

The Solitary Revolutionary

Proudhon's Notebooks — By GEORGE WOODCOCK

“WHENCE COMES to me this passion for justice, which dominates and provokes and enrages me? I have no means of telling. It is my God, my religion, my all; and if I attempt to justify it by philosophic reasoning, I do not succeed.”

Thus Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, self-styled *homme terreur* of the 1848 Revolution, wrote in his notebook three years earlier. Justice, in Proudhon's mind, was indeed the immanent deity according to whose mysterious dictates the life of man should be shaped. In his greatest work, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, completed in 1858, he made this concept the corner-stone of a vast and bizarre cathedral of libertarian theory and autodidactic learning which he erected in opposition to the edifices of conventional authority represented by the Second Empire and the Catholic Church. The desire to express and realise the principle of justice in concrete, human terms of social and economic relationships as opposed to the abstract, mechanical terms of political relationships, dominated his life as a revolutionary philosopher. Proudhon was convinced that at one and the same time he was the voice in the wilderness and “*la voix du peuple qui sent, qui veut, qui parle et qui fait.*”

Persecuted, imprisoned, exiled and impoverished, detested in his time by the traditional Left as much as by the official Right, Proudhon in the end presented such an example of integrity in the general political breakdown of French politics after the failure of 1848, that from his very isolation sprang a vast posthumous legacy. The Anarchists and the Communards, the Spanish Federalists, Russian *Narodniks*, and French Syndicalists, all claimed him as an ancestor. Tolstoy and Herzen, Kropotkin and Bakunin and Sorel, willingly acknowledged his influence. For less convincing reasons the French royalists, led by Charles Maurras, claimed him as their own, while he has had a

curious fascination for Jesuit theologians. To complete the complexity of his heritage, an American scholar, J. Salwyn Schapiro, advanced some twenty odd years ago the theory that Proudhon was—all unwittingly—a harbinger of Fascism.

Proudhon gloried in the shocking paradox and the extreme statement, and, like Walt Whitman, prided himself on his contradictions. He saw his thought as a product of constant evolution, felt no need to be consistent with himself over any long period, refused to establish or to accept the discipline of a party, and stressed the anti-systematic nature of his thought. “My system? I have no system,” Herzen records him as saying to an inquisitive Englishman; and anyone who tackles the mass of his polemical writings on subjects as varied as free credit, federalism, and feminism, Courbet and copyright, war and peace and progress, taxation and theology (not to mention *The Stock Exchange Speculator's Manual* and *On the Observance of Sunday*), will discover a polemical prose which Baudelaire and Flaubert justly admired and will encounter a resilient mind crammed with facts and notions, but may not in the end be aware of a consistent doctrine even as dully cut as that of Marx.

One reason is that Proudhon detested abstractions and absolutes; he strove consistently to see principles realised in concrete and existential forms, and he knew from observing his rivals on the Left how far rigid political dogmas had taken them from the social realities of mid-19th-century France. For this reason alone it is necessary to suspect all the system-makers who have claimed Proudhon. True, he called himself an Anarchist, and the label fitted, but there was much that he did not share with either of the founders of organised Anarchism: Bakunin and Kropotkin. He contributed undoubtedly to both Syndicalism and Federalism. One can even grant to Dr. Schapiro that the Fascists borrowed

from him, mainly indirectly, a few notions and phrases, just as they borrowed a few techniques from Lenin. But to define so extraordinary an individualist as Proudhon merely in terms of movements that arose after his death is as misleading as recent attempts to re-define his nearest English equivalent, William Cobbett, in terms familiar to late-twentieth-century students of politics.

IT IS MORE PROFITABLE with men of Proudhon's genre to recognise the inevitability of the biographical: to view them first as personalities reacting with often irritated sensitivity to a series of social and political situations, and thence to proceed to the ideas that emerge. In this way enduring elements are perceived, and a consistent outlook on existence may be observed behind the continual rectification of attitudes on particular issues. Once we cease to fit labels to Proudhon—even the labels he himself created—we begin to see him whole.

IN THIS PROCESS the intimate documents of his life are essential. Proudhon was a copious and excellent correspondent. The fourteen volumes of his letters not only contain some of his best writing, but also reveal a gentler side of his nature than the polemical works. In reading them one realises why he made so many public enemies, so many private friends. The separate *Lettres de Proudhon à sa Femme* (edited by his grand-daughter Suzanne Henneguy and published as late as 1950) provide an extraordinary insight into his patriarchal family life and his relationship with the uneducated seamstress, Euphrasie Piégard, to whom he proposed without introduction one afternoon in 1847 on a street in the Quartier Latin, and to whom he remained devoted all his life. Still incompletely available to the public are the *Carnets*,¹ the manuscript volumes of notebooks which now, at last, are deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

I first saw the *Carnets* in 1951, when I was beginning to gather material for my book *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (1956). During the decade after Proudhon's death, the publisher Lacroix was proposing to present them in an eight-volume edition, but he lost so much on the fourteen volumes of the *Correspondence* (published in 1874-75 when the memory of the

Commune still clouded Proudhon's reputation among the middle class) that he abandoned the project. Except for a few extracts inaccurately reproduced in *La Grande Revue* in 1908, nothing more was heard of the Notebooks until 1944, when Daniel Halévy published in *Hier et Demain* a long article, "Proudhon d'après ses Carnets inédits, 1834-47," which included brief extracts. In 1948, in a life written for Gallimard's series, "Leurs figures," Edouard Dolléans was the first French biographer of Proudhon to make a somewhat limited use of the *Carnets*.

Neither Halévy nor Dolléans gave any clues as to the whereabouts of the *Carnets*, and I found nothing definite until I reached Paris, where Giliane Berneri, daughter of the Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri, introduced me to Alexandre Marc, the European Federalist who had edited a selection of Proudhon's works in 1945. Marc in turn introduced me to the Abbé Pierre Hautmann, who was studying the relationships between Proudhon and Marx, and from him I discovered that the *Carnets* were in the possession of Mlle Henneguy, who lived in Paris a few streets away from the Rue Serpente, where my wife and I were staying. A few days later Mlle Henneguy sent a note to our hotel, and we walked over the Boulevard St. Michel to the small street off the Rue des Ecoles where she lived, and climbed the stairs, smelling of polish and Gauloises, to her apartment on the second floor.

A small round pigeon of a woman opened the door and hurled shrill French at us like a *mitrailleuse*. She was Suzanne Henneguy, the daughter of Proudhon's eldest child Catherine; she was delighted that I had come all the way from the Canadian coasts of the Pacific to write about her grandfather. For the next fortnight, during which my wife and I spent every afternoon in his apartment, she and her sister, who had married into the family of Gabriel Fauré, treated us with the kind of Franc-Comtois hospitality for which Proudhon's household, even in his times of poverty, was celebrated among his friends (and still, occasionally, we commemorate that time by making a magnificent pudding, filled with rum-soaked *crème de marron*, whose recipe had been handed down from his wife Euphrasie).

Each day, entering the parlour where we worked, we stepped back atmospherically into the age between 1848 and the Commune, to which Proudhon belonged. He had never inhabited this room, though as a young man he had lived in the quarter; but the things among which he had moved were there, and even the things that had not belonged to him recalled the age in all its physical stuffiness and discom-

¹Two volumes of an edition of Proudhon's *Carnets*, up to the beginning of the 1848 revolution, were published in 1960 by Marcel Rivière in Paris, under the editorship of Abbé Hautmann.

fort. Voluminous dark red curtains, faded and betasselled with tarnished braid, hung over every doorway and obscured the windows. Armoires, sideboards, a desk, of Second Empire grandiosity, crowded together like the paradoxes in Proudhon's prose, and supported a small museum of bronze stags in combat and marble nymphs and fauns. There were objects that flashed into recognition: here, the square inkwell that stands on the garden steps in Courbet's painting which hangs in the Petit Palais of Proudhon and his daughters, there the steel spectacles with tiny lenses just covering the eyes that appear in all the caricatures from 1848 onwards. Mlle Henneguy switched on a light over a picture we had not before noticed. It was the original of Courbet's best portrait of his friend and political mentor. Out of a dense, dark background, Proudhon's face shone with a lambent brilliance, the great brow of which his contemporaries always talked soaring over the intense eyes, over the square, dogged Comtois face and the shaggy beard.

Every day thereafter the portrait acted as a kind of icon, for it was on a table beneath it that Mlle Henneguy laid out the eleven worn black notebooks we had come to see, and all the time we read and noted, Proudhon's face glowed rather truculently upon us.

THE CARNETS extended from 23 July 1843 to an undated entry of a third of a page at the beginning of 1864, a few weeks before Proudhon's death. The first volume, which spread over two years, was a mere 100 pages long; the last, which covered the ten years from 1854 to Proudhon's death, was the largest, with 592 pages. An earlier notebook, which Proudhon had kept in 1832, when he was a printer at Arbois in the Franche-Comté, has not been preserved.

The *Carnets* were written in a crabbed, crowded handwriting. The early entries in pencil had faded in a century to the ghosts of messages, and the passages in ink were often so minutely written as to be unreadable without a magnifying glass. The damp of prison cells, particularly in the Conciergerie, where Proudhon spent periods in 1849 and 1850, had almost ruined some of the pages. At other places Proudhon had written in haste or anger; the words sprawled towards obscurity. This happened in 1845 when he suspected Heinrich Heine of being a *mouchard* and of having engineered the expulsion from France of the German socialist Karl Grün. When he noted his own arrest on 5 June 1849, for having published a libel on Louis Napoléon, then President of the Second Republic, his hand was so unsteady that one cannot even guess the name of the man he

suspected of having given away his hiding place to the police.

The *Carnets* begin, in 1843, as little more than commonplace books in which Proudhon notes addresses and names, makes calculations regarding the river transport business at Lyons in which he was then employed, and sketches out the basic ideas of such early books as *Economic Contradictions*. Gradually, by 1845, the personal threads that make a true diary take their place among the notes of works to come, and until about 1853 the *Carnets* contain much biographical raw material and some very personal observations on political life. From 1853, after Proudhon had been released from prison and had left the revolutionary Bohemia of his youth for a patriarchal and financially anxious married life, the diary recedes, the *Carnets* once again become notebooks of projects and ideas, and gradually even these thin out until they are worn down to little more than domestic account books.

This diminution of the *Carnets*, Daniel Halévy suggested, corresponds to the exhaustion of a spirit beaten down by excessive work carried on in the midst of the anxieties of constant poverty." This is only partly true. Halévy, a rich man, had a romantic inclination to exaggerate the effects of other people's poverty. The last years of Proudhon's life were in fact extraordinarily productive, both in completed books (he published eight volumes in the three years from 1861-3) and in major unfinished works, like *De la Capacité Politique des Classes Ouvrières* and *Du Principe de l'Art et sa Destination Sociale*, to which his friends and fellow Comtois, Courbet and Gustave Chaudey, put the finishing touches after his death. The drying up of his *Carnets* represented not exhaustion, but a changing technique, a tendency to write his polemical works without preliminary notes. At the same time, during the exile in Brussels from 1858 to 1862, he had acquired the habit of recording personal events and the quality of his daily life in letters to his friends which at this period were numerous, long and lively, giving no sense at all of "exhaustion of spirit."

SOME OF THE MOST INTERESTING portions of the *Carnets* are those in which Proudhon reveals the core beliefs around which his changing ideas circulate and take shape. They appear occasionally in catechismal question-and-answer forms, and often in criticism of the ideas of other men. For example, he works out his conception of God in a series of entries disputing the "humanitarianism" of Feuerbach, written in 1845 when, in the company of Marx, Bakunin and Karl Grün, all then expatriates in Paris, he was discovering German philosophy and going

through his brief inoculation with Hegelianism (as mandatory in the 1840s as McLuhanism appears to be today, and a great deal more productive).

At times Proudhon becomes the populist art theoretician. He prided himself—justly—on being a prose stylist, and, as the long essay on Courbet which he was writing at the time of his death demonstrates, he had strong ideas on the social relevance of art. Anything that detached art from life, from the actual struggle that was the glory of existence, he disliked; Offenbach he loathed as a symbol of all that was corrupt and artificial in the Second Empire. At the same time, though he was a “social realist” of a kind, he did not conceive art as propaganda. As many extracts from his *Carnets* show, he thought that to survive, art must be public and accessible to the non-artist; basically, his attitude was much like that of George Orwell in our own day.

Towards people as individuals Proudhon reacted decisively. His likes and dislikes were strong, and it was the dislikes that he expressed

most eloquently. His *Carnets*, like his letters, are studded with brief, pungent sketches of the people he met in his life as a revolutionary in the years around 1848; the great actress Rachel, whom he detested because she stirred emotions which he feared; George Sand and the Comtesse d'Agoult, admirers who provoked in him the distrust he felt for all bluestockings; his rivals among the socialists—Cabet, Leroux, Marx—and the ambiguous figures who floated on the surface of French society in the reigns of Louis Philippe and Louis Napoleon.

THE RELATIONSHIP of the sexes always troubled Proudhon, and many passages in the *Carnets* relate to women and love and marriage. Proudhon's attitude to women has often been described as reactionary. He believed that they had no place in public life, but lived as moons to their spouses; essentially neutral, they received their morality from men.

Chastity has its principle in man; it belongs only to him and comes from him alone. Woman

God and man, neither is more than the other; they are two incomplete realities, which have no fullness of existence.

God is necessary to reason but rejected by reason.

Money is the only God that makes no hypocrites. One never sees men pretending to love of money as others pretend to love of God or of their neighbour; they pretend rather not to love it, which is a subtle way of proving their love.

Work creates out of nothing, like God.

The new socialist movement will begin with the war of the workshop.

The true school is the workshop.

The social revolution is seriously compromised if it comes through a political revolution.

Man, according to the Scriptures, lives not by bread alone, but by knowledge. In the matter of love I say: man lives not by meat alone, but by love.

No hatred, no hatred. Eliminate by principle.

All discussion is in vain without anger.

I can be neither spiritualist, nor materialist, nor atheist, nor humanist, and when I have driven away all these mysticisms, I find myself at grips with an even greater mysticism, justice, which is the mystery of mysteries.

I am told not to be troubled by the depth of the heavens. But this question does trouble me, and even more when I discover that in

this question lies that of knowing whether there is a God or not.

Ever since I came into the world I have felt myself dying.

*

What is religion? It is a dream.

What is philosophy? An hallucination.

What is property? It is theft.

What is communism? It is death.

What is royalty? A myth.

What is democracy? Chaos.

What is criminal justice? A snare.

What is God? An abstraction.

What is the immortality of the soul? It is despair. Resignation is the virtue of dupes.

What is Necessity? It is the Law. Summa lex, summa necessitas.

What is chastity? The highest expression of love.

What is marriage? The fullness of the human personality.

What is Association? The systematisation of industrial forces according to the relationship of functions and products. It is at once the most necessary and the most difficult thing of all.

What is justice? The objective calculation of the relations between workers.

What is man? No more than nature, arrived at self-consciousness.

(CARNETS: c. August 1843)

allows the law of chastity to be imposed upon her, accepts it, submits unreflectingly to it with a kind of indifference, with the same docility with which she gives herself up to sensuality, capable of passing from one to the other, and of being in turn Venus and the Virgin Mary. Basically, and in general, woman is neither chaste nor immodest. She is what her husband would like her to be.

Women belong therefore in the home, where their functions are supreme. Proudhon did not suggest that they are actually inferior; their capacities are merely different from those of men, and, properly understood, complement his. He reacted vehemently against the feminism of the followers of Fourier, which he felt was connected with the strain of libertinism he found in their doctrines. "The Phalansterians elevate sensuality to the heavens," he once noted. "Enjoyment, for them, is all of man. *You are disgusting!* is my last word." But, conservative though such a viewpoint may appear, it cannot—as Schapiro attempted to do in his denunciation of Proudhon³—be taken as evidence of incipient fascism; it reflected pretty faithfully the attitude of French working men in Proudhon's time, as did many of the points on which he differed from the doctrinaire socialists, and it was sustained by his working-class followers in the First International, who combined an opposition to feminism with an anti-bourgeois animus which made them seek to keep all but manual workers out of the IWMA.

Proudhon's attitude towards love showed a curious mixture of the exalted and the utilitarian. Reflecting on his youth at the age of 28, he noted:

I know today what at twenty made my spirit so full, so loving, so enraptured; what made women seem to me so angelic, so divine; what in my dreams of love (wherein faith in God, in the immortal soul, in religious practice, mingled and combined with faith in infinite love) made my religion so precious to me.... I was Christian because I was in love, in love because I was Christian—I mean religious.

Passing through a phase in which he doused his sensuality with "refrigerants," he weighed carefully the justifications for marriage:

Would you be completely free in reason, in imagination, in industry? Then do not marry. Would you be free and a lover, both at the same time? The best thing is to marry. The question is to know whether you want to or can do without love.

Having made his decision, he began his eccentric courtship of Euphrasie Piégard, under an assumed name and for two years in secrecy from even his closest friends. Even his *Carnets* were almost silent about it. A few brief notations (e.g., "Euphrasie P. does not reply to me. What is happening?" in December 1847) are all we have until his marriage on 31 December 1849, while in Sainte Pélagie Prison. According to the civilised treatment of political prisoners in mid-19th-century France, he was allowed a day out every week to attend to such matters of private business. "I have only one regret, and that is not to have made this marriage four years ago," was all he said then; and a little later, in February 1850, he noted: "In all, during six weeks of marriage, I have slept three times with my wife, a fact I am far from lamenting. It is not good, in my view, always to be together." Later in the same month he added, "I am captive but I am very happy." And that was almost all he had to say in the *Carnets* about his marriage, or, indeed, from that time on, about women in general. His doubts and curiosities were satisfied, and a union that began so oddly appears to have been extraordinarily successful.

PERHAPS the most important passages of the *Carnets* are those which reinforce the evidence of Proudhon's life and of his most important writings that Marx's definition of him as a petit-bourgeois was nonsense, and that suggestions—like those of Professor Schapiro—that he was a harbinger of bourgeois revolutionism (or of Fascism) and sustained a "hostility to labour" come from an extraordinary misreading of the facts. These characterisations of Proudhon can only be perpetrated by ignoring deliberately his last important work, *De la Capacité Politique des Classes Ouvrières*, which is a complete rejection of the bourgeoisie as a revolutionary force in our time, and by closing one's eyes to the fact that it was his personal disciples who founded the International in France, according to his doctrines, an achievement he lived just long enough to welcome on his death-bed.

During the early years of the *Carnets*, Proudhon was living mostly in Lyons, where he associated with the Mutualists, a group of working-class socialists, mainly silk weavers, who refused to follow the lead of any of the middle-class socialist theoreticians of the time, but evolved their own ideas on producers' association. Proudhon and Flora Tristan were both much taken with the idea, and Proudhon welded on to it his own theories of free credit

³"Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism," *American Historical Review*, July 1945.

and the People's Bank as a means of exchange among producers. The idea of the Association as an international movement in the 1840s was really the precursor of that of the International in the 1860s, and in this way Proudhon's goals were throughout his career in the mainstream of working-class (as distinct from bourgeois socialist) thought in the mid-19th century. In the spring of 1843 he had fantastic hopes for the Association; it was one of those crystal-clear ideas whose fulfilment seems so inevitable when one is twenty-five. He saw it as a great voluntary movement of the workers, perfectly organised, peacefully pushing out the exploiters, throwing up its own managers (Proudhon, of course, among them!) and recruiting all the

scattered socialist groups of the time under one banner.

Appeal to the Phalansterians, who will all come [he noted]. Communists will come also. We are 100,000... By 1860, the globe will be over-run by the Association.

The thesis of *De la Capacité Politique*—that the working class must stand on its own efforts to achieve social transformation, and has the power to do so—is stated already twenty years earlier in the *Carnets*:

The proletariat is a new force which should rely only on itself. Whatever I have said about capital and power applies to the bourgeoisie, to

ON SEEING ROSSINI'S "WILLIAM TELL"

...In listening to that music it seemed to me more than ever that no work of art in our times will stand as a whole; it all needs re-working. What we see are not spectacles, but mutilated fragments of spectacles.

Tragedy, comedy and music have independently reached a high point of perfection, but as they have not reached it simultaneously, the performance cannot attain completeness. Modern composers need new libretti, and they do not find the poets to write them....

The theatrical spectacle can exist only as a collective product; for that everything in society must be remodelled: the education of the masses, the security of labour, and the more equal sharing of its products. A dancer is forced to supplement her wages by trafficking in her charms. Operatic chorus girls are in the same position as seamstresses....

The more I reflect on what is needed for the renewal of art and of society, the more convinced I am that a revolutionary movement is indispensable. For, since ideas move more quickly than action, the people, once they are educated, will be in no mood to wait. We must therefore push on the downfall of the dynasty.... (23 August 1843)

ON THE PROPER PLACE OF A MODERN ART

Artists in the past had only to follow a world of ready-made ideas; but today, when the old faith has disappeared, the artist must substitute, for that which no one any longer believes in, a philosophy drawn from his own resources, and that seems difficult to men who reason so little.

Public places, theatres, academies, classrooms, gymnasia, concert halls, and dance halls, cafés, town halls, libraries, etc., it is these which art should adorn and embellish without counting on domestic patronage....

A museum is not the destination for works of art; it is simply a place of study and passage, a collection of antiques, of things which, owing to circumstances, can be placed nowhere else. They are the pensioners among beautiful things which a progressive civilisation puts out of use. (1845)

ON SEEING RACHEL IN "PHÈDRE"

From beginning to end of the tragedy she seemed like an old tart in love with a handsome boy, and in the grip of an attack of hysteria.... When Rachel moves one, it is by grating on one's nerves, not by touching one's feelings. (1843)

ON ETIENNE CABET

I distrust Cabet: he is religious, proprietary, dictatorial, intolerant, arrogant, intriguing. Watch out! (1845)

ON KARL MARX

Marx is the tapeworm of socialism. (1846)

ON BEING CALLED TO VISIT LOUIS NAPOLEON

Visit to Louis Bonaparte. This man appears well-intentioned, chivalrous head and heart; more filled with the glory of his uncle than with a strong ambition. At the same time, a mediocre intellect.... For the rest, be on your guard. It is the custom of every pretender to seek out first of all the heads of the parties. (26 September 1848)

ON BEING VISITED IN PRISON BY GEORGE SAND

A long, cold, tired face; a woman of great good sense, simple good heart and little passion, her speech curt, clear, positive and simple. G. Sand has burnt the candle at both ends, rather, I believe, from fancy than from sensuality or passion.... She is too mannish, too poised, too sedate.... Nothing in her, nothing, nothing of the feminine! (February 1852)

any kind of aristocracy, and for this reason, not only is no government and no authority compatible with the principle of mutuality, but no authority can aid in the work of reform. For all authority is opposed to equality and justice; hence it would be a contradiction for us to come to terms with the partisans of royalty or the representatives of parliamentary rule, or for that matter of property or Communism.

From this first moment we must live to ourselves and to ourselves alone.

And, a little later, this:

Today it is to the workshop that the genius of humanity is directed. It is there we shall find the heroes of the new republic; it is there—awaiting the hour of deliverance—that suffer the noble hearts and great characters of the century to come.

During the events of 1848 Proudhon remained an independent revolutionary attached to no party, since he could not see any with a constructive programme. "The mess is going to be inextricable. . . . They have made a revolution without ideas," he noted on 23 February. On the next day, after taking part in the assault on the Tuileries, he added, "They have nothing in their heads." Most of the revolutionaries of that time in fact had their heads stuffed with the notions of 1793, and the consequences which Proudhon dimly foresaw followed—the brief and bloody civil war between the workers and the bourgeois revolutionaries in June 1848, and the election of Louis Napoleon by popular suffrage in 1849, followed by his *coup d'état* on 2 December 1852. In his paper, *Le Représentant du Peuple*, Proudhon was one of the few writers courageous enough, at that time of kangaroo courts and proscriptions, to defend the June rebels. On 23 June he noted in the *Carnets*:

The terror reigns in the capital, not a Terror like that of '93, but the terror of the civil and social war. . . . What is beginning here is what has always been seen: each new idea has its baptism; the first to propagate it—misunderstood and impatient—get themselves killed for too much philosophic independence.

And, on the 28th: "The ill will of the Assembly was the cause of the insurrection." These notes lead up to the famous debate in the Assembly on 31 July, in which Proudhon demanded the "liquidation of the old society," and declared that if the propertied classes did not agree "we ourselves shall proceed to the liquidation without you." Asked whom he meant by *you*, Proudhon answered: "When I used those two pronouns, *you* and *we*, it is evident that I was identifying *myself* with the proletariat and *you* with the bourgeois class." So much for the argument that Proudhon was hostile to labour and preached the "bourgeois revolution"!

Now we come to the light which the *Carnets* throw on the most controversial of Proudhon's books, *La Révolution sociale démontrée par le Coup d'Etat du 2 Décembre*. In this book Proudhon argued that, whether he willed it or not, history had put Louis Napoleon in the position where he could bring about a revolutionary transformation in society; he called on him to accept the challenge. Proudhon's critics have taken this to mean that he approved of the *coup d'état*. His diary for the vital day, 2nd December 1851, and for the subsequent days, shows his complex feelings at this time.

2nd December. I . . . walked through the capital and observed the population. Faces were sad, and all minds were overwhelmed. The fact is that, while not counting in any way on the good faith or prudence of the President, nobody expected that he would risk such a crime.

3rd December. Never has such an assault been committed on the good faith of a nation. . . . The insult is too sharp; the nation is lost if it gives in.

4th December. I rise at 5.30 in the morning; I have had a feverish and inflammatory sleep, with intolerable beating of the arteries. . . . If I were free, I would bury myself under the ruins of the Republic with her faithful citizens, or else I would go to live far from a land unworthy of liberty.

5th December. How right I was, in 1843, to cry out against that absurdity of universal suffrage. No, the masses are not and will not for a long time be capable of a good action for themselves.

10th December. Through the defection of the working class, France has lost the battle.

14th December. She [Mme Suchet] confirms the news of the shooting of citizens taken at the barricades. . . . Thus, he is not content to defend himself; he has not even recoiled before massacre, before crime. France is under oppression. The insolence of the conquerors knows no bounds; indignation is growing.

15th December. A sign of Parisian stupidity. Most people go about repeating, with B's newspapers, that without the *coup d'état*, we should have had the revolution, that is to say, pillage, arson, murder, robbery. And they have under their eyes the atrocities, the nameless atrocities, of the army!

From these extracts it is clear that Proudhon was appalled by the actions of Napoleon. At the time, he felt the people were to blame because they had voted Napoleon into office. This was the only time when, for a few months, he was disillusioned with the workers of France. By the following October he had recovered his faith enough to note: "We affirm the possibility of educating the people." But he remained suspicious of universal suffrage, not because he was anti-democratic, but because he felt—like the archists after him—that the vote was an

abdication of responsibility and an invitation to tyrants; other ways must be found to express the popular will. With the change from a political to a social and economic organisation of society, he believed this could be done and that it would result in an increase of freedom.

THE EFFECT OF Proudhon's temporary disillusionment with the people was that it led him

A CRITIC should be the expression of the public, rather than of art itself, because art is made for the public, and it is not for art to judge itself. No doubt it is useful to know the opinion of artists, and to listen to their reasons, but it is for the public to weigh them and pronounce on them. If an artist wishes to give an account of the effect he aimed at providing, of the means he has employed, all well and good. But it is for me, the public, for me alone to see whether he has succeeded. I have no need to know what he should have done; I limit myself to saying that he has not succeeded. I do not know how you would draw a statue out of this block; but I shall certainly see whether it is a statue, and I shall see moreover whether it is beautiful.

I would like literary criticism to be done by mathematicians, jurists, scholars; art criticism by philosophers and business men; criticism of the theatre, music, dance, mime and elocution by historians and philologists.

Criticism carried out by people in the same field is mere babbling, an unintelligible jargon which all the ninnies and chatters hasten to ape in order to give themselves airs.

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HOW IS IT that such a simple thing has never been understood? LABOUR IS MONEY. And if labour is money, CAPITAL exists; what more does one ask? If capital is no more than an expression, a realisation, of work, it is a perishable expression and realisation, since it is fatally destined to be consumed (to perish); labour itself is immaterial, imperishable, unconsumable, immortal, always living and always creative, always tending sponte sua, by its own virtue and without external help, towards realisation; one need only leave it FREE to bring about its release, its exteriorisation.

Thus whoever has labour has capital; the first and only source of funds; he has money, wealth, security, guarantee, he has power, not shut up in a coffer and easily spent, but lodged in the heart and brain of Humanity, which are inexhaustible treasures.

(CARNETS, 1845)

to gamble desperately on the old illusion that a benevolent despot might carry out what the revolutionaries had failed to do. The Digger Winstanley appealed in the same way to Cromwell; and Bakunin for a while placed his faith in the autocratic Count Muraviev. Proudhon's reason was clear, stated in a note in the *Carnets* for October 1852. "The revolution always advances, making use of each individual, of each interest, of each tongue." Like Tolstoy, he saw famous men as the prisoners of history. He believed that Napoleon could be made to serve his—Proudhon's—ideals; he had no intention of serving Napoleon's purposes; and when he realised, in September 1852, that "L.N. goes to the bourgeoisie," he immediately rejected him. At worst, he made in *La Révolution sociale* a tactical error, not an abdication of principles. Certainly, the incident shows him in no way as a reactionary.

The gravest thing the *Carnets* reveal to 20th-century eyes is a strain of anti-Jewish feeling in Proudhon during the 1840s. Today, with Auschwitz in our memories, we give more importance to this than to prejudice against other communities; dislike of the Jew is, even more than dislike of the Negro, the hallmark of the reactionary. It is impossible for us not to be troubled and angry when we read anything that suggests racial prejudice.

Yet one must differentiate historically between the anti-Semitism of the Nazis and the Black Hundreds, the single-minded obsession that resulted in the worst holocaust of a bloody century, and the anti-Jewish feelings that were endemic in early and in mid-19th-century radical movements, which infected Cobbett as much as Proudhon, which touched even Marx (as Camillo Berneri showed during the 1930s in *Le Juif Anti-Sémite*), which shifted to the Right in France during the Dreyfus Affair, but which even after that time cropped up in American Populism and which have lived on among Russian Bolsheviks to this day. The myth of Jewish financial supremacy was then widely believed among socialists, and the ubiquity of the Rothschilds as statesmen-financiers gave an appearance of authenticity to the idea.

It is clear from Proudhon's *Carnets* that it is to the exclusiveness of the Jews as a special community, as a kind of religious caste within European society that he objects, as Marx the liberated Jew objected, and as Russian officials still object. In 1847 he notes:

When Crémieux speaks at the tribune, on any question where Christianity is engaged, directly or indirectly, he is careful to say: YOUR faith, which is not mine; your God, your Christ, your Gospel, your brothers in Lebanon.

This is what all the Jews do; they are in agreement with us on all points, in so far as they can draw advantage from it, but they are always careful to exclude themselves. They keep themselves apart!

Elsewhere he asked for the "fusion" of the Jews into the French community. Clearly his idea was assimilation, the breaking down of the social enclave in which the orthodox Jew chooses to live. This was not merely an idea relatively frequently held by socialists at the time, but also a projection of the intense patriotism which Proudhon—like Cobbett—cultivated at the same time as his radicalism. Just as Cobbett felt uncomfortable with all but true-blue southern English countrymen, so Proudhon felt uncomfortable with all but solid French peasants and artisans. All the world else—except for a few Russian *narodnik* noblemen—he despised or hated. And, just as Cobbett's anti-Jewishness deflates when we realise that he hated Anglican clergymen as much as Jews, and Quakers even more, so does Proudhon's when we read in his *Carnets* the phrase: "Hatred of the Jews, *as of the English*, should be an article of our political faith." Nobody, to my knowledge, has become very much concerned over Proudhon's Anglophobia.

Finally, it should be remembered that 1847, the year in which Proudhon's statements against the Jews were most intemperate, was also the year in which he suspected Heine of being a "police spy" and in which Marx attacked him so bitterly in *The Philosophy of Poverty*. A decade later he showed little sign of anti-Jewish prejudice and at his trial in 1858 actually engaged Crémieux as his lawyer.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY was a time when men hated wholesale and without disguising the fact, for politics and revolution were held to be passionate occupations, but usually without doing a great deal of harm in the process. We have since seen how Fascism and Nazism took up these hatreds and expanded them into monstrous doctrines of systematic extermination. But this does not mean that every man in the 19th century who expressed a dislike of Jews was a proto-Fascist, any more than every man who proclaims a dislike of Americans today is a crypto-Maoist. Men have to be seen, virtues and faults entire, in the jungle of their own time, not in ours. Only then, paradoxically, do their messages have meaning for us, as Proudhon's criticisms of authoritarian government certainly do today, is an age when the dismantling of the great states and the decentralisation of social and economic life, for which he stood, have become inevitable and will take place destruc-

tively if we do not choose to bring them about by rational and peaceful means.

ALL THIS HAS BEEN emphasised in both Europe and the Americas during the quasi-revolutionary events of the past two years and, with a great deal of appropriateness, in those of France especially. In the summer of 1968 the French students and workers put on a creditable re-enactment of the events of 1848, with the difference that de Gaulle was of different mettle from Louis Philippe, the Bourgeois King, and his tactical retreat was merely the prelude to a brief return which would certainly not have astonished Proudhon with his scepticism regarding universal suffrage.

It is not difficult to imagine what Proudhon would have done had he appeared, in his steel spectacles and long greenish *redingote*, as a revenant in those streets of the Quartier Latin that were so long his world. Proudhon was not a physical activist, but he was sufficiently carried away by the emotions of 1848 to help build a barricade and to fell a tree in the February days, and he was present at the sacking of the Tuileries. No doubt in 1968 too he would have been present, marching in a demonstration or two, tearing up his little pile of paving cobbles, but most of all observing and recording with pungent individuality his impressions of the time. No doubt he would have fearlessly protested at police brutalities, as he did in the June days of 1848; he would have detected the emergence of a new force among the embattled students at the same time as he criticised their lack of any real sense of what they meant to do with the revolution when they got it; he would have disliked M. Cohn-Bendit at first meeting and denounced him at second. His closest sympathies would have been with the young workers who defied the Communist union bureaucrats and sought to bring back to French unionism some of the lost anarcho-syndicalist fire and idealism which he and his followers imparted to the French labour movement.

But, most of all, we can imagine him noting, with the self-pride he never lacked, how events in 1968 bore out what he had said more than a hundred years before. The critic of Polish and Italian Nationalism—at a time when the patriots of these nations were the heroes of liberal and revolutionary Europe—would have found plenty to criticise in the resurgent nationalisms of the 1960s; neither Israel nor the Arab States would have escaped his condemnation or have failed to produce a sermon on the virtues of federalism as a solution to the problems of insoluble frontiers. The rising local and racial patriotisms, of Bretons in France and French in Canada, of

Welsh in Britain and Flemings in Belgium, he would have treated with a characteristic anarchist distinction. He would have encouraged their desire for local autonomy (did he not once claim that his native Franche-Comté might perhaps be better off in federal Switzerland?), but he would have urged upon them the need to seek their ends through decentralised cantonalism rather than by creating new national states to increase the danger of wars and lessen the freedom of communication.

The enemy of the State would have noted, on the one hand, the vast proliferation of governmental powers, especially in his own field of propaganda. (By nature a reclusive warrior of the pen, he would have made a poor show on television, unlike Bakunin who would have been a natural for the video screen.) He would have observed accurately the improvements which a later autocrat, also brought to power by the combination of *coup d'état* and universal suffrage, had made on the techniques of that earlier expert in mass-supported authority, his contemporary Louis Napoleon. But he would have noted, with a sharp but unillusioned eye, the weaknesses which its own centralisation and

rigidity had brought to the modern state, as revealed during the May days of 1968.

Undoubtedly some aspects of modern youth movements would have aroused the denunciatory ire of that intensely moral French working man of the 1840s. He would have been disturbed by the sexual revolution, and would have found many contemporary manifestations in the arts as revolting as Offenbach and as disconcerting as Rachel; he would have found bluestockings in mini-skirts as appalling as George Sand in trousers. But in denouncing the cult of affluent living which often makes the 1960s so reminiscent of the last days of the Second Empire, he would have been entirely at one with the young revolutionary ascetics of today.

Indeed, it is more easy to imagine Proudhon, with his flexible and foresightful mind, settling protestingly but not incongruously into the 1960s than any of his more rigid-minded socialist contemporaries. Most of his central ideas, with very little adaptation, can be used as touchstones for the trends and events of our times, and to make statements which enable men a century later to look at their world with more perception is surely the only true prophetic art.

The Looting

This parish has been plundered
 The poets have been here
 Ransacking, ruining, denuding
 Everything worth taking is gone
 Sequestered pools polluted
 The tallest oaks defrocked
 The very skies defiled
 Stars destroyed
 Vandals filching
 Locusts flashing
 (That girl on the urn
 Has thighs made of stone)
 Flesh they turn to foam
 And hurl the lovers from a cliff they've made
 I've seen them disembowel the sun

Nothing is safe
 I woke this morning thinking of someone I
 swore I'd never mention
 Just out of public decency
 He was already in a poem

Larry Rubin

FILM

Whatever Happened to Godard?

By John Weightman

LE GAI SAVOIR, which I have just seen at the ICA, is such a silly and pretentious film that one cannot help wondering what Jean-Luc Godard is now up to. The hand-outs say that it was begun as a documentary on education, commissioned by French television, but that it has so far been banned in France. I cannot understand why; the censors must be even more obtuse than one supposes if they fear that such a tedious work might arouse dangerous passions, apart from acute irritation with M. Godard himself. Perhaps, after all, they rejected it simply because it is bad. It is even a *tour de force* of badness. In purporting to deal with education, Godard manages to be more boring and irrelevant than the most boring Sorbonne professor. God knows, I have sat through some scores of dreary *discours en trois points*, but they had more to them than this vapid verbalisation, which can only be considered as a form of cinematographic suicide.

I have never been an unconditional admirer of Godard, but I have always before found brilliant passages in his films and felt that, in his slapdash way, he had his finger on some modern nerve. Genuineness is even rarer in the cinema than in most other forms of art, and Godard seemed to be genuine, like the early Bergman. So much of what is considered as "good" cinema—dare I breathe the names of Buñuel, Renoir, Hitchcock?—seems to me to have something arranged and meretricious about it. Godard's very defects appeared to make him direct and personal; he used the camera in a rapid, elliptical style to catch life on the wing. If an actor stumbled during a take, he might well

leave the stumble in to give an impression of irrational authenticity. His work was, one gathered, entirely his own, with no concessions to committee feeling or commercial tactics.

I must have seen about a dozen films by him,¹ but I haven't a very clear idea of the order in which they were produced. The first I went to was *A bout de souffle*, and I remember queuing in the cold in Paris one Christmas, because the new film was all the rage and Jean-Paul Sartre, who was then still a public figure to be reckoned with, had declared that it was "*un très beau film*." There was also a queue when I saw *Pierrot le fou* at the Cameo-Polytechnic. But all the others—*Bande à part*, *Le Petit Soldat*, *Une Femme Mariée*, *Une Femme est une Femme*, *Masculin-Féminin*, *Week-End*, *La Chinoise*, *One plus One*—are associated in my mind with deserted halls and back-streets whether in Paris or in London. The bulk of Godard's films must have made comparatively little money, and his world-wide reputation is hardly based at all on popular success.

He declares (in an interview, which is part of the ICA handout) that his early films belonged to his "hippie" period, corresponding to "a bourgeois philosophy," and that the events of May 1968 hastened his mental evolution by at least five years. As I understand it, he is saying that he has moved from non-commitment or half-commitment to total commitment. I remember commenting, at the time of *A bout de souffle*, on the paradoxical fact that Sartre, the apostle of commitment, should have praised a film which was a romantic idealisation of an outlaw, based not on real life but on the alienated fictional hero, played so many times by Humphrey Bogart. (On reflection, the paradox is not as surprising as all that, since nihilistic despair has always been one pole of the Sartrean philosophy.) *Pierrot le fou* was in many respects a remake of *A bout de souffle*, and both films had a strong affinity with *Bande à part*. I

¹I missed *Vivre sa vie* and *Made in U.S.A.*, saw only extracts of *Les Carabiniers* and can remember nothing of *Le Mépris* except that it took place in a dream-like Mediterranean villa and Michel Piccoli kept his hat on in the bath.