

## Daniel Guérin and the Elaboration of a New Marxism

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes a key thesis of an important twentieth-century intellectual and political militant. Daniel Guérin (1904-1988) paid close attention to the historical and theoretical interpretations of revolutionary movements and socialist currents since the French Revolution. He carefully studied how they could help us understand contemporary class politics and class struggles. Through a series of key historical monographs, Guérin articulated the many different forms that the class struggle has taken for more than two and a half centuries. A common political thread runs through all his works. Guérin describes and explains the attempts of various socioeconomically oppressed and exploited classes to establish forms of economic self-management and direct democracy. These attempts were regularly crushed by reactionary social forces supporting the ruling classes. From the collapse of the Enragés (Enraged Ones, commonly known as the Ultra-Radicals) in France to the crushing of more recent radical groups like the Black Panther Party in the United States, Guérin's research draws political lessons from the past. The main objective of all his analyses is the theoretical and practical development of a radically democratic socialism that combines the best elements of the Marxist and anarchist traditions. To this end, Guérin analyzed in depth the pattern of ongoing debates between Marxism and anarchism, which he believed fuelled both currents. Our paper also presents the origins of Guérin's main ideas and develops the actuality of his political thought today.

**Keywords:** Daniel Guérin; Marxism; Anarchism.

**Riassunto:** Questo articolo analizza una tesi chiave di un importante intellettuale e militante politico del XX secolo. Daniel Guérin (1904-1988) ha prestato molta attenzione alle interpretazioni storiche e teoriche dei movimenti rivoluzionari e delle correnti socialiste a partire dalla Rivoluzione francese. Ha studiato attentamente come queste potessero aiutarci a comprendere la politica e le lotte di classe contemporanee. Attraverso una serie di monografie storiche fondamentali, Guérin ha articolato le molte forme diverse che la lotta di classe ha assunto per più di due secoli e mezzo. Un filo politico comune attraversa tutte le sue opere. Guérin descrive e spiega i tentativi di varie classi socioeconomiche oppresse e sfruttate di stabilire forme di autogestione economica e di democrazia diretta. Questi tentativi venivano regolarmente stroncati dalle forze sociali reazionarie che sostenevano le classi dominanti. Dal crollo degli Enragés (gli infuriati, comunemente noti come ultraradicali) in Francia alla repressione di gruppi radicali più recenti come il Black Panther Party negli Stati Uniti, la ricerca di Guérin trae lezioni politiche dal passato. L'obiettivo principale di tutte le sue analisi è lo sviluppo teorico e pratico di un socialismo radicalmente democratico che combini i migliori elementi della tradizione marxista e anarchica. A tal fine, Guérin ha analizzato in profondità lo schema dei dibattiti in corso tra marxismo e anarchismo, che secondo lui alimentavano entrambe le correnti. Il nostro articolo presenta anche le origini delle principali idee di Guérin e sviluppa l'attualità del suo pensiero politico oggi.

**Parole chiave:** Daniel Guérin; Marxismo; Anarchismo.

### 1. A Possible Synthesis Between Marxism and Anarchism

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the weakening of communist and socialist parties in Europe and around the world has divided the Left into numerous political factions.

These factions have, for several years, begun to distance themselves from some traditional political and ideological reference points of the revolutionary Left. For example, the importance accorded to class and class struggles is less than it once was for some groups and organizations. In certain cases, other issues have now become more central. For some critical philosophers of the twentieth century, including Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997), the failure to achieve democratic socialism on a global scale, as advocated by the Marxist doctrine, implies that the scientific theory of society developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) was only one more erroneous philosophy of history (Castoriadis, 1999, p. 78). However, despite the rejection or critique of Marxism by some intellectuals on the Left, whether organic or not, one original thinker sought to defend Marx's theory of history. He attempted to better understand the meaning and destiny of Marx's political and economic thought since his death. Daniel Guérin (1904-1988) paid close attention to the historical and theoretical interpretations of revolutionary movements and socialist currents since the French Revolution. He carefully studied how they could help us understand contemporary class politics and class struggles (Guérin, 1973a).

Through a series of major historical monographs, Guérin has been able to articulate the many different forms that the class struggle has taken for more than two and a half centuries. A common thread runs through all his works. Guérin describes and explains the attempts of various socioeconomically oppressed and exploited classes to establish forms of economic self-management and direct democracy. These attempts were regularly crushed by reactionary social forces supporting the ruling classes. From the collapse of the *Enragés* (*Enraged Ones*, commonly known as the *Ultra-Radicals*) in France to the crushing of more recent radical groups like the Black Panther Party in the United States, Guérin's research draws political lessons from the past. The main objective of all his analyses is the theoretical and practical development of a radically democratic socialism that combines the best elements of the Marxist and anarchist traditions.

To this end, Guérin analyzed in depth the pattern of ongoing debates between Marxism and anarchism, which he believed fuelled both currents (Guérin, 1969, p. 22). His research led him to emphasize what these two visions had in common. According to him, anarchism turns out to be historically inseparable from Marxism: "Les opposer c'est poser un faux problème [...] Je vois en eux des frères jumeaux entraînés dans une dispute aberrante qui en a fait des frères ennemis » (Guérin, 1969, p.12). Guérin equated Marxism with a worldview influenced by both bourgeois Jacobinism and a different current which

he sometimes called *libertaire* (Guérin, 1969, p. 62). Accented by bourgeois revolutionary elites, the Jacobin turn of mind often took over during the great political upheavals of the twentieth century. Moreover, the theory of the intellectual (enlightened and scientific radical) vanguard (revolutionary minority or highly organized Party) often provided the ideological basis for the justification of bureaucratic power over the revolted masses (Moussaly, 2018. p. 83).

According to Guérin, to cure the Jacobin authoritarian disease which regularly infected certain Marxist currents would necessitate a theoretical blood transfusion from its anarchist twin brother. However, the terms *socialisme-libertaire* and *communisme-libertaire* already had an earlier use than that of Guérin. For example, critics of Marxism such as Pierre Kropotkin (1842-1921) and Errico Malatesta (1853-1932) had already used these terms and other similar ones. Criticizing the authoritarianism of some Italian socialists, Malatesta attached the epithet libertarian to communism: “Nous aspirons aussi au communisme comme à la plus parfaite réalisation de la solidarité sociale, mais ce communisme doit être anarchique, c’est-à-dire, librement voulu et accepté” (Malatesta, 1979, p. 319). The theoretical differences between these two socialist currents proved to have major political consequences, particularly in revolutionary struggles throughout Europe in the twentieth century.

## 2. The Political Actuality of Daniel Guérin

For his part, David Berry, a specialist on the thought of Guérin, placed the thinker in his proper historical and political context. He explains Guérin's shift from Marxism to anarchism: “Increasingly critical of what he saw as the ‘Jacobinism’ inherent in Leninism, he went through what he described as a ‘classical anarchist’ phase in the 1960s” (Berry, 2014, p. 323). But Guérin never rejected Marxism completely. For him, the capacity of historical materialism to decode class struggles correctly had no theoretical rival: “Elle [la conception matérialiste dialectique de l’histoire] présente des garanties d’objectivité que n’offre aucune autre méthode d’analyse historique” (Guérin, 1968, p. 434). Guérin affirms, moreover, that his writings attempt to play the role of a corrective to mechanistic and deterministic forms of Marxism: “L’étude que nous avons consacrée à la Révolution française est tout entière inspirée de la préoccupation de tenir la balance égale entre le point de vue objectif et le point de vue subjectif” (Guérin, 1976, p. 38). For Guérin, it would be just as naive to reject the brilliant insights of anarchism concerning freedom as

it would be to underestimate the contributions of Marxism.

There would therefore be a heuristic advantage in recognizing, after more than a hundred and fifty years of invective between rivals, that the two socialist currents have nevertheless influenced each other profoundly. This idea is confirmed by a book by Olivier Besancenot and Michael Löwy. The latter thinkers assert that there is : “[U]n autre versant de l’histoire [...] souvent oublié, et parfois même délibérément écarté : celui des alliances et des solidarités agissantes entre anarchistes et marxistes” (Löwy, Besancenot, 2014, pp. 9-10). A few years later, they would synthesize their arguments about a fusion of the two currents in a more academic article (Löwy, Besancenot, 2018), but the critical response was not long in coming from a rival scholar, Michael Yates (Yates, 2018). In addition to providing some important landmarks on anarchism and the political thought of Guérin in our article, we will rely on the research of Jean Préposiet who has formulated an overview of the anarchist movement throughout history. The works of Daniel Colson, David Berry, Eduardo Colombo, and Gaetano Manfredonia will also illustrate the variety of modern forms of anarchism and its complex relation to Marxism. According to Guérin, Marx himself was partly responsible for the valorization of a certain form of Jacobin authoritarianism that Bolshevik leaders such as Lenin (1870-1924) and Trotsky (1879-1940) later amplified in their political practice and writing. However, and in opposition to this authoritarian aspect, Marx’s critique of capitalism was sometimes combined with the critique of state power developed by Proudhon (1809-1865) and Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876). Guérin points out that both these opposing tendencies can be found in Marx’s various writings at different times.

The libertarian ideas and practices were, according to Guérin, inflecting the authoritarian tendencies of Marxism. Considering the importance of the theoretical and practical issues at stake, the work of Daniel Guérin deserves to be re-examined. In our view, it provides useful reference points for the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of two major visions of post-French Revolution socialism. The dialogue between the two currents, apparently conflicting and opposed, has produced some elements that can be used to synthesize the different socialist doctrines.

### **3. The Enragés as Precursors of Anarchism**

There are many scholarly works that deal with the history of anarchism, its relationship to socialism and its opposition to Marxism. Jean Préposiet offers a well-documented

overview of the anarchist movement (Préposiet, 2012). In addition, he notes that as far as the modern world is concerned, anarchism is in large part a reaction to the increasingly centralized and authoritarian state. Anarchists impute an authoritarian and bureaucratic character to this new form of political power in capitalist societies. This rise in new forms of authoritarianism is due in part because the modern notion of the sovereignty of the people, manipulated by the ruling classes, has muddied the political waters. It has created an illusion of popular control of institutions which is not actually true. Most anarchists are suspicious of this mystifying idea of modern popular sovereignty. The fact is that any sociologist with a modicum of rigour and insight points to significant differences that exist between rulers and ruled, exploiters and exploited, concomitant with the advent of the modern capitalist state (Losurdo, 2016, p. 7). In other words, it is not subaltern groups (the majority population in any class divided society) that decide policy, but rather economic and political elites issued from the ruling classes. The typical modern capitalist state is more an oligarchy than a democracy if we go by Aristotle's classical theory on the forms of regime.

For his part, Préposiet argues that the now popular "collective we" is mainly meant to represent the state and its subjects in the world today: “[C]e *nous* désigne aussi bien ceux qui gouvernent que ceux qui sont gouvernés et, parmi les gouvernés [...] la majorité et la ou les minorités” (Préposiet, 2012, pp. 29-30). The legitimacy of indirect political representation is challenged by the anarchist tradition. Préposiet suggests that Enragés figures, such as Jacques Roux (1752-1794) and Jean Varlet (1764-1837), challenged the absolute power of the new republican government in France from a libertarian point of view *avant la lettre*. Guérin adds the name of Théophile Leclerc (1771-1820) to this list of spokesmen for the sans culottes during the French Revolution. He specifies that they were, according to Marx himself: “[L]es interprètes directs et authentiques du mouvement des masses” (Guérin, 1973a, p. 61). These men all suffered directly from material misery. They were not rich bourgeois *philosophes*, political elites disconnected from the people and insensitive to the evils that afflicted them: “Au nom de ce peuple qu'ils côtoyaient chaque jour, les enragés élevèrent une protestation [...] Ils osèrent attaquer la bourgeoisie de front” (Guérin, 1973a, p. 61). The ability or inability of a minority to fully identify with the class that seeks to emancipate itself from exploitation and domination will be central to Guérin's research. For his part, Eduardo Colombo points out that the theoretical conceptualization of a non-repressive social organization was formulated only quite

recently: “Jusqu’à la Modernité tardive toute réflexion politique considérait la domination – ou certain degré de domination – comme un fait naturel” (Colombo, 1998, p. 88). The harbingers of the anarchist doctrine that people's power from the bottom up conveys runs counter to the dictates of any authoritarian and elitist government. As Préposiet explains : “[I]ls [les Enragés] se sont affirmés continuellement comme les plus farouches partisans d’une action directe du peuple considéré par eux comme l’unique détenteur de la souveraineté” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 36-37). For them, any form of indirect representation smacks of political alienation and disempowerment of the masses.

Guérin points out that one of the major concerns of the exploited classes, especially since the rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe, has been to create forms of direct democracy that maintain a political autonomy of the masses that can also resist state power. Bourgeois class power, especially in its modern parliamentary forms, masks the reality of the oppression of the rich: “L’avant-garde consciente de la sans-culotterie ne pouvait combattre efficacement la bourgeoisie révolutionnaire que si elle lui arrachait son masque [...] que si elle projetait toute la lumière sur le problème du pouvoir” (Guérin, 1976, p. 61). According to Guérin, the anarchists are the direct heirs of this project, articulated mainly by the vanguard of the bare-armed (*bras-nus*). In another work, Guérin admits that an adequate solution to the problem of the revolutionary vanguard remains to be found : “Les rapports entre la masse et la minorité consciente forment un problème dont la solution n’a pas encore été pleinement trouvée, même par les anarchistes” (Guérin, 1981, p. 55). Nevertheless, certain psychological and ideological characteristics of anarchist militants have produced partial answers to this thorny question.

#### 4. Psychological and Political Portrait of Major Anarchists

According to Guérin, if there's one method that raises doubts when it comes to analyzing political ideologies, it's the one that attempts to identify the typical psychological traits of people identified with a particular political current. What, then, would it mean to say that a person is, based on his or her character or temperament, a fascist, a Marxist or a liberal? Indeed, how can we link the sociopsychological character of the self-taught printer Pierre-Joseph Proudhon with that of the Russian prince and scientist Peter Kropotkin? Even within a single ideological current, several personality types coexist and collaborate. The individualist Stirner, according to Guérin, has the merit of having placed the human person at the centre of the social problem: “Stirner a réhabilité l’individu à une époque

où, sur le plan philosophique, dominait l’anti-individualisme hégélien” (Guérin, 1981, p. 40). For his part, Bakunin associated the ills of modern society with its unequal, hierarchical form of economic and political organization. They both promoted different aspects of anarchism but differed quite a bit in their character and habits.

Like Guérin, Préposiet describes the anarchist in these terms: “Généraliste de la révolution, le plus subjectif des révolutionnaires [...] celui qui sympathise le plus volontiers avec les opprimés et les exploités du monde entier” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 46). Moreover, he suggests that Marxism is more interested in the question of totality and global truths, whereas the anarchist tends, in general, to be concerned with the individual and the unique. For his part, Daniel Colson rejects this unilateral interpretation: “Cette opposition [...] est démentie par l’ensemble des expériences libertaires [...] comme par la théorie anarchiste elle-même” (Colson, 2005, p. 160). However, by not associating anarchism with any kind of solipsist bourgeois individualism, Guérin and Préposiet broadly agree in situating anarchism within the larger family of modern socialism. As Colombo, another expert, explains, one of the fathers of anarchism, Bakunin understood individual freedom in terms of collective human collaboration: “Bakounine avait déjà défini la liberté comme un résultat de l’association humaine” (Colombo, 1998, p. 96). Préposiet insists on the importance of individualism in anarchist doctrine, even if interpreters are not unanimous: “L’anarchisme débute ainsi par l’égoïsme (Stirner) et se présente comme plaidoyer permanent en faveur de la liberté subjective” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 48). The collective action of oppressed groups must never ignore the need to improve the lot of every individual, without undermining the freedom of individuals united in their struggle against the forces of oppression. Observing the setbacks of top-down socialism makes anarchist doctrine seem more realistic: “[L]a critique anarchiste [de l’autoritarisme] paraît aujourd’hui moins tendancieuse, moins injuste; elle revêt même [...] un caractère prophétique” (Guérin, 1981, p. 31-32). The fall of the Soviet regime in Russia, which had not yet occurred when Guérin wrote these lines, vindicates his positive assessment of the anarchist critique of political authoritarianism.

Guérin's main work on European fascism deals with the critique of authoritarianism, capitalism, and religious mystification. It shows that the instinctive rebellion of the individual against exploitation and domination does not preclude a variety of forms of collective organization, from the regional to broader federative associations. The centralized state is generally the main enemy of anarchists, who also see the subterfuge

of elections and universal suffrage as a means of justifying the usurpation of direct popular power. Similarly, Colombo stresses that anarchism is opposed to any theoretical legitimization of state power. It thus assumes a contrary position from all other major political philosophies : “[L]a fonction ultime de la philosophie politique ancienne et moderne a été [...] la justification de l’État et de sa légitimité” (Colombo, 1998, p. 96). In this respect, he argues, post-Enlightenment anarchism represents a radical break with the entire tradition of political philosophy. Préposiet notes that anarchists do not believe that an electoral majority is entitled to infringe on the rights of minorities: “[L]es anarchistes ne peuvent supporter l’idée de se soumettre à la loi du plus grand nombre” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 53). Representative democracy based on elections to determine which party will wield state power is for anarchists merely a form of tyranny of the majority.

For Guérin, national socialism is no more than a petty-bourgeois reactionary doctrine that keeps the power of big business intact. Fascism in general, he argues, merely proposes a phony anti-capitalism that reinforces existing social hierarchies : “Tout l’art du fascisme consiste à se dire anticapitaliste sans s’attaquer sérieusement au capitalisme. Il s’emploie tout d’abord à transmuier l’anticapitalisme des masses en nationalisme” (Guérin, 2014, p. 148). According to Guérin, even if the Jacobin bourgeoisie in France was sometimes objectively progressive during the revolution, it used the same mystifying strategy to control the majority. It turned left enough, sometimes more in words than in deeds, to divide the revolting subaltern classes and unite some of them behind a national-popular project within bourgeois limits. This national-popular project stifled the direct challenge to bourgeois power and served to reinforce its hegemonic ambitions overall. The bourgeoisie's concessions to subaltern classes were never unselfish. Rather, they are motivated by their own class interests and to maintain their political hegemony.

Elections, like religion and the power of money, are often, the opium of the people. Préposiet notes that the anarchist current is not made up solely of revolutionaries like Bakunin, but that there is also a current made up mainly of collective rebels who don't dream of creating a new social organization *per se*. On the one hand, then, there are rebellious anarchists inspired more by Stirner and the idea of refusing to collaborate with the existing powers, and, on the other, communist anarchists who are closer to Marxism. As Préposiet states : “C’est ce qui fait dire aux libertaires de tendance révolutionnaire que l’anarchisme vrai implique nécessairement un choix *politique*” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 57). The most influential anarchist current is that of the organized revolutionaries with a



political project. Guérin proposed to summarize their main conclusions as follows : “[L]a société future libertaire devait être dotée d’une double structure : *économique*, la fédération des associations ouvrières d’autogestion, *administrative*, la fédération des communes” (Guérin, 1981, pp. 31-32). Certain key historical moments, such as the Paris Commune, the early days of the revolutionary Soviets in Russia and the anarchist forces during the Spanish Civil War, were marked by the establishment of a dual organizational structure in town and country. These were eventually either defeated by reactionary forces or integrated into a bureaucratic and authoritarian structure by a minority.

According to Guérin, freedom is never lost for good, and human beings tend to regularly shake off their state of economic dependence and political alienation. As Préposiet explains: “L’anarchiste prend sur lui de rappeler aux hommes cette liberté primordiale et mythique, dont le souvenir s’estompe dans la mémoire de l’espèce” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 59). For his part, Colombo translates the same idea into a vocabulary closer to that of Cornélius Castoriadis than Guérin. It is worth noting that Guérin's language is more concrete and less speculative than that of Castoriadis. Colombo affirms that the instinctive rejection of any permanent political and social order is the most radical aspect of anarchist philosophical doctrine: “La rébellion contre l’influence naturelle de la société [...] va plus loin que la liberté politique, elle s’inscrit dans la relativité radicale du *nomos*” (Colombo, 1998, p. 103). He concludes that this is an essential moment in "the imaginary institution of society". The influence of Castoriadis on his thinking is here very palpable and sometimes makes Colombo fall into speculative and metaphysical traps far from the concrete historical materialism of Guérin.

## 5. Elementary Principles of Anarchism

As Guérin explains regarding anarchists, it is the modern state, born of bourgeois Jacobinism, that is the main source of oppression. For his part, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the Italian communist revolutionary, notes that any integral and original worldview must possess some basic philosophical principles (Gramsci, 2014). But despite his great repugnance for philosophical systems and metaphysical assumptions, the author of the *Prison Notebooks* is keen to stress that anarchism is no exception to this rule (Moussaly, 2020, p. 130). As for Préposiet, he maintains that anarchists, like the Marx of the theses on Feuerbach, the question of freedom or determinism is not metaphysical, but above all practical and historical. Moreover, human freedom manifests itself in

revolutionary practice: “De même qu’on démontre le mouvement en marchant, il suffit de vivre en homme libre pour prouver que la liberté existe” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 62). Colombo adds that anarchism's radical anti-statism stings not only the hegemonic bourgeoisie, but also the promoters of most other socialist currents : “[I]l [l’anarchisme] suscita le rejet des idéologies révolutionnaires qui ne voyaient d’autre voie de salut qu’à travers l’État” (Colombo, 1998, p. 114). Anarchists criticized authoritarian socialists for justifying the establishment of a new ruling elite. Submission to a ruling minority is a recurring danger faced by the masses in their struggle for liberation. In his historical analysis of the black emancipation movement in the United States, Guérin notes the search for socialist and libertarian solutions to racial oppression in North America : “[I]l existe une troisième voie, susceptible de mettre fin à l’exploitation [...] au racisme [...] un socialisme spécifique américain [...] c’est-à-dire démocratique et libertaire” (Guérin, 1973b, p. 316). At every moment of historical upheaval, such as the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Civil War, there was a need to avoid both authoritarianism and defeat at the hands of reactionary forces. Sometimes, for objective reasons, sometimes because of the lack of symbiosis between the rulers and the oppressed mass, the third way was not followed to its ultimate end. According to Guérin, Rosa Luxemburg regularly formulated proposals close to libertarian ideas that were likely to lead to workers' victory, while also remaining faithful to Marxism.

As for Préposiet, he notes that the centralization of the state was combined with the national imaginary to bring all groups in modern society under its aegis: “C’est alors que l’État-nation devint le Dieu terrestre. La pensée de l’État pénétra toutes les consciences. On entra dans l’ère de la politique” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 65). In some respects, the anarchist interpretation of the bourgeois nation-state comes close to that of Marx: “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Marx, Engels, p. 8). But as Guérin reminds us, Marx's dispute with the anarchists remains unresolved when it comes to the dissolution of the state and its possible replacement.

Faced with the "never completed and disappearing" proletarian state, Bakunin feared that the government would place the instrument of power in the hands of a minority, as was the case in the Soviet Union. Paraphrasing Bakunin's argument on this subject, Préposiet asserts that: “Effectivement, dans ce pseudo-État populaire, une petite caste de savants – ou prétendus tels – fera la loi” (Préposiet, 2012, p. 74). The same doubts hover over the

"dictatorship of the proletariat" as the legitimate representation of proletarian interests. Firstly, the working class does not include all the oppressed groups in capitalist society even if some anarchists accept that they are indispensable for leading a successful revolution. What's more, if workers are directly and in power through direct bodies, councils, unions, cooperatives, etc., they don't need a group of individuals to represent or direct their interests.

From Guérin's point of view, the principle denounced by anarchists has to do with the power of the majority, which would be detrimental to the expression and action of the masses. In the same vein, Préposiet ends a section of his work by referring to the definition of anarchism proposed by libertarian Sébastien Faure (1858-1942). Faure emphasizes the constant struggle even against the principle of authority, which he sees as the essential element that unites anarchists: "Ce point commun, c'est la négation du principe d'autorité dans l'organisation sociale et la haine de toutes les contraintes qui procèdent des institutions fondées sur ce principe" (Préposiet, 2012, p. 84). Colombo, for his part, defines the libertarian political ideal as follows: "L'anarchisme propose l'institution d'une société sans contrainte politique, une société égalitaire" (Colombo, 1998, p. 115). Anarchy is thus opposed to authoritarian command and all forms of domination. Colson also points out that: "[L]'anarchie c'est le refus de tout principe premier [...] de toute dépendance des êtres vis-à-vis d'une origine unique" (Colson, 2001, pp. 26-27). Having established the historical context surrounding the emergence of the principles of the anarchist movement, we can now further enrich the comparison with Marxism by considering the main currents of socialism.

### **6. Three Currents of Socialism**

In examining Guérin's contribution to the socialist movement, we find him to have undisclosed merits. In a book published in 2003, Guérin's comrades assembled for publication several of his writings on the links between anarchism and Marxism, calling him a rigorous historian/sociologist (Guérin, 2003). David Berry adds that Guérin's militant anarchism is not purely intellectual: "To a large extent, the story of Guérin's adoption of the cause of the oppressed was to be coterminous with his growing determination to reject all ties with his own class" (Berry, 2014, p. 324). What's more, he produced a classification of the socialist currents that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution. From the outset, it is established that: "Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen,

appartiennent à la pléiade que le *Manifeste du parti communiste* de 1848 désignait sous le vocable nuancé de socialiste *critico-utopistes*” (Guérin, 2003, p. 19). Next come the socialists, whom Guérin usually calls authoritarian (*autoritaires*) because they assert that an elite can awaken the masses and guide them towards liberation from the yoke of the bourgeoisie, because : “Ils sont les héritiers directs des institutions politiques audacieuses improvisées dans la bourrasque de la révolution bourgeoise, les petits-fils de 1793, la postérité de Robespierre” (Guérin, 2003, p. 19). In direct opposition to the authoritarian vision of revolution come the anarchists/libertarians, who propose other values: “Réfractaire au jacobinisme, pestant contre l’État, il [ce genre d’anarchiste] oppose au précédent l’alternative d’un socialisme décentralisé, fédéraliste, autogestionnaire, impulsé de bas en haut”. This tripartite classification is the key Guérin uses to add yet another synthesis between Marxism and anarchism.

Despite progress in several areas, the French Revolution came up short when it came to achieving complete social harmony. This was because a conflict situation had emerged, namely, the opposition of the rising bourgeoisie to the nascent proletariat. Guérin then asks: what is the main source of the proliferation of socialist ideas in the three currents? His answer attributes the birth of socialist constructs to a dual disappointment with the results of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, which had failed to generate a free and egalitarian society. The fundamental cause of the failure of the first socialist movements was not long in coming: “[L]eur réponse est vite trouvée : parce que la subversion n’a pas été poussée jusqu’au bout, parce qu’il n’a pas été mis fin à l’antagonisme des riches et des pauvres” (Guérin, 2004, p. 21). As a result, the nineteenth century was one of intense theoretical debate and divergent proposals to put an end to this crucial antagonism.

## 7. Freely Associated Producers

What's more, Daniel Guérin has the merit of pointing out the double failure of the various versions of modern reformed (reformist) capitalism and bureaucratic socialism. By looking back to the very foundations of the great socialist theories, one opens hitherto untrodden paths to building what Guérin calls libertarian communism. He adds that the political aims of Marxists and anarchists are fundamentally the same and have the same radical anti-capitalist motive: “Ils [anarchistes et marxistes] se proposent de renverser le capitalisme, d’abolir l’État, de se passer de tous les tuteurs, de confier la richesse sociale

aux travailleurs eux-mêmes” (Guérin, 2003, p. 28). After the authoritarian setbacks of Stalinism, Marxism failed to draw on the anarchist ideals compatible with its own. Gaetano Manfredonia underlines the originality of the anarchist movement's approach to social organization: “[L]’anarchisme va s’efforcer de concilier les exigences de liberté et d’égalité [...] en préconisant des formes d’organisation sociale non étatique à base fédéraliste et contractuelle” (Manfredonia, 2002, p. 6). He notes, however, that the free associations of the anarchists must not be confused with the liberal trend characterized by the hegemony of the capitalist market.

For example, Guérin points out that self-management is an idea shared by many anarchists and certain Marxist currents: “[L]’anarchisme [...] se fait l’avocat de l’association ouvrière, qu’on appelle de nos jours autogestion. Les libertaires ne veulent pas de la gestion économique par le capitalisme privé” (Guérin, 2003, p. 28). Anarchism also rejects bureaucratic state management of the economy in all its aspects and forms: “Cette planification ne serait pas bureaucratique [...] mais animée de bas en haut, réglée en commun par des délégués des diverses unités de production” (Guérin, 2003, p. 29). Instead of having a single party directing all aspects of social life, a federative principle would coordinate efforts at all levels, local, regional, national, and even international: “Cette fédération [...] associe entre elles à la fois les entreprises autogérées et les communes autonomes” (Guérin, 2003, p. 29). According to Guérin, the federative principle at the political level stems from a libertarian conception that values the human person as a social being: “L’anarchisme [...] valorise l’individu. C’est en partant de l’individu libre qu’il se propose d’édifier une société libre. Ici réapparaît le principe fédéraliste” (Guérin, 2003, p. 31). The free association of all individuals in various federated societies is at the heart of the libertarian communism advocated by Guérin, where all the necessary steps reflect Marx's vision of freely associated producers.

Moreover, in his historical analysis of the American labour movement, Daniel Guérin does not despair of the working class, while attacking the overly pessimistic vision of the philosopher Herbert Marcuse who: “[N]e distingue à aucun moment les secteurs les plus réactionnaires du *Labour* de ceux qui, dans un passé relativement récent, se sont montrés les plus progressistes et les plus combattifs” (Guérin, 1976, pp. 23-24). This comment echoes Guérin's criticism of certain historians of the French Revolution who were unable to highlight the reality of class struggle even when it was obvious. In Guérin's view, failure to appropriately identify the classes in their struggles, their inner divisions, and

their specific motivations, was a major methodological sin that Marcuse and other intellectuals on the Left sometimes committed.

### 8. Problems of the Anarchist Revolution

The twentieth century was terribly murderous and violent in political terms, and the dreams of nineteenth-century libertarian socialists were often dashed by the horrors of fascism and authoritarian forms of communism. Returning to his classification into three currents, Guérin clarifies his point and gives names to each of the tendencies: the authoritarians, the libertarians, and the scientific socialists (Marx and Engels). He then explores each of these trends, proposing solutions to the problems of overthrowing capitalism and building socialism. The first group suffers from what Francis Dupuis-Déri calls political agoraphobia (Dupuis-Déri, 2016). Although the militants in this group are united in the cause of the exploited and oppressed, they don't believe in their ability to make revolution on their own. To this end, Guérin sums up the malaise of authoritarians who: “[N]’ont pas confiance dans la capacité des masses à parvenir d’elles-mêmes à la conscience, et ils ont [...] une peur panique des masses” (Guérin, 2003, p. 40). They believe that the multitude is imbued with the prejudices of the ruling class is stultified by exploitation and, above all, is unpredictable. At the opposite extreme of this tendency are the libertarians who : “[S]outiennent que la Révolution doit être l’œuvre des masses elles-mêmes, de leur spontanéité [...] de leurs facultés créatrices” (Guérin, 2003, p. 40). Marx and Engels, according to the different periods of their writings, fall halfway between the two extremes.

Occasionally, some members of the ruling class recognize the importance of scientific knowledge and disassociate themselves from capitalism. As the *Communist Manifesto* states: “[A] small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands” Marx, Engels, 2008, p. 18). A little further down, Marx refers to radicalized bourgeois intellectuals: “[S]o now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.” (Marx, Engels, 2003, p. 18). But Guérin is right to point out that classifying authors in a single category is never exclusive or appropriate. Taking Proudhon as an example, Guérin points out that he sometimes doubted the autonomous political capacity of the proletariat. This negative observation led Guérin to note that in

one of his last works, *De la capacité des classes ouvrières*, Proudhon : “[R]ejoint les autoritaires dans leur suggestion que les masses doivent être dirigées d’en haut” (Guérin, 2003, p. 40). For Guérin, it's above all a question of ideological recurrence on the part of the author concerned.

Rigidity of classification aside, it would be useful to use Guérin's tripartition of socialist visions to show the fundamental differences between currents. For the authoritarian : “[L]es masses populaires, dirigées par leurs chefs, doivent substituer à l’État bourgeois leur propre État décoré de l’épithète « prolétarien »”(Guérin, 2003, p. 41). However, according to professional revolutionaries, building socialism requires political restraint. In contrast, libertarians : “[A]ttendent de la révolution prolétarienne l’abolition totale et définitive de la contrainte étatique, ils voudraient [...] la libre fédération des communes associées” (Guérin, 2003, p. 42). Guérin acknowledges that the young Marx's preoccupation with the question of economic and political alienation should have brought him closer to the libertarian movement. As for Manfredonia, he defines anarchism in terms like those of Guérin: “[L]e refus de la domination politique et de l’exploitation économique, la réalisation d’une société qui garantirait l’autonomie la plus grande aux individus” (Manfredonia, 2001, p. 7). This requires the creation of an egalitarian economic system and the adoption of a non-hierarchical political system.

### 9. The Dangers of Marx and Engels’ Hesitation

According to Guérin, Marx and Engels are constantly torn between two opposed visions: “Ils ont subi l’empreinte jacobine, mais, d’une part, le contact avec Proudhon [...] d’autre part, la critique de l’hégélianisme [...] les ont rendus quelque peu libertaires” (Guérin, 2003, p. 42). Indeed, Marxist philosopher Lucien Sève acknowledges that criticism of G.W.F. Hegel's (1770-1831) mystifying conservatism lies at the heart of Marx's radical critique (Sève, Marx, 2011). Guérin notes that many anarchists and Marxists have an attraction/repulsion relation to Hegel's work. This is another point of contact between the two currents. During the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels moved ever closer to the libertarian position on abolishing the state and supporting federalism. The positions of the two founders of Marxism and their followers sometimes leaned authoritarian, sometimes libertarian. But the authoritarian notion of the transitional state prevailed: “L’État transitoire de Marx et d’Engels devient [...] avec Lénine et [...] avec la postérité de Lénine, un monstre tentaculaire, qui proclame sans ambages son refus de dépérir”

(Guérin, 2003, p. 43). The centralizing monster created by Marxism-Leninism is one of the reasons, according to Guérin, why the exploited classes are reluctant to embark on a socialist revolution again.

### 10. The Economic Question

Social reformers of all three socialist persuasions see similar reactions to the same economic problems. For the authoritarian : “L’État captera dans son immense filet toute la production [...] Le « capitalisme d’État » survivra à la révolution sociale”. But the libertarian counterproposal favoured by Guérin was not systematic. There is constant movement between mutualist, collectivist, and communist tendencies. Marx and Engels' political position oscillates between two opposing tendencies: “Dans le Manifeste de 1848 [...] ils avaient adopté la [...] solution omni-étatique. Mais plus tard [...] ils tempéreront cet étatismes et parleront d’*autogouvernement des producteurs*” (Guérin, 2003, p. 43). According to Guérin, historical evolution now leads neither to capitalism, reformed or otherwise, nor to statist communism, but to libertarianism. Manfredonia describes Bakunin's anarchist vision as follows: “Dieu et l’État apparaissent à Bakounine comme les deux faces inséparables d’une seule et unique réalité faite de domination et d’aliénation”(Manfredonia, 2001, p. 40). Added to this is the globalized power of Capital, against which anarchists and Marxists have always fought. Regarding the problem of the political knowledge of the masses, Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) is said to have suggested solutions that soon gained popularity. Guérin summarizes her message by proposing : “[D]’aider les masses à faire elles-mêmes leur apprentissage de la démocratie directe orientée de bas en haut” (Guérin, 2003, p. 46). Moreover, Guérin argues that the era of a scholarly (or mainly intellectual) avant-garde bringing revolutionary science from outside is already over, or at least, must be dialectically overcome. To this end, he emphasizes the importance of Rosa Luxemburg's work : “[S]on immense mérite est d’avoir à la fois contesté les conceptions d’organisation autoritaires de Lénine et tenté d’arracher la social-démocratie allemande à son légalisme réformiste en insistant [...] sur la priorité déterminante de l’auto-activité des masses”(Guérin, 1971, p. 86). And Guérin postulates that this priority lies at the heart of the anarchist conception of revolution.

As far as the state is concerned, the question at stake is whether it should be abolished or maintained. Material, scientific, and social progress, particularly in the countries of



advanced capitalism, suggests that the resolution of this issue is highly plausible. It follows that the need for an authoritarian and centralized state is not tenable: “L’État totalitaire engendré par la pénurie et y puisant sa justification devient chaque jour un peu plus superflu” (Guérin, 2003, p. 47). In the field of economic management, the gigantism of the planning state and the chaos engendered by financialized capitalism, according to Guérin, have both failed: “L’avenir, sans aucun doute, est à la gestion autonome des entreprises par des associations de travailleurs” (Guérin, 2003, p. 48). As Guérin affirms : “Le capitalisme privé [...] ne survit que grâce à la course aux armements, d’une part, et à la faillite du « communisme » d’État, de l’autre” (Guérin, 2003, p. 49). Having established the failure of both economic and political systems, Guérin retains what is most viable in the various socialist currents of the past.

### 11. Libertarian Marxism at the Heart of Today’s Debates

Daniel Guérin has sought to rehabilitate the idea of libertarian socialism. Although he urges us to look beyond thinkers such as Marx, Engels, Proudhon and Bakunin, the fact remains that the left need not waste time reinventing the wheel. Michael Löwy and Olivier Besancenot use Daniel Guérin's work as a basis for a more up-to-date synthesis of the state of libertarian Marxism, defining first what they mean by the term: “It is an enlargement of Marxism, a broadening of its horizon, to incorporate those ideas and practices largely attributed to Anarchists” (Löwy, Besancenot, 2018, p. 364). However, they are keen to stress that, for them, libertarian Marxism, or what Guérin eventually called libertarian communism, is not a finished doctrine. Rather, for Löwy and Besancenot, it's a question of seeing how these two currents fit together harmoniously. Like Guérin, they also assert that the socialist revolution of the future will necessarily have to forge this synthesis: “We believe that the revolutionary culture of the future, that of twenty-first century emancipatory struggles, will be both Marxist and Anarchist, bringing together, in action and thought, two of the largest revolutionary currents of the past” (Löwy, Besancenot, 2018, p. 365). Leaving aside their differences, Bakunin and Marx were nonetheless able to collaborate in the cause of human emancipation. However, their fundamental differences cannot easily be ignored. Manfredonia, for his part, nevertheless shows that the anarchists' attacks on capitalism had the effect of corroborating Marx's theory: “Kropotkine insista avec force sur l’obligation de remettre en cause [...] les formes contraignantes et parcellaires assumées par la division du travail

en régime capitaliste”(Manfredonia, 2001, p. 80). So, it's not simply a question of workers reappropriating the means of production, but of radically transforming the capitalist mode of production and overcoming the law of value which governs it.

Like Guérin, Löwy and Besancenot praise Rosa Luxemburg as a leading figure who came closer to certain anarchist positions. The revolutionary events in Russia cemented her leanings: “The revolutionary events of 1905 in Tsarist Russia will largely confirm Rosa Luxemburg in her conviction that the making of a working-class consciousness results from direct action and the autonomy of the workers” (Löwy, Besancenot, 2018, p. 366). One thing is certain: Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg were influenced by anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist currents. Indeed, they have been accused by reformist socialists of being libertarians in the guise of orthodox Marxists. Löwy and Besancenot also mention Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and his conception of history and revolution. In their view, Walter Benjamin's critique of state violence is anarchist-influenced: “Benjamin does not hide his total disdain for state institutions, like the police – violence as in the most degenerate form of power imaginable – or parliament, described as a deplorable spectacle” (Löwy, Besancenot, 2018, p. 367). As we've seen with Préposiet, Colombo and Manfredonia, these are themes dear to anarchists, and we believe Benjamin would fit well into the psychopolitical portrait of libertarians. Löwy and Besancenot then turn to Guérin. They contrast him with Victor Serge (1890-1947), who went from anarchism to Marxism, whereas Guérin went the other way round: “Reading Bakunin in the 1950s had the effect of ‘a second cataract surgery’, making him forever allergic to any version of authoritarian socialism”(Löwy, Besancenot, p. 370). Berry even compares Guérin's anti-authoritarian conversion to a political *Road to Damascus* (Berry, 2014, p. 338). Löwy and Besancenot then highlight the main components of the synthesis of the two currents proposed by Guérin, who believed that a good dose of anarchism in Marxist blood could reinvigorate both traditions: “This Anarchist serum consists of workers’ self-management, federalism and a revolutionary syndicalism, as well as the centrality of the individual in the collective emancipatory project”(Löwy, Besancenot, 2018, p. 370). At the end of their journey, Löwy and Besancenot return to their first proposals and synthesize them. For his part, Manfredonia, like Guérin, points to a kind of infatuation with anarchism that began in the 1960s: “[L]es signes d’un certain regain des idées et des pratiques libertaires deviennent évidents un peu partout en Europe et dans le monde”(Manfredonia, 2001, p. 112). Several factors explain this revival: a loss of faith

in the Bolshevik model on the part of some revolutionaries, the recognition of new forms of oppression, and the rise of new social movements (feminism, environmentalism, and the fight against systemic racism) that have borrowed many ideas from the libertarian movement.

As far as the economy is concerned, Löwy and Besancenot suggest self-management formulas that have already been proposed by anarchist thinkers as well as Marxists such as Ernest Mandel (1923-1995): “In other words, the local management of industry by workers does not mean, for example, the maintenance of economic competition between the units of production according to the market” (Löwy, Besancenot, 2018, p. 372). It should be noted that the federative principle described by Guérin has replaced the authoritarian conception of top-down planning. Löwy and Besancenot also criticize the work of John Holloway and his strategy for getting out of the capitalist system (Holloway, 2007). They argue that Holloway neglects the question of democracy too much. Löwy and Besancenot believe that Holloway's democracy, like those of the anarchists, would always be majority rule exercised at the expense of the repressed minority. But Löwy and Besancenot point out that : “ Democracy means the majority has power-over the minority. This is not an absolute power, it has limits and it must respect the dignity of the other. But even with this caveat, it is still a power-over” (Löwy, Besancenot, 2018, p. 374). As we have seen with Préposiet, this implies a rejection of representative democracy among anarchists, and sometimes even of direct democracy, if minority rights are not respected. For his part, Manfredonia assigns contemporary libertarians the production of alternatives to capitalism rather than inaction while awaiting revolution: “[L]es libertaires ont tendance à se présenter [...] comme une force capable de proposer des alternatives crédibles aux logiques étatiques et patronales”(Manfredonia, 2001, p. 118). These solutions are aimed above all at the gradual compilation of conditions conducive to the emergence of anarchism. Löwy and Besancenot refer to historical experiences such as the Paris Commune. They believe that Holloway's conception of power is overly abstract and one-sided. Libertarian communism, an alliance between anarchism and Marxism, will not, in their view, be achieved through abstractions. It's a long, historical, and experimental process that attempts to keep centralized power out of the hands of the few. The least we can say is that neither the anarchists nor the Marxists have fully clarified the thorny issue of direct democracy in economics and politics. To build libertarian communism, Löwy and Besancenot propose a mix of direct democracy and forms of

representation and delegation.

## 12. Yates' Nuanced Gramscian Critique

It appears clear from his writings that Guérin understood the importance of synthesizing Marxist and anarchist orientations. Michael D. Yates, for his part, counters some of Löwy and Besancenot's arguments with an article in the same journal. He stresses that his critique revolves around three points: spontaneity, popular education, and individual freedom. Regarding spontaneity, Yates alludes to Gramsci's organic intellectual concept. According to Yates, however, a certain leadership is unavoidable : “[E]ither before they happen [revolutions] or while they are taking place, leaders of one kind or another have appeared, and they play critical roles in whatever transpires. [...] not much is truly spontaneous ” (Yates, 2018, p. 380). Yates echoes Gramsci's assertion that the pure spontaneity of the masses never really exists outside of concrete struggles that historically produce active leaders of social forces. It cannot be denied that certain anarchist leaders, such as Bakunin or Buenaventura Durruti (1896-1936), played a significant role in revolutionary history, as organic intellectuals of the subaltern masses (Tosel, 2016, p. 270). They did not appear out of thin air. They grew within and around social struggles which they sometimes led. The same goes for anarchist groups and organizations. Guérin has always acknowledged the importance of this leadership role. It is on the level of revolutionary education that Yates most directly joins Gramsci and Guérin. To prevent the revolution from being hijacked by an intellectual elite drawn from the ruling classes, it is essential to train organic intellectuals with a bottom-up impulse: “As Gramsci reminds us, here is where organic intellectuals, raised from the working and peasant classes, can be of vital importance. They can spread the word, and in the process, empower the masses”(Yates, 2018, p. 381). Finally, while stressing the importance of the tradition inherited from Stirner that emphasizes the centrality of the individual and his rights, it would be inappropriate, according to Yates to oppose individualism and collectivism in a vision of libertarian communism.

According to Yates, the first personal pronouns, whether singular or plural, share equal importance: “But the ‘We’ is of the greatest importance in terms of solidarity, compassion, and all the values radicals cherish most” (Yates, 2018, p. 381). Finally, to summarize the debates discussed in this article, there are no easy solutions to the political

questions raised by bringing the two currents together. Contemporary thinkers such as Löwy and Besancenot are convinced of the topicality of the synthesis of the two currents that Guérin has been advocating for years. As for Yates, he adds the crucial contributions of Antonio Gramsci and his dialectic of knowing, feeling and revolution as well as the importance of collective identities of struggle.

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