

— ANARCHIST BEGINNINGS —

DIALOGUES
BETWEEN AN
ANARCHIST
AND AN
AUTHORITARIAN

BY HECTOR MOREL

FROM THE PAGES OF

LA RÉVOLTE

1888

with a

RESPONSE TO AN OBJECTION (1889)

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

“At Brussels, at the age of 70 years, has died the compagnon Hector Morel, a brave old man who has been part of all the social revolts. He was the author of the *Dialogues Between an Anarchist and an Authoritarian*.”

The death of Hector Morel was announced, with the briefest of notices, in the pages of *Le Révolte* on July 23, 1891. It’s a fascinating couple of lines, providing an important bit of bibliographical data, since the *Dialogues* were unsigned, but also posing a question that continues to haunt me a bit: *What else did this brave old man, who was part of all of the social revolts, write?*

The question might not even arise, of course, if we didn’t already have a partial answer. In June 1892, *Le Révolte* began the serial republication of an 1862 work, *Les Nationalités considérées au point de vue de la liberté et de l’autonomie individuelle*, by “un prolétaire,” which had originally appeared, unsigned, in the Belgian newspaper *Le Prolétaire*. This time, their author was identified as Hector Morel. Morel himself also mentioned other writings in the *Le Prolétaire*, in a context that suggest — to me, at least — contributions beyond a series of letters documenting a conflict in the French exile community. But most of the contribution to the paper were unsigned.

I translated *Nationalities Considered from the Point of View of Liberty and Individual Autonomy* back in October 2009. At that time, the thing that struck me was just how good it was. I felt very much the same about the *Dialogues Between an Anarchist and an Authoritarian* when I encountered them and it has really only been a matter of chance that I haven’t got around to translating before now. It seems clear from the few mentions of Morel in the anarchist literature that others have been impressed as well, despite the real obscurity that still surrounds him, and we shouldn’t be surprised, as the works we can identify reveal a very interesting anarchist thinker. It is simply hard to believe, given the apparent knowledge of anarchist theory displayed in these two known works, that they amount to the *complete works*.

Perhaps more research will turn up more material. *Le Prolétaire* is a fascinating paper. When I recently started to go through it page by page, I was equal parts amused and annoyed to find that “Plus du gouvernement!” — the essay I just recently tracked down and translated, after a rather long search — was among the articles reprinted in its pages, along with material from Joseph Déjacque’s *Le Libéraire*. I had been in possession of the Benjamin Colin article, it turned out, for quite a number of years, without being aware of it. I also found a list of donors to the fund to support *Le Libéraire* in a period of need: Morel and a Mme. Morel both contributed to support Déjacque. And there is a great deal of material there that seems at least anarchist-adjacent, waiting for another chunk of free time to be sifted.

The next stage is probably a revision of these rather tentative translations. There are peculiarities of style and diction that may provide some clues useful in identifying other contributions by Morel — but which, for now, have posed translation problems that I don’t want to rush through. Fortunately, they are mostly related to style. The content of the *Dialogues* seems quite clear and I think readers with an interest in the development of anarchist ideas will find this example of more-or-less “anti-organizationalist” anarchist communism intriguing. So, while I hope to return to this material sooner, rather than later, I feel comfortable sharing it as-is. — SHAWN.

FIRST DIALOGUE: UNION

(Dialogue between an anarchist and an authoritarian)

The Anarchist. — So be it. Let's speak no more of it. You maintain your way of seeing things and I'll maintain mine. I'm so tired of all your authoritarian, unionist patter, all your song and dance about elections, reforms, the conquest of public power, etc., etc. It is nauseating, in the end, and I have had enough of it. We'll remain good friends, if you wish, but let's not argue any more.

The Socialist. — Ha-ha! You abandon the struggle, give up the discussion. And about time! That is what is known as recognizing your helplessness. I'm not surprised. I have already known the anarchists for a long time, and I know what they're worth. They are people who make a great racket, who shout very loud, criticize everything indiscriminately, and when they have spoken of propaganda by deed, of picrate, of dynamite, they have said it all. But of ideas, of principles, nothing. And if they find themselves, by chance, in the presence of someone who, without letting themselves be intimidated by the anarchists' loquacity, knows how to back them into a corner, then — oh! no way! nothing doing! — these gentlemen abandon the discussion. It is very convenient, and yet, it is said, from the shock of discussion springs the truth.

The Anarchist. — Yes, I know it. Discussion, whether oral or written, is the most powerful vehicle for ideas, the most dynamic means of propaganda, as well as the most effective. So, far from fleeing from it, I am, on the contrary, very much its partisan.

The Socialist. — Why then won't you continue with me?

The Anarchist. — Do you think that by discussion I mean all the twaddle that you reel off every day, over and over again? When one wishes to discuss, my friend, one begins by producing some ideas, some principles, some views. One develops them, asserts them and demonstrates their superiority. So, for example, you are an authoritarian socialist, while I am an anarchist. Very well, let us examine, if you like, but seriously and as suits free men, these two points regarding the revolutionary question. Present to me the future social order as you imagine it, explain its function and benefits, tell me how the proletariat could, by means of its application, free himself from all oppression, from all despotism, from all exploitation and finally establish the reign of justice and equality. And it will tell you, in my turn, how I envision these things from the anarchist point of view. Under these conditions, I am prepared to take up our chat once again. Is that acceptable?

The Socialist. — Absolutely, although I should note that I have already explained myself on these subject eight times in our conversations.

The Anarchist. — No, no. I protest. You have never explained anything at all. You constantly speak of the republic, of socialism, of universal suffrage, but of the application, of organization, you have not said a word. If I speak to you again of anarchy, you should respond seriously, if you would refute me by plausible reasoning, if, in a word, if you should try to show me that I might have been in error. But, no, you don't want to hear anything, you get angry, you go and find me, as objections, a bunch of nonsense and commonplaces, which have long been the basis of all bourgeois blaguocracy: Anarchy is chaos; anarchy is disorder; anarchy is the negation of all society. And then again: M. Chose said it, M. Machin affirms it: without government, without authority, without laws, no social order is possible, and therefore, no rights, no justice, no liberty. There you have it, my friend, the absurdities that you oppose to me; that's what you call discussing.

The Socialist. — Yes, I get carried away, and in that I am wrong. But do you think that one can remain calm and listen calmly on questions that make no sense and are as contrary to logic as to sound reason? With its negation of all regulation, instead of leading us to liberty, anarchy would lead us directly back to barbarism. For how can one conceive of a society without government, composed of individuals with no rules other than their own pleasure, no laws other than their will, where each person could answer to anyone who complained about their actions: "I do what I please!" Where would the social guarantees be in this case? What brake can be put on arbitrariness? If this is not a savage state, what name should we give it?

The Anarchist. — And you call that being serious! You claim that these are reasons worthy of a revolutionary socialist? Come on! This is pure chatter, gossip from the door, good at best for gentlemen radicals, those political gougers who only know how to mark time, and whose "get you out of here so I can get in" constitutes the whole of revolutionary science. But for the rest of us, this outdated verbiage must no longer be in season. We must place ourselves above these cheap politicians and treat the question from its true point of view: the complete emancipation of the human being. Isn't that also your opinion?

The Socialist. — Absolutely.

The Anarchist. — So, let's start again. Let's see if you have reasons to believe that liberty and authority can go together. Can you not admit that I may also have some reasons to affirm that these two terms are antipathetic and that they negate each other?

The Socialist. — I do not deny it.

The Anarchist. — Therefore, before launching your great phrases of barbarians, savages, etc., would it not be better to examine, reason, seek to enlighten each other, without passion and without bias? For, in these kinds of courteous jousts, there is, there can be neither vanquished nor victor. We seek the truth and whatever the result, the advantage is equal to both sides.

The Socialist. — Without a doubt. Only I will point out to you that it is you who wanted to break off our daily chats. And that because I say things as I think them, and I reject with all my strength a doctrine that I consider fatal and contrary to the interests of the cause that we serve.

The Anarchist. — What do you know about it? Have you studied it? Do you even know the first word? Well, if I were to ask you this simple question — What is anarchy? — could you answer in a way that is, I will not say peremptory, but even plausible?

The Socialist. — I have already answered it. I told you and I repeat it to you, since you want it, that anarchy is disorder, the negation of all notions of justice, the absence of all social guarantees as of all rights, the reign of the good pleasure of each. It is, in a word, arbitrariness, that is to say the universal spoliation of the weak by the strong erected as a principle.

The Anarchist. — And that is your response! What reasoning! What logic! And you claim to know anarchy! Why don't you say right away — like the purveyors of penal colonies, in their indictments — that anarchists are people of sack and rope! To attribute such aims to someone is to consider them as scoundrels or fools. Who can authorize you to call anarchists that? To do or desire anything, one must have some interest in it. It is elementary. Now, what interest could guide us in this? Our goal, like that of all socialists, is the liberation of humanity. Some pursue it by authoritarian means, we pursue it by libertarian means. That is the difference. Is there any reason to cry out against us?

The Socialist. — Without being a madman or a scoundrel, one can be mistaken, believe one is walking on the right path and go the wrong way.

The Anarchist. — Will it be said that we are ambitious, aiming to rise to power? But, from one end of the governmental hierarchy to the other, we make a clean sweep of all authority, all power, all direction. Anarchy admits only free and equal citizens, individual autonomy finally.

The Socialist. — This is precisely what condemns you, for it is pursuing a chimerical aim.

The Anarchist. — So don't talk nonsense, and let me continue. Will we be accused of being mean, fierce, bloodthirsty; of wanting to fight for the sole satisfaction of seeing blood flow, of seeing men cut each other's throats? But in our eyes no one is unaware of it — human life is a sacred thing, and at the cost of our own blood, we would like to be able to stop the slightest effusion. Let us establish, for example, the reign of justice, liberty and equality — but absolute, of course — and immediately the use of force ceasing to be a social necessity, we disarm, we abandon the fight and we become conservatives.

The Socialist. — The anarchists, conservatives! Ha! That's a good one!

The Anarchist. — Why not, if our dream were realized, if liberty were the exclusive arbiter of human societies? But as long as this odious world of capitalists, proprietors, exploiters of every shade and every kind lasts, as long as we hear the entrails of the workers crying out with hunger before the bellies of the sated and stuffed bourgeois, ho! we swear, yes, with all our strength, with all our will, with all our energies, not for a moment will we cease to arouse in the scapegoats the treasures of hatred, anger and vengeance with which our hearts overflow; we will push them relentlessly, without respite or rest, to a vengeful, implacable, just revolution. And we will not cease our call to struggle, our incitement to violence, until the old world has breathed its last, when the eternally exploited have finally won their place in the sun, and justice reigns without hindrance, over a new world, all resplendent with freedom and happiness. If this is to be fierce, ferocious, bloodthirsty, we will accept these epithets with joy, and we will even strive to do everything to always deserve them.

The Socialist. — As for me, I accuse neither your intentions nor the motive that makes you act. But what I accuse you of, what I reproach you with above all, is devising, disorganizing, scattering our forces, while the revolution is at our doors and union is so necessary for us, so indispensable.

The Anarchist. — This is the great hobby horse of the authoritarians: "The anarchists divide, disintegrate our forces." If you had to give even the slightest explanation on this subject, your embarrassment would be great. Divide your forces! But, wretch, look around you: it is your way of doing things that creates division and dispersion everywhere. It is your steering committees, your disciplines, your programs — minimum or maximum — that disorganize everything, men and things, and arouse rivalries and hatreds.

The Socialist. — What! Every day we do the impossible to group together all the nuances of the popular party and we would be agents of division?

The Anarchist. — Yes, with all due respect. To convince yourself of this, it is enough to consider the results that you obtain. Your union is like the work of the Danaïdes, the more you do, the less we see.

The Socialist. — That is a completely gratuitous supposition that nothing justifies.

The Anarchist. — Do you think so? Well, count how many of these messes we have today, where the unionist mixture is stirred and re-stirred every day, and tell me where you are with your famous party unity, which is praised so much and so often announced. So many shops, so many surprise boxes, where people devour each other in the name of fraternity. And if you continue to unionize in this way, I do not despair of seeing your groups and their personnel reach such a fragmentation that, soon, there will be no more vestige of them.

The Socialist. — There will be no more vestige of them! That is soon said, but to demonstrate it is another thing, and I would be obliged if you would be willing to make this demonstration to me. I would be curious to know, for example, how a party as strongly organized, as well disciplined — composed of free citizens conscious of their actions — as the workers' party could dissolve and fall to pieces, as you say.

The Anarchist. — You wish to group individuals, not according to their tendencies, but by means of a discipline to which you wish them to submit, they who are already at war with governmental discipline. Admitting that, in a spirit of conciliation and believing that this much-advocated union is necessary, they have allowed themselves to accept your discipline for a moment, but when it is a question of making each one's ideas triumph, or of applying his way of seeing, it is clear that your union will at once be transformed into the most complete disunion. Time will be wasted in useless discussions, in shouting, in recriminations, and nothing will be done. Given the diversity of opinions that form the Socialist party, where the divergences of ideas are to the point that the different schools are inevitably led to make war on each other, simply by the differences in the object that they pursue, how can you ever hope to bring them together to fight? One must be absolutely mad to hope that one will succeed in bringing those who fight for the destruction of authority to ally themselves with those who dream only of seizing it; to confuse in their ranks those who advocate abstention and those who always have a candidate to place. Come on, seriously, do you believe that these are only simple divergences of detail that do not need to be dealt with, or do you believe that they are serious enough to affirm that they have their reasons for being and can only disappear on condition that one of the two camps abandons its tactics to rally to that employed by the dissidents? And note well that I am not speaking to you any more about all the causes of division that your hierarchical organization necessarily contains within itself and which are so many seeds of destruction among those who claim to have the same ideas and are causes of dissensions even more profound than the differences of schools. It is disappointed ambition, wounded personal pride that is at stake, and these are much more irritating. Believe me, my old friend, it is only those who have no knowledge of ideas, or only the ambition to bend others under their domination who can preach union and believe that it is possible otherwise than by a perfect communion of the ideas and the means to be used to arrive at the same goal.

The Socialist. — Yes, I understand what you are saying, I understand the accuracy of your deductions. But nothing proves that they are in accordance with the logic of the facts and that things must happen as you say. In founding the workers' party, we did not act blindly, and nothing has yet come to show that we were on the wrong track. The anarchists say so, it is true, but who, between them and us, is right?

The Anarchist. — There is none so deaf as he who will not hear, none so blind as he who will not see. Come, reread your history of the workers' party, recall all the splits that have occurred there, caused by nothing but questions of personal ambition, count the fractions into which it has

subdivided because each wanted to be its pontiff, and you will tell me if these are affirmations. And then, come, let us reason a little. Man is by his nature a free and independent being, rebellious to all command as to all obedience, he never submits except under duress. His intelligence, in a constant work of research, leads him to evolve constantly in continual improvement, so we often see him condemn the next day what he had freely acclaimed the day before. All this is incontestable.

The Socialist. — Very well. But this is not the demonstration requested.

The Anarchist. — Wait! So to persist, as has been done up to now, in wanting to pen it, regiment it and discipline it in some agglomeration, is to act against its nature; it is to condemn it to roll endlessly the eternal and fateful rock of Sisyphus; it is, in a word, to attempt the impossible. Hence this multitude of rival and enemy groups in the socialist party. Hence also in each of these groups these continual excommunications. And you ask how the crumbling and dissolution are possible? It is the opposite that should astonish you. And then, do you not see to what new and terrible disappointments your centralist stubbornness would still lead us? But, fortunately, the anarchists are there to put a good order to it.

The Socialist. — What, you will put a good order to it! What do you mean by that? You do not, I suppose, presume to set yourselves up as censors, to want to reprimand us? That would be too presumptuous.

The Anarchist. — The anarchists do not presume to censor, or to reprimand anything or anyone. We preach, we prepare minds for revolution, that is all. We throw handfuls of revolutionary seed into that fertile ground called the populace, the vile multitude, convinced that it will germinate there, that it will bear fruit there in full freedom. Only, instead of amusing ourselves with your unitary swings, we urge the proletarians to break with the old routine, to reject all organization, all centralization, and to group themselves henceforth only around the anarchist idea, which is the incarnation of the revolution. And we affirm that there, and there alone, will be realized the union of collective forces, as well as individual wills and initiatives, converging toward the same goal.

The Socialist. — The grouping around the idea, so be it. It would still be necessary to be able to demonstrate its possibility.

The Anarchist. — That is an easy thing. The idea does not know the law of distances. Every individual, therefore — wherever he may be and wherever he comes from — who professes the libertarian ideal is, by the very fact, our co-associate, our companion in struggle. He is an integral part of this vast confederation of free men spread throughout the entire world, whose bond of cohesion, whose rallying point is the social revolution, wherever it may explode. Is that clear enough?

The Socialist. — I do not say the contrary. But this seems to me a little platonic and it is action that is in question.

The Anarchist. — To be effective, the revolution must first be made in minds. This is the work of propaganda. Now, seeing its results, one can affirm with all certainty that anarchist propaganda is action first and foremost. It is the evolution preceding the struggle, the seed from which the harvest must come. Everything consists in making sure that the sowing is good.

The Socialist. — Everything in its time. I understand.

The Anarchist. — When these truths, well understood, have penetrated the understanding of the masses, true union will be an accomplished fact. Then comes the psychological moment, when the great ringing makes its terrible commotion heard, and we will see if, in order to respond to its call, it is necessary to be regimented and to have leaders. “You know where the enemy is,” said Babeuf, “march there by all the roads, by all the exits.”

The Socialist. — All roads, all exits! But in these conditions, there is no possible direction!

The Anarchist. — Of course. But it is the true, the only revolutionary strategy. To want to use another is to confuse street warfare with open-field warfare, which is absurd. This is what we preach, what we want to make understood and what the people already understand perfectly. This is what makes our strength.

The Socialist. — Your strength! What does it consist of, how many of you are there?

The Anarchist. — Open your eyes and you will know. You will see that everyone that is a conscious socialist, a convinced revolutionary is already with us. So — despite the calumnies and persecutions that assail us from all sides — we have become legion, from the few dozen that we were until recently. And today, anarchy is a power. Popularized among the masses, spread in profusion, it forms a bundle all the more formidable, all the more imposing as it extends, ramifies everywhere and is graspable nowhere.

The Socialist. — Nowhere graspable! What do you mean by that?

The Anarchist. — I mean that the anarchist grouping is made in such a way that it escapes all attack, that it can defy the blows of the enemy. Yes, one can do whatever they want, we can be pursued, we can be struck individually (and you know if we deprive ourselves of it), but one will never succeed in hindering our propaganda, in paralyzing our action.

The Socialist. — I recognize that this is a good and excellent method, but is it really and usefully practicable?

The Anarchist. — The results obtained attest to the urgency of its practicability and clearly demonstrate its superiority over your programs, your regulations and your disciplines. For, with this mode of grouping, the path is sure and the triumph certain. Now, without doubt, the struggle will be long, fierce, terrible, and not all will see the promised land. More than one of us will fall on the path before we have seen the dawn of the great day break on the horizon. What does it matter! The cause we serve is beautiful enough, the goal to be reached seductive enough, for us not to haggle over the price. And then: anarchist blood, anarchist seed.

The Socialist. — To that I have nothing to answer, I applaud it without reserve.

THE REVOLUTION

(Second dialogue)

The Anarchist. — Tonight we are discussing the revolution, aren't we? But before we begin, I would like to have your opinion on our last talk. You say that you have thought about it?

The Socialist. — Yes, I have thought about it a lot, and my ideas, on certain points, have, I confess, changed considerably. Thus, for example, I would not be far from admitting that disciplines and programs offer more disadvantages than advantages for our party, in that they immobilize intelligence and neutralize individual initiatives which — I do not hesitate to recognize with you — are the very essence of revolutionary socialism. But what I cannot concede to you, what I would not admit, is the suppression of all organization, of all centralization.

The Anarchist. — Yet logic and common sense lead you there quite naturally.

The Socialist. — In the period of propaganda, in times of proselytism, I would willingly grant it to you. I would even accept your free and spontaneous grouping around the idea. But in times of revolution, when it is a question of material action, that is to say, of the clash of popular and governmental forces, I cannot admit it. Because, what we need in this case is a strong centralization, an energetic direction either to lead the movement, or to organize the triumph.

The Anarchist. — In revolution, have the parties ever organized, or directed, anything? To paralyze, neutralize the popular energy and confiscate the triumph for their own profit, well and good!

The Socialist. — With the workers' party, these dangers are no longer to be feared. For that we are too well and too strongly organized. We have regional federations where all questions of the future are worked out, discussed and elucidated, and a national committee centralizing and directing all our forces. Now, this committee, chosen by us, is and can only be the agent, the servant of the party. If therefore we were to prune its programs and disciplines, the libertarian government dreamed of by the anarchists would, it seems to me, be resolved. Isn't that your opinion?

The Anarchist. — No, a thousand times no, that is not my opinion. Suppress and prune everything you want. As long as you are constituted as a distinct and defined party, as long as your federations, your organizations, your national committees or other committees exist, you will continue to wade through the authoritarian quagmire and to undergo — whether you like it or not — the regulations, the programs and the disciplines. This centralist craze is colossal in its stupidity and one would really say that you are afraid of lacking masters. A simple question, however: What if, at the beginning of a decisive action, your famous committee were to make a mistake, too? What if it were to take the wrong path, as you said the other day when speaking of the anarchists?

The Socialist. — That is hardly likely. Being the direct emanation of the workers' party, it is from it that it draws its strength and authority. But supposing — which I repeat is not admissible — that it could fail, err or betray. It would be immediately broken and replaced. Nothing to fear on that side. You see, our precautions and our guarantees are well taken.

The Anarchist. — Naturally. Betrayed by one, you hasten to create another. O, naivety of naiveties! But, unfortunately, what use are the lessons of the past? The whole of history is there, crying out to us: Wherever man can abuse, he will abuse. And since 89, all our revolutions, all our changes of governments and institutions have only justified and corroborated this historical adage.

Everywhere in all times, among all peoples, we have seen the same facts reproduced, results of the same causes. And you imagine that your committee would be an exception to the rule? Come on, it is too much good nature!

The Socialist. — No. The members of the committee are our comrades, taken from our ranks; they are, so to speak, our other selves. How in these conditions would you want them to even have the thought of betraying our confidence?

The Anarchist. — I don't want anything at all. I'm not saying that these citizens are worse than others. On the contrary, I'm convinced that, left in the libertarian environment, they could be excellent revolutionaries. But, placed in a situation where they could abuse, I maintain that they abused, because that's entirely the nature of man and they are men, damn it!

The Socialist. — Admitting it, what does that prove? The man who abuses is not necessarily a traitor. One can be mistaken, make mistakes.

The Anarchist. — I am willing. But then what need is there to confide in leaders who, if they are not traitors, may only be incapable or ambitious. To err, to abuse or to betray is all one in a revolution. Indeed, when Liberty succumbs, when the blood of the people flows profusely on the pavement of the streets, whether the fault is attributable to the incapacity of a Robespierre or to the treason of a Ledru-Rollin or a Louis Blanc, what does it matter, is the revolution less betrayed, the people less victimized?

The Socialist. — That is obvious.

The Anarchist. — So, once and for all, let us break with this bloody and sterile tradition, abandon these old authoritarian paths where all popular attempts constantly founder, and henceforth take as our motto this adage as profound as it seems trivial: One is never so well served as by oneself.

The Socialist. — Agreed. But are the people in a position to be able to serve themselves? That is the question, and I do not hesitate to answer no.

The Anarchist. — Why not? If the people are capable of choosing their representatives — and you recognize this aptitude in them — they must be at least as capable of being able to lead themselves. That is elementary. In any case, they would not have much to lose by trying it, if we judge by what they have gained up to now by letting themselves be led.

The Socialist. — This confirms the truth of my saying, that the people are not in a position to be able to lead themselves. You recognize it yourself, since you admit their lack of discernment in the choice of their leaders.

The Anarchist. — I did not say to you that the people discerned well or badly. I told you that they must henceforth do without leaders. Therefore, they have no need to make a choice, because all those they could make — good or bad — could only be disastrous to them and betray their interests.

The Socialist. — You do not make any distinction, so you take them all for traitors?

The Anarchist. — No, but for ambitious men. Now, from the ambitious to the traitor the distance is short and easy to cross. We have seen it too often, alas! Any individual who has become a leader — whether by election or otherwise — is thereby lost to the movement. He is no longer a useful citizen, a man of action, a companion in the struggle; no, he is a leader, that is to say a director, a kind of Deus, in short, an aspiring savior. You are no longer his equals, you are "his

men” and at the moment of action all your energies, all your wills will come to clash, to be blunted against his will, for he commands and all leaders are opportunists.

The Socialist. — That is possible. But you forget that in the workers’ party things can no longer happen like this. The citizens who compose it are not an unconscious mass blindly following the leaders. They are free men, conscious of their actions as well as their words. The revolution is not for them this enigmatic sphinx whose meaning is indecipherable. They have studied all its phases and its goal. You will grant me that such men are not as easy to lead or to deceive as you seem to believe, and that, on the part of the leaders, a betrayal or a failure is hardly possible and would in any case be quickly repressed before having had time to produce its fatal consequences.

The Anarchist. — Are you quite sure? The Blanquis, the Flourens and all those who in 1870, during the siege of Paris, had the ear of the people, were also — no one could deny it — citizens who had proven themselves and who could offer all the desirable guarantees. Those who surrounded them, who marched in their wake, were not the first comers either. They too could claim to be conscious of their actions. None of them lacked courage, energy and will. Well, what did they do on that famous day of October 31st which was announced under such brilliant auspices? They were all there at the Hôtel de Ville which they had just invaded, they commanded there as masters; what were they coming there to do? It was or never the hour of supreme resolutions, of prompt and decisive action. A word, an order from the leaders and the Picards and others of the same ilk flew out of the windows (only the dead do not return.) The mass waited, quivering. What were the leaders doing during this time? They came and went, not knowing which way to turn. One pulled this way, the other that way; they amused themselves by parleying with those they were supposed to break. In short, no order was given, no resolution was taken. And this beautiful day, which could have been decisive and from which the salvation of the revolution could certainly have come, ended with a sad and ridiculous *baiser Lamourette*. You know the rest. Look, an event that happened at the town hall of the 13th arrondissement and that was told to me by an eyewitness will prove to you better than a long speech that if the spirit of initiative were developed in individuals, the *endormeurs* would not have a good game in a popular movement.

It was the evening of October 31st; the recall had been sounded and part of the battalions of the 13th were descending on the Hôtel de Ville. Arriving at the Place d’Italie where the town hall of this district is located, they were stopped by the famous Colonel de Montaut, who led the officers to the town hall and there, with a long and drawn-out speech, he managed to shake them and persuade them to return home. While he was speaking, one of the national guards who had followed him to the town hall, took a revolver from his belt and signaled to one of the usual orators of the 13th, at that time, Léo Meillet, I believe, who had great authority over the crowd, whether he had to blow the man’s brains out. Léo Meillet signaled no. The individual holstered his revolver, the battalions dispersed, the Hôtel de Ville was retaken during the night for lack of defenders. Well, if instead of the confidence in leaders that existed at that time, it had been individual initiative that had been advocated and understood, my individual, instead of asking permission, had properly blown the pacifier’s brains out, the others, stimulated by this act of vigor, would have descended on the Hôtel de Ville, and the revolution would have taken place that day and perhaps on other bases.

You will tell me that it could have happened that this act could not have had the consequences that I attribute to it. That is true, if it had had to remain isolated, but if it had been done as a result of ideas put forward, it must be admitted that it would not have remained isolated, that it would have been renewed at all times of the revolution. Judge what a revolution would be like if made on these bases and if our tactics are not better than those of centralization?

The Socialist. — Oh! yes, I know. But why infer from this that it will always and inevitably be thus. These grave errors of the past must serve as a lesson for the future.

The Anarchist. — Alas! I would like to share your illusion, but is it possible? Have we not seen, in fact, the idiotic Commune begin again the next month the same errors, and succumb under the weight of the same errors? And yet did an insurrectional power ever have in its hands such a force and such powerful means of action? And what momentum, what enthusiasm in the masses! But the authoritarian virus was there.

The Socialist. — All this is unfortunately only too true, I must admit.

The Anarchist. — You see what the lessons of the past are for. Revolutions are made, and rivers of blood are spent in pure loss. And it is always to be started again. And in fact, this is understandable. As long as you follow this fatal path, you will inevitably arrive at the same results. It is however high time that this should end and that we finally enter the libertarian path, for, in reality, what reason have you to admit that individuals, by the mere fact that they are members of a committee or leaders of whatever, are more clear-sighted and more capable of judging or appreciating events than the masses themselves? Nothing justifies this ridiculous pretension, which the history of all true popular uprisings denies.

“In these great movements that change the world,” says the *Journal des Débats*, “nothing is wiser than the instinct of the people. Once they have thrown themselves into the lists, let them be; do not stop them with your threatening predictions, with your untimely advice; spare them your useless experience.”

The Socialist. — And it is the *Journal des Débats* which speaks thus?

The Anarchist. — Yes, and it speaks the truth. It is not in the brains of a few appointed mountebanks, but in the midst of the popular masses that the genius of revolutions resides. I am surprised that in your working class section this has not already been understood.

The Socialist. — So be it. But then, explain to me how you anarchists intend to prepare, organize and direct the revolutionary forces.

The Anarchist. — We do not organize, we do not direct anything at all. To imagine that one can make the revolution, or even hasten its advent, by means of organizations or groupings, is naivety. Revolution cannot be decreed or improvised. It comes at its own time and no one can advance or delay its explosion. It must first, I repeat, be made in people's minds, and it is up to us, pioneers of the future, to carry out this arduous and glorious task.

The Socialist. — How do you understand it?

The Anarchist. — The bourgeoisie make a scarecrow of it; it is up to us to show it in its true light, that is to say, as justificatory and restorative. Revolution is as old as the world. It is to humanity what force is to matter: it transforms and vivifies it. It is the great conservative ferment of societies, the eternal sword of Damocles permanently hanging over the head of despotism. Let us teach this to the worker, let us tell him not when and how it will come, but its goal and what it must be. Let him know finally that the revolution is the conquest within, the complete liquidation

of bourgeois society, proprietor and capitalist, and the immediate taking of possession by its only beneficiaries, the producers. To make these truths penetrate the popular understanding, there tend all the efforts of anarchist propaganda. It is our way of preparing the revolution. We do not admit any other.

The Socialist. — And how do you intend to make the popular forces march to the assault of power? This power is highly organized, it has a numerous and well-disciplined army; all its cogs function with a unity, a precision that is, so to speak, automatic. How are you to think, I will not say of conquering, but just of attacking with some hope such a power with scattered individuals, numerous, I agree, energetic and determined, I grant you, but finally without cohesion, without unity in the whole, without direction. No, this is really madness, aberration, and a party in these conditions is no longer a party; it is a mob.

The Anarchist. — A mob. So be it. I accept the epithet and prefer it to that of party, even if it is a workers' party. Only, I will point out to you that this crowd is composed of an entire people. As for making it work, as you say, we do not think about it, convinced that it will know how to work all by itself. But we want to make this crowd, by dint of propaganda, either by the press, or by meetings, or by the fact, by dint of hammering into its brain the cause of its evils, the anarchist idea, that is to say the idea of liberty, justice and equality, — we want to make it, I say, — and we will make it, — so conscious of itself, of its will and its power, that the day when, cornered in this dead end without issue that we call the accumulated folly, the power will have made the struggle inevitable and provoked the general uprising. (It is always thus and never otherwise, note well, that all revolutions have been made and will be made.) We will see it, this mob, rolling through the streets in its impetuous waves, without order and without leader, rushing to the assault of the old society by all the roads, by all the exits, throwing to all the echoes its terrible and implacable war cry: make way for labor, make way for the sole and legitimate master of social wealth, make way for the producer. And what I say is not a metaphor, a fanciful exaggeration. No. The future, and a near future, will prove it. Then ask your disciplined and hierarchical governments to go and block the path of this mob, it would be as good as trying to stop the unchained waves of a raging sea.

“When a people, truly a people, is standing and fighting for its freedom,” said Louis-Philippe, “no power could stop it.”

The Socialist. — Very well. But where will be the pivotal axis; where will all these scattered forces converge? For finally, starting from all sides at once, as you say, a central point is absolutely necessary where they can group together, form a homogeneous and resistant whole.

The Anarchist. — The pivotal axis! But it will be the backbone of the rulers and of all the followers of the exploiters. This is the central point where all the blows of the exploited will converge.

The Socialist. — Certainly, I am a revolutionary, you know that, which is to say that I would not shrink from the bloody consequences that any revolution necessarily entails. But, from there to being pitiless, to striking, to putting to death a whole category of human beings, the difference is great and I could never accept it. Not, believe me, out of love for the rabble of scoundrels who squeeze and oppress the people, but out of respect for human life, which, in my opinion, must never be harmed without absolute necessity.

The Anarchist. — Who is talking to you about killing anyway and indiscriminately? Overthrowing a government, demolishing the bourgeois caste does not necessarily mean putting to death the entire authoritarian and dominant breed. No, but quite simply dispersing it, disorganizing it, annihilating the institutions that are its reason for being, that give it power and authority. All this personnel is harmful and dangerous only insofar as it holds power, as it has at its disposal force and public wealth. To suppress this power, to break this force, to reduce all these people to impotence, such must be the revolutionary work. Killing is not a solution. The bourgeoisie, for its part — an honest and moderate class par excellence — can do without the sweet satisfaction of putting a city under control, of having an entire population slaughtered, without distinction of age or sex; it is playing its role. But the people, for their part, have other ways of acting. Oh! Certainly, they are terrible in their great outbursts. But, always just and equitable, they know how to respect the defeated and disarmed enemy. They only strike when constrained and forced, in the heat of the fight, when everyone's life is at stake, or when necessity obliges them to break the obstacles that block their path. And they do well, their anger is always legitimate.

The Socialist. — Do you think that thus unleashed, left to themselves and without restraint, the people can allow themselves to be drawn into excesses, the consequences of which can be disastrous. Has that been seen before?

The Anarchist. — In the mouth of a revolutionary, this language has reason to astonish me. Indeed — history is there. In all eras, in all great political and social crises, excesses have always been a pledge of triumph! A Revolution without excess is a tree without fruit: it is with feet in blood that humanity marches to the accomplishment of its destinies! And then, whoever says Revolution says Justice! And the great popular justicier does not have to haggle too much over his blows. To want him is to be able. Let him therefore be without pity. Let him strike, without respite or mercy, all who oppose his invasive march! But after the final victory, when our enemies, defeated, overcome, will be reduced to absolute impotence, let us turn our efforts towards the institution. Let us seize, hand-to-hand, the old society. And without worrying any more about the lamentations of our former masters — who have become, necessarily, our equals — let us research it down to its deepest arcana, let us break it to pieces. And, so that no vestige remains of it and so that no one is tempted to want to reconstitute it, let us throw its filthy and impure debris to the winds: Laws, Codes, Decrees, Ordinances, etc., etc. May all this jumble of old paperwork, this arsenal of old grimoires, which constitute its fundamental basis, be piled up by us, put in a heap and disappear in an immense blaze which, this time at least, will be and rightly *a real popular bonfire!!!* Then, but only then, will the Revolution have accomplished its emancipatory work!!!

The Socialist. — Certainly, that would be, I agree, a fine result. Only, achieving it seems difficult to me, if not impossible. The Bourgeoisie will not let itself be dispossessed without resistance. It is tenacious and clever, while the people, for their part, do not know how to will persistently and are easily deceived.

Ah! If the great majority were with us, I do not say.

The Anarchist. — To undertake or accomplish anything, if we had to wait for the majorities, we would still be in a savage state. It is the minorities who lead the world. In the days of great

¹ We believe that this work should not be done after the victory, but rather during the Revolution. Victory cannot be certain unless this work is accomplished. — Editor's note.

struggles, the men of initiative, the militants, those who are finally inspired by the idea, throw themselves resolutely at the head of the movement and imprint on it its true meaning. The masses — unconscious, perhaps, but always eager for justice, liberty and well-being — follow them. Wherever they go, the people will go. That is certain. Everything consists in walking on the right path and making the wretched, the scapegoats, feel the immediate benefits of the Revolution. As for this supposed skill, which you attribute to the bourgeoisie, it is only the result of our stupidity.

“This people who on the gold, strewn before them,”

“Victorious, walked barefoot and did not stoop” — said the poet. — “Death to the thieves,” cried the candid revolutionaries of 48, inspired by this beautiful maxim. It was simply absurd. Go and make revolutions with such philosophers!

The Socialist. — We cannot, however, erect theft as a principle nor let people believe that revolutionaries are a bunch of crooks.

The Anarchist. — What a joke. But my goodness theft is today raised to the height of a social institution, and thieves everywhere hold the upper hand. That a bandit robs a landowner, that is a matter between these honest people. The Revolution — whose aim is to make all the rogues pay up — has no need to worry about such trifles. Ah! Our good bourgeois acted differently, themselves, in 89, when they armed themselves to conquer their place in the sun. Imbued with this truth, that a revolution is a conquest within, they began by making a clean sweep of the entire old regime. Then, without worrying any more about whether or not people were going to cry thieves, they seized public affairs and proclaimed themselves their masters, mercilessly crushing royalty, clergy, nobility, everything that, in short, tried to oppose them with the slightest resistance. Ah! They were *rudes lapins*, our revolutionaries of that time, and the guillotine machine was in their hands a terrible argument to impose silence on their adversaries. It was consistent, it was logical. So says the great law of movement. The feudal Old World had had its day. Morally and intellectually it was finished. Therefore, by suppressing it, the bourgeoisie asserted its class superiority.

It is up to us to follow its example. The situation is identical today. The bourgeois world is worn out, gangrenous to the core. It no longer has any reason to exist. Therefore, it must disappear in turn, under the blows of the proletariat, giving way to the now superior class, the producers. It is in order.

The Socialist. — Come on, decidedly — we must face the facts. — The anarchist method prevails for revolutionary action as for propaganda; only, it is only a question here of the struggle, of the negative Revolution finally. Now, breaking, destroying, that is very good, but that is not all. After the triumph, the morrow as they say, it will be necessary to organize, ensure, consolidate the triumph in the hands and for the benefit of the people. How will you proceed?

The Anarchist. — I will answer this question tomorrow.

GOVERNMENT

(Third dialogue)

The Socialist. — I repeat my question: After the popular triumph, the day after the Revolution, how do the anarchists intend to organize society, either from a political or a social point of view? In other words: What form of government do you intend to establish?

The Anarchist. — Anarchy being the absolute negation of all authority, the anarchists therefore have no need to concern themselves with the reestablishment or reorganization — in whatever form — of this political monstrosity called government. It is suppressed and that is all!

The Socialist. — That is what I cannot admit. In vain I rack my brains, turn the question around and around; I cannot manage to conceive of a society without direction and without a leader. It is impossible. It has never been seen at any time and among any people!

The Anarchist. — Naturally. It has never been seen, therefore it will never be seen! Gagged we have always been, gagged we must always be. O, endemic disease of prejudice. What havoc have you wreaked on brains, to distort understanding in this way.

But slavery and serfdom have also existed. And they have disappeared. But all the mythological and theological antiquities: God, Religion, Paradise, Hell, etc.; all the grotesque conceptions, finally, that have dominated the world for so long and whose origin is lost in the mists of time, are today denied, rejected, condemned by science, by reason, by free examination. And their disappearance is only a matter of time! Nothing will resist the investigation of the human mind. Everything changes, everything is transformed under the incessant action of its development! Two principles, two forces, have been fighting for the empire of the world, since the origin of societies, — the libertarian force, the authoritarian force — always at odds, the latter constantly harassed by the former, and constantly pushing it back.

It is from the clash of these two antagonisms that these great political and social cataclysms are born, which we call revolution. Humanity, in its continuous evolution, and under the impulse of these successive and so to speak permanent struggles, breaks, destroys, prunes everything that hinders its upward march! The State cannot be an exception. It must disappear in its turn, drawn into this movement towards the libertarian ideal. This is inevitable and cannot be doubted. This is the logic of progress, the law of transformism!

The Socialist. — I admire your dialectic, but I am not convinced.

The Anarchist. — Has a government ever been seen—whatever its form and origin may have been — to take account of the progress made, to inquire into the aspirations, the needs, the spirit of the people, and which has governed according to the rules of justice and the rights of citizens?

The Socialist. — No, certainly not. But what does that prove?

The Anarchist. — It proves that the best has never been worth anything. You yourself agree.

The Socialist. — Without doubt. But that does not mean that it should be suppressed. It can be improved, reorganized on more equitable bases and more in conformity with law and justice.

The Anarchist. — How, by what means?

The Socialist. — By means of universal suffrage!

The Anarchist. — Universal suffrage! But we have had it for nearly 40 years. Could you tell me what advantages we have derived from it? It was supposed to inaugurate, it was said, an entire era of justice and well-being! We owe it the butcheries of June 48, the machine-gunning of

December 51 and the massacres of the Bloody Week! — that is to say, the most terrible killings of human beings that history mentions! As for liberty, the people are waiting under the elm, and if they do not take it themselves, they will wait a long time yet!

The Socialist. — I will point out to you that the true and regular functioning of universal suffrage has never existed. The people having to undertake their political education, could not from the outset understand the full importance of the right to vote. Hence, these fumbblings and these errors that cost them so dearly. But today, now that their education is done, now that they are of age, they also know how to use it.

The Anarchist. — We see it in the choices they make at each new election. The more things change, the more they stay the same! But finally, if their education is done, if it is true that they are of age, what need do they have to give themselves masters. They can perfectly well manage their business themselves!

Truly, I admire the good nature of people infatuated with the authoritarian mania. They are all the same — differing only in time and form; — they believe themselves lost, as soon as they no longer feel the spur. “The king is dead, long live the king” shouted the court valets of times gone by, at the top of their voices; our masters are no more, quickly, let us name others, proclaim today the stats of all stripes and all kinds, when it would be so natural and so simple to cry out: our masters are no more, long live liberty!

The Socialist. — Yes, no doubt, long live liberty, but shouting it is not enough. It must be won and its reign definitively established; and this result can only be obtained by purified universal suffrage, that is to say, universal suffrage freed from the bourgeois corruption which, today, contaminates it and distorts its essence.

The Anarchist. — How will you go about it?

The Socialist. — By political and administrative decentralization — which implies the federation of communes, governing and administering themselves freely, without any interference from the central power. — No more Senate, no more president, a single legislative assembly and a council appointed by direct vote, charged with executive power, all with an imperative mandate and written commitment to resign at the slightest infraction, and finally, laws and constitution subject to popular veto!

The Anarchist. — And you call yourselves revolutionaries! And you call that a transformation! I call it a change of scenery, because overthrowing a government to replace it with another is no longer revolution, it is a repainting.

Delegating to one or more the right to govern in one's place and stead is giving them a certificate of capacity, recognizing their intellectual and moral superiority over others.

Placed thus, outside and above all, how could these “chosen ones” consider themselves equals? If the people need directors, they will say, it is because they know they are incapable of directing themselves. And if they have chosen us, it is because they recognize in us qualities that they lack. So it is up to us to command; it is up to them to obey! Now this obedience goes without saying. Constraint is imposed on anyone who would like to escape it. Constraint implies force, force necessarily implies the police, the gendarme, the judge, prison, etc., that is to say, the whole monstrous paraphernalia of chains and gags, in which humanity has been struggling for centuries. Then there must be a budget — the State cannot do without it. — Who will pay for it? The people naturally. Who will set the rate? The State, of course.

Look then in such an environment for the liberty, equality and guarantees of the citizens of which you spoke a moment ago. Go, my friend, turn and return the question, take all possible precautions. To delegate is to abdicate, and he who has, beside him, the sabre and the hundred-sou piece is and will always be the master; and, if you took a fancy to want to forget it, HE would quickly make you feel it!

The Socialist. — But as I have just said, these decisions will have force only insofar as they have received the sanction of the people. Until then they are like no avenues, and the power cannot demand anything or force anyone.

The Anarchist. — What reasoning! What logic! How is it that the people, are according to you, too ignorant to be able to conduct themselves, and that at the same time you grant them enough intelligence and discernment, not only to choose a leading personnel and impose their will on them, but also to accomplish the thing at once the most complicated and the most difficult: to judge the acts of their government, to appreciate their full scope, so as to be able to pronounce with perfect knowledge on their validity — all things on which the best among you would be powerless to pronounce.

The Socialist. — Say at once that we are only imbeciles!

The Anarchist. — No. But you are jokers! You know, as well as I, that the strength and power of the rulers reside entirely in the diversity of views and assessments of the governed and in the impossibility in which they find themselves of being able to consult and agree.

Have you not seen, during the famous plebiscites, the “most intellectual” people cover, twice, with their veto, the inept bandit of December; and later, the sinister jokers of the defense — called national! — However, they could not argue ignorance; the facts were recent and palpable.

The Socialist. — Agreed. But, it is no longer a question of plebiscite or national defense. It is a question of establishing a truly popular power, with well-defined and well-limited attributions, so that it knows that it exists only by the will of the citizens. Under these conditions, and even assuming some defects in the choices, how could a power prevaricate? Would it dare to even try?

The Anarchist. — Ah! the good ballot... Make and botch your government as you wish, impose on it all the mandates, all the surveillance, all the possible controls. From the moment that it is constituted, it will be the master and it will be able to dare anything!

The Socialist. — You seem to forget — and one would say that it is on purpose — the essential point. This master, as you like to call him, is in reality only a delegate, a representative having no will, no rights and no force other than those which will be conferred on him by the sovereign people. Therefore, I repeat, obliged to confine itself to the limits which will be prescribed to it, it will necessarily have to stick to them.

The Anarchist. — All this is superb and would be acclaimed, I have no doubt, in a circle of the workers' party, only it does not make common sense.

The Socialist. — Not common sense! That is easy to say.

The Anarchist. — And as easy to demonstrate. See what has been happening in France since 89. — And this, despite all our revolutions. — Among all the governments that have succeeded one another, — and we have had all sorts and in all sauces, — Has a single honest man been found? I mean one who has not lied to his promises, betrayed his mandate, forfeited his commitments! Republic, Empire or Royalty. We see, during this period, only a long uninterrupted

series of traitors and rogues, scoundrels and imbeciles! All rose to power on the shoulders of the people, after a thousand promises and the most tempting professions of faith!

The Socialist. — Yes, it is true, but...

The Anarchist. — Leave me alone with your ifs and buts. Examine all these scoundrels who, at this moment, preside over the destinies of our country. They are, for the most part, former revolutionaries of 48 and 71. One had to hear them and their peers thunder against despotism and exploitation, deploring the condition of the “poor people.” “The people,” said one, “are the *ecce homo* of modern times.” “The times are near,” cried others, “it is then that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” On February 2, the predicted times arrived. The victorious “*ecce homo*” entrusted itself to its new prophets, the care of realizing their prophecies! Ah! The weeping and gnashing of teeth were not long in coming. But, alas, we know from which side! Well, these same men, these scoundrels, these idiots, who, after having drowned the Republic in blood, delivered it to imperial despotism, bound hand and foot. The people hastened to put them back at the head of the Third Republic, which will soon, if we let it happen, join its two elders.

The Socialist. — That happened in 71, but we have advanced since then.

The Anarchist. — Yes, and the proof is that the government bilges are still all stuffed with ghosts from those times. It’s all swarming and spreading over the social body — like phylloxera on the vine.

Search through the pile — President, Ministers, Senators, Deputies and all that — you will find everything in there, except good men. And that is understandable. As soon as a man crosses the steps of power, he becomes, *ipso facto*, a scoundrel doubled with an imbecile. And all this is the work of the people, the product of universal suffrage after 40 years of experience. And you find that the test is not enough?

The Socialist. — So, according to you, as soon as one comes to power — even when called by popular confidence — one ceases to be an honest man.

The Anarchist. — Yes, that is my conviction; so much so that if tomorrow I were offered to enter the governmental fold, I would refuse outright, not wanting to fall in my own eyes.

The Socialist. — That is pushing rigorism a little too far.

The Anarchist. — But no, on the contrary it is quite natural. The art of governing is the art of deceiving men; it is not lying, but lying in politics, says the adage. And, in fact, for the statesman, what are conscience, morality, justice, right? He knows only the reason of State and, for him, it takes precedence over everything: it is his guide, his criterion, his *vade mecum*, and under its aegis he commits all crimes, all infamies, all misdeeds with the consciousness of duty accomplished.

The Socialist. — You exaggerate, for if it were so, the statesman would be an evil being, a kind of monster with a human face.

The Anarchist. — You said it. Yes, they all “are in the moral world what monsters are in the physical world.” Look, listen to this historical fact that paints them all in one stroke. In 1830 — when he was only a simple journalist aspiring to power — Thiers said, in a proclamation to the Parisians: “Charles X can no longer enter Paris, he has shed the blood of the people,” but, having come to power, Thiers showed — in the Rue Transnonain and in the Bloody Week — how the statesman practices the theories of the simple citizen. And Thiers, let us not forget, came from the working class.

The Socialist. — Ah! I was unaware of this proclamation and the origin of the monster, but fortunately not all are cut from this model. There are many exceptions.

The Anarchist. — No, there are none! Let me give you, on this subject, a peremptory example. Did you know Cabet? Certainly, this man was as honest as one can be. In devotion, in disinterestedness and in generosity, no one would have surpassed him. But he was a partisan of authority above all. When he left to found his Icaria, he took with him a whole galaxy of intelligent, brave and devoted citizens. He led them to a new country, where one could — according to his own expression — *help oneself*.

Two paths were open to him: the libertarian path and the authoritarian path. The first imposed itself, so to speak, of itself, in view of the environment, which so favorable and with such companions! Cabet took the other. You know where that led him and his enterprise!

The Socialist. — And yet. He was neither a scoundrel nor an imbecile. You have just said it yourself!

The Anarchist. — Yes, before being head of state. But, Cabet, a power, had to undergo all the deleterious influence. Hence the anger of the Icarians; one does not violate the laws of nature with impunity. Now, nature has created man free, and the more favorable the environment is to liberty, the less the citizens are disposed to support the yoke. Is this example conclusive enough? Will you finally understand?

The Socialist. — I understand what you are saying, but I do not see the State like that!

The Anarchist. — Come on, what is its use? What does it do? Do we see it being concerned in any way with the interests, the well-being or the ill-being of the citizens? No, that is not within its attributions. Therefore, since it cannot do anything for us, what need do we have of it?

The Socialist. — I cannot accept that. Why could the State do nothing for the public good, especially if we consider it to have come out of the hands of the people? Because, finally, in our days, — even with the absurd powers that we are subjected to — many reforms and improvements have been carried out. It is meager, yes, but it exists and gives an idea of what a popular and well-intentioned government could do!

The Anarchist. — You are always quibbling over the heads of pins. These bladders, which you take for lanterns, the small improvements, these anodyne reforms which, in reality, improve nothing at all. The power never grants them except under duress, and even then it is careful to take back with one hand what it lets go with the other. — It is seen every day — for example, tell me what the people have gained from all our Revolutions; and what improvements they have brought them either in economic or political terms. They are starving, but they have the right to choose their masters! — that is to say, to their abjection, irony was added: they were proclaimed sovereign!!!

The Socialist. — That is true, I am obliged to admit. But then, what are we to do? Are we condemned to constantly fall from Charybdis into Scylla?

The Anarchist. — No, no. Humanity never stops or retrogrades. It evolves incessantly, and we must follow it in its successive transformations, but we must abandon the old routine, suppress all kinds of election, delegation and authority and fully understand this truth: that plebiscite or popular veto, universal or restricted suffrage, are, in reality, only sleight of hand. The free man, conscious of his interests as well as his dignity, cannot, without diminishing himself, participate

in these ridiculous comedies, where the destiny of an entire people is played out — always for the benefit of the rogues!

The Socialist. — Reject all kinds of voting! That is another of your hallucinations. Voting is the cornerstone of all societies, the obligatory solution to any question in dispute. Ten people come together to resolve a political, social or economic question. After discussion, what will make them agree? Voting, of course. So, whatever you say and whatever you do, whatever your mode of organization, with or without a government — perhaps you will find another mode of voting — but whatever it may be, it will be necessary to go through it.

The Anarchist. — Oh! certainly, I am convinced, a voting system of an entirely new kind will soon arise, and I can assure you that the anarchists will not fail to do so; only the ballot boxes and the ballots will be something other than pine boxes and squares of paper. And in this great and terrible ballot — which will take care not to be secret — there will be no need to examine the lists or count the votes. The majority will assert itself, and the minority will have to submit or be our equal, or be crushed. Such will be its alternative!

The Socialist. — I understand. But after the triumph, what will you do?

The Anarchist. — We will simply take possession of the commonwealth, as the bourgeois did in 89! Only, as we are not despoilers, we others, but justiciars, and as Liberty and Justice are not the exclusive patrimony of a few, but goods whose enjoyment is for all, we will extend a fraternal hand to the vanquished — our enemies of the day before — invite them to participate in it with us. If they refuse, so much the worse for them!

The Socialist. — And when you are installed: how will you arrange yourselves? Who will direct general or public affairs? Who will direct the relations of interest between citizens? For can we leave to isolated individuals the direction of these things that are so complicated and interest the generality to such a high degree?

The Anarchist. — First, in anarchy individuals, while being free and independent of each other, while recognizing no authority, will not be isolated, as you understand. Property, the instruments of labor, raw materials, everything which finally constitutes the social foundation, being common, belonging to all and to each. Man, free dispenser of his destiny, knows, nevertheless, that his destiny is intimately linked to that of his fellows. Now, this link can only be solidarity, — supreme law of economic grouping, — isolation properly speaking, could not therefore exist!

The Socialist. — If economic groupings take the place of everything, how will you classify them?

The Anarchist. — They will classify themselves quite naturally, by the regular play of needs. The citizens, freed from all antagonism, from all fear of tomorrow, and the necessity of labor helping, will come together, will group themselves by affinity and by interest!

The Socialist. — Very well. But that is only one side of the question. There are not only economic or interest relations between men. We have civil, political and social relations, and it is here that administrative action is necessary; the State, in these conditions, is the collective force united in a few by the will of all. It is the social pivot, centralizing, around which gravitate and converge all interests, all aspirations in a word, it is to the social body what the heart is to the human body. It receives and spreads circulation and life!

The Anarchist. — In which tale of the Thousand and One Nights did you see that? The State, my friend, is quite simply the absolute erected as a principle, the arbitrary imposed and sanctioned by force. Its function is to compress, to repress any expansion of the human spirit, and human stupidity is its reason for being! It takes man in the cradle and leaves him only at the grave, with the pretension of serving as his guide in this inextricable maze, which we call the path of life. Well, frankly, do you think that we could not follow this path without its borders?

The Socialist. — That remains to be demonstrated.

The Anarchist. — Very well. Man brings, at birth, his right to life. The right, liberty, are absolute things, having as a corollary the equality of conditions, essential basis of any harmonious social order! To want to regulate them, to bring a correction or any delimitation to them, is to go against the laws of nature. It is to violate the very essence of life. It is, in a word, to commit the crime of *lèse-humanité*. Now, it is precisely in this that all governmental science lies!

The Socialist. — Agreed. But, society being a collective whole, composed of particles, liberty, to have a practical meaning, must be at the same time collective and individual. Now, what will be the limit of the rights of the individual? Where will collective rights begin? In other words, to what extent is the individual independent of the social group! This must be regulated, defined beforehand, hence the need for organization, unifying the various parts, determining and fixing the rights and duties of each!

The Anarchist. — Someone denied movement before a philosopher. For his whole answer he began to walk. Liberty is like movement (of which it is an integral part.) It is not discussed; it asserts itself. There are not several types of liberty: collective, individual, etc. etc..., it is one, personal, without control, or it is not!

The Socialist. — In this case, what guarantee will we have against the possible brutalities of certain individuals. I am free to do what I please: therefore, finding myself in front of you, on a sidewalk, I give you a punch to force you to give me passage.

The Anarchist. — Several authoritarians have already made this intelligent objection to me! I have always and invariably answered: Two horses, two dogs, two donkeys cross on a path or in a street, instinctively, they move aside, one after the other, in order to avoid a collision. Would you then be inferior to these beasts? The absolute liberty of one naturally and logically implies absolute liberty of the other, that is to say of each and every one. My liberty, however absolute it may be, has as its natural limit the liberty of my fellow man. This is elementary and should not need demonstration, because, in fact, if a single citizen could be injured by the free will of another, there would no longer be liberty; there would be arbitrariness on the one hand, and discomfort and oppression on the other.

The Socialist. — Yes, I would even agree with you, if it were not for this terrible question of tomorrow, which constantly preoccupies me. How will this mass, which we see so indifferent today, be able, from one day to the next, to direct itself according to the rules of common sense and logic? Why not trace out for it in advance a program, a line of conduct. A plan of organization.

The Anarchist. — By virtue of what prescience would we allow ourselves this? What presumption to claim today to be more clear-sighted, more capable than the men of then will be! The path to follow, the means to use. It is up to them to determine both the urgency and the effectiveness, because they will be competent, they; and we, we are not!

The Socialist. — The people are still so ignorant!

The Anarchist. — Always your same old refrain. Ah! No doubt, in our monstrous social state, where interests are constantly in conflict, where the fear of tomorrow fevers all existences, the people, constantly repressed, can seem incapable, even to act contrary to their interest.

But, let the Revolution come, and, driven by the anarchist idea, let it take in hand the work of its emancipation, and we will see this same people, freed from the bonds that bind them, launched on the path of justice and reparation: astonish the world by the grandeur of their views, the justice of their decisions and the energy of their resolutions.

The Socialist. — Who will lead them?

The Anarchist. — No one. Their genius, their needs, their interests and above all their great love of justice and liberty. And then, who better than themselves to lead them?

The Socialist. — The autonomy of the communes, with their strongly organized federations, would offer, it seems to me, an effective means. What do you think?

The Anarchist. — I think it would always be “pie in the sky.” The people, the masses alone have the strength and power to be able to assume the responsibility of such a move.

The Socialist. — What! You reject even communal autonomy?

The Anarchist. — Yes. We want man to be happy and free, and we seek, for that, the best way, the best middle ground. For two men, in one another’s presence, to be free and equal — a condition without which there can be no true happiness — there must be no subjection of one to the other. Now, authority and liberty are antipathetic terms, which cannot be reconciled, and order and harmony can only be understood with individual autonomy. The “know thyself” of the ancient Greeks, as well as the “Do what you will” of Rabelais, did not mean anything else. Which proves that the anarchist idea is not new.

The Socialist. — Will you not imagine that anarchy existed in the time of Socrates?

The Anarchist. — I do not imagine, I affirm. Yes, Anarchy — which is the ideal towards which Humanity gravitates — is as old as the world; the love of liberty was born of oppression. As far back as we go into the past, we see liberty constantly grappling with despotism. History and legends teem with these libertarian heroes, struggling against human and divine majesties. What were the Titans, Prometheus, Satan and so many others invented by mythologists to give credence to their fictions? If not sublime rebels, audacious revolutionaries. Who could number the victims who, from Socrates to the martyrs of Chicago, fell in the name of Justice and Right.

The Socialist. — To compare the victims of Chicago to Socrates seems to me a little daring.

The Anarchist. — How daring! But in the upward march of progress, the former were the continuators of the latter. And if I had to choose between them, it is certainly not to the Athenian that I would give the palm!

The Socialist. — As an anarchist, it is possible. But you do not pretend to make me believe that all these victims of the past were anarchists. That would be too amusing. The name did not even exist in Rabelais’ time!

The Anarchist. — Although not yet formulated, the idea existed nonetheless. The proclamation of the Republic in 92 was the consequence of the storming of the Bastille. Do you think that the revolutionaries of July 11 were aware of it? One can conceive of an ideal and not grasp at first all of its phases and consequences. For a long time I too believed that by means of a democratic government, one could arrive at liberty. It was in seeking the causes of the numerous and continual revolutionary disappointments that the evolution of my mind arrived at this

conception: Anarchy, that is to say, the negation of all authority, of all power, of all government. And, consequently, the affirmation of individual autonomy. But, before as after, I was no less an anarchist, since my ideal was absolute liberty, the complete emancipation of the individual. Now, this can be applied to all revolutionaries past and present, and to you first of all.

The Socialist. — That requires an explanation.

The Anarchist. — Let me explain. You are a revolutionary communist, are you not?

The Socialist. — I do not hide it.

The Anarchist. — You pursue the complete emancipation of the human being, the advent of the reign of liberty, justice, equality. You recognize the necessity of a liquidation of society, of general and unrestricted expropriation. And you admit that this result can only be obtained by force?

The Socialist. — Absolutely, that is my conviction.

The Anarchist. — Well. That is the anarchist ideal. We are therefore in communion of ideas on all these points. Is the demonstration precise?

The Socialist. — Without doubt. And if it were shown to me that things could work without government or authority, I would not hesitate to declare myself an anarchist!

The Anarchist. — That is not the question. It is a question of knowing whether in social relations, liberty and individual initiative are more in conformity with the nature and interest of the citizens than the interference of the State. Now, even today, the affirmation is imposed; therefore, if on the one hand, we consider that a government is a group of essentially parasitic individuals, placed outside and above the others, and whose sole function is to legislate, to direct and to command. If on the other hand it is established that, the great economic law — production, consumption, exchange — is and remains the supreme law that sums up all relations between men (and on this point, no contradiction is possible.) It goes without saying that society, as well as individuals, have everything to gain and nothing to lose from the suppression of this machine, as useless as it is annoying, which is called State.

The Socialist. — Ah! But, you will tell me so much. And then, considered in this way, the question is simplified; liberty and equality can only be a truth when individual will and initiative are the only social guarantee.

The Anarchist. — Ask yourself rather if they can exist between the active worker, whose function is to produce, and the idle manager, whose function is to do nothing. Which constitutes, subjection on the one hand, privilege on the other.

The Socialist. — I see there neither privilege nor subjection. Working and managing are functions of equal importance. Each acts in the sphere that is assigned to him. It is quite natural.

The Anarchist. — Really. Well then, look, — you partisan of equality. — The equation, between the rights of these two men, one of whom gives orders and cannot receive them, the other of whom receives them and cannot give them. In these conditions — whatever the environment — individual prerogatives are not equivalent. There is hierarchy, that is, a scale of graduation. Ask the one at the top of the scale if he considers the one at the bottom as his equal? “He who first understood that it was necessary to divide men in order to reign over them,” says an author, “he instituted hierarchy, because hierarchy is the negation of equality.”

The Socialist. — Here is a truth I had not thought of and which is nevertheless absolutely obvious!

The Anarchist. — So, let us reverse the scale. Let us place it horizontally, and, having neither top nor bottom, equality becomes a reality by the same token. No more hierarchy, therefore, no more government, no more authority. Reign of Anarchy! — that is to say, the libertarian grouping: Autonomy, Justice, Solidarity! This is our ideal, the goal we are pursuing, that we want to achieve and that we will achieve at all costs!

The Socialist. — Ah! For once, I lay down my arms. I admit defeat. Perhaps I am already an anarchist. But, before I decide, I need to think about this!

THE LAW

(Fourth dialogue)

The Socialist. — No, I understand and share your opinion. But, finally, how can misdeeds and crimes be prevented, if the fear of punishment, decreed by law, is not there, like a scarecrow, suspended over the heads of criminals?

The Anarchist. — Here again, the law is powerless to prevent anything. Never, at any time, has the fear of punishment stopped the arm of a criminal. Everywhere and always, the frequency and enormity of crimes have been, on the contrary, in proportion to the multiplicity and severity of laws. This is a fact that cannot be disputed.

The Socialist. — However, the law, according to Saint-Just, is a relation of justice. And, for the revolutionaries, Saint-Just is not just anyone.

The Anarchist. — Do you believe that on the 10th of Thermidor, — when his head was about to fall under the blows of the same Law that had struck the Royalists and the Girondins, — Saint-Just would have been of the same opinion? It is at least permissible to doubt it! The law, a relation of Justice! Come on. But on that account, all the dominators, all the heads of powers, whose history is, for Humanity, only a long martyrology — from Nero, burning Rome on a whim, to Thiers slaughtering Paris by instinct — all these monsters would therefore be only justice-bringers. And their crimes acts of justice? For, it is in the name of the laws that the tables of proscription were set up, that the pyres were lit, that the bloody week was accomplished! No, no, justice — emanation of human conscience, supreme guide of the free man — can have no relation to the law — emanation of authority, sanction of arbitrariness and force! Do what you want, says Justice; obey, says the law, armed with its sword!

The Socialist. — However, it is in the name of the law that Justice is usually rendered.

The Anarchist. — Yes, doubtless. But, when I speak of justice, I mean that soft and sweet deity, that feeling within us, which leads us to do to others what we would have them do to us. And not that old second-hand dealer, prostitute to all powers, who, in the courts and tribunals, profusely peddles fines and months of imprisonment! This justice can go hand in hand with the Law — the two are equal. — It is of it that Proudhon said: “it is only the distribution, more or less reasoned, of the arbitrary!”

The Socialist. — Here, I have nothing to object. Only, all this applies to the past and the present, and is perfectly explained, given the defectiveness of our social organization. But in the future, when the Revolution will have placed power in the hands of the people, the conditions having changed, nothing will be able to prevent the making of equitable laws!

The Anarchist. — Whomever it is made by, and in whatever name, the law, from the moment it exists, demands to be and must be obeyed. Now all obedience implies constraint and subjection, that is to say, negation of liberty.

The Socialist. — Since it would be the expression of the general will, in obeying it, one does not really obey anyone. There could therefore be neither objection nor constraint.

The Anarchist. — Yes, I know. The will of all, imposed on each. But, my friend, this is the most inept kind of oppression, at the same time as the most intolerable, because the individual, confused, annihilated in the whole, thus becomes the instrument of his own enslavement; and he cannot complain of it, since he enjoys, like all the others, his share of sovereignty!

The Socialist. — However, if the law were limited to regulating, to regularizing social relations, without decreeing either penalty or punishment, where would the oppression be, where would the enslavement be?

The Anarchist. — Either the law must have power and authority, to impose respect and submission, or it has no reason to exist. What good, in fact, are laws that could be broken and violated with impunity?

The Socialist. — How, in this case, are we to establish and organize the functioning of the administrative machinery.

The Anarchist. — These machinery, today so complicated, thanks to the antagonism that reigns supreme in our societies, will become in Anarchy — when this antagonism will have given way to solidarity — of an elementary simplicity. And as for authority, privilege, exploitation, we will have substituted liberty, justice, equality. The social problem will be solved. And, consequently, the laws, ceasing to be a necessity, will find themselves suppressed at the same time.

The Socialist. — Perfect. But that is not enough. The social order is not a mess that can be transformed instantly and in the blink of an eye. Its arrangement is more complicated than you seem to believe, and cannot be solved like a mathematical problem. It will take time to arrive at a perfect solution!

The Anarchist. — I do not claim that Society can be transformed and reach perfection instantly and in the blink of an eye. No. I know too well the numerous and terrible difficulties that we will have to surmount and conquer. But I wanted to say and demonstrate that the surest and shortest way to obtain this result is not to amuse oneself by reorganizing, by repairing, by patching up the old rotten debris, which constitute the current order of things, but by eliminating them. And I maintain that it will be only after this cleaning — essentially hygienic — that the simplicity of the libertarian or anarchist social order will appear to all eyes.

The Socialist. — Very well, let us admit it. But, apart from economic relations, there are others: family relations, births, marriages, deaths; everything that, finally, is the domain of civil status. Now, civil status, a social necessity in the first place, could not exist if the laws did not regulate its functioning and its attributions.

The Anarchist. — Civil status is a chain — and one of the heaviest. — Through it, power holds in its hand and disposes at will of all existences. It will therefore be urgent to get rid of it as quickly as possible!

The Socialist. — What! You also condemn civil status?

The Anarchist. — Since it is well known that it is a yoke as useless as it is annoying, what is the point of keeping it?

The Socialist. — And the ties of kinship and genealogical filiation, what do you do with them?

The Anarchist. — What an argument! Cannot man be born, live and die, without each phase of his various transformations being recorded in an official register?

Consult history. Many are those who, in all ages and in all conditions, have distinguished themselves under assumed names: Moses is the name of a foundling, Homer was a bastard, as was William the Conqueror, and Charlemagne was the son of Pepin, whose father was called Martel (a nom de guerre.) Where is the genealogical filiation of the Pythagorases and the Platos, of the Aristotles and the Terences, of the Voltaires, the Molières and so many others, whose works were

their only their civil status! An integral part of the great humanitarian whole. Man belongs to himself, and his value and his merit are not a family heritage!

The Socialist. — On this point, I have nothing to answer. The demonstration is peremptory; but the regularization of matrimonial alliances, and the legitimation of children, etc., etc.

The Anarchist. — Oh! You can add more etceteras... Yes, I know, in our old world, where everything is stamped, numbered, registered to excess, these regulations, these isolations have their reason for being. We can therefore explain — but not justify — these distinctions: of marriage and concubinage, of legitimate children and natural children. And the kind of abjections of the reprobates — because the love, of which they are the fruit, has not been noted and sanctioned on a public book. And yet they are men in the same way as all the others. Children of nature, product of free love, their origin implies their legitimacy. What need do they have, beyond that, of a fictitious and conventional legitimation?

The Socialist. — So you also abolish marriage and the family?

The Anarchist. — In this purely physiological order, no one has the authority to suppress anything. — It is a matter of time and progress — but we can already foresee and even affirm that evolution on this subject leads us infallibly to free love! Now, free love having replaced legal marriage — this anti-social monstrosity — a new order, more in conformity with nature and human dignity, will impose itself, quite naturally, in the family group!

The Socialist. — Certainly, this definition may seem plausible. But, it does not entirely convince me. And I come back to my first question: laws are needed. Because, whatever the mode of grouping, it will be necessary to govern. How, and by what means do you intend to do it?

The Anarchist. — By liberty — individual autonomy, necessarily implying solidarity, cannot leave the slightest doubt on this subject!

The Socialist. — Liberty! Liberty! But one must be able to define its action. And that can only be done by laws! That is what I would like you to answer!

The Anarchist. — Liberty, as I have already told you, asserts itself and is not discussed; its action is immanent and has no need, in order to manifest itself, of the assistance of a legislator or a jurist.

The Socialist. — Yes, doubtless, if men were perfect, it could perhaps work that way. But, given our poor humanity, how, without laws, can we keep the individual within the strict limits of the good? For, whatever the environment, his faults and vices will always be there to counterbalance his qualities. How many misdeeds, how many crimes in our days that have no other causes than rivalries, jealousies, self-love, etc. Now, these defects are inherent in our nature and will not entirely disappear with social injustices. How then can we obviate these inconveniences and restrain the ill-intentioned?

The Anarchist. — Human perfection has no place here. Man is an absolute: nothing more, nothing less. Vice and virtue, defects and qualities, are only conventional terms, which have, in themselves, no meaning. As for these hatreds, these rivalries, these internal quarrels — which make some believe that human perversion is an endemic disease, while it is only the product, the resultant, of social organization, of the antagonism of interests, of the struggle for existence in short — the laws can do nothing about it. The anarchist order alone can put an end to them, by suppressing the causes that engender them!

The Socialist. — So you believe that a society could exist without laws, as without government? It is droll. I can't understand it!

The Anarchist. — I'm doing everything I can to hammer it into your brain. But it seems like you're stubbornly refusing to grasp it.

The Socialist. — What do you want? It's not my fault. I'm putting all the good will I can into it.

The Anarchist. — Let's see. One last demonstration to finish convincing you. These laws that are made so much of and whose indispensable necessity is praised to us, what are they in reality? They are established, it is said, to regulate social relations, either between citizens or between rulers and ruled. The law is, says Cicero, "the supreme reason that orders or that forbids." So be it. Let us admit this definition for our authoritarian societies, where the hierarchy of functions is the essential basis of the entire political organism. But in a libertarian society, where reciprocity and equivalence of services will have made all hierarchy, all distinction between individuals, disappear, how can we admit it? Indeed: I am a man, I am free, I am in full possession of all my faculties. What need do I have, therefore, of rules formulated or written to order me or defend me from anything. And then, what are the legislators: our fellow men, our equals, that is to say ordinary men, having no superiority over others, whose moral sense and understanding could in no way exceed the common level! And since it is we who name them. Now, if we are able to assess them and judge their works, it is quite obvious that our capacities are at least equivalent to theirs and that we can perfectly do without their services! Evolving in the same environment, under the influence of the same needs, the same passions, the same weaknesses, what could they teach us or tell us, that we do not already know ourselves!

The Socialist. — Yes, it is true. All this seems logical to me and I would be disposed to rally to it.

The Anarchist. — Good. Now, if, on the other hand, it is admitted (and there can be no doubt) that all relations, all sociable relationships between men are reduced, in the end, to this admirable economic trilogy: Production, Consumption, Exchange, it goes without saying that the only regulatory law that is imposed here is solidarity and equality of conditions!

In such an environment, where the individual, the sole arbiter of his destiny, is at the same time his own legislator and master, what would authority do with its baggage of hierarchy, laws and "supreme reason to order or to defend."

Leave to man the free and absolute disposition of his individuality, of his self. Let individual interest merge, identify with the general interest; and let each one be able to act as he pleases, according to his tastes, his desires, his inclinations, without any other limit, without any other corrective than the respect due to the same prerogatives among his fellow men. This is the ideal, this is the supreme law that must govern societies, if we want to see the era of bloody revolutions close and an era of peace, justice and true fraternity open!!!

The Socialist. — Very well, we must face the facts. You speak the truth; this last demonstration is decisive and completes my conviction. Yes, you are right, Anarchy is the ideal, the goal towards which human evolution irresistibly tends, and the anarchists, alone, are on the revolutionary path! — I understand it now — so, I no longer hesitate, I place myself under their banner and I say with them no more government, no more laws, no more authority! Liberty! All liberty! Nothing but liberty!!!

RESPONSE TO AN OBJECTION

You say, in your last dialogue: “All relations, all sociable relationships between men are ultimately summed up in this admirable economic trilogy: Production, Consumption, Exchange” and you add: “there can be no doubt about that.”

That is, certainly, a somewhat risky assertion! Are you quite certain, citizen, of the truth of such an assertion? And could you demonstrate to us its accuracy and correctness. I believe that will be very difficult for you?

Produce, consume, exchange, so be it, very good. That is the *sine qua non* of life. But is that all? Can social life be confined exclusively to this purely material environment? I do not think so. Sparta is far from us. And today, black broth would no longer be in season! Man — as has already been objected — is not a being who can live exclusively for the sake of living. His needs, his desires, his aspirations are multiple and infinitely diversified. Each day sees new ones born which, barely satisfied, call for new ones.

Hence these thousand little nothings with which existence is enameled; and whose habit makes enjoyment so pleasant! Where would be the sign of exchange for his fanciful objects?

And the sciences, the arts, literature. All these high and sublime conceptions which constitute the ideal life, what do you do with them? They are also products of human activity, I imagine.

But are they exchangeable and consumable in the same way as those of manual labor? You would not dare to maintain it! How indeed to consume and with what to exchange productions like the canvases of a Rubens, the vocal pearls of a Patti, the theories of a Darwin, the poetic treasures of a Victor Hugo! What place would you assign to them in your “economic trilogy”?

Let me summarize:

Without being precisely an anarchist, I nevertheless share your ideas on liberty and equality! Thus, for example, like you, I am of the opinion that all men have an equal right to comfort and well-being. But, wanting, under the pretext of equality, to establish a similarity between the work of a scholar or an artist, and that of a laborer, that is what I cannot admit. It is contrary to right and justice. And the egalitarian level cannot go that far! Because, finally, however much one may support equality, one must nevertheless face the facts, and one is obliged to recognize that the human spirit, as well as discernment and aptitudes, are not things that can be leveled!

In a society, the conditions of life are not adequate, great is the difference that exists between physical or material life, and moral, intellectual or quintessential life. With your “Economic Trilogy” how will you manage to balance these parts — so disparate — of the social whole? I would be truly obliged if you could demonstrate this to us!

These are the objections, the arguments, that are put to us! Is it from a serious adversary or from a simple fanciful contradictor? In any case, here is my answer.

Leaving aside Sparta, its black broth and the “thousand little nothings,” which have no place here, I enter without further preamble, into the heart of the question.

Man, you say, is not a being who can live exclusively to live! In truth! And why would he live then? Would it be to gain Heaven? It is a goal like any other!

But, admitting the truth of this assertion, what does it prove for or against Anarchy? In what way could the equality of conditions hinder the free manifestations of life? The truth, citizen, is that man lives, that he wants to live, and to live as pleasantly as possible! It is for this reason, to increase the sum of his well-being and his enjoyments, that we see him, every day, committing so much baseness, so much villainy, so much turpitude! But, what is living? “Man is sensation, sentiment, knowledge,” says Pierre Leroux. Now, to evolve under this triple aspect, to give free rein to all his faculties — physical, intellectual and moral — to be master of his destiny, and to be able to give free rein to his inclinations, his desires, his passions: this is, for the human being, life in all its plenitude, in all its blossoming! And it is not only for a few, for a group or for a class. But for all — distinctly, *individually!*

But, cries my opponent: The sciences, the arts and literature, what do you do with them? How do you classify them? Eh! Good Lord, citizen, what do you want us to do with them? We leave them for what they are, that is to say branches of human activity, whose products — exchangeable and consumable, in the same way as the others — sort themselves naturally in the “Economic Trilogy” and are an integral part of social wealth!

All production, whatever its source — industry, science, art, literature, etc. etc. is, whether we like it or not, subject to fluctuations in supply and demand. This is so true that, as soon as an object no longer meets a public need, it will lose value and cease to have currency. Indeed, things are only important, in our eyes, in relation to the services they can provide us. To a man with an empty stomach, present a treatise on geometry or physics; he will answer that a piece of bread would do much better. Who could, today, revive the cosmogony of Hesiod, or the astronomy of Ptolemy! So, I repeat, the economic trilogy — production, consumption, exchange — is — even in present-day life — the supreme law. I am sorry for the artistic and learned people, but their works — or their products — must submit to this common law absolutely like those of the laborers. This is what nature demands. And its decrees are indisputable.

What kind of man, then, is this class that we call the “learned world” or the “artistic world”? Where do they draw their origin from? Are they engendered differently from the others? Could we classify them in the embryonic state? So stop boasting about your “superior classes;” there is nothing truly superior in the world except what is useful, necessary, indispensable. The rest — however brilliant — is only accessory. If, therefore, there were to be a superiority, only the working class would have the right to claim it, for it is the nourisher of the Human Race, while all your “learned worlds” put together would not even be able to sustain a sparrow. It is the cornerstone of every social edifice. They are only the decoration! — and the decoration cannot be worth the edifice. — And then, what do these distinctions mean?

Men born free and equal. Why should they not live the same? Life is one, and the diversity of its manifestations can in no way justify the inequality of conditions. Strange anomaly! No creation, no invention — whether in science or in industry — can be achieved by human genius outside the strict observance of natural laws; and it is precisely in violation of these same laws that all the institutions that govern societies today are established, and despite the struggles, the divisions, the disturbances resulting from this violation, man — this “king of creation,” this being endowed with reason, intelligence, and understanding — obstinately refuses to surrender to the evidence, to refuse to return to the path traced for him by Nature. He will have to decide to do so, however, because, despite resistance and ill will, they will know how to force him to do so.

Come the Revolution! Let the psychological four o'clock strike! Let the people, freed from all ties, freed from all guardianship and making their own the anarchist tendencies, finally decide to bite, once and for all, into the fruit, theirs, so long forbidden, (let us never forget that in revolution, this is the crucial point) and savoring the first fruits, they will have quickly understood that, henceforth, it is for themselves that they are working, and they will do, be assured, prompt and good work. Oh! we will go forward. We will not stop halfway. And if, as I have the firm and complete conviction, success responds to our energy, to our audacity. The old society will have quickly given back its beautiful soul to its *creatures*, and this first phase accomplished, the Revolution or the masses — here, it is all one — pursuing its march, resolutely, without hesitation, without stopping. We will go all the way, that is, to the complete annihilation of the existing order of things. And, returning to the ways of nature — *destruam et aedificabo* — we will make arise from the ruins of the Old World, a new world, carrying in its bosom an entire era of work, freedom and happiness for all. Then, a profound modification, or rather a complete transformation will be accomplished, spontaneously, in relations and in social relationships. From now on, no more government, no more law, no more authority. Equation, equivalence, reciprocity in everything and for everything.

Production multiplied by the extension of machinery; work simplified by the new solidarized economic groupings, a few hours of daily labor, will be amply sufficient for the needs of general consumption. From then on, having all the leisure to perfect his education — everyone will be able to become at the same time an excellent worker, a scholar or an emeritus artist. How many scholars, how many artists, how many writers will emerge from this environment, from this great whole, diversified and personalized. What dimension will the circle of human knowledge reach then. It will no longer be its qualifiers, these classifications of “elite world” of “upper classes,” etc. No, all this nitpicking, so popular today, will have disappeared.

It will be the advent of a world of free men, the realization — *for all* — of the “ideal and quintessential life!”

Conclusion: the goal of life is life itself, a libertarian social order, with equality as its fundamental basis, solidarity as its rule, and as its arbiter: Justice.

Do you understand, now, how, through the regular play of evolution, “these parts — so disparate — of the social whole” will be able to balance themselves and resolve the problem of well-being and universal harmony! From each according to his strength, to each according to his needs! Such is the formula — an essentially anarchist formula, the only true one, the only one in accordance with the will of Nature.

Are you convinced? If not, I agree to continue the debate, it is worth it; if, however, the *Révolte* does not see any obstacle to it.