

Subversive Anarchy Past and Present

A brief look at Illegalist, individualist and nihilist anarchy

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“Revolution is aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and set no glittering hopes on “institutions.”
– Max Stirner

Don't follow me... I'm not leading you... Don't walk ahead of me... I'll not follow you... Carve your own path... Become yourself...” – Conspiracy Cells of Fire, Imprisoned Members Cell

“I know that there will be an end to this fight between the formidable arsenal of the State and me. I know that I will be vanquished, I will be the weaker, but I hope I can make you pay dearly for the victory.” – Octave Garnier

On the this day over 100 years ago on the 21st of April, 1913, Illegalist and Individualist anarchist Raymond Callemin was executed by guillotine by order of the French state. On the anniversary of his execution I write this in memory of all those that have fallen or been jailed in the social war against society.

The illegalist current is an offshoot of individualist anarchism. Refusing to be exploited, forced to work for some rich tyrant, instead the illegalist chooses to rob them. It's an anti-work ethic for individual autonomy to be realized in real life right away through Individual expropriation also known as individual reclamation.

Individual reclamation gained notoriety in France in the last decades of the 19th and early 20th century and gave birth to what was to become known as illegalism. Proponents of individual reclamation were anarchists such as Clement Duval and Marius Jacob. Marius Jacob stole to fund himself as well as the anarchist movement and other causes. This is the main factor that separates illegalism from individual reclamation, the illegalists stole solely for themselves. Although some Individual illegalists did fund individualist anarchist newspapers from the proceeds of their expropriations and gave money to comrades that were in need.

The illegalists, many of whom, inspired by Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche were of the persuasion of why should they have to wait on the passive herd of exploited and poor classes to rise up and expropriate the rich? The poor seemed quite content with the conditions they inhabited. Why should the illegalists have to wait on the exploited workers to become enlightened

with a revolutionary consciousness? Why should they have to continue to live a life of being exploited and worked to death while they wait for the future social revolution that may not ever happen? The illegalist anarchists had no faith in the workers struggle, so decided to fight back and rob the wealthy, it was a purely egoist endeavor.

Stirner would have called them “conscious egoists”, expropriating their lives back for themselves, not asking for permission to exist. They refused to be slaves to bosses and the state. The illegalists chose to steal through conscious revolt against society.

The illegalist anarchists robbed, shot, stabbed, counterfeited money and committed the odd bit of arson across Europe, but predominantly in France, Belgium, and Italy. There were gun battles and shootouts with cops. Long jail sentences and executions.

One such group of illegalist anarchists were to become immortalized as “The Bonnot Gang”.

Raymond Callemin was born in Belgium, a former socialist who then became an anarchist after becoming disillusioned with the reformism of the Belgian Socialist Party. Having become influenced by anarchism, Raymond left the Socialist Party with Victor Serge and Jean De Boe who were equally disillusioned with socialist electoral politics. Together they published an individualist anarchist newspaper “Le Revolte” which was totally hostile to unions and political parties, and was for “permanent insurrection against the bourgeoisie”.

Octave Garnier on the run from France, fled to Belgium to avoid being conscripted to the army. He had already committed several expropriations on the rich via burglaries and had spent time in jail. He first started out in syndicalism but didn’t take long before developing a disgust with the union leaders being akin to the bosses using and manipulating workers for their own ends. He then joined the ranks of the anarchists. Not being able to work in the profession of his choice, having to work menial jobs and forced into being a wage slave in jobs he did not even want in order to live, he became a committed illegalist.

The four anarchists were in their early 20’s, they found each other through the anarchist circles in Belgium and shared a mutual hatred for the rich and their system of exploitation. Raymond and Octave carried out many burglaries together and tried their hand at counterfeiting coins.

Victor Serge writing articles for Le Revolte brought a lot of attention on himself from the Belgium state. Since he was a refugee in Belgium from childhood it made it easier for the Belgian state to get rid of him. He was expelled from Belgium as a dangerous subversive. He left for France and set up a libertarian commune with other anarchists. Not long after, Octave Garnier having warrants out for his arrest, followed Victor to France, with Raymond.

In France they met with Jules Bonnot who was on the run. Jules was in his early 30’s, an ex soldier and a committed illegalist anarchist. The police were looking for him for a murder, which was really an accidental shooting of a comrade. Jules having a lot of experience carrying out expropriation and being quite successful, offered Octave and Raymond a proposition to carry out a big job together. The pair were only happy to accept Jules’s offer, being fed up not making as much as they’d like to from the burglaries and counter fitting, risking a lot while not getting much back in return.

The three along with another anarchist, Eugène Dieudonné, came up with a plan to rob a bank messenger who would be delivering money. They started by robbing a high powered car from a rich neighborhood on the outskirts of Paris. Jules learned how to drive in the army so he’d be the getaway driver. Raymond, Octave, and Eugene would rob the bank messenger. And so on 21st of December 1911 in broad daylight they robbed the messenger. They held up the messenger’s security guard as the pair were leaving the bank. Octave demanded the messenger to hand over

the briefcase. Raymond grabbed it and attempted to make his way for the getaway car. But the messenger wouldn't let go of the case. Octave shot him twice in the chest (the messenger was badly wounded but did not die). They made their getaway speeding through the streets of Paris in what was one of the best model cars of the time. It was the very first time a car was used in an armed robbery in France, because of that the media nicknamed them the "auto bandits".

From the robbery they made 5,000 francs which they weren't happy with. They expected to have expropriated much more. A few days after the robbery of the bank messenger they broke into a gun shop stealing many guns including high powered rifles. Not long after, on the 2nd of January 1912, they broke into the home of a rich bourgeois, killing him and his maid in the process. They got away with 30,000 francs from this burglary. They soon fled to Belgium carrying out more robberies and shot 3 cop along their way. Then back to Paris to rob another bank, but this time they would hold up the bank. While doing the robbery they shot 3 bank clerks. After the robbery a bounty of 700,000 francs was put on the anarchists heads, the Société Générale bank they robbed put another 100,000 francs on their heads.

There is a deep nihilism, egoism, and anti-reformism within illegalist praxis with its continuity today with groups like the Conspiracy Cells of Fire, the Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front and individuals such as the Chilean Anarcho-nihilists Sebastian Oversluij who was shot dead while expropriating a bank, and Mauricio Morales who was killed when the bomb he was transporting in his backpack detonated prematurely.

Modern day insurrectionary anarchism also has a direct lineage with this anarchist history. Many of the main components of ideas and praxis that comprise illegalism and individual reclamation (which includes propaganda of the deed, which is individual direct action against the bourgeois class, their property and their flunkies, ie pigs, screws and judges, in the hope the action will inspire others to follow suit; anti-organisational in the form of individual insurrection, affinity groups and informal organisation; and an extreme disliking of the left and its tactics of reformism) are also found in the different strands of insurrectionary anarchism today.

What was branded the "Bonnot Gang" by the media and the pigs was an affinity group. Jules Bonnot was not a leader of the group, there were none. The individuals that comprised the different affinity groups that carried out the so called crimes that were branded with the name the "Bonnot Gang" were simply individuals with mutual aims that came together to carry out actions. The French state used the name to brand any anarchist they pleased with association to any of the so called crimes.

On the 30th of March 1912 André Soudy (an anarchist who took part in some of the robberies of the group) was caught by police. A few days later, another anarchist involved with some of the robberies, Édouard Carouy was arrested. On the 7th of April, Raymond Callemin. By the end of April, 28 anarchists had been arrested in connection with the "Bonnot Gang".

On April 28 police discovered the location where Jules Bonnot was hiding in Paris. 500 armed police surrounded the house. Jules refused to give himself up, a shoot out commenced. After hours of exchanging shots, the police detonate a bomb at the front of the house. When the police stormed the house they discovered Jules rolled up in a mattress, he was still firing shots at them. He was shot in the head and died later from his injuries in hospital.

On the 14th of May police discovered the location of Octave Garnier and Rene Valet (another member of the group). 300 cops and 800 soldiers surrounded the building. Like Bonnot the pair also refused to be arrested. The siege lasted hours, the police eventually detonated a bomb and

blew part of the house up killing Octave. Rene badly injured was still firing off shots, he died not long after.

A year later on the 3rd of February 1913 Raymond Callemin, as well as many other anarchists including Victor Serge were put on trial by the French state for their alleged parts in the “Bonnot Gang”. Although Raymond did carry out many robberies and shot dead a bank clerk, many others who were put on trial had no part whatsoever in any of the so-called crimes that were attributed to the “Bonnot Gang”. The French state was thirsty for revenge and so after it gunned them down and blew them up; the state executed, locked up and exiled many anarchists. On the 21st of April, 1913, Raymond Callemin, Étienne Monier and André Soudy were executed by guillotine . Many of their co-accused were sentenced to life and hard labour in French colonies.

This revenge practice by states is still carried out today with the Scripta Manent trials in Italy which are directly related to the kneecapping of the manager of a nuclear power company by individualist anarchists Alfredo Caspito and Nicola Gia, and other acts of resistance in Italy. And the repressive trials in Russia against anarchists, anti-fascists, and the FSB’s (Federal Security Service) fabricated “Network” organization case. In retaliation Anarcho-communist Mikhail Zhlobitsky last October detonated a bomb in the Russian Federal Security Service Regional Headquarters in Arkhangelsk, dying in the process. And so the FSB carried out another round of repression against anarchists after the bombing, arresting, interrogating and slapping false charges on many anarchists as payback for the attack. On the 22nd of March, 2019 a cell from the Informal Anarchist Federation naming Itself FAI/FRI Revenge Faction – Mikhail Zhlobitsky carried out a grenade attack against the Russian embassy in Athens, Greece as revenge for the repression carried out by the Russian state against anarchists.

Whichever current of anarchism an individual lives, it doesn’t matter, once it is subversive and in conflict with whatever authority that attempts to infringe on an individual’s autonomy. The ongoing war against industrial capitalist society has been raging for over 200 years, which has claimed many lives of anarchists with even more being jailed. The same insurrectional spirit of no mediation and no compromise with authority continues to flow in subversive anarchy today. In solidarity with all anarchists imprisoned and at war with industrial capitalist society.

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