revolutionary dictatorship, it will become self-perpetuating, and we'll have a new class of intellectuals and bureaucrats who will pretend to rule the People in the People's name. And the people won't feel any better when the stick they're beaten with is labeled the "People's Stick" [laughs].

And so he came up with the whole theory of the new class, and that the Marxist theory that once you abolish capitalism the state would wither away was nonsense. It's not going to wither away, it will become self-perpetuating, because you have a class of people who benefit from having this kind of a state socialist system, who won't want their jobs to disappear, and will want to keep the power that they enjoy. There's not going to be anything that's going to wither away in that regard.

And James Guillaume at the Hague Congress actually made that argument about the new class. He referred to the Manifesto of the Communist Party that Marx and Engels had published way back during the 1848 revolutions, and said how it described how the State would create industrial and agricultural armies and that there

position that a General Strike wasn't enough. There would have to be some kind of insurrectionary activity as well. And that was a common view among some of the Italians and some of the Spanish delegates because they were basically either going through revolutionary struggles already, or had recently been through them for the Italians. They've been through these decades-long attempt to unify Italy. And it wasn't just unifying Italy, it was achieving Italian independence from the Austro-Hungarian empire from France and the Vatican.

So both of those groups have been involved in, and there was ongoing involvement in real revolutionary activities. This continued through the early 1870s in Italy and Spain. And so there were these debates about what kind of tactics would be successful. What did they hope to achieve? And the Belgians initially continued their support for a bottom up approach where the International and prefigure the future, free society. But then some of them, the most well known being a fellow named César De Paepe, he had been the guy who had written the pamphlet before the 1869 Basel Congress about the International being the embryo of the future free society. But he was in correspondence with Marx after the split and was persuaded, I think, by Marx that, "no, we really need to pursue an electoral strategy, and then we'll be able to bring about the social revolution". So basically, from the top down.

Where this came up was in there was a debate over public services initiated by De Paepe. And he said, "We shouldn't let the workers control public services, it shouldn't be a form of worker self management. Because then they'll have their own agendas and they won't be fair to people. And the thing is, there's all kinds of issues that go beyond local boundaries."

**TFSR:** How does this mean this municipality relate to this one? And how do they coordinate between one another?

**RG:** Right. How are we going to build a road from Paris to Lyon and set up an international railway network and communications networks and all these other things. Saying we have to have

There was also push by some sections the requirement that delegates to the International, had to actually be working class. Which is not the position that either marks or Engels fulfilled, the latter as a factory owner, the prior as an academic.

So you see the manipulation of this organization in order to create, not only, mandated political parties that follow the same format in all these countries, but a central committee that would have agency and that would not be revocable, and that would actually be able to determine its own membership, orchestrating all of these various chapters or parties in these other countries. If I'm not misunderstanding. Can you talk about this idea of it being personal...these two bearded dudes going at it, sort of thing, versus the ideas?

**RG:** That's a myth. And the first point I want to make is that the only Marxist in the International are basically Marx and Engels themselves, and a couple of acolytes. But, you know, the British trade unionists were not Marxist, most of them were reformist, and that's why quite a few of them were kind of appalled by his essay on the Paris Commune. Because they didn't advocate violent revolution and wanted to distance themselves from that. In fact, Marx had the International organized so that the English didn't even have their own Federation in the international until after the Paris Commune. And then there was a split in the English Federation between those who supported Marx and those who didn't.

So the fact is, in the International itself, anything that could be described as a Marxist, they were few and far between. The primary groups remain the English trade unionists, and the French members of the International who, by the time of the Paris Commune, included Blanquists. They had not originally been involved in the International but then the Revolutionary Socialists and the French mutualists, that was an interlocking kind of group. There were still French mutualists, who were kind of conservative and definitely not in favor of anything that would be considered armed struggle or violent revolution. But they definitely also were not Marxist.

So, that's the first thing. The second...I mean, Bakunin did refer to them as the Marxians, and so forth, so he actually helped create the myth that Marx had a significant following in the International, which he didn't. And in fact, the first explicitly Marxist political parties didn't emerge until the 1880s in France.

But anyway, the idea that this was a conflict between Marx and Bakunin is nonsense. As I mentioned in the 1869 Basil Congress, a majority of the delegates — primarily the French, Spanish and Italian ones — voted in favor of an anarcho-syndicalist kind of program. And at the very least, Federalist socialist program, where you would have organization from the bottom upwards, and a system of men dated recallable delegates, and the creation of a socialist economy under workers control or worker self management. That was pretty clear that that was the majority point of view.

And it was also pretty clear that Marx didn't actually support that approach. At one point, he basically said that the anarchists had things backwards — and Engels said something very similar — you can't abolish the State and Capitalism through a federal style of organization, you can only create that after you've abolished the State and Capitalism. Which illustrates their approach which favored a form of centralized leadership, and also hierarchical organization. And then somehow miraculously after the revolution, as Engels once put it, the state would wither away.

It's kind of the inverse version of the old French Proudhonist mutualist thing, where the State and Capital would kind of wither away as the mutualist organizations became more powerful and predominant. In the Marx and Engels version after the Revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is created, somehow that organization is going to wither away. But then there's no kind of counter organization to cause it to wither away because everything's been centralized under the State.

In any event, you had these currents within the International before Bakunin got involved. He didn't officially get involved in the international until 1868, although he probably had joined it a

became involved in the International as well as in the Spanish revolutionary movement.

Just as an aside, there were attempts to establish revolutionary communes in Spain in 1872, that the Spanish Federalist anarchists were heavily involved in, and also an attempt at a general strike in Barcelona. And so, in Spain, things were very unsettled, if I could put it that way, in 1872 as well. But it was the Spanish Federalists, as they were called back then, but many of them were anarchists that were involved in those activities, and they were members of the International. And then there were the French refugees and Spain and Switzerland who were also involved. And so the International that was, I say, continued or reconstituted at that St. Imier Congress in September 1872 after the Hague Congress, it was a pluralist organization. It was not a revolutionary anarchist organization. Even some of the English delegates who had broken with Marx ended up participating in the reconstituted International.

In their subsequent Congresses you also had some German Social Democrats who participated in some of the reconstituted Internationals Congresses. James Guillaume, who I mentioned a moment ago, he was very much in favor of this pluralist approach, and tried to get the Germans to formally rejoin the reconstituted International. Of course, Marx and Engels heard about that and told their followers in Germany — who had never played a significant role in the International even before the Hague Congress — “no way, there's no way you can participate in this anarchist organization”. So there were no further attempts at that.

But what happened in the reconstituted International is that you continue to have these very significant debates over revolutionary tactics and goals and strategy. And so there were big debates about the General Strike, and whether that was an effective way of taking on the capitalist economy. Many of the Italians were of the view that no, that's insufficient. Errico Malatesta was one of the Italian Internationalists who later became a very well known anarchists revolutionary, and even back then, he was taking the

“look, let’s boycott the Congress and have our own Congress. Obviously we know that the delegates are being stacked for the Hague Congress, so we might as well just boycott it and set up our own Congress”. But Bakunin didn’t like that idea. He didn’t want to be expelled from the International, it would make him look bad. And he was right, in the sense that after he and Guillaume were expelled, many historical treatments, particularly the Marxist ones, of course, make it sound like that was the end of the anarchists, right? Guillaume and Bakunin were expelled so that’s the end of them.

Now finally Marx and Engels had control of the organization, but then they they engineered a motion to the chagrin of the Blanquist who were at the Congress to move the General Counsel of the International to New York, where it soon became an irrelevant rump, and the Blanquists quit the International in disgust and essentially the so-called Marxist International, just collapsed. Whereas the people who were opposed to the more authoritarian approach that was being followed by Marx and Engels held the Congress in St. Imier — after, not before as the Italians have wanted to do, but after — to reconstitute the International, without having a central control, a central governing body. Where each group would be free to adopt whichever policy or approaches they wanted in relation to things like participation in electoral politics, revolutionary socialism, internal organization and so forth.

That’s what they did. And as a consequence the new anti-authoritarian International — I mean, it’s not really new — it comprised the majority of the former members and groups belonging to the International prior to the Hague Congress. The Belgians ended up joining, the Spaniards, the Italians, a large group of French delegates, either as refugees from Switzerland, or some of them actually joined from within France. This was a difficult position for them, because basically they were having to work underground. Many of them ended up going to Spain, where they

few years earlier, but wasn’t officially involved. The first Congress he went to was the 1869 Basel Congress, where he advocated a form of revolutionary socialist anarchism; he didn’t use the word “anarchy”, because that would scare people. Bakunin was actually quite clever as a public speaker. Apparently, he could be very persuasive. And he knew how to talk to people and inspire them, but also not frighten them at the same time.

So up until that time, and it was at that Congress that the delegates, the majority voted in favor of an anarchist Federalist kind of approach. Bakunin wasn’t the one who swayed them into that, his main speech was in favor of abolishing the right of inheritance. Although he obviously spoke in favor that the International should be the embryonic form of the future society that they were trying to achieve. And this idea had been expressed before the Basel Congress, by delegates from Belgium and from Spain, and it became a very popular idea. So, the idea is that the revolutionary organization that’s going to try and achieve the social revolution, the social transformation, has to mirror or prefigure — that’s the word people like using now — the future organization after the revolution has been successful. And that was a position that was adopted before Bakunin became involved in the debates within the International, and it was the position that was endorsed by a majority of the delegates at the Bassel Congress in 1869.

It wasn’t Bakunin who got those people to do that. They did it themselves. And then there was a conflict between that idea that the pre revolutionary organization should prefigure the post revolutionary society. Marx and Engels were very vociferous in their opposition to that idea. Engels claimed that what the anarchists and the Federalists were advocating was that the workers lay down their arms, even before there’s a revolution, and act as if utopia had already been achieved [chuckles]. That’s what he said. And he said there’s no way we can defeat the bourgeoisie without a centralized form of party organization that will direct the workers and achieve

military victory. Engels was, you know, an amateur General, he liked to think of himself as a great military tactician.

**TFSR:** I did point, just to step back to something that I said shit talking on Engels and Marx, neither of them being of the working classes, Bakunin himself was a prince so-

**RG:** Well, he wasn't a prince, he was just an aristocrat.

**TFSR:** Oh! Okay.

**RG:** Kropotkin was a prince.

**TFSR:** Oh okay. Correction.

**RG:** But yes, he came from the Russian nobility, there's no question about it. And it was actually at the founding Congress of the International 1864...no, sorry, I think it was in 1866. Anyway early on in the organization's history, there was a debate as to whether or not non-workers should be allowed. And someone actually pointed to Marx as an example of "well, we should have people like Mr. Marx in our organization, and if you pass this motion here, he won't be allowed in". So the motion was defeated and the non-workers were allowed to join including Marx. Engels didn't join the International until 1870-71. But yeah if they had passed that motion Bakunin wouldn't have been allowed to join either [chuckles].

But the thing is, the most important opposing currents within the International from an ideological point of view are the Federalist anarchists, in favor of prefigurative organization, means being consistent with the end and also a Federalist form of organization from the bottom upward. Versus the centralist not just Marx and Engels, advocates of revolutionary dictatorship, advocates of social democratic electoralism. They were themselves an uneasy coalition which disintegrated in 1872 after Marx engineered the expulsion of Bakunin from the first International at the Hague Congress.

But Bakunin simply gave expression to ideas that were already widely accepted by the Spanish, Italian and French members of the International. Now he had a role in convincing the Spanish Internationalists to adopt a kind of anarchist approach...

the Hague Congress. Now, prior to the The Hague Congress, which is the one where Bakunin and also his associate from the Jura Federation, a guy named James Guillaume, who was like a real proto-anarcho"syndicalist and advocate of also a revolutionary commune. He wrote, during the commune before it was suppressed, that this was basically anarchy in the positive sense that Proudhon had always advocated. He was a firm supporter of it, and also helped many of the surviving Internationalists escape France to Switzerland. He also got expelled.

The pretext for Bakunin being expelled was that he had received an advance from a Russian publisher to translate Marx's Capital into Russian, and then had abandoned the project. And he had an associate from Russia, the notorious Nechayev who was an unpleasant person. He murdered one of his fellow radicals in Russia before fleeing to Switzerland. Anyway, he sent a threatening letter to the publisher basically saying, "don't try and get your money back from Mr. Bakunin".

**TFSR:** This is his "little tiger cub?"

**RG:** Yeah [laughs], that's right. And so Bakunin was essentially expelled from the International because of the threatening letter that Nechayev sent to the publisher in Russia, and also for having a secret society, the International Alliance. In fact, the International Alliance was admitted as a section into the International 1868. So it wasn't really a secret organization. Of course Bakunin had his own inner circles and stuff, but so did Marx and Engels. Both of them were busy writing letters to people trying to get them to support their side. I mentioned how they, Marx and Engels, tried to use Cafiero in Italy. They also used his [Marx's] son in law, Paul Lafargue, in Spain and in France.

So anyway that was the pretext. But why was Guillaume expelled? There was no rational justification for him to be expelled. It was just because he was a revolutionary Federalist socialist, who is associated with Bakunin, so he was out too. But before the Congress had even been held the Italian International was saying,

now organizing in opposition to this policy of having political parties attempt to achieve state power in order to bring about reforms for the working class and also ultimately create some kind of socialist society. Of course, that was not something that Marx and Engels were going to tolerate and they were involved in trying to defeat the Federalists within the International in France, in Spain, in Italy. In Italy they were unsuccessful because Cafiero went over to the anti-authoritarians. In Spain, they were only able to attract a few adherents, and they did stuff like release the names of the Internationalist to the police, putting them at danger of being arrested and many of them had to go underground.

But they engaged in some pretty dirty tactics. In France, they would try and get their people elected as delegates, if they were going to go to the Hague Congress, and were able to do so in some cases. In other cases, they weren't. But then at the Congress, they persuaded the delegates to support their position.

After they had Congress in 1872, you had a bunch of French sections of the International which were basically underground organizations, because the International was illegal in France and you could face certain imprisonment, exile and possibly even death if you were arrested as a member of the International. This was still during the immediate aftermath of the suppression of the Paris Commune where the French state had shown it would show no mercy to people it felt posed a threat to the existing system.

So, you know, after the Hague Congress, you had French sections denouncing their own delegates because they hadn't adhered to their mandates and had voted in favor of things like expelling Bakunin from the International and adopting this, basically, mandatory policy of creating a working class political party that was going to attempt to achieve power within each nation that was affiliated with the International through its own organization.

That's what ultimately led to the St. Imier Congress in September of 1872, it was held within, like, less than a week and a half of

**TFSR:** And the Italians too, right?

**RG:** And the Italians. In fact, his most important work in Italy began before he joined the International. He tried organizing revolutionary socialist groups in Italy, beginning in around 1864-65. He lived in Italy at the time, for a while, in the mid 1860s, ended up going to Switzerland because he was too radical and was going to maybe get arrested if he stayed in Italy. So he ended up in Switzerland, where many political refugees ended up after the Paris Commune. It was a lot easier back then for them to get into Switzerland and is for a refugee today.

Interestingly his most important work in Italy was after the Paris Commune, where this famous Italian patriot who was in at the time — Italy was going through this process of national unification. It was divided up into these various principalities, part of it was controlled by Austria, the Pope's still controlled large pieces of territory. And so you had people, Garibaldi was one of the famous Italian Patriot revolutionaries who tried to unify Italy and the other guy was Mazzini. After the Paris Commune, Mazzini denounced the communist and atheist materialist kind of thing, which created outrage among his followers in Italy, who thought he was a revolutionary Republican, and maybe even a socialist. Bakunin wrote a couple of famous pamphlets in answer to Mazzini in 1871, where he basically said, "how dare you denounce the Commune, and after all these people were massacred, and advocating a materialist, revolutionary socialist approach". And that just resonated with the Italian Republicans and revolutionaries. And that's how many of them ended up becoming anarchists.

But that was in 1871. So prior to then, you had the anarcho-syndicalist program already adopted by a majority of the delegates back in 1869. And amusingly, Marx and Engels at one point thought that Bakunin could help their cause in Italy. They found out that he was advocating revolutionary anarchism, which they were never in favor of, despite, you know, some people's attempts to make it sound like "no, really, it was just a personality conflict". No, it

wasn't. And so they tried to recruit people to counter Bakunin's influence in Italy, once they found out that he was trying to and successfully persuading people to essentially adopt a revolutionary anarchist approach.

One of them was a fellow named Carlo Cafiero. He was an Italian internationalist and Marx and Engels wrote him a bunch of letters, particularly Engles, basically telling him to try and discredit Bakunin and persuade people to adopt a Marxist approach. And Cafiero was so appalled by Engles personal attacks on Bakunin that he basically said, "Well, if this is what you mean by socialism then I don't want to have any part of it", and then he ended up by becoming an associate of Bakunin and adopting a revolutionary anarchist perspective.

Meanwhile, he did become kind of an informant or spy for the anarchists in Italy because he would tell them, "Oh look at this latest letter I got from Engles, this is what he wants me to do". So at least the Italian Internationalists had some idea of what Marx and Engels were really up to, because they were being very frank in their correspondence with Cafiero about what they wanted. And it was not revolutionary anarchism, that's for sure.

**TFSR:** I mean, we could do a whole podcast just on the myths that were spread by Marx and Engels and Associates. Some of which had some grain of truth, like around antisemitism or around secret societies or these sorts of things. And as well as like crap talking on Bakunin because of his advocacy for women's liberation and equality.

**RG:** At one point Marx, in one of his notes, described Bakunin as a hermaphrodite because he was advocating equality of the sexes.

**TFSR:** If you can't see past your own nose and say that someone would advocate because they feel someone else's equality is good, as opposed to something that serves you personally...

In any case, with this split — as you make the very poignant point in the book — the split and the eviction of a lot of the anti-

authoritarians or the anti-authoritarian splitting from this sort of toxic atmosphere that the authoritarians were fostering in the International was a growing moment for anti-authoritarians. There was the first anti-authoritarian International which was hosted by the Jura Federation in 1872. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how that sort of helped to shape the anarchist movement — not that everyone that participated in that were anarchists, but — the anti-authoritarian and the anarchist movement moving forward in terms of its rejection of the political or its anti political, its anti-state and at times anti-organizationalist approaches.

**RG:** Sure. So, after the September 1871, London conference, where Marx and Engels got a majority of largely handpicked delegates to vote in favor of each national section, create a working class political party to try and achieve power, the Jura Federation issued something called The Sonvilier Circular, which denounced that approach and said that the General Counsel couldn't dictate to the International Federations — the national and regional federations — what policy or approach they should take to politics. That it was up to each Federation to determine their own approach. But they also did talk about pre-revolutionary organization should be organized in a way that's consistent with what was hoped to be achieved in a post revolutionary society.

And so they rejected a central governing body within the International and said that it should be a genuine Federation, where each group would be free to decide what approach it wanted to take. And they use this phrase that had become *popular* and it was originally, I think, used by the Belgians in 1868 and 1869, that the International should be "the embryo of the human society of the future". And so that was a popular view. And it wasn't one that Bakunin made up, as I said, it came from the Belgians, originally. But I mean it was consistent with the approach that most of the French Internationalists and the Spanish and Italian ones too.

So that was the beginning of the kind of creation or coalescence of an anti-authoritarian wing of the International. That they were