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The Effects of Persecution

Pëtr Kropotkin

May 4/10, 1895

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For fifteen months everything was done to stifle anarchy. They reduced the press to silence, repressed men, shot down at point blank range in Guyana, departed to the isles of Spain incarcerated by the thousands in Italy without even bothering with draconian laws or judicial comedy. Every method was sought, including starving women and children by sending the police to put pressure on those bosses who still dared to give work to anarchists.

They stopped before nothing in order to crush men and stifle the idea.

And despite it all, the idea has never made as much progress as it has during these fifteen months.

It has never so rapidly gained adherents. It has never so thoroughly penetrated sectors once resistant to any kind of socialism.

And never has it been so well demonstrated that this concept of society without either exploitation or authority was a necessary result of all the ideas that have been at work since last century; that it has deep roots in all that has been said over the past three years in the infant science of the development of

societies, in the science of moral sentiments, in the philosophy of history, and in philosophy in general.

We can already hear it being said: “Anarchy? But it’s the summary of the ideas of the coming century. Beware if you seek to return to the past. If you will, greet a future of progress and freedom!”

At the very time that according to the law the very label of anarchist earned you relegation to Guyana and the slow death from malaria or the mistreatment of the prison guards, what was it that occupied the press?

We remember the inquiry on anarchy carried out by a major Parisian newspaper. They said: “In order to carry themselves so proudly they must be inspired by a great ideal. We must get to know it!” And we read hundreds of articles in the daily and monthly press, which perhaps began by wanting to crush the “hundred-headed hydra” but which often ended by justifying both ideas and men.

Young people in the schools, so long resistant to a socialism that, beginning gloriously, ended with an eight-hour law or the expropriation of the railroads by the state, greeted the new arrival. Young people got a glimpse there of a large and powerful conception of the life of societies, embracing all human relations and bringing to all its relations the pride, the force, the initiative of free men, the very essence of all progress. And in their best representatives young people were taken with a concept that makes them understand how the freeing of the worker becomes the freeing of *man*; how communism and anarchy smash all the chains in which a Christian, Roman-law, and Jacobin society stifled the freedom of the human being.

The English press – especially the weekly paper that speaks to peasants and workers – took part in the discussion of anarchist principles, ideals, roads, and means. For months and months the five or six newspapers most read by the masses in the provinces had one or two columns of correspondence on anarchy. “Enough!” cried the editors. “From here on in we will

cease this correspondence!” But in the next issue it re-opened it to a new discussion: individualism and communism, the state and the individual...we could put together volumes of this, and still it continues.

At the same time, in Germany and Russia works appear in revues concerning the relation between society and the individual, the rights of the state, the fact of the individual placing himself outside current morality and the influence of this fact, the progress of public morality, and so on. Godwin and Max Striner have been dug up. Nietzsche has been studied, and it was shown how the anarchist who dies on the scaffold is connected to the philosophical current founded on the works of the German philosopher.

And finally Tolstoy, speaking to the entire civilized world, showed in his responses to the criticisms raised to his last book how not only Christians, but every intelligent man, whatever his philosophy, *must* completely break with the state that organizes the exploitation of the worker, *must* refuse to take the least part in the crimes, the economic exploitation, and the military atrocities committed by every state, whatever its label.

To sum up in a few words: in all the many domains of thought there has been produced an impulse towards anarchy. A profound labor of ideas is being completed that leads to anarchy and gives communism a new strength.

We note this work with happiness. But our thoughts go elsewhere.

We are searching for the signs that demonstrate that the same labor is at work in the classes that on suffer to produce everything without enjoying any of the marvels of art, science, and wealth that they pile up on the earth.

We find these signs everywhere: at meetings, at working class congresses, in the very language of these meetings. But we never stop asking ourselves: “Does the echo of these discussions penetrate the homes, the hovels of the worker, the hut of the peasant? Do the peasant and the worker glimpse the road

that will lead them to their dual liberation, from capital and the state? Or else, fooled by scholars, priests, journalists, the admirers of power and the whole lot maintained by the state – have they maintained their unshakeable faith in the benefits of governmental Jacobinism?”

Does their criticism of what makes them suffer go beyond the criticism of individuals? Does it rise to the criticism of the principles upon which capital, wage labor and their creature, the state, reside?

Is the idea of an international union of all the oppressed implanted among them, and do their hearts bleed in the same way for massacres committed at Fourmies or Berlin, Chicago or Vienna? Do they include the whole band of international exploiters in the same hatred, be they Japanese or French patriots, German or English?

Born in the breast of the people, under the inspiration of the people in the International Workingmen’s Association, and strong in the support it finds in study, the idea must return to the people, grow in its breast, inspire it with its irresistible breath.

There alone will it achieve its full development. There alone it will take form and find the way to substitute itself for the departing old world and reconstruct society on the basis of equality, the complete freedom of the individual, and fraternity among all men.