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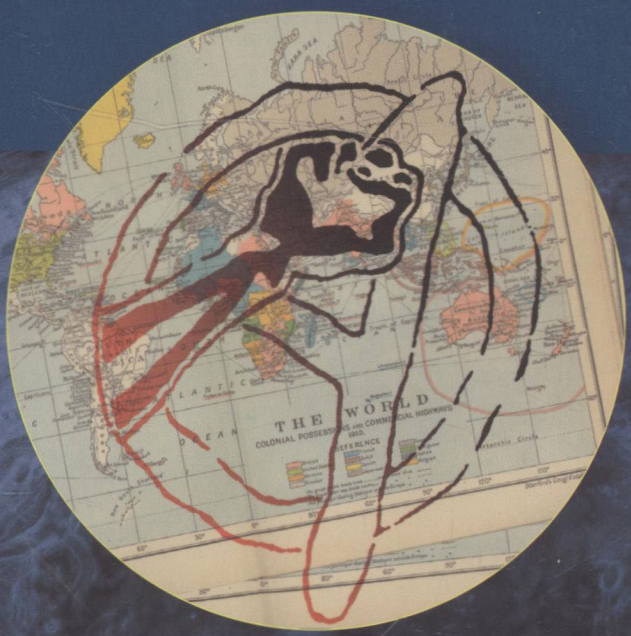
ANARCHISM AND SYNDICALISM IN THE COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL WORLD, 1870–1940

THE PRAXIS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION, INTERNATIONALISM, AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION

EDITORS: STEVEN HIRSCH & LUCIEN VAN DER WALT

WITH A FOREWORD BY BENEDICT ANDERSON



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On the cover: Map of the world with anarchist symbol.
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PREFACE

Benedict Anderson
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If one decided, in a frivolous moment, to sketch a Borgesian version of Aesop's Fable of the Rabbit and the Tortoise, one would need only to extend their race over the horizon to an ever-receding winner's tape. The rabbit, even after many naps, would speed past the tortoise again and again. But a rabbit has a short life while a tortoise lives long and will in the end rumble-stumble past his rival's corpse. Where to? Does he think with Beckett: "I can't go on, I'll go on"?

Today it is not difficult to find very energetic, even if usually (but not always) small, self-described anarchist (or syndicalist) groups around the world, mostly in urban areas. At the same time, there are only a few places left where seriously communist parties still exist. Explaining the colossal phalanx of police and other security professionals guarding the New York Republican convention which ensured Bush's second presidential nomination, the commissioner told reporters that the real danger did not come from Communists or even *djihadi* Muslims, but from violent anarchists. From the early 1990s, scholarly interest in anarchism has produced a minor avalanche of excellent studies.

There can be little doubt that this development arose from the decay and collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, China's headlong rush down the yellow-brick capitalist road, Fidel Castro passing the reins to his septuagenarian younger brother, and Kim Il-sung to his son, and probably grandson too. This cataclysm, along with the fossilization of "social democracy", has encouraged many kinds of people on the left to look for hope elsewhere, and also re-engage with non-Leninist socialist traditions. All the more so, since orthodox Marxist politicians and intellectuals had long cast anarchism, "utopian" rather than "scientific", into the dustbin of history, and created a good deal of falsified historiography to ensure it stayed there.

What we are aware of now is that anarchism got an early start with the work of Fourier and Proudhon, and was "passed" by Marx and Engels until Bakunin threatened to take over the First International.

Between Marx's death and Lenin's sudden rise to power in 1917, orthodox Marxism was in the minority as far as leftist opposition to capitalism and imperialism was concerned—successful mainly in the more advanced industrial and Protestant states of Western and Central Europe, and generally pacific in its political positions. It was rather anarchism (or anarchisms—the outlook was always highly contested, despite the major contributions of Bakunin and Kropotkin) that stole hearts and headlines, first with the wave of spectacularly successful and failed assassinations of heads of states, top politicians and capitalists (from Buffalo to Harbin) under the rubric of "propaganda by the deed"; then by the rise of syndicalism with its signature theme of the revolutionary general strike, discussed by Sorel but in fact first theorised by the anarchists of the 1870s. In his memoirs, Léon Blum, the peaceable former socialist Prime Minister of France, could write that his generation was saturated with anarchist ideas and values.[1]

Lenin was not exactly a rabbit, but his establishment of a Marxist-Leninist regime in much of former Tsardom shot orthodoxy far ahead of any competition. This was followed by the establishment of the Comintern, the Communization of much of east and central Europe, Mao's rise to autocratic power, and so on. In the standard historiography, anarchism made its last heroic and tragic stand in the Spanish Civil War. Europe's anarchism was on its last legs by the end of World War II, and finished off as a mass movement in the aftermath—for the time being at least.

What were anarchism's early advantages? Certainly not theoretical. Marx's towering theoretical contributions were widely acknowledged on the left, not least by Bakunin, who graciously called Marx the "supreme economic and socialist genius of our day" (of their relations, he later wrote, Marx "called me a sentimental idealist, and he was right; I called him gloomy, unreliable and vain, and I was right too.")[2] But in Bakunin and in Kropotkin, and others, anarchism had powerful writers and leaders; in Malatesta it had a charismatic, nomadic political activist.

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[1] See Joan Ungersma Halperin, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885–1898*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, 12.

[2] Quoted in Guy Aldred (ed.), *Bakunin's Writings*, Indore/Bombay: Modern Publishers/Libertarian Book House, 1947, 92, 99.

Its main assets were, I believe, three. First of all was its utopian *élan*. James Ensor's masterpiece, the huge painting he completed in 1888 and entitled *Christ's Entry into Brussels, 1889*, exemplified this *élan*, not only by its hectic dates, but by the huge red banner over the popular crowds surrounding the triumphant Christ, emblazoned with *Vive La Sociale*, meaning "long live the revolutionary new society being born", and by the enigmatic, grandfatherly face of the Marquis de Sade in the lower right hand corner. About the same time, a group of Italian anarchists persuaded the elderly Emperor Pedro II of Brazil to make over land sufficient to establish utopian colonies where anarchists could live unmolested as they dreamed. (Unluckily the Emperor was soon overthrown, and his brutal republican successors quickly obliterated these *colonias*). It was surely also this spirit that made anarchism attractive to so many artists and writers, at least in Western Europe.

Second was anarchism's positive attitude towards peasants and agricultural labourers, who almost everywhere outside northern and western Europe were much larger in numbers than the urban and industrial working classes. Finally, for a long time, anarchism could be said to be more seriously internationalist than its competitor. This attitude partly arose because anarchism rode the huge waves of migration out of Europe that characterized the last 40 years before World War I: Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Poles, Jews and so on poured into the New World, round the Mediterranean, and into the empires being created by the Europeans in Asia and Africa. (Malatesta spent years in Argentina and Egypt, for example, while Marx and Engels stayed in Western Europe).

This internationalism certainly had its theoretical side, but more important, it was a matter of experience and struggle in non-European contexts and terrains. Necessarily these first generation activists found themselves often as "foreigners", and as such bringing the outside international world with them. If and when they returned to Europe, as many did, especially Italians, they brought that extra-Europe experience back home. The main thing was that they did not only work, but they constantly crossed state borders.

It is just here that we see the estimable contribution of the present volume, which focuses on anarchists in the world outside western Europe (except for the case of Ireland): the Caribbean, Peru, Argentina, South Africa, Egypt, then Korea, enlaced with China and Japan, and the

Ukraine.[3] In some cases, for example, the Caribbean and South Africa, the migrants could float in on such imperial, or ex-imperial, languages as English and Spanish. But Italians had to deal with Spanish in Argentina, and in Egypt with Greek, French, Arabic and English. Internationalism was only seriously possible if linguistic communication was successful. One could say that anarchists were the most productive translators of the era—out of need. *La Sociale* was no less significant.

This book offers numerous and fascinating examples of straightforward political activity and organisation—unions, federations of unions, strikes, walkouts, demonstrations, meetings, clubs, even occasional participation in electoral politics. But these activities and organisations were also understood as the social bases of the good society to come: mutual help, mutual sociability, loyalty to the comrades, a common vocabulary. But we can see an additional side of *La Sociale* by looking at Edgar Rodrigues' *Os Anarquistas: Trabalhadores italianos no Brasil*,[4] a first hand account of the life of anarchists and syndicalists in the Brazil of that era, which features a long list of plays and "musicals", staged for anarchist audiences in short-term-rented theatres in Rio and São Paulo. There were also weddings, bars, parks, and so forth. It is just here that one sees the link to the peaceable, isolated *colonias* mentioned above.

The "African" cases are especially interesting, because the anarchists' aims were much more difficult to achieve in this regard. Anarchism was brought to Egypt by Italian workers recruited for the gigantic construction project that was the Suez Canal. Direct access to the Arabic-speaking population was a huge problem, quite aside from the culture of Mediterranean Islam. Demotic Greek was a sort of *lingua franca* in the big cities, especially Alexandria, but Greek wasn't a Romance language and had its own orthography. Greeks were also not Catholics.

Gorman's chapter shows beautifully how hardly solidarity was won: by endless translations, written and oral, and constant oral practice. And won it was, with difficulty and perseverance, via "international" unions organising Arabs and Europeans, multi-lingual meetings and speeches, and even a degree of cooperation with nationalistically-minded Egyptian intellectuals. The movement was anchored in radical

[3] Today we usually think of the Ukraine as part of 'Europe,' but it was long regarded as part of the half-Asiatic empire of the tsars.

[4] Edgar Rodrigues, *Os Anarquistas: Trabalhadores italianos no Brasil*, São Paulo, Global editora e distribuidora, 1984.

and anarchist networks spanning the three sides of the Mediterranean, linking Europe and the Middle East, led strikes and helped launch communism in Egypt. As an example of its practical internationalism, there is Malatesta's remarkable involvement in Ahmad 'Urabi's 1882 revolt.

Van der Walt's fine chapter on South Africa shows another set of intractable non-European difficulties: those connected to race. How could young Scottish anarchists and syndicalists reach out to black workers when fearful white workers typically tried to secure their fragile place by forming white-only unions? Borne into South Africa by European immigrants, the anarchist and syndicalist movement never appealed to more than a small section of the whites. Indeed, its main success was when it developed into as a popular, radical, union tradition amongst the Africans, Coloured, and Indians. Sometimes cooperating with nationalists (as did the Egyptians and the Asians), it had no love for the nation-state; it sought the grail of an anti-nationalist mode of anti-imperialism, via the One Big Union.

Northeast Asia is a different story in many respects. Neither Japan nor China was ever colonized (although a substantial part of China was conquered or concessioned), but Korea, from 1910 to 1945 was forcibly included in the realm of the Japanese "Emperor". There were plenty of Europeans around, but they were soldiers, diplomats, missionaries, teachers, journalists, and capitalists: no workers or peasants. All three countries were "Confucian" to varied extents, but their spoken languages were mutually unintelligible. The editors of this book posit Meiji-Taisho Tokyo as East Asia's counterpart to Kropotkin's London. The British capital was safer for anarchists than Paris, Madrid or Rome, and, as we shall see, radical Koreans and Chinese were safer in Tokyo than in Shanghai or Seoul.

Meiji Japan, eager to get fuller access to European philosophy, natural and social science, literature, etc., plunged into a massive endeavour of translation, not only from French and English, but also German and Russian. (Tolstoy, an anarchist favourite, arrived straight from St. Petersburg). Anarchist texts interested both the Japanese police and home-sprung radicals opposed to the authoritarian political regime: the timing is probably significant, since 1870–1939 was the noonday of anarchism and syndicalism in the West.

Japan naturally produced its own influential anarchists and syndicalists, some of high intellectual and moral calibre, and syndicalist unions, though they often came to bloody ends, but immigrants also

proved key people, as Hwang nicely shows. Thousands of young Chinese, either sent by the Manchus or shipped by other means, came to study in Japan at a time when the writing of Japanese was still heavily done in *kanji*. Koreans were also brought to Japan, with the idea that this was a good way to domesticate them and ward off nationalist resistance. A small Japan-educated intelligentsia became visible as early as the late 1910s.

Books prohibited back home were usually available in the metropolis. It should also be said that newspapers played a parallel role. Already in the 1870s a global circuit of telegraphic under-ocean cables was in place, so that literate East Asians had almost immediate access to the Boer War in Africa, the Cuban rebellion in the Caribbean, and near to home the revolution in the Philippines.

What is both touching and instructive in Hwang's study, and also indicated in Dirlik's chapter on China, is actually the practical internationalism of the first generation of Korean anarchists, some of whom fled to China and linked up with Chinese comrades in an astonishingly energetic campaign to create *La Sociale*—schools, workers' colleges, libraries, cooperatives, militias, refuges and so forth. These days, when Koreans have a reputation for diehard, inward-turning nationalism, Hwang's account is really poignant. The transnational dimension of "Asian" anarchism is also stressed by Dirlik, who focuses on the role of networks and translocal connections in the making of the movement.

The next part of this book, probably more familiar to readers than the Asian and African sections, consists of four powerful studies of the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Americas, though the important North American IWW Wobblies make brief but significant appearances. What is most valuable here is the sharp contrast in experience and praxis that the authors bring out. Biondo and Toledo's description of radical politics in São Paulo from 1895 until 1935 etches especially clearly the familial tension that could arise between extremist anarchism and its pragmatic relative, syndicalism.

In Europe, the upsurge of syndicalism was mainly a response to the deepening of industrialism and the rapid growth of the urban working-class, as well as the violent state reaction to anarchism's spectacular "propaganda by the deed", in the last quarter of the 19th century. The emergence of syndicalist unions in China and Japan (in Korea, these were ruthlessly crushed) was conditioned by similar factors. Syndicalists believed that revolutionary change could only come from the massive organisation of trade unions, and their federation in different

forms, including the dream of a single "big union" of them all. Their method of action was centrally defined by the strike, local, trade or general.

Anarchists did not ignore the significance of unions, and many played active roles within them. Moreover, the roots of syndicalism lay in the anarchist wing of the First International, and a great many anarchists embraced syndicalism. Nonetheless, a vocal section of anarchists always suspected that these unions were bases for undesirable internal hierarchies, and that, too often, they focussed on short-term "economic gains"—higher wages, shorter working hours, and so on—at the expense of general social liberation.

Syndicalism flourished in São Paulo, the sole large industrial centre of a Brazil that was still overwhelmingly rural and pre-industrial, and its main concerns were often with the "working man." In some anarchist eyes, it therefore marginalized women and rural labour, and was not much interested in the general social and cultural transformation of the population. In a country dominated by a tight-knit oligarchy, and foreign capital, and with a very limited suffrage, anarchists and syndicalists were nonetheless united in their hostility to the coalition of oligarchs, capitalists, and the armed power of the state.

Laforcade's wonderful micro-study of anarchist and syndicalist radicalism in riverine Argentina in the same era forms a nice parallel to the case of São Paulo. It is instructive that he focuses not on industrial workers in the restricted sense, but rather on the longshoremen and sailors employed in coastal and riverine shipping, who held a key strategic position in a country whose internal and external commerce was heavily determined by its unusual geography. Buenos Aires stood near the meeting-point between the Atlantic Ocean and the gigantic Rio de la Plata, navigable for hundreds of miles into the interior, shared with Uruguay and Paraguay, and dotted with the riverine ports through which agricultural exports from the interior overwhelmingly passed in a largely pre-railway era. Waterfront and on-ship strikes had a capacity for inflicting "damage" on the class enemy that was unmatched by any radical group in São Paulo. One consequence was that anarchists and syndicalists found in unionism a powerful weapon, and cooperated and competed on the waterfront for many years.

In both studies, we see the crucial role that immigration played in developing communication with European comrades, especially in Italy, Portugal and Spain. But we are also shown how the experience of being "foreign" created a strong stimulus for assimilation to

local conditions and for developing solidarity across ethno-linguistic lines, particularly in the face of official efforts to create a deep divide between "foreign" trouble-makers and loyal, nationalist-minded "citizens," paralleling, for example, the efforts in Egypt to unite "foreign" and "local" labour.

To the cases of São Paulo and Buenos Aires, Shaffer's original chapter provides an impressive contrast. He describes and compares two very different types of transnational radical networks that grew up on the fringes of the rapidly expanding US empire in the Americas. The first linked Cuba with Puerto Rico, southern Florida (Tampa mainly), and Panama, that Yankee imperialism snatched out of Colombia's hands to enable the creation of the inter-oceanic Panama Canal. Small places, without big industrial cities, all controlled by the US after 1903; huge immigration from rural Spain to Cuba in the 1880s and 1890s, and large Cuban emigration to southern Florida and Panama later on. Hence a network in which "language" was no obstacle, but rather a source of solidarity across state lines. In this context, syndicalism was a powerful force, straddling borders, and conflict between anarchist "purism" and syndicalist unionism was rare.

Anarchism and syndicalism had come to Cuba early, with the wave of immigration from anarchist Catalonia, above all. But almost at once it faced the problem of nationalism in a way that is invisible in Brazil and Argentina. Anarchists had defended immigration against creole nationalism, and if they initially hesitated to support Martí's national revolution against Spanish colonialism, they eventually came round on anti-imperialist grounds, playing a central role. Curiously enough, the American occupation in 1898 allowed the anarchists to develop some favourite traditional themes, the condition of women, especially those working in the tobacco factories of Cuba and Tampa, the pitiable condition of children's health and education, and so forth. At the same time, bound by the Spanish language it also moved easily across state boundaries, and created a dense network of communication, financial support, and educational activities that crossed over into the southeast tip of the USA and across the Caribbean to the Canal Zone.

Shaffer's contrasting case developed around and across the border between the US and Mexico, especially once the Mexican Revolution got under way. Here we find syndicalism showing up, especially in the oil-fields along the Caribbean coast and in the largest urban conglomerations. Doubtless, this was partially the result of generally close ties with the syndicalist Wobblies themselves, who included a significant

number of native Spanish speakers and well as bilingual Anglos in the American border states between California and Texas, who also were committed to internationalism.

Hirsch's moving chapter on Peru makes "anarcho-syndicalism" its basic subject. Facing the remote southern Pacific rather than the heavily criss-crossed Atlantic, Peru experienced very little like the vast European migrations into Brazil, Argentina, and Cuba. On the other hand, it had a huge native population, which had long been extirpated in Cuba and Argentina, and been completely marginalized in coastal Brazil. Hence it faced a very different kind of nationalist question—one far closer to that confronting the movement in Egypt and South Africa, where Europeans were a small minority.

The origins of Peruvian anarchism and syndicalism therefore have some features comparable to the three previous Latin American and Caribbean cases, but others startlingly different. On the one hand, it was brought to Peru not by poor *émigrés* but by an upper-class Peruvian intellectual, Manuel González Prada, who spent 7 years of self-exile (1891–1898) in Spain and France. There he developed close contacts with radical leftists just at the time when syndicalism was in the ascendant at the base and when anarchism still had a strong influence in intellectual circles. On the other hand, at the end of the 19th century, Lima and the nearby port-city of Callao were starting to follow the earlier path of São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Johannesburg—industrialising big city agglomerations increasingly connected to foreign capitalist investments in mines and other export industries.

In Hirsch's narrative there are three themes of unusual interest. The first is that, well before any other political group, the anarcho-syndicalists made determined efforts to reach out to, and create solidarity, with the indigenous populations, both in the former Inca capital of Cuzco in the remote highlands and in urban coastal towns where migrations from the interior were beginning. This cannot have been easy, since few people of Spanish descent mastered either Quechua or Aymara, and the cultural gap between the highlands and the coast was truly vast.

Here a comparison is warranted with Brazil and Cuba, as well as South Africa. In the 1880s, Brazil and Cuba were the last in the world legally to end slavery. Shaffer shows how the Cuban anarchists sought to deal with the race question, although Toledo and Biondi do not mention the large population of urban blacks along the country's northeast coast. Yet the blacks in both countries were far closer in religion and

language to the dominant whites than anything comparable in Peru. In South Africa, the indigenous African majority (and African workers in particular) were culturally distinct, yet, as van der Walt shows, the latter were nonetheless championed by and increasingly central in the local anarchist and syndicalist movement.

Second, Hirsch underlines the Peruvian radicals' close ties with their counterparts in neighbouring Chile—at a time when the governments of the two countries were ferociously hostile to one another. Finally, the author underscores the serious efforts to empower and succour women, especially women workers, as well as to carry out the traditional anarchist endeavours to create a new culture by building schools, pamphleteering, literacy campaigns, and all the sociability characteristic of *La Sociale.*

Why is there a chapter on Ireland in this book? Morphologically, it can hardly be called a colony in the standard sense, parallel to, say South Africa, Indonesia, Syria, or Mozambique. It had its own parliament in the 18th century, and after the Reform Act and the end of legal discrimination against Catholics, both happening in the 1830s, it had a powerful electorally-based presence in Westminster. From the 18th century on some of the most outstanding writers in the UK were Irishmen too, including Swift, Burke, Sheridan, Wilde, and Joyce. Immigration into Ireland from Britain was negligible, while Irish emigration into Britain (and the USA) from the 19th century on has been massive. By 1900, only a very small minority, in the far west of the island, spoke Gaelic rather than English. What marked most of the island off from Britain was the attachment to an often cruelly persecuted Catholicism and its poverty-stricken agricultural economy. It was one of the earliest European places where a militant nationalist movement was born.

O'Connor's sober text makes the link, not through anarchism (which is not much mentioned) bur rather through syndicalism, even though, by his own account, few Irish worker radicals called themselves syndicalists. It appears in the decade before World War I, at a time when syndicalism was a major social force in Catholic Western Europe—France, Italy, and Spain, and when the Wobblies were a household word in the USA to which so many Irish people had fled during and after the great famine of the 1840s. It was also inextricably linked to the rising mobilisation of Irish nationalist identity, and hostility to British domination—even of the local branches of powerful trade unions controlled from across the Irish Sea.