

The Libertarian Group of Ménilmontant

by Miguel Amoros¹

The Libertarian Group of Ménilmontant (LGM)² was the best placed [in the aftermath of the May 1967 splits within the *Fédération anarchiste*] to take the initiative. The group began with a critique of the poverty of libertarian life, which it developed in the pamphlet *Prolégomènes à un premier manifeste pour une Internationale anarchiste*. The convergence with situationist critique was obvious, but the style was original. It began like this: “The revolution is dead; it has given up the lived and the real in order to become history.”³ Every revolutionary ideology puts forward a deceptive image that serves it. No matter what part of the past is claimed, “the past is never put into play through its critique. And so, there once was history, but no longer.”⁴ Like all the other ideologies, anarchist ideology resorts to the staging of false contestation and an unreal life, comfortably established through a confrontation between fictive contradictions: “The anarchist phantom meets in council to haunt liberty. Having no gender, it perpetuates absence, it hasn’t the decency of the dead (...) Far from being the modernized negation of the old world, the revolutionary anarchist phantom serves that world in good conscience; it participates in recuperation.”

Permanent reference to the past, which is a particularity of libertarian milieus, transposes reality transformed into an illusion [back] into that past and prevents its surpassing. The obvious contradiction between the real means proposed and the proclaimed ends of the movement reveals the counter-revolutionary role of anarchism reduced to the state of an ideology: “One cannot justify the means by the ends to which, in their essence, they would be foreign. The ends only justify the means when they contain them. Thus it is impossible to disassociate them from each other, and the means aren’t justifiable as ‘easy ways’ that are ‘provisionally’ separated from the ends.”

At the time, anarchism in France could be divided into three official tendencies: anarcho-individualism, anarcho-syndicalism, and libertarian socialism. The old structural synthesis – which excluded libertarian communism, which was

¹ Excerpted from Miguel Amoros, *Les situationnistes et l’anarchie* (Éditions de la Roue, 2012), pp 71-73 and 111. Translated by NOT BORED! 20 September 2015. All footnotes by the translator.

² Yves Raynaud, Pierre Lepetit, Hubert Berard, Nicole Le Foll, Bernard Stepanik, Jean-Louis Philippe, and Jacques Le Glou.

³ All further quotes come from the LGM’s *Prolégomènes a un premier manifeste pour une Internationale anarchiste* (May 1967).

⁴ An allusion to a famous quote by Karl Marx.

attached to another form of organization, one based on a homogenous program, on precise tactical and theoretical positions – was the famous “platform.”

With regards to anarcho-individualism [the LGM stated], “To claim to be an individual, but without having critiqued the compression and explosion of individuality in the current forms of society, is to be an individualist in form only (...) Psychoanalysis has shown the degree to which individuality is implanted in society. There will only be individual history when we’ve left social prehistory behind. The individual will be the creation [*le fait*] of all or it won’t exist at all.”

Anarcho-syndicalism proclaimed the labor union to be the everyday instrument of proletarian struggle and the fundamental tool of the future revolution and post-revolutionary social reconstruction. But [in the words of the LGM] “the bureaucratization of the unions has become an end in itself; by structuring the workers’ movement according to authority, they have gone over to the side of the bosses and the State; right from the start, they lead the proletariat to an impasse by managing the survival of the system, by recuperating all the active forces that are disposed to put its survival into question. Such forces are ceaselessly annihilated by false struggles and constant compromises. The unions are ‘whorehouses,’⁵ an inexpensive police presence, the heavy artillery of workers’ false consciousness. Being apolitical, which used to be the guarantee of intransigence, has today become a cover-up for impotence. The refusal of syndicalist authority marks the first step towards the renewal of the working class’s consciousness.”

The unions can’t be revolutionary, and the revolution can’t be based upon them. The contradictions within syndicalism mark its ultimate fate, which is to be a State within the State. The unions can’t put work itself into question and there’s nothing “to do with the people for whom work is a reason to live. We are with the workers who write on the walls of the factories: FREEDOM ENDS HERE.”

Libertarian socialism, which in large part rests upon an uncritical memory of the Spanish collectivities [in the 1930s] and the self-management of work, ends up in a revolt whose impoverished means cause doubts about the serious character of the ultimate purpose. As a result, “the positivity of the past no longer clarifies the negativity of the present.”

In sum, these three sub-ideologies define, not a movement, but a milieu in which revolutionary methods, the class enemy and even history itself have disappeared.

“All of the tactics of this movement that’s become a *milieu* are designed to secure a place in the sun of ‘culture.’ Camus and Brassens work with the phantoms

⁵ A phrase that would appear on the walls of Paris and elsewhere during May 1968.

of Barcelona and Kronstadt.⁶ Thus does anarchism obtain a respectable position in the memories of the old world. Everything is recuperated, except for Ravachol,⁷ who has been relegated to the Grand Guignol.⁸ Thus, to be an anarchist, you have to go to school. The teachers won't fail: the goal of anarchy will be the recognition of the authority of its memories. 'Milieu' also means an absence of extremes, absence period. The anarchist milieu has no history; it is closed and static. It feeds upon itself."

"Our tactic is the moral disarmament of the old world in its everyday image; the denunciation and sabotage of spectacular places is the game that we offer with the obstinacy of the circumference that determines itself with respect to its center (...) It is a question of direct action that, in its very means, signifies the refusal of all reformism (...) Anarchists must appropriate for themselves all the more or less conscious crimes against property and authority. They must be in solidarity with all violence that knows its object, with all those who treat the enemy as an enemy. It is a question of the next revolution, which must be the accomplishment and surpassing of all the classic proletarian revolutions. We must sabotage the future of the police, by denouncing the police officers of the future. It's the scorched earth tactic that, in advance, snatches from power any pretense to novelty. Consciousness must leave its prison by arming all of its bad passions. Freedom is the crime that contains all the others; it is our absolute weapon."⁹

In a provocative way, the group ended its pamphlet by reclaiming the exemplary gestures of Bonnot, Jacob, Henry, Duval,¹⁰ Ravachol, etc., seeing in them not despair but the most absolute optimism.

"The 'revolutionary' anarchist movement is amputated from itself. In the name of a 'realism' that is only complacency, it believes that, along with the police, it will have the last word by condemning the simplest anarchist gestures. It describes as irresponsible or utopian those who are resolute or have everything to win. But despite all the monuments and all the cemeteries, we will continue to

⁶ Albert Camus wrote the following famous line about revolutionary Spain in the 1930s: "It was in Spain that men learned that we can be right and yet be beaten, that force can vanquish spirit, that there are times when courage is not its own reward. It is this, doubtless, which explains why so many men, the world over, regarded the Spanish drama as a personal tragedy." As for Georges Brassens, I can't any specific reference that would be appropriate here.

⁷ François Claudius Koenigstein (1859-1892), a militant French anarchist.

⁸ Theater in which horror plays were performed.

⁹ A quote from the Marquis de Sade.

¹⁰ Jules Bonnot, Alexandre Jacob, Émile Henry and Clément Duval were all revolutionary anarchists who practiced "illegalism."

reclaim a past in which we will only see life. We others, the anarchists, we take our desires for reality.¹¹

“Anarchism is dead. Long live anarchy!”

¹¹ Another phrase that would appear on the walls of Paris and elsewhere during May 1968.