

# **Worlds of Western Anarchism and Syndicalism**

**Class Struggle, Transnationalism, Violence and Anti-imperialism, 1870s–1940s**

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*The French Anarchists in London, 1880–1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation*, by Constance Bantman. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013. 256 pp. \$99.95 US (cloth).  
*The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880–1917)*, by Pietro Di Paola. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013. 256 pp. \$99.95 US (cloth).  
*The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks*, by Timothy Messer-Kruse. Urbana, Chicago, Springfield, University of Illinois Press, 2012. ix, 236 pp. \$30.00 US (paper), \$85.00 US (cloth).  
*Black Flag Boricuas: Anarchism, Authoritarianism and the Left in Puerto Rico, 1897–1921*, by K.R. Schaffer. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, University of Illinois Press, 2013. 240 pp. \$65.00 US (cloth).

Many political movements — anarchism included — have draped themselves in the clothes of antiquity, by imagining a historical lineage fading back into the mists of history. Anarchism is, in fact, a younger movement than Marxism: an integral part of modern socialism, it “emerged as an active political movement within the First International” (or International Workingmen’s Association), a coalition of unions, political groups and clubs, and cooperatives that ran from 1864–1877 (Bantman pp. 1, 7–8).

From the 1890s into the 1920s, it was in many contexts the dominant force on the revolutionary left, with a substantial impact on unions, popular culture and anti-imperialist movements worldwide. Even outside of this “glorious period,” anarchism and its union offshoots, anarcho- and revolutionary syndicalism, was (and is) an important current.<sup>1</sup> Its initial rise coincided, and not accidentally, with the first modern globalization of the 1880s to the 1910s, a period characterized by massive international flows of labour and capital, a transportation and telecommunications revolution, and the rapid spread of industrialization.

Anarchism was a global movement not only in aspiration; in practice too, it was global and transnational. Migration — both voluntary and forced (due to persecutions) — and a widely circulating press facilitated the exchange of ideas, struggle repertoires and key militants, which in turn linked and created international activist communities. Stereotypes of an action-first outlook notwithstanding, the movement “had an intensely bookish culture” stressing publication, theory, and debate (Bantman p. 20).

Repression, aimed at suppressing radical ideas and formations, including the First International, often had the opposite effect, as exiles spread their ideas abroad and developed, debated and applied these ideas in different contexts on their travels. One effect was the massive dissemination of radical ideas in Europe and abroad: Italian anarchists, for example, were active in the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa, West Europe, and both Americas (Di Paolo p. 3). Exile enriched radicalism, and many ideas were developed, even forged, abroad. Thus exile exerted a “remarkable influence on the development of socialist ideas in Italy and in other countries” (Di Paolo p. 2), and proved “very fruitful” despite the pressures and frustrations that exile inevitably brought (Bantman p. 73).

A growing literature continues to shed new light on this historical and contemporary current that — despite its importance — remains strikingly under-researched. The four books under

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<sup>1</sup> B. Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anticolonial Imagination* (London, 2006); E. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London, 1993); L. van der Walt and M. Schmidt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland and Edinburgh, 2009).

review are part of the welcome recent upsurge in research. A core part of three of the volumes under consideration centres on the operations of international anarchist and syndicalist networks as they emerged in the context of this increased radicalism. Di Paola and Bantman focus on anarchist exile communities — Italian and French respectively — in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century London, where relatively tolerant British immigration and political asylum policies enabled the flourishing of a range of overlapping, polyglot radical milieus.

Schaffer's contribution is similar, examining the largely indigenous Puerto Rican anarchist movement but situating the Puerto Rican movement within a much larger regional network that linked Puerto Rico to Havana, Tampa, New York, Philadelphia and beyond. Messer-Kruse's main aims are different: mainly to overturn a dominant interpretation of the Haymarket affair, but in the process his book goes a long way to painting the picture of the world of US-based anarchism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. This, like its counterparts in Italian and French exile communities in London, was forged in the context of overlapping, global influences.

## I.

In the imperial Western metropolis of London, substantial anarchist groups, “chiefly French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian,” were in operation, alongside the British (Bantman p. 72). Despite an unavoidable degree of insularity (many exiles focused on their homelands), exiled and local anarchists were generally fiercely internationalist; while by no means free of stereotyping, they were “relatively enlightened exceptions in an age of exacerbated nationalism” (Bantman p. 71). They shared many principles, the basis of their internationalism: opposition to social and economic inequality, commitment to struggle from below, anti-capitalism, anti-statism; as Bantman notes, their declarations of class war terrified the upper classes (Bantman pp. 16, 23), many imagining vast anarchist conspiracies (Di Paola p. 10). Appropriately enough, London was the site of the 1881 launch of the anarchist “Black International” at a congress representing a claimed 60,000 people (Bantman p. 29), delegates including luminaries like Piotr Kropotkin and Errico Malatesta (Di Paola pp. 53–56), and people from as far afield as Mexico and the United States (Messer-Kruse p. 81).

Western anarchists consistently promoted working class internationalism by opposing militarism and capitalist wars — a commitment most kept during World War I when fierce, divisive controversies broke out (Bantman pp. 178–87; Di Paola pp. 184–94, 209–10). Anti-militarism was linked to anti-colonialism, expressed in (for example) consistent anarchist opposition to the British invasion of South Africa of 1899–1902, and the Italian invasions of Libya of 1910–1911 and 1914 (Di Paola pp. 98, 116–19, 146, also p. 192; also Shaffer p. 40). Police reports from 1910 show Malatesta to have been publicly

... pleased that the leaders of the [protest against Libyan war] movement were Italian, thus offering a strong contrast to the Italy that murders defenceless Arabs. He became animated when he spoke about the Arabs and the crowd applauded warmly (p. 120).

Malatesta had previously joined the 1881 Arabi Pasha revolt in Egypt; in June 1914, he was a leader of the 1914 “Red Week” Italian insurrection against the second Libyan war.

The London anarchist movement promoted a “very cosmopolitan” inclusivity. As police reported, the “malcontents of all nations,” British included, could be found together at anarchist venues like the Autonomie Club, and at movement commemorations and rallies (Bantman pp. 72–73, 79–87; also Di Paola pp. 161–62, 207–08). Exiled anarchists also participated in British groups like the Social Democratic Federation, the early Fabians and the *Workers Dreadnought* circle (Di Paola p. 7). Elements of these exile movements remained active into the 1930s, although decline was marked from the 1910s — when London faded as a revolutionary hub (Di Paola pp. 8, 12, 201). Political clubs and taverns were a key part of movement infrastructure, an important part of the social life of political exiles, an interface with British radicals, and an important site of women’s participation (Di Paola pp. 157–83). Beyond this, however, the movement was deeply divided on issues of strategy and tactics, and the debates on these issues — notably, in Italian and French circles — had important implications for the movement’s larger trajectory.

The anarchists had substantial divisions over strategy and tactics that can be mapped onto two main poles: a “mass” anarchism that stressed patient organization, popular education and participation in immediate struggles preparatory to revolution, of which pole syndicalism was part; and an “insurrectionist,” strongly anti-organizationalist anarchism (sometimes called “illegalist,” or, misleadingly, “individualist”) stressing spontaneity, informal groups and small-scale violent actions, or “propaganda of the deed” as a means of provoking revolution; this current opposed to unions and reforms.<sup>2</sup> (Strictly speaking, anti-organizationalists did accept, in reality, a degree of organization, nominally informal. Conversely, some mass anarchists favoured loose, even informal, organization, complicating the division).

Di Paola’s study resurrects the world of the Italian exile radical colony in London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but does much more besides. He locates this in the larger world of exiled Italian radicals including republicans, socialists including anarchists, and trade unionists. He also underlines the importance of London as a central hub in global anarchist networks, playing host not only to men like Karl Marx, but also to what one contemporary observer called the most “qualified congregation of anarchists of all nationalities” ever seen (Di Paola p. 7).

Besides Italian personalities like Malatesta and Saverio Merlino, participants included, at different times, the Russian Kropotkin, the Germans Johann Most and Rudolph Rocker, and the legendary Commune Louise Michel. Kropotkin (who stayed continuously in Britain from 1886–1917) and Malatesta (who was in London on and off for forty years) were arguably the most influential anarchists of all on a world scale after the death of Mikhail Bakunin (who visited Britain twice).

Di Paola also uncovers a host of lesser-known, often forgotten, even invisible militants who played a crucial role in the dissemination of anarchism globally. His exemplary work, firmly located within the growing field of transnational labour history, provides a vivid portrayal of the development of this London community of Italian anarchist immigrants, reconstructed through an exploration of personal networks, informal groups and formal structures, radical clubs, anarchist publications, and the debates that took place both amongst the expatriates and within the larger anarchist movement.

Having explained how the Italian diaspora was partly the product of waves of repression from the 1870s (Di Paola pp. 14–35), into the 1890s, when repression of the opposition reached “Rus-

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<sup>2</sup> See van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, p. 128–33.

sian” levels (p. 16), Di Paola maps (figuratively as well as literally) the movement in London, detailing the world of anarchist hang-outs, meeting points, houses, districts, clubs and headquarters (Di Paola p. 36). This anarchist “subculture,” or “counterculture” with its own institutions, myths, martyrology, songs, icons, plays, and identity bound together anarchist exiles “possibly even more” than their overt political campaigns (pp. 9–10).

Having detailed the factors that drove Italian emigration, Di Paolo, like Turcato<sup>3</sup> stresses that *Italian* anarchism was a transnational movement that cannot be understood through a focus on *Italy*. Considering Italian anarchism as a national phenomenon provides a misleading “image of dis-continuity, spontaneity and ineffectiveness” (Di Paola p. 6) that Di Paola’s perspective helps correct.

Italian anarchism was shaped by events abroad: the debate between Bakunin and Giuseppe Mazzini over the 1871 Paris Commune was decisive in winning young Italians (among them Malatesta) from left nationalism to anarchist internationalism (Di Paola pp. 8–9, 27–31). Likewise, anarchism in Italy was also shaped by Italian anarchists abroad.

What of the specifically Italian dimension of Italian anarchism abroad? The author explores how national identity and common experiences provided, at one level, a resource that enabled organization. They also implied, however, a degree of insularity from the larger society – reinforced by a common language and close-knit neighbourhoods – that helped generate a political focus on events in the homeland (Di Paola pp. 169–70, 207–08).

If one criticism were to be made here, it would be that the various elements of description, despite exhibiting a notable attention to detail, are not always explicitly drawn together to demonstrate their implications for transnational study. Understandably, the insularity of foreign colonies (deftly explored in the book) is a stumbling block for anyone attempting to study the ways that complex interactions between host populations and exile colonies inhabiting them combine to produce transnational networks of activism.

Unfortunately though, a discussion of mutual influences does not form a systematic part of a larger discussion of the development of the anarchist tradition. The fact that Malatesta’s arrest “stimulated” the anarchist movement in London (Di Paola p. 150) is noted. Likewise, the book reports that local British traditions (of using free houses and cafés for radical discussion circles) intersected with similar Italian traditional practices linked to the *osterie*. It also records that these clubs connected different refugee communities and facilitated links to British radicalism – acting as “a conduit between host country, home country and the wider world” (Di Paola p. 183). However, what exactly these interactions produced is not always given serious consideration nor explicitly interrogated by the author.

The book studiously chronicles crucial debates that have fundamentally shaped anarchist perspectives on key issues but often shies away from explicitly tracing the outcomes of key debates and what they meant in the long run for the trajectory of the anarchist movement. Similarly, a deeper discussion of (for example) the methods by which Italian migrants “introduced British trade unionists to anti-statist socialism” (Di Paola citing Carl Levy, p. 7) – and of the content of those ideas – would have added another dimension to what is an extremely valuable contribution to transnational historiography.

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<sup>3</sup> D. Turcato, “Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement, 1885–1915,” *International Review of Social History*, 52 (2007), pp. 407–44.

Constance Bantman's political and social history of French anarchists in London between 1880 and 1914 is another impressive study of transnational and exilic anarchist activism — as well as an important work of historical recovery, which stresses the role of “informal internationalism” in constituting global anarchism. In France, as Bantman notes, the anarchist movement was a widespread, primarily urban, working class and artisanal movement, its “implantation roughly coinciding with the distribution of industry and the regions with a strong tradition of political radicalism” (Bantman pp. 21, 58). In Italy, anarchism had a strong base in the working class, and a substantial number of the exiles were skilled workers (Di Paolo p. 204).

French anarchists had already settled in London in the 1880s, but numbers grew rapidly as the international rise of anarchist-inspired terrorism — that is, of insurrectionist anarchism — provoked intense repression in the 1890s in France, Italy, and other places. As elsewhere, the larger movement, including mass anarchists, paid the price for the actions of small insurrectionist groups, as authorities enacted sweeping measures against anarchists as a whole, propelling activists into exile. Many of the deeds of the insurrectionists, intentions notwithstanding, were also brutal, often bordering on common crime (for some descriptions: Messer-Kruse pp. 81, 129) and did little to win public favour (or that of many anarchists). In Britain itself insurrectionist plots by several French and Italian exiles, in-effectual as they often were, were also enormously disruptive of the larger movement. The main effects were to accelerate police surveillance (and international coordination), prompt tougher immigration laws and foster a poor public image (Bantman pp. 103–56).

Bantman, while necessarily devoting some space to the topic of anarchist insurrectionism, takes care to show that the importance of this trend has been overstated. A completely disproportionate focus in the scholarship on sensational violence — reinforced by current concerns with *jihadi* attacks — has detracted from careful, balanced study of anarchists (Bantman pp. 3–6). For example, insurrectionists were always opposed by most of the anarchists, and their brief period of hegemony in France soon gave way under the growing influence of mass anarchism. By 1894, most French anarchists were set on syndicalism (pp. 2, 24–26).

Further, as Bantman's account implies, few insurrectionist anarchists actually undertook violent actions, confining themselves to violent words. Indeed, the global toll of insurrectionist violence was also surprisingly small: Richard Jensen suggests that for 1880–1914, anarchist violence in general — this includes by mass anarchists — accounted for only 160 deaths and 500 injuries worldwide in twenty-four years.<sup>4</sup>

Debates between different anarchist currents were often bitter, and were exacerbated by the trying and often grim conditions of exile. If the words of exiled French insurrectionists rarely resulted in actual deeds, they consumed energy and goodwill with extraordinary amounts of violent, self-righteous ink denouncing mass anarchists — a practice promoted by the manipulations of the “massive” police spy presence in insurrectionist ranks (Bantman pp. 64–67). A few notable Italian insurrectionists applied their theories, even in exile, although most did not. Both the inactive and active insurrectionists indulged in a great deal of bombastic writing (see Di Paolo pp. 71–77, 103–05).

Frustrated by exile, and largely inactive in other struggles, the insurrectionists found an outlet for their energies in sectarianism. Not all of this sectarianism was harmless: in several cases,

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<sup>4</sup> R.B. Jensen, “The International Campaign Against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880–1930s,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21, no. 1 (2009), p. 90.

insurrectionists were involved in violent, sometimes deadly, attacks on socialist and anarchist critics in Europe and Latin America (Di Paola p. 64),<sup>5</sup> a thuggery completely at odds with any notion of individual freedom. Insurrectionists were in turn treated with contempt by the organizationalists, denigrated as “poor dev-ils, sharks following a ship” they did not pilot (quoted in Bantman p. 65).

Anarchism and syndicalism did not, of course, operate in a vacuum: their adherents’ plans for the overthrow of the ruling class, by whatever means, had real effects on state policy. As Bantman notes, not only were transnational linkages important for anarchism (from below), anarchist exiles also played a formative role in institutional changes in British state policy (from above) — including prompting internationally collaborative political surveillance and, ultimately, playing an important part in the removal of liberal British immigration and asylum policy with the Aliens Act of 1905.

Di Paola devotes substantial time to the complicated relationship between the British and Italian authorities. He shows how the spy networks that kept anarchists under surveillance were important in bringing an end to the liberal era (pp. 23–25, 122–56). In the wake of the 1905 Acts, admission was at the discretion of British officials, and immigrants already granted admission could be expelled. Malatesta only escaped this fate in 1912 following demonstrations (up to 15,000-strong) by British labour and the left, as well as immigrant communities; others were not so lucky. (Such British solidarity was not unusual; in 1909, the Social Democratic Party organized a massive rally in solidarity with Spanish anarchists; 1914 would see mass rallies for deported South African labour activists).

With the onset of World War I, repression reached a new level in Britain, although it did not stop anarchist and syndicalist activities. Around 10,500 “enemy aliens” were interned, legislation cracked down on strikes and dissent, and censorship was imposed (Di Paola pp. 195–200).

Thus, from the 1880s, London became a key place within international anarchist networks, and an influential site in the development of anarchist organization and ideology. It was arguably — along with centres like Havana, Paris, Tokyo, and Johannesburg —<sup>6</sup> one of the key hubs in global anarchist and syndicalist networks. Both authors expand our understanding of this hub by examining its local history as well as its international connections and impact; together they provide an evocative picture of the streets, bars, workplaces and housing of the militants, and of their day to day lives, often marked by destitution and squabbling (pp. 54–67).

The importance of these London years for international anarchism and syndicalism is another common, and important, theme. For exiled Italian and French circles, it was here key debates over the merits of insurrectionism versus a more mass-based anarchism — including anarchism based in trade unions, like syndicalism — took place (Bantman pp. 64–65, 92–93, 98–102). Bantman shows how, for example, the French anarchist press circulated far beyond Britain, and provides an illuminating discussion of the mechanisms by which ideas spread and took hold. Further, she shows that French anarchist exiles had an enormous impact on developments in France, not least as an interlocutor for British anarchist and syndicalist thought and experiences.

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<sup>5</sup> In Argentina; O. Bayer, *Anarchism and Violence: Severino di Giovanni in Argentina, 1923–1931* (London, 1985), ch. 7.

<sup>6</sup> See L. van der Walt and S.J. Hirsch, “Rethinking Anarchism and Syndicalism: The Colonial and Post-colonial Experience, 1870–1940,” in S.J. Hirsch and L. van der Walt (eds.) *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism and Social Revolution* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), pp. xlv–xlvii.



While repression in continental Europe pushed labour and left movements back during the 1890s, a range of formations — social democratic, Marxist, anarchist, labour unionist, local as well as immigrant and exilic — flourished in Britain (Bantman pp. 28–43). British models, experiences and references (particularly the rise of the more militant “new unionism” in the 1880s and 1890s, and its freedom from political party control) thus played an important part in the exile’s debates. Bantman even argues that British labour convinced Kropotkin and others of the importance of unions and syndicalism (p. 41).

Di Paola, likewise, explores how many of the key debates within Italian anarchism played out in London, roughly between organizationalists largely represented by Malatesta and Merlino, who favoured unions and strikes, and rejected “propaganda of the deed” on the one hand, and anti-organizationalists under the leadership of insurrectionists like Luigi Parmeggiani and Vittorio Pini on the other (Di Paola pp. 42, 61–91). He also suggests that at times anarchist agitation in London outstripped efforts in Italy. Among the Italians, mass anarchists who associated with figures like Malatesta were impressed by British unions and strikes. Contrary to the fairly widespread myth that Malatesta was hostile to syndicalism,<sup>7</sup> it seems he embraced a “syndicalist strategy” and an orientation to the unions, and sought to form unions amongst workers in London restaurants (see pp. 34–35, 80–81, 83–84, 91, 94–9, 111–14, 205). He supported the need to form an “anarchist party” with a shared programme “capable of engaging the labour movement,” free of insurrections, and distinct from the unions (pp. 88–91, 99–100). In fact, he insisted that without an active anarchist presence, the tendencies to union bureaucracy and union sectionalism could easily prevail (pp. 99, 101).

Thus, a (re)orientation to trade unions (syndicalism was part of the First and Black Internationals), including an argument for the infiltration of existing unions, arose among Italian and French exiles. This was exported (Bantman argues) back to France through channels like the exile papers *Père peinard* and *Le Tocsin* (pp. 75–76); *Le Temps nouveau*, linked to Kropotkin, was another conduit (pp. 162–63). Predictably the insurrectionists opposed any orientation toward unions, arguing that reforms were ineffective, that the unions were bureaucratic and so forth (Di Paola p. 105). Although the evidence is less clear for the Italian case, it does seem that the exiles’ London debates also contributed to growing the numbers of anarchists that joined unions and similar formations, opposing reformism, in the homeland (Di Paola pp. 97–98, 208).

Anarchists and syndicalists soon became a very powerful minority in Italian unionism, although this achievement was surpassed in France, where they achieved a leading role. Anarchists began permeating French unions around the congress in Nantes in 1894, having an enormous impact on the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, CGT, (“a hotbed for ‘proto’-syndicalist ideas” (Bantman p. 160)) and the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail* — and in the merging of the two (on a syndicalist programme) in 1902. The two-tier structure of the expanded CGT was perceived by its secretary, (former London exile) Fernand Pelloutier, as “embodying the anarchist ideal of social organisation” because its decentralized character was directly imported from libertarian principles (Bantman p. 161). The victory of syndicalism in France in turn revived syndicalism worldwide.

Pelloutier, champion of “boring-from-within” existing unions, rather than forming new ones, argued for emulation of British unions that used “sabotage,” steered clear of state mediation of industrial relations, and stressed careful organization and union independence. Other former exiles, among them Emile Pouget and Jean Grave, also highlighted elements of the “British” model. Bantman argues that the CGT’s syndicalist Amiens Charter of 1906 had its “origins” “further

back and borrowed from British practices” (Bantman p. 161). Links made in Britain, to figures like Tom Mann, would reinforce these influences (pp. 168–70, 172–74, 177). Mann, for instance, actively championed the CGT example in the English-speaking world and visited France to study the federation. Thus, for Bantman, rather than syndicalism being a French innovation, it was in fact preceded by British anarchist syndicalism in the 1880s (Bantman p. 164).

This line of argument is extremely fruitful, and indicates the merits of a transnational lens. First, as Bantman argues, the London years of French anarchism are usually ignored in the literature, with the result that 1890s syndicalism is often viewed as a novel, and distinctly “French,” phenomenon that was subsequently exported globally. But if “French” syndicalism cannot be fully grasped unless in relation to ideas generated elsewhere, and in earlier periods, this is a powerful argument against the limits of methodological nationalism. Bantman also provides a very concrete model of how, exactly, cross-border ideological and organizational transfers can take place: through individuals, through networks, through the radical press, themselves nested in counter-cultural and oppositional milieus. This has the merit, on the one hand, of drawing attention to the role of informal structures (often ignored in labour histories, in favour of formal institutions) in ideological and political developments, and, on the other, to the ideological and political role of such structures (often ignored in social histories that focus on cultural forms and daily life).

Anarchism was, above all, a *political* movement; its social institutions like clubs, press, and networks were all constituted by the overarching aim of gathering the like-minded, and of expanding their ranks. Thus, like Di Paola’s, Bantman’s account includes a discussion of key debates within the movement, including what she describes as its “organisational conundrums” (p. 158). The debates over unions — in which mass anarchists eventually triumphed decisively over insurrectionists, and the subsequent re-launching of syndicalism in France through the rise of the CGT — were part of a larger set of debates over the merits of reforms, formal organizations, and the necessity of (and appropriate forms for) specifically anarchist organizations.

That said, there are some weaknesses in Bantman’s approaches to the relationship between anarchism and syndicalism. For example, her text tends to create the impression that syndicalism was an innovation, labelling the late 1880s as the period that saw the emergence of “proto-syndicalist ideas” (Bantman p. 160). But the case can also be made that syndicalism was always a major theme in mass anarchism, from the days of Bakunin. As other writers have noted, syndicalism dates to the birth of anarchism in the First International; syndicalist unions in Mexico and the United States were, in fact, the largest affiliates of the 1881 Black International. Thus, the syndicalism inspired by the CGT was actually a “second wave” of global syndicalism.<sup>7</sup>

A tendency to treat syndicalism as distinct from anarchism also means that the larger impact of anarchism gets somewhat elided. Given the enormous impact that the CGT had on French society, and its role in fostering a global upsurge that saw syndicalism come to dominate labour and left movements in a range of countries, Bantman somewhat undercuts the importance of her arguments by simultaneously arguing that “anarchism was always a minority, radical pursuit” (Bantman pp. 1, 14). But mass syndicalist unions had existed worldwide since at least the late 1860s; by the 1910s, syndicalism was — or had been — a leading force in numerous labour movements worldwide, and would grow again from the late 1910s. Since syndicalism is part of anarchism, anarchism was hardly “always a minority, radical pursuit,” in France or elsewhere.

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<sup>7</sup> See van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*, ch 5.

Bantman also tends to accept some of the assumptions of the anti-organizationalist anarchists, who viewed anarchism as incompatible with disciplined, tight organizations. Thus, she makes the following arguments: that the “organisational drive” of the syndicalists and others “was paradoxical and highly problematic considering the anti-authoritarian and anti-centralisation tenets of anarchism” (p. 158); that there was an “inherent impossibility” in structured anarchist organizing (p. 31, also p. 183); and that “the rise of syndicalism in the early 1900s provided an answer to the question of militant organisation, *albeit by toning down its libertarian contents*” (ibid., emphasis added).

Further, Bantman proposes that “informal networks” serve militancy better because “they do not seem to carry the threat of authoritarianism” (p. 159, also p. 31). She adds that there are important parallels between the classic anarchist movement and the 1990s leftwing “alter-globalisation” movement, which was also often an informally organized movement based on networks (pp. 189–90).<sup>8</sup>

These positions are problematic. There is no reason to suppose, as Malatesta and Pelloutier pointed out, that organization, in itself, is inherently authoritarian and centralist: such dangers exist, but it is the form and content, rather than the simple fact, of organization that is decisive. Even the pessimistic Robert Michels stressed that organized anarchists and syndicalists paid unparalleled attention to establishing structures that were as bottom-up and democratic as possible.<sup>9</sup> Certainly we can agree with the author that “personal networks” can provide an effective means of spread-ing ideas (Bantman p. 160), but this does not in itself show the superiority of informal, over formal, structures.

The ability of informal networks to constitute movements that can decisively change society also remains doubtful: it was through syndicalism, above all, that French anarchism became a leading force; conversely, the ephemeral and loose nature of 1990s “alter-globalisation” left it ill-prepared to sustain its struggles, move beyond the activist milieu, or respond effectively to a range of external challenges, such as the “war on terror.” At the same time, the impact of anti-organizationalism on anarchism has often been to weaken it: for example, anti-organizationalism weakened the Black International, was a major factor in the anarchist defeats in the Second International, and contributed directly to the failure of a 1907 Amsterdam congress to launch a new anarchist international (e.g. Di Paola p. 55).

Further, there is no reason to suppose that informal networks and structures are free of hierarchy: since such structures tend to be centred around a few forceful personalities, lack clear mechanisms for accountability, and normally deny the existence of internal inequalities (however real), they are prey to invisible hierarchies and an “uncontrolled and uncontrollable leadership.”<sup>10</sup>

## II.

Messer-Kruse picks up the theme of anti-organizationalism in the United States in the years following the London Congress of 1881, which (as noted) included North American delegates. Messer-Kruse’s work is a reassessment of the Haymarket conspiracy and the anarchists involved

<sup>8</sup> This also highlights the “dual processes of globalisation based on new transnational spaces and connections — one state-led and capitalist, the other anti-hegemonic” (p. 8).

<sup>9</sup> R. Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York, 1962 [1915]), pp. 313–15, 317–22, 325–29.

<sup>10</sup> Freeman, J. *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* (Hull, UK, 1970).

(implicated?) in it. The story begins with a bomb thrown at police during an anarchist rally near the Haymarket in Chicago, May 1886, during a general strike for the eight-hour day, which provided the basis for a massive crackdown on anarchists in the United States for conspiracy. This was followed by the conviction of eight anarchists, most of whom were active in Chicago's unions. Of these, four were executed by hanging, a fifth committed suicide before his sentence was carried out, and the others got life sentences. For many, they died as martyrs in the struggles for the eight-hour day. The trial of the anarchists drew world attention. To this day, their deaths and their links to the struggle for the eight-hour day are commemorated annually on May Day. Adopted as a day of global labour solidarity at the founding congress of the Second International in 1889, May Day has been the most enduring of the old left calendar of events, outlasting commemorations for the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution.

Messer-Kruse's work, which has attracted some controversy, has two main aims. First, it stresses the "anarchist" character of the Haymarket men. As Messer-Kruse notes, substantial literature has presented them merely as trade unionists, or as leftists practically indistinguishable from "ordinary Marxists," and even as "pacifists at heart," a project of "domestication" that obscures their radical views (pp. 5, 183, 184–85). Second, it seeks to challenge the standard account that insists that the eight men arrested had nothing to do with the bombing, that the trial was unfair, and that the sentences were primarily an attack on organized labour and immigrants.

In terms of demonstrating the anarchist character of the Haymarket Martyrs, Messer-Kruse makes a powerful and much-needed case, chronicling the rise of anarchism as an important current in the United States in the wake of massive labour unrest in 1877. He also makes an important contribution to transnational historiography by tracing how anarchist ideas were spread from Europe by the anarchist press, by migrants, by exiles and travelling radicals, by correspondence, and by the news reports that "zipped around the world on transoceanic telegraph cables" (pp. 27–30, 39–42, 44, 56, 58–59, 70, 79–81). Radicals on both sides of the Atlantic were "closely connected," and if anything, "radicals of the same mind on either continent were more closely associated with one another than they were with their factional rivals across town" (p. 44, 46–47).

In cities like Chicago, with massive immigrant populations, anarchism set down deep roots, and influential radical papers in a variety of languages had a major influence (p. 45). This was qualitatively different to the small exile scenes in cities like London; Chicago and its working class were, for example, in the majority German, with German the city's most commonly spoken language (p. 44). As anarchist ideas gained increasing influence in Germany around men like Most, so the fortunes of anarchism rose in German communities elsewhere. In the United States, the immigrant left fractured as powerful anarchist currents arose, winning sections of it and its left press (the *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung* and the *Alarm*, both of which aligned to the Black International.) These processes also led to the formation of the (United States-wide, and anarchist) International Working Peoples Association (IWPA) in Pittsburgh in 1883 (pp. 53–68, 70–71, 81–3). Haymarket martyrs Albert Parson and August Spies were prominent in the IWPA, as was Most (who now lived as an exile in the United States).

Much of what Messer-Kruse notes about the features of the United States anarchist movement of the 1880s and 1890s — its international connections, its fiery language and internal squabbles, its involvement in unions, its call for revolution, its formation of working class militias and weapons stores, and the existence of a vocal insurrectionist wing — are not especially controver-

sial, having been documented in a range of earlier studies.<sup>11</sup> However, he provides an essential corrective to accounts that present the Chicago radicals as mild-mannered undefined “socialists,” or even as early Marxists.<sup>12</sup> The account has some fascinating sidelights, such as the links between the anarchists and a section of the transnational Irish nationalist movement (Messer-Kruse pp. 106–14), foreshadowing far more substantial cooperation between syndicalists and nationalists in the 1916 Easter Rising. His work also helps draw attention to the influence of anarchism. Marxists have repeatedly predicted the early rise of a mass socialist party in the United States.<sup>13</sup> Not only has this yet to come to pass, but there have been several periods in which anarchism and syndicalism drew far ahead of Marxism — and the 1880s was one of them. Anarchist papers, notes Messer-Kruse, had a wide circulation and arguably a bigger influence than Marxist contemporaries. Indeed, the United States was host to the world’s first anarchist daily paper.<sup>14</sup> Anarchist rallies could draw tens of thousands (pp. 45, 91–92).

Messer-Kruse’s stress on transnational connections is also timely, even though there could be more reflection on how transnational networks entail a *circulation* of ideas, rather than one-way transmissions. So closely does Messer-Kruse map anarchist ideas in the United States onto preceding anarchist ideas in Europe, with anarchism presented as an “imported and foreign ideology,” “distilled” in the European “pressure-cooker,” and at odds with the United States’ historic libertarianism and republicanism (p. 90) that some of the insights of the transnational approach are lost. North American anarchism appears in his account as an outpost of European anarchism, and as something alien, at odds with “the public’s nativism and anti-leftist bias” (pp. 2–3).

This approach, while it is correct in drawing attention to the ethnic insularity of sections of the immigrant left, downplays the impact of anarchism on native-born Americans. It also neglects the specific factors that contributed to the rise of a powerful anarchist current in America. There is not much analysis of how ideas from abroad were incorporated into and shaped by new settings. Despite stressing the “foreign” character of anarchism, Messer-Kruse shows, at several points, that native-born English-speaking Americans played an important role in the First International, the Black International, the IWPA and the United States anarchist press. He notes, but does not discuss, the significance of movements like the IWPA explicitly locating themselves in the local revolutionary tradition of men like Thomas Jefferson (pp. 82, 86–99, 176). Nor is there much discussion of the impact that United States anarchists had on *Europeans*, as when, for example, an American delegate at the Black International’s founding congress championed “boring-from-within” unions in London (Messer-Kruse pp. 140–41), or when IWPA veteran Lucy Parsons toured Britain in 1888.

Messer-Kruse continually contrasts the anarchists with “the public,” but it is not clear why this is so, given that they obviously had a major impact: testament to their influence and standing were the tens of thousands that rallied in support of the Haymarket defendants, attended the funeral and commemorations, and later helped secure clemency for the surviving three; the

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<sup>11</sup> See P. Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, 1984); J. Bekken, “The First Daily Anarchist Newspaper: The Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung,” *Anarchist Studies*, 3 (1995).

<sup>12</sup> See for example, C. Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago, 1976). For a similar corrective, see G. Ahrens (ed.), *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality, Solidarity* (Chicago, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> M. Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class* (London and New York, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Bekken, “The First Daily.”

author himself concedes that the anarchists succeeded in fundamentally “reorienting American socialism” and displacing Marxism (p. 90), and were an important union current.

For a movement to take hold, it must also relate to local conditions. Even if Messer-Kruse’s claim that anarchism was basically forged in Europe is conceded — and there is a substantial scholarship that disputes this, drawing attention to the part played by Latin Americans and North Africans in creating the movement<sup>16</sup> — the ability of the movement to set down American roots requires explanation. More could have been made of how specifically United States conditions like ballot-rigging, economic depression and the race question enabled the rise of local anarchism, and shaped its themes. For instance, formations like the IWPA had links to the old slavery abolitionists, and advocated “Equal rights for all without distinction of race and sex,” aiming (with some success) to build a multi-ethnic, multi-racial mass movement, while opposing racism, anti-immigrant sentiments, and the repression of the Native Americans<sup>17</sup> at a time when (for instance) anti-Chinese populism had a massive influence (Messer-Kruse p. 87).

Less convincing is Messer-Kruse’s other major claim, which is that the Haymarket defendants were guilty of the charges levelled by the authorities. According to Messer-Kruse, the Chicago anarchists were set on instigating a violent insurrection during the eight-hour day general strike including throwing a bomb at the Haymarket.

This “conspiracy” was no less than the “culmination of a coordinated plan to attack the police” (pp. 1–3, 8, 172–73). At times this intended insurrection is presented as a recent plan; at times the author speculates it went back “years” (p. 171). Admitting there was no evidence that IWPA luminary Albert Parsons was involved in the bombing (p. 3), Messer-Kruse notes that Parsons was nonetheless involved in plans to arm the working class (pp. 119, 123–27), and closely associated with co-defendants Spies, George Engel, Adolf Fischer, and Louis Lingg — the men he believes drove the alleged May 1886 anarchist “plot” (pp. 7, 9–15). Lingg is also specifically named as the builder of the bomb thrown at Haymarket (p. 3).

Messer-Kruse provides an important intervention, in highlighting the revolutionary outlook of the Haymarket Martyrs: certainly they were not a movement merely “bluffing to attract attention” (p. 5). Certainly the IWPA anarchists “plotted revolution” at some stage; they were always explicit on this point, even when on trial.

But what Messer-Kruse fails to demonstrate convincingly is that an insurrection was set for May 1886 — which was the basis of the prosecution’s case. Having shown, at length, that IWPA militants disdained to conceal their views and intentions — to thrilled audiences, to sensation-seeking journalists, or even, disastrously, to a hostile court (p. 3) — as well as noting the undoubted bravery of these men, Messer-Kruse dismisses the Haymarket anarchists’ “jailhouse denials” (p. 7).

Yet the only direct evidence for any “conspiracy” that Messer-Kruse provides is the testimony of “more than a dozen ‘squealers,’” all admittedly on the police payroll (pp. 3, 9–26). Of these, “only a couple” even indicated that the Haymarket rally fitted into the supposed master plan — and then only vaguely (pp. 14–15). An established scholarship that has raised serious questions about these testimonies, and located them squarely in a larger and documented process of judicial and police manipulations<sup>15</sup> is not addressed. Testimonies contradicting the “dozen ‘squealers’” are also not engaged. The improbability that a vast “conspiracy” would end with nothing but a single bomb — a bomb that no prosecution witness could state was part of the supposed master

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<sup>15</sup> For example Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, pp. 268–78.

plan (p. 14–15) — and a few clashes with police and scabs (hardly unusual in 1880s United States strikes), is not addressed.

Much use is made of *non-sequiturs*. The fact that police raids found an “arsenal of weapons” (p. 3) does not demonstrate that insurrection was planned for May 1886; it indicates only that the anarchists had — as they had openly proclaimed — diligently armed their militias. That the anarchists had militias in Chicago (as they did elsewhere, from Argentina to China to Germany to Poland and the Ukraine), also does not prove the existence of a plot for May 1886. It has long been conceded in the literature that an insurrectionist anarchist threw the Haymarket bomb,<sup>16</sup> but this, too, is insufficient evidence of a larger conspiracy. The consequence of the bombing — massive repression — conforms, in fact, to a familiar pattern of mass anarchists paying the price for irresponsible insurrectionist activity. As Messer-Kruse notes, the Haymarket trial and associated 1880s “red scare” set the movement back decades (p. 179).

Messer-Kruse also relies on an unusual (and arguably flawed) definition of anarchism that presents anarchism as basically an ideology of terror: anarchism and anarchist refers to “ideas, groups, or individual radicals ... distinguished by their complete rejection of authoritative legal reforms and the voting systems that bring them about, by their advocacy of violence both collective and individual, and by their belief in the imminence of mass insurrection” (p. 7).

Since this description applies to a range of currents, it does not suffice to define anarchism: Messer-Kruse himself mentions “extremist” Irish and Italian nationalists and Russian nihilists with the same outlook (pp. 36–37, 56, 106), and — while he presents Marxism as a union-centred movement awaiting “glacial” historical processes, and lacking a set programme (pp. 7, 30–32, 34, 42–43, 54–55, 97, 99) — his definition of anarchism actually fits many Marxists too. The definitional problem is manifest in the book itself, when Messer-Kruse cites inflammatory statements by Most that date to his period as a leading German Marxist (pp. 54–56), and conflates anarchists with the very different “nihilists” (pp. 7, 31, 57, 71–72). Conversely, Messer-Kruse repeatedly refers to as “anarchists” people who by his own descriptions manifestly do *not* fit his definition, such as Benjamin Tucker (pp. 111, 131–32, 134–35, 180).

The definition used provides a misleading and unduly narrow sense of anarchist history, views, aspirations, and elides debates — *including* over strategy — that are addressed by Di Paola and Bantman. Messer-Kruse describes, for example, the First International as founded and led by Marx (pp. 34–35, 42–43, 81–82), when in fact it was actually founded by French socialists. Further, by the 1872 split, the majority of sections repudiated Marx’s leadership, and embraced anarchism and Bakunin.<sup>17</sup> This first period of anarchism was deeply syndicalist: the First International’s largest section, Spain, had become the first mass syndicalist union by 1872; the second mass syndicalist union followed with the General Congress of Mexican Workers in 1876 — but Messer-Kruse does not address this at all. In another example, Bakunin is presented as an insurrectionist, associated with “brigands” and conspiracies, disinterested in theory and unconcerned with education or mass work (pp. 32–37, 43). This is a caricature of Bakunin, who insisted that

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<sup>16</sup> Including in Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, pp. 444–45.

<sup>17</sup> G.M. Stekloff, *History of the First International* (London, 1928).

The only way for the workers to learn theory is through practice: *emancipation through practical action*. It requires the full solidarity of the workers in their struggle against their bosses, through the *trade unions and the building up of resistance funds*.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of the insurrectionists is repeatedly overstated: Messer-Kruse describes the relatively obscure Most — a contemporary of the world-famous mass anarchists Kropotkin and Malatesta — as “probably the most influential anarchist of his generation” (p. 78) and claims the anarchist movement was “officially founded in 1881” with the Black International (p. 7), thus skipping the First International entirely. While there is no doubt that insurrectionism was reaching its height in the 1880s and early 1890s, and that it had an important impact on the Black International, Messer-Kruse barely notes (see p. 82) that this international’s largest early affiliate was the syndicalist General Congress of Mexican Workers, now with 50,000 members.<sup>19</sup>

Mass anarchism of this sort is effaced by Messer-Kruse’s approach, wherein anarchism is defined by violence, with the noisy insurrectionist minority treated as exemplary of the movement. The related problem is that the Chicago IWPA anarchists were (mostly) syndicalists, leading a range of unions, among them the butchers, carpenters and furniture workers, cigar makers, metalworkers, tailors, and typographers. They also influenced lumber yard and brewery workers, and founded the city’s main union centre, the Central Labour Union, in 1884 (which affiliated via the IWPA to the Black International). Moreover, they played a role in numerous strikes, including on the eve of the Haymarket bombing, and their militias were mainly union-linked (as Messer-Kruse himself concedes). Messer-Kruse downplays this union focus, mainly by interpreting IWPA critiques of union *reformism* as a complete rejection of unions (pp. 140, 145, 147), highlighting IWPA commentary on violent strikes (p. 148), and quoting (anti-union) insurrectionists (pp. 142–143, 148), and anti-anarchist trade unionists (pp. 141–42, 148–49, 159–60, 162, 166–67, 177).

This is unconvincing. Messer-Kruse himself documents United States anarchist congresses and groups *endorsing* unions, and demands and strikes for better hours and wages (pp. 141, 143–44, 146–47, 148, 155, 159–65, 166,), despite criticizing moderate unions for smallness of vision and a treacherous leadership in Chicago (pp. 140, 142, 145, 147–48, 150–51, 152, 168–69). He concedes massive anarchist union influence, with anarchists enrolling “more than half” the new union recruits ahead of May Day 1886, with rallies of many thousands (pp. 163–64, 168). The distinction repeatedly set up between “the anarchists and the trade unionists” (pp. 152, 160, 166, 171) is misleading. IWPA mass anarchists were quite clear where the difference actually lay: their unions insisted that labour could “only acquire any rights whatsoever by ... force as may be necessary” (p. 156), while the moderates’ unions wanted “harmony and peace based on the slavery of labour to capital” (p. 152). In all of these ways, the Haymarket anarchists pioneered the syndicalism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) founded in 1905 — a debt the IWW openly acknowledged.<sup>20</sup>

Having reprimanded scholars for focusing too heavily on anarchism’s “more abstract principles and ultimate goals,” thus ignoring its violent bent (p. 185), Messer-Kruse bends the stick

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<sup>18</sup> M. Bakunin. “The Policy of the International,” in S. Dolgoff (ed.), *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism* (London, 1971 [1869]), p. 167, emphases in original.

<sup>19</sup> J.M. Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1931* (Austin, 1978).

<sup>20</sup> S. Salerno, “The Impact of Anarchism on the Founding of the IWW: The Anarchism of T. J. Hagerty,” in D. Roediger and E. Rosemont (eds.), *Haymarket Scrapbook* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 51–52, 69–71.



too far in the other direction, largely ignoring some underlying anarchist principles — like anti-capitalism, anti-authoritarianism, internationalism, anti-imperialism — and anarchism’s diverse strategies and tactics. With violence presented as the core of anarchism, his account, although fascinating and insightful, is somewhat one-sided, leaving out core features of the movement. This is true even on the issue of anarchist violence itself, the author’s main focus. While most anarchists argued that social revolution will be violent, there was a crucial division to note: insurrectionists tended to argue that violence will generate a mass revolutionary movement, while mass anarchists (including most syndicalists), viewed violence as a means of defending a mass movement, built through careful daily work, including defence during a revolution.<sup>21</sup>

### III.

The late nineteenth century rise of United States unionism and a radical, modern left, took place in the context of rapid industrialization and imperial expansion. Cracking down on dissent at home, the United States government also challenged older imperial powers for influence in Latin America and the Pacific: Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico were drawn into the United States’ orbit following the 1898 Spanish-American War.

For this reason, Shaffer’s path-breaking investigation of anarchism in Puerto Rico provides an interesting companion to Messer-Kruse’s. Like Messer-Kruse, Shaffer uncovers a rich history of activities, propaganda, organizations, struggles, publications, and debates. Yet whereas Messer-Kruse examines influences in one direction — Europe to the United States — Shaffer avoids insulating the Puerto Rican movement from developments elsewhere, underscoring the importance of a multi-directional exchange of ideas, forms and strategies across borders in the making of the movement. For example, as elsewhere, anarchists generally did envisage the revolution involving some violence (pp. 118–22); as elsewhere, mass anarchism was predominant, with syndicalism a key element of the movement.

The Puerto Rican movement built upon local radical and popular traditions (p. 24), but its emergence in the 1890s was also closely linked to the impact of radical papers from abroad, to exiles, and to immigrants. However, Puerto Rico never experienced the level of mass immigration seen in, for example, Cuba or the United States: its anarchists were “mostly home-grown and from a wide racial representation” (p. 7). A pioneering role was played by figures like Santiago Iglesias Pantuín, a Spanish anarchist active in the Cuban independence struggle: while fleeing arrest in Cuba for London, ca. 1896, he decided to leave the ship when it docked, en route, in Puerto Rico. Here, he soon played a leading role in the first unions, before evolving to a pro-United States, reformist position (pp. 19, 23–24, 28–29, 35–36).

As anarchism grew in Puerto Rico, setting down roots in the workers’ movement that arose from the 1870s (pp. 24–33), the local movement became part of an active regional network that spanned the Caribbean basin, linking the archipelago to Cuba, the United States, and elsewhere; in the early 1920s, the tobacco factory city Bayamoñ briefly displaced Havana as the Caribbean network’s hub (p. 158). Circular migration by revolutionaries between Puerto Rico and the United States, as well as Cuba, was a key part of this transnational network (pp. xvi–xvii, 2).

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<sup>21</sup> L. van der Walt, “Anarchism, Syndicalism and Violent Anti-imperialism in the Colonial and Post-Colonial World, 1870–1940,” panel on “Transnational Dimensions of Violent Dissidence,” Fourth Global International Studies Conference, World International Studies Committee (wisc), (Frankfurt, Germany, 6–9 August 2014).

The book provides a brilliant example of Thompsonian-style social history, exploring the rich dynamics of anarchist counter-cultural struggle through publications like local anarchist newspapers *Voz Humana* and *El Comunista*, imported papers like Cuba's *¡Tierra!*, to which local anarchists contributed money and articles, and through radical theatre, fictional works, public oratory, social centres, and schools (pp. 1–4, 20). As part of this project, Shaffer recovers the history of many now-forgotten key anarchist figures, often women, whose stories are deftly merged into the larger narrative.

Providing an important corrective to portrayals of anarchism as basically violent extremism, Shaffer shows that mass anarchism predominated in Puerto Rico, where anarchists were pragmatic “realists,” quite willing to engage in fights for immediate reforms, to “bore-from-within” moderate movements, to engage in broad alliances — even with moderates and the professional middle class — and to write in non-anarchist media outlets. One example was a tactical partnership formed with largely middle class anti-clerical freethinkers in the 1910s (especially in the city of Ponce) who found common ground on issues of freedom of speech, women's liberation, and the abolition of the death penalty (pp. 19–20). Another example is the presentation of Jesus Christ by anarchists as a champion of the oppressed, killed by the “aristocratic bourgeoisie” and dishonoured by Catholicism (p. 41). Anarchists even flirted briefly with “spiritism,” a growing force in Latin America, but rejected its stress on class conciliation and its irrationalism (p. 99).

The debate over insurrectionism versus mass anarchism that split movements in France, Italy, and the United States hardly featured in Puerto Rico, where syndicalism was always central. Local anarchists helped launch the unions in the 1890s, and remained active in labour for decades, often with leadership roles in local sections of unions (pp. 2, 17, 19). If syndicalism never reached the leading position it enjoyed in unions in France, Mexico, or Cuba, anarchists were always an important presence in the labour press and in the Regional Federation of Workers (FRT, formed 1898), and the Free Federation of Workers (FLT, 1899). While Marxist writings were almost unknown in the early labour press, anarchist materials were commonplace (pp. 40, 44). The anarchists opposed the FLT's growing involvement in state elections, and when the FLT launched a Socialist Party in 1915, anarchists continued to press for a distinct revolutionary agenda, not just within the unions but also within the new party (pp. 60–66, 139).

Whereas US involvement in much of Latin America was informal and economic, it was direct in Puerto Rico, which (like Cuba) passed from Spanish to direct American rule in 1898 (pp. 6–7). While Cuba gained limited independence in 1902, Puerto Rico became an American territory, a reality with a deep impact on labour and left politics.

This meant, on the one hand, continued exposure to US political currents. The FRT leadership admired the formal ideals of the United States, not unlike many IWPA militants, and welcomed “Americanisation” of labour law rooted in Spanish colonialism (pp. 35–36). The early FLT was briefly linked to the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) in the United States, which would later articulate a syndicalist position (pp. 39, 58). In 1900, Iglesias even affiliated the FLT to the moderate American Federation of Labour — the *beête noire* of IWPA and IWW syndicalists. Puerto Rican anarchists like Ramón Romero Rosa opposed the merger, but refused to leave the FLT; they continued to push for their own programme *within* the orthodox unions (pp. 47–55, 66–71).

But the close connections also meant that the Puerto Rican movement was subject to joint United States–Puerto Rican efforts to suppress anarchists, and was caught up in the massive (American) Red Scare of 1919–1921, it therefore suffered severe repression as did the American IWW and other leftists (pp. 4, 21). The movement declined sharply in the 1920s, with substantial

haemorrhaging to the Socialist Party and the nationalists, although a few individuals and groups remained active in the decades that followed (pp. 21, 173–79). Anarchists were active in the independence movement, including the Puerto Rican Anti-Imperialist League in the late 1920s (p. 175), the Puerto Rican Proindependence Party in the early 1970s (p. 177), and specifically anarchist groups emerged in 1972 (p. 176), and, more substantially, from 2009 (p. 178).

The US link also meant that the anarchists continually engaged with a colonial situation. Anti-imperialism was, as indicated earlier, central to anarchism everywhere. Anarchists in Puerto Rico, as elsewhere, opposed imperial expansion — in this case by the United States (p. xvii). This was linked to the case against using parliament, by pointing out that the United States would never tolerate radical legislation by the island's national assembly (pp. 46–47, 75). They rejected domination by Spain and the United States, and criticized the North Americans' power in Latin America (pp. 21, 47, 61–66, 151–58).

The thornier debates for the movement were not about whether to be anti-imperialist, but, rather, about *how* independence struggles related to the anarchist project. In unpacking the debates, Shaffer goes a long way in overturning erroneous versions of anarchism's history that ignore its anti-imperialism, and to (implicitly) addressing Marxist charges that the pre-Leninist left lacked an anti-imperialist programme.

The anarchists never came to a unanimous position, or “a consistent anarchist line on independence” (p. 153). As elsewhere, the movement was divided on this issue: some saw independence struggles as futile, on the grounds that they would simply mean the replacement of a foreign exploiting elite with a local one; others favoured independent statehood as a step forward, with revolution deferred to a vague future; and others favoured transforming the struggle for independence into the anarchist revolution.<sup>22</sup>

A few anarchists, such as Ángel Dieppa, took the first (purist) line by arguing that independence was a “fruitless” goal, since it would inevitably be captured by the elite (p. 149). The Cuban experience led some to see independence as “bourgeois and misguided” (pp. 18, 155): anarchists played a major role in the Cuban war of independence only to find themselves under the jack-boots of the local elite allied to United States interests. Others favoured peaceful reforms toward a more autonomous Puerto Rican state, with revolution deferred (pp. 32–33). And, finally, a substantial bloc favoured a “revolutionary” rather than a “straightforward” (p. 132) struggle for independence.

This last group stressed the limitations of “bourgeois” independence (p. 142) where flags changed and the elite became national, but in which exploitation, hierarchy and oppression remained intact. Amelio Morazin and the *El Comunista* insisted, for example, that “every country had the right to self-determination,” adding that “independence and a workers revolution in a non-advanced capitalist society was possible” (p. 154). Since “only through revolution could true independence emerge,” they wanted a more radical independence struggle (pp. 150, 153). Alfonso Torres took a pro-independence line, but he was similarly “not for bourgeois independence but as part of a larger struggle” (p. 150). Shaffer indicates that these views were rooted in Bakunin's extensive work on the national and colonial questions (pp. 16–18), although he does not, regrettably, elaborate much on this point. Nevertheless, the book is rigorously researched, well constructed and deeply valuable — both in its own right and as part of a larger project to

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<sup>22</sup> See van der Walt and Hirsch, “Rethinking Anarchism and Syndicalism,”

recover more nuanced left histories and to revise the historiography of anarchism, both globally and in the colonial and postcolonial world specifically.

Shaffer also picks up on the role of anarchist and syndicalist women, including their role in organizing a major labour conference in Cuba in 1912 and in the anarchist schools on that island (pp. 100–01). In Puerto Rico, key anarchist women included Dominica González, Paca Escabián and of course, Luisa Capetillo, who is today probably the most widely-remembered of the island’s anarchists (pp. 110–13). Unlike the other books, close attention is paid to how the movement thought through the oppression of women. Anarchists, men as well as women, openly rejected a social order in which women could be subjugated in the home by husbands who acted as “little czars,” driven into prostitution, molested in factories, and subjected to *machismo* and sexual double standards (pp. 110–18). The ideal society would have “free unions” based on love, not religious or cultural dogma, or financial necessity; equal education for boys and girls; recognition that female sexuality was natural and good; extensive maternity bene-fits; and an end to household conflicts arising from miserable conditions.

#### IV.

Anarchism and syndicalism are beginning to take their rightful place in left and labour history. This is a very welcome academic development; the richness of its ideas and organizational forms, and the histories of the (transnational) movements in which they were developed, could hold important possibilities for those looking for answers today. Anarchism’s resurgence in the recent epoch of globalization is surely a driving force for the renewed interest. Given the massive influence commanded by the movement in an earlier period of “first” globalization<sup>23</sup> — details of which have been well captured in the four volumes reviewed here — it is clear that the movement comes replete with a “repertoire of action” that is of great contemporary relevance.

All four volumes reviewed are also testimony to the importance of methodological transnationalism (or conversely, the shortcomings of studies that do not fully appreciate the paradigm’s merits). For Bantman, the transnational lens enabled a rethinking of the long held belief in the historical novelty of “French” syndicalism. Di Paola’s work demonstrated the centrality of London as a formative influence over Italian anarchism, as a key site in driving the shift from insurrectionism to mass anarchism, and in the growing influence of syndicalism, of which Malatesta was a key proponent. Schaffer, too, used the transnational approach, producing a work of history that overturns large swathes of dominant thinking about anarchism — thinking that too often ignores the central place of race, colonialism, national liberation, and independence in its praxis. Messer-Kruse, whose aim does not lie primarily in resurrecting the world of United States anarchists, or in tracing its formation by means of exchanges across national borders, uncovers interesting materials, for example, about the links forged by United States anarchists and Irish nationalists fighting for independence from Britain.

Although more work of this calibre is needed to address the glaring deficiencies in our historical knowledge of the inner workings of the historical transnational anarchist movement, the monographs featured here — despite our criticisms — are all crucial contributions to a collective project currently underway that one day might adequately piece together a much fuller picture.

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<sup>23</sup> P. Bonner, J. Hyslop, and L. van der Walt, “Rethinking Worlds of Labour: Southern African Labour History in International Context,” *African Studies*, 66, nos. 2–3 (2007), pp. 137–67.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

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Sian Byrne and Lucien van der Walt

Worlds of Western Anarchism and Syndicalism

Class Struggle, Transnationalism, Violence and Anti-imperialism, 1870s–1940s

2015

Retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021 from [lucienvanderwalt.com](http://lucienvanderwalt.com)

Published in *Canadian Journal of History* / *Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, volume 50, number 1,  
pp. 98–123.

**[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)**