

# **Anarchist Communism**

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## Abstract

Communism is a model of stateless society based on the common ownership of the means of production and informed by the principle ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. Though this concept has remained stable throughout the history of anarchism, the corresponding label does not denote a single, coherent current traversing that history. Rather, different currents used that label at different times, as a way of contrasting themselves to other anarchist currents. Through the controversies first between communists and collectivists, then between communists and individualists, anarchist communism has ultimately come to represent an associationist tradition that is characterised more in terms of tactics (collective action, involvement in unions, insurrection) than of ultimate goals. At the same time, anarchist communism has taken on distinctive traits that set it apart from the communism of the Marxist tradition. In the voluntaristic views of its foremost advocate Errico Malatesta, anarchist communism evolved from being a *sine qua non* of anarchism to being one among different options, to be realised to the extent that it received support, in a pluralist, experimentalist, gradualist, solidaristic, libertarian process of social evolution.

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Communism is a model of stateless society based on the common ownership of the means of production and informed by the principle ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. In other words, common ownership is not limited to the means of production, but extends to the products of labour: under communism, ‘everything belongs to everyone’.

This definition remained stable and uncontroversial throughout the history of anarchism, and was always shared by communists of the Marxist school, who regarded the state as an instrument of class oppression and therefore believed that it had no place in a classless society. So, from a strictly theoretical perspective, there was neither evolution in the concept of anarchist communism nor even a distinctive concept of anarchist communism to be contrasted with other forms of communism.

However, different models of anarchist communist societies have been proposed. Moreover, the centrality of communism within the broader anarchist theory has shifted over time. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, anarchists and communists of different schools disagreed on the path to their common end. Hence, the anarchist communist tradition is best characterised in terms of tactical as well as theoretical beliefs and is best appraised contrastively, in relation to the beliefs of its opponents. In brief, the history of the anarchist communist current is not only the history of a concept but also the history of a label. From this perspective, that history is less linear than a narrow doctrinal perspective would suggest. The ‘anarchist communist’ label was taken up in time by anarchists of different types and in contrast with different opponents, and the dividing lines could vary considerably.

Communism has not always been associated with anarchism. The anti-authoritarian branch of the International Workingmen’s Association was initially collectivist, in contrast with the communist branch. Collectivism differs from communism in the way it envisages the distribution of the social product in a socialist society. Its informing principle is ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his work’. However, the real divide was not the distribution of the social product but freedom. The communist tradition, from Étienne Cabet to Wilhelm Weitling

and Karl Marx, had been predominantly authoritarian. In that tradition, common ownership of the means of production meant ownership by an all-encompassing state. The key implication of the collectivists' claim that each was entitled to the full product of his work was the negation of any other source of entitlement, whether by a capitalist or a state. In this vein, Mikhail Bakunin claimed that he detested communism, because it necessarily ended with the centralisation of property in the hands of the state, and was instead a collectivist, because he wanted 'the organization of society and of collective or social property from the bottom up, by free association'.<sup>1</sup> In fact, anarchist collectivism was under-determined and inclusive with respect to the distribution of products. As the historian of anarchism Max Nettlau remarks, 'nobody then took care of determining in detail what *the full product of work* meant; it was understood that it was the product not decimated by the capitalist and the state, and this sufficed'. The search for practical and equitable means would be left to the future groups and associations.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1876, the collectivist formula had come under scrutiny. The beginning of an anarchist communist current can be dated to that year. Though anarchist communist ideas had been occasionally put forward in France, the decisive thrust came from the Italian branch of the International, which counted Carlo Cafiero and Errico Malatesta among its most prominent figures. Their criticism of collectivism was based on two arguments that have since remained the cornerstone of communism: it was impossible to give everyone equal access to the means of production since, for example, the fertility of the land differed from place to place, and physical and intellectual endowment differed from individual to individual; and it was impossible to determine each individual's contribution to production, since production was an inherently social process, in which each individual's work depended on the work of others. Collectivism, they argued, was bound to reinstate competition and inequality.<sup>3</sup> A resolution that replaced the collectivist with the communist programme was passed at the 1876 congress of the Italian branch of the International in Florence.

In the following years anarchist communism came to be accepted in most countries where the antiauthoritarian International had a presence. From 1880 it came into use in France, Belgium, and Switzerland, where it was accepted by the Jura Federation in October of that year, with the support of Cafiero, Élisée Reclus, and Peter Kropotkin, who all lived in that country at the time. Kropotkin went on to become the best-known and most influential advocate of anarchist communism. Unlike earlier proponents, such as Malatesta, who acknowledged that communism presupposed abundance of products and highly developed moral consciousness and therefore foresaw a transitional period before communism could be established, Kropotkin maintained that the immediate establishment of communism after the revolution was both necessary and practicable. In his distinctive scientific attitude, he claimed to refrain from any 'metaphysical conceptions' and to follow, instead, 'the course traced by the modern philosophy of evolution'.<sup>4</sup> In this light, he maintained that existing societies 'are inevitably impelled in the direction of Com-

<sup>1</sup> M. Bakunin, 'Deuxième discours au deuxième Congrès de la Paix et de la Liberté,' 23 September 1868, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Amsterdam: IISG, 2000, CD-ROM).

<sup>2</sup> M. Nettlau, 'Internazionale collettivista e comunismo anarchico,' in E. Malatesta, *Scritti*, 3 vols. (rpt, Carrara, 1975), vol. 3, 255.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: C. Cafiero, 'Anarchy and Communism,' in R. Graham (Ed), *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 112–113; [E. Malatesta], *Programma e organizzazione della Associazione Internazionale dei Lavoratori* (Florence: Tipografia C. Toni, 1884), 30–34.

<sup>4</sup> P. Kropotkin, 'Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,' in R. N. Baldwin (Ed), *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover, 1927), 47.

munism', which he regarded as 'the synthesis of the two ideals pursued by humanity throughout the ages—Economic and Political Liberty'. Therefore he was convinced that 'the first obligation, when the revolution shall have broken the power upholding the present system, will be to realize Communism without delay'.<sup>5</sup> Kropotkin envisaged a decentralised society. 'Political economy' he wrote 'has hitherto insisted chiefly upon *division*. We proclaim *integration*; and we maintain that the ideal of society—that is, the state towards which society is already marching—is a society ... where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work ... and where each worker works both in the field and the industrial workshop'. He thus extolled the virtues of petty trades, small industries, and industrial villages, and discerned 'a pronounced tendency of the factories towards migrating to the villages, which becomes more and more apparent nowadays'. In those villages, factories and workshops would be at the gates of fields and gardens, and would be used by 'the *complete* human being, trained to use his brain and his hands'.<sup>6</sup>

Kropotkin's influential writings provided ammunition for an exclusivist and optimistic version of anarchist communism that took root in the Italian, French, and Spanish movements and was epitomised by the twin pamphlets *Les Produits de la Terre* and *Les Produits de l'Industrie*, published respectively in 1885 and 1887 in Geneva. The pamphlets argued, on the basis of statistical data, that 'the dwellings on earth are many more than is needed to comfortably accommodate all human beings', that 'foodstuff amounts to twice the quantity required to fulfill the human kind's needs', and 'the quantity of manufactured goods, estimated in francs, is *three times greater* than the amount representing the expenditure needed for all individuals'. In brief, statistical support was given to the claim that the communistic *pris au tas*, 'taking from the stockpile', was an immediate possibility.<sup>7</sup> Outside of Europe, Kropotkin's ideas were especially influential in China and Japan. In 1914 the Chinese anarchist Shifu published the manifesto *Goals and Methods of the Anarchist Communist Party*, which included the following programmatic point: 'The products of labour—food, clothing, housing, and everything else that is useful—all are the common possession of society. Everyone may use them freely, and everyone will enjoy all wealth in common'.<sup>8</sup>

The one European country where communism did not gain predominance in the anarchist movement was Spain, where anarchist collectivism and anarchist communism vied for the favour of workers throughout the 1880s and beyond, in a protracted and often heated controversy that was both theoretical and tactical. In Spain socialism had developed as a mass organisation guided by anarchist collectivist principles. By the end of 1882, the *Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Española* (FTRE) boasted a membership of 64,000 workers.<sup>9</sup> In the Bakuninist tradition, Spanish collectivists advocated the worker's entitlement to the full product of his labour, as a matter of freedom, and rejected communism as authoritarian. In so doing, they explicitly upheld individual property. The need to distribute products according to the value of each individual's work presupposed a highly organised and systematically defined collectivity, which an 1881 FTRE manifesto

<sup>5</sup> P. Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1972), 62, 65.

<sup>6</sup> P. Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 22–23, 350, 413.

<sup>7</sup> We have translated from the following Italian edition: E. Reclus, *I prodotti della terra e dell'industria* (Geneva: L. Bertoni, 1901), 29. The original pamphlets were published anonymously. Though Reclus was instrumental in bringing them about, the attribution to him is incorrect.

<sup>8</sup> 'Goals and Methods of the Anarchist Communist Party,' in Graham, 349.

<sup>9</sup> J. Piqué i Padró, *Anarco-collectivisme i anarco-communisme* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1989), 15.

described as ‘a free federation of free associations of free producers’.<sup>10</sup> The structure of the future society was mirrored by the structure of the FTRE, for the present workers’ organisation was to be the embryo of the post-revolutionary collectivity. Therefore the FTRE had a complex federative organisation. Though it was believed that the collectivist society could only be ushered in by a social revolution, the path to revolution was essentially a syndicalist one, focused on the gradual growth of the labour movement and based on the tactics of ‘legalism’, aimed at preserving the organisation’s public existence: in order to build a mass movement, violent tactics were rejected in favour of methods, such as strikes and boycotts, that could be carried out within legal boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

The dissidence from the FTRE’s policy arose first on the tactical ground, without questioning collectivism. In Andalusia, where legalist tactics were ill-suited for the starving peasants, the opposition to the FTRE’s Federal Commission materialised in 1883 in the formation of the group *Los Desheredados* (The Disinherited). Another dissident group arose in the Catalan town of Gràcia, with the shoemaker Martín Borrás and the tailor Emilio Hugas as prominent figures. In 1883 they presented a draft regulation which, after reasserting the principles of anarchist collectivism, proposed a decentralised reorganisation of the FTRE.<sup>12</sup> In 1886 they published the first avowedly anarchist communist periodical, *La Justicia Humana*. Their opening editorial stated: ‘We are anarchist communist ... We are illegalist ... We are not in favour of organizing the working classes in a positive sense; we aspire to a negative organization ... We believe this has to be by groups, without regulations’.<sup>13</sup> In the historian George Esenwein’s summary, communists were ‘intractably opposed to trade unions, which were viewed as essentially reformist bodies’; ‘they preferred to set up small, loosely federated groups composed of dedicated militants’; and they held a profound faith in the power of spontaneous revolutionary acts. ‘Quite understandably, then, they tended to shun strikes and other forms of economic warfare in favor of violent methods, extolling above all the virtues of propaganda by the deed’.<sup>14</sup>

Not only did the tactical cleavage precede the ideological controversy, but it also had a broader geographical scope. Esenwein’s outline of the Spanish anarchist communists’ tactical tenets could be equally applied to Italian ‘anti-organisationists’, who engaged long and often harsh polemics with ‘organisationists’ that divided the Italian movement from the 1890s on over involvement in unions, propaganda by the deed versus mass action, and institutional forms of organisation such as parties, programmes, and congresses. In the Italian case, however, the ideological controversy had no prominent role, so that the advocacy of communism could be unproblematically shared by anti-organisationists such as Luigi Galleani and organisationists such as Malatesta. As the ideological controversy subsided in Spain, the divergence on organisation persisted in many countries. In brief, there is evidence that the tactical divide had deeper roots and that the ideological controversy in Spain was grafted onto it.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> M. Nettlau, *La Première Internationale en Espagne (1868–1888)* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), 353–354.

<sup>11</sup> G. R. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 82.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Proyecto de reglamento de la Federación Regional Española,’ *La Federación Igualadina*, 17 (1 June 1883).

<sup>13</sup> ‘Nuestros propósitos,’ *La Justicia Humana* (Barcelona), 1:1 (18 April 1886).

<sup>14</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, 108–109.

<sup>15</sup> On the cross-national character of this debate, see my ‘European Anarchism in the 1890s: Why Labour Matters in Categorizing Anarchism,’ *Working USA*, 12:4 (September 2009), 451–466.

While anti-organisationism did not strictly imply communism, the association was not arbitrary. In an 1893 essay, the Italian Francesco Saverio Merlino remarks that ‘much of what today goes by the name of anarchist communism is borrowed, unfortunately, from the individualist theory’. Like the individualists—Merlino argues—self-styled anarchist communists claim the *sovereignty of the individual* and ‘demand, like those, that each individual have *free access* to the production sources, as if each individual lived in a world of his own’. Their motto is ‘do what you want’ and their assumption is that, once everyone will do so, a perfectly organised society will result. In fact, Merlino argues, they claim that no organisation will be necessary, for ‘the individuals will agree, cooperate, distribute tasks, exchange products without a previous understanding ... by *nature’s* secret impulse’.<sup>16</sup>

Towards the end of the 1880s, prominent figures in the collectivist camp, such as Ricardo Mella and Fernando Tárrida del Marmol, made efforts to overcome the rift by proposing an unhyphenated form of anarchism, for which Tárrida coined the fortunate phrase ‘anarchism without adjectives’, that tolerated the coexistence of different anarchist schools.<sup>17</sup> Outside of Spain, an effort in the same direction was made by Malatesta. His proposal is all the more significant for our discussion, as it comes from an early proponent of anarchist communism, who redefined the place of communism in anarchist theory without recanting his erstwhile beliefs. While confirming his personal belief in communism as the only full solution to the social question, Malatesta shifted his emphasis on the concept of anarchism as a method, arguing that the coexistence of collectivists and communists in the same party was a logical consequence of that method: ‘If anarchy means spontaneous evolution ... by what right and for what reason might we turn solutions we prefer and advocate into dogmas and impose them? And then again, using what means?’ Anarchists could hold the most diverse ideals about the reconstruction of society, but ‘for the formation of a party it is necessary and sufficient that there should be a shared method. And the method ... is shared by all, communists and collectivists alike’.<sup>18</sup> To emphasise this new stance, Malatesta and his associates preferred to inclusively call themselves ‘anarchist socialists’, while retaining their communist beliefs.

By the 1890s communism had virtually won the battle with collectivism. Declarations of anarchist communist faith tended now to argue more for socialism in general, while arguments for communism in particular were often left implicit. For example, John Most’s 1892 article ‘Why I am a Communist’, after criticising capitalism and private property, simply urged that the means of production ‘be transferred into the possession of the community’: ‘And such a transfer’ he claimed ‘means nothing short of abolishing private property, and of establishing the collectivism of wealth, of Communism’.<sup>19</sup> As a result of these parallel trends following the decline of the communist–collectivist controversy, the ‘anarchist communist’ and ‘anarchist socialist’ labels could often refer interchangeably to the same programmes. An illustration of the permeability of labels is the long-lived bilingual Swiss periodical *Réveil–Risveglio* (Awakening), which was founded in 1900 as *Le Réveil Socialiste-Anarchiste*, changed its qualification to ‘anarchist-communist’ in 1913, and became simply ‘anarchist’ in 1926 to avoid any confusion with authoritarian communism, with no change in its editorial line.

<sup>16</sup> S. Merlino, *L’Individualisme dans l’Anarchisme* (Brussels: Edition de la Société nouvelle, 1893), 8–9.

<sup>17</sup> See Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, Chapter 8.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Our Plans,’ in D. Turcato (Ed) *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014), 98.

<sup>19</sup> *The Commonwealth* (London) 7: 302 (20 February 1892).

At the same time, anarchist communism came increasingly to be contrasted, no longer with anarchist collectivism but with anarchist individualism. In this contrast we can grasp the substance of the anarchist communist label in this phase. The most influential anarchist individualist writer, Benjamin Tucker, defined anarchism as ‘the doctrine that all the affairs of men should be managed by individuals or voluntary associations’. Influenced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s mutualism, he rejected the common ownership of the means of production, but wanted to give everyone access to them by abolishing all forms of monopoly. He thus claimed that communists were not anarchists, ‘on the ground that Anarchism means a protest against every form of invasion’.<sup>20</sup> Anarchist communists believed the individualists started from a false premise. As Malatesta argued in 1897, they looked upon society ‘as an aggregate of autonomous individuals ... who have no reason to be together other than their own advantage and who might part ways once they find that the benefits that society has to offer are not worth the sacrifices in personal freedom that it demands’. However, he added, the individual cannot exist independently of society. In society a man may be free or a slave, but in society he must remain because that is the context of his being a man. Therefore, the point was not to safeguard a fictitious individual autonomy from invasion but to seek the most equitable conditions in which associated life could take place.<sup>21</sup>

At any rate, the future society was not the key issue, for all agreed on the principle of freedom as its basic rule, after all. Above all—as in the communist–collectivist controversy—it was a matter of different tactics advocated in the present. As the American anarchist Alexander Berkman remarked, communist anarchists believed in social revolution, while individualists and mutualists thought that present society would gradually develop out of government into a non-governmental condition. Moreover, Malatesta wrote in 1926, there were dissensions about the anarchists’ attitude towards the labour movement, about organisation, and about the anarchists’ relationships with other subversive parties.<sup>22</sup> In this shift from the communist–collectivist to the communist–individualist contrast, the tactical continuity of latter communism is more with collectivism than with former communism. As we have seen, the link between individualism and early versions of communism had already been pointed out by Merlino. In his abovementioned 1897 article, Malatesta concurred with Merlino’s analysis, arguing that ‘individualist anarchists of the communist school’ shared with individualists of Tucker’s type the complementary and equally faulty beliefs in the individual’s absolute autonomy and in a principle of ‘harmony by natural law’, whereby—in the communists’ version of the principle—‘with everybody doing as he pleases, it will turn out that, quite unknowingly and unintentionally, he will have done precisely what the rest wanted him to’.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Malatesta’s later reference to the communists’ tactical dissensions with individualists shows that the communists were the heirs of the organisationist current that in Spain was represented by the collectivists, while the individualists adopted an anti-organisationist stance. In brief, in its evolution, the anarchist communist current had come to stand for that associationist tradition based on workers’ collective action that in Spain went by

<sup>20</sup> C. L. S[wartz] (Ed), *Individual Liberty: Selection from the Writings of Benjamin R. Tucker* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1926), 7–9, 32.

<sup>21</sup> E. Malatesta, ‘Individualism in Anarchism’, in D. Turcato (Ed), *Complete Works of Errico Malatesta*, vol. 3 (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2016), 79–80.

<sup>22</sup> A. Berkman, *What is Anarchism?* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2003), 169; E. Malatesta, ‘Comunismo e individualismo’, in *Scritti*, vol. 3, 227.

<sup>23</sup> Malatesta, ‘Individualism’, in *Method of Freedom*, 79–80.

the name of *societarismo*. At the same time—especially in contrast with early twentieth-century syndicalism and its reliance on the general strike as a revolutionary weapon—it retained the advocacy of armed insurrection and of specific anarchist organisations to promote it.

Among the many anarchist communist programmes that furthered this tradition worldwide after its first half a century of existence, two deserve mention for their historical significance, as they were linked to two major European revolutionary experiences, the Russian revolution of 1917 and the Spanish revolution of 1936. The first is the *Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, a programme published in 1926 by *Dielo Trouda*, a group of exiled Russian anarchists including Nestor Makhno and Peter Arshinov. The document aimed to draw a lesson from the Russian revolution, where, in the authors' view, divisions hindered anarchist action. Accordingly, unity of action was their watchword. The document urged all anarchists to gather under a single organisation characterised by theoretical and tactical unity. 'The executive organ of the general anarchist movement' it was stated 'introduces in its rank the principle of collective responsibility', according to which the entire organisation was responsible for the activity of each member and each member was responsible for the activity of the organisation as a whole. The organisation was to be structured federally, but it demanded 'execution of communal decisions' from its members. This spirit of integration is also discernible in the document's 'constructive section', where the post-revolutionary path to building a communist society is traced. The country's diverse branches of industry, it is argued, are tightly bound together; hence all actual production is considered 'as a single workshop of producers'. Accordingly, 'the productive mechanism of the country is global and belongs to the whole working class'. Though all industrial products would belong to all from the outset, it was acknowledged that individuals may not have unlimited liberty to satisfy their needs from the first day of the revolution, hence insufficient goods would be divided 'according to the principle of the greatest urgency'.<sup>24</sup>

A different view of the future communist society was taken in the historical resolution about 'the confederal concept of libertarian communism' passed at the 1936 Saragossa congress of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT), on the eve of the Spanish revolution. The resolution, which was inspired by Isaac Puente's popular pamphlet *El comunismo libertario* and drafted by Federica Montseny, Puente himself, and others, was not just a statement of a distant goal but also a plan for the aftermath of a revolution that was felt to be imminent.<sup>25</sup> After stating, as a founding principle of the revolution, 'that the needs of each human being be met with no limitations other than those imposed by the economy's capabilities', the organisation of the post-revolutionary society is described, in a bottom-up fashion, as resting on a triple base: individual, commune, and federation. Great emphasis is placed on the 'free commune' as the basic political and administrative entity. Communes are to be autonomous and 'are to federate at county and regional levels, and set their own geographical limits, whenever it may be found convenient to group small towns, hamlets and townlands into a single commune. Amalgamated, these communes are to make up an Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes'. Characteristically, it is claimed that 'the new society will eventually equip every commune with all the agricultural

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<sup>24</sup> *Dielo Trouda*, *The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists* (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Isaac Puente's pamphlet was translated in English as 'Libertarian Communism,' *Anarchist Review* (Orkney), 1:6 (Summer 1982), 27–35.

and industrial accoutrements required for it to be autonomous, according to the biological principle that the man—in this case the commune—is most free who needs least from the others'.<sup>26</sup>

These two programmes illustrate alternate visions of the anarchist communist society, one based on large, interdependent industrial networks, the other on local, autonomous communities. In pre-revolutionary Spain, the former view was upheld by the foremost anarchist Diego Abad de Santillán. He expressed his views in a book published only months before the Saragossa congress, with the intent of 'out-growing the puerility of a libertarian communism based on supposedly free independent communes, as peddled by Kropotkin'.<sup>27</sup> 'The "free commune" Santillán argued 'is the logical product of the concept of group affinity, but there are no free communes in economy, because that freedom would presuppose independence, and there are no independent communes'. Instead, Santillán's ideal was 'the federated commune, integrated in the economic total network of the country or countries in revolution'.<sup>28</sup> As for the best economic system, Santillán favoured communism, but this, he argued, was not coterminous with anarchy, which can be realised in a multiformity of economic arrangements, individual and collective. Why dictate rules, then? 'We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy. Therefore there must be free experimentation ... Without *a priori* rejecting other solutions, let us spread ours to reach more easily abundance in economy'. After the revolution, as a majority anarchists would have to acknowledge the minorities' right to organise their life as they wish, just like as a minority they would demand freedom of experimentation and defend it by all means.<sup>29</sup>

Santillán's pluralist and experimentalist views were the same as Malatesta's, whose anarchist communism had come a long way since his early advocacy of 1876. His pluralism and experimentalism had their root in the concept of anarchism as a method that he expounded in 1889. Malatesta agreed with the individualists that individual freedom was the cornerstone of anarchy and with the communists that communism was the best form of society. However, he did not believe in harmony by natural law. The outcome of applying the method of freedom was open. Communism was only one of the options, which had to be consciously willed. The possibility of alternate economic arrangements was not just a concession imposed by circumstances during a transition period, but it was to be a permanent feature of the anarchist society: 'I am a communist only so long as I do not have to be one', Malatesta claimed in 1896.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the outcome of Malatesta's trajectory throws into relief the distinctive traits that differentiate the anarchist version of communism from the Marxist. 'Communism' Marx and Engels claimed 'is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things'. Accordingly, 'the communists do not preach morality at all ... They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists'.<sup>31</sup> Malatesta's views were the polar opposite: communism was an ideal and history had no line of march. 'Communism, like anything else

<sup>26</sup> José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, vol. 1 (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 202–205. We have slightly amended the resolution's translation on the basis of the source Spanish text.

<sup>27</sup> D. Abad de Santillán to unknown recipient, Buenos Aires, 10 July 1965, in D. Guérin (Ed), *No Gods, No Masters* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 469.

<sup>28</sup> D. A. de Santillán, *El organismo económico de la revolución* (Barcelona: Ediciones 'Tierra y Libertad', 1936), 189.

<sup>29</sup> Santillán, *ibid.*, 182–185, 196–197.

<sup>30</sup> E. Malatesta to A. Hamon, London, 20 July 1896, Hamon Papers, file 109, IISG, Amsterdam.

<sup>31</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, 'The German Ideology', in D. McLellan (Ed), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 187, 199.

that depends on human will, will not come to pass until men want it to', he wrote in 1898.<sup>32</sup> Communism, for him, was indeed a matter of morality: 'To be anarchist it is not enough to wish one's own individual emancipation; it is necessary to wish everyone's emancipation'.<sup>33</sup> Communism, like anarchy, could only be realised gradually, to the extent that such moral consciousness spread: 'Communism is an ideal ... In order to be truly possible, communism ... must arise locally, among like-minded groups ... In brief, communism must be a sentiment, before it becomes a thing'.<sup>34</sup> Marxists conflated the descriptive and normative domains and rejected any distinction between 'is' and 'ought'. In contrast, that distinction was the cornerstone of Malatesta's voluntarism. For him, society could go in any direction in which the interaction of individual wills would take it. Anarchist communists were just one component in this interplay. As anarchists, they demanded the interplay to be uncoerced. As communists, they spread their ideal and put it in practice wherever they got enough support. In the moral basis of communism was the reconciliation between the individual dimension of freedom and the collective dimension of equality. The name of that moral basis was 'solidarity'.

In conclusion, the history of the anarchist communist current shows—in contrast with the persistent stereotype that depicts anarchists as utopians detached from reality—that the substance of anarchist controversies was more about the means to be used in the present than about the future society. Thus, on the one hand, anarchist communism came to represent an associationist tradition that was characterised more in terms of tactics (collective action, involvement in unions, insurrection) than of ultimate goals. On the other hand, the ultimate goal of communism evolved from being a *sine qua non* of anarchism to being one among different options, to be realised to the extent that it received support. It would be ironic, and not very flattering, if mainstream historiography let this pluralist, experimentalist, gradualist, solidaristic, libertarian version of communism go down in history in the company of that uppercase 'Communism' whose disastrous implications anarchists foresaw a hundred and fifty years ago.

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<sup>32</sup> E. Malatesta, 'In Defense of Communism,' in *Complete Works*, vol. 3, 421.

<sup>33</sup> Malatesta, 'Comunismo,' in *Scritti*, vol. 3, 224.

<sup>34</sup> E. Malatesta, 'Ancora su comunismo e anarchia,' in *Scritti*, vol. 1, 144–145.

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