

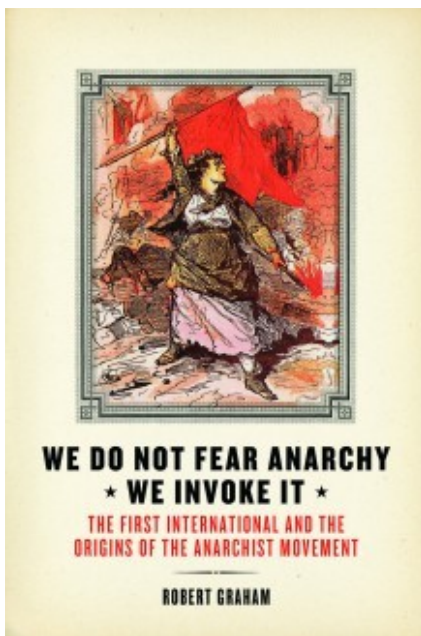
<https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/we-do-not-fear-anarchy-we-invoke-it-a-summary/>

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[Robert Graham's Anarchism Weblog](#)

Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas

[We Still Do Not Fear Anarchy](#)



This month marks several noteworthy anniversaries: the suppression of , the Haymarket affair; and Bakunin's birthday (May 18 on the the Paris Communeold Russian calendar; May 30 on the modern calendar), among others. It has also been about a year since the publication of [‘We Do Not Fear Anarchy – We Invoke It’: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement](#) (AK Press). I discussed the roles of both Bakunin and the Paris Commune in the emergence of self-proclaimed anarchist movements in Europe and the

Americas in that book. The quote in the title is taken from Bakunin himself, who first publicly identified himself as an anarchist in 1868, around the time that he joined the International. It is surprising then that in another book along similar lines, René Berthier argues that

*the anarchist movements that emerged ([Social Democracy & Anarchism in the International Workers' Association 1864 – 1877](#)) from the struggles within the International regarding the proper direction of working class and socialist movements constituted a break with rather than a continuation of “Bakuninism,” and that Bakunin is better described as a revolutionary socialist or syndicalist than as an anarchist. I think my book provides a good counter-argument to that position. I also included several selections from Bakunin’s anarchist writings in Volume One of *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*. But this is a blog, not a book, so today I thought I would just present some quotations from Bakunin in which he identifies himself as an anarchist and describes what he is advocating as a form of anarchism, in terms of tactics, methods, means and ends.*

Bakunin’s Anarchism

“We do not fear **anarchy**, we invoke it. For we are convinced that **anarchy**, meaning the unrestricted manifestation of the liberated life of the people, must spring from liberty, equality, the new social order, and the force of the revolution itself against the reaction. There is no doubt that this new life—the popular revolution—will in good time organize itself, but it will create its revolutionary organization from the bottom up, from the circumference to the center, in accordance with the principle of liberty, and not from the top down or from the center to the circumference in the manner of all authority.” [*Program of the International Brotherhood*]

“Outside of the Mazzinian system, which is the system of the republic in the form of a State, there is no other system but that of the republic as a commune, the republic as a federation, a Socialist and a genuine people’s republic — the system of **Anarchism**. It is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the State, and the economic, altogether free organization of the people, an organization

from below upward, by means of a federation.” [*Circular Letter to My Friends in Italy*]

“I am *the absolute enemy of a revolution by decrees*, which is the application of the idea of a *revolutionary State* and a sequel of it; *that is, a reaction disguised by revolutionary appearances*. As against the system of revolutionary decrees *I oppose the system of revolutionary action*, the only effective, consistent, and true system. The authoritarian system of decrees, in seeking to *impose* freedom and equality, destroys them. The **Anarchist** *system of action evokes and creates them in an infallible manner*, without the intervention of any official or authoritarian violence whatever. The first leads inevitably to the ultimate triumph of an outspoken reaction. The second system establishes the Revolution on a natural and unshakable foundation.” [*Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*]

“Let us turn now to the Socialists, who divide into three essentially different parties. First of all, we shall divide them into two categories: the party of peaceful or bourgeois Socialists, and the party of Social Revolutionists. The latter is in turn subdivided into revolutionary State Socialists and revolutionary **Anarchist-Socialists**, the enemies of every State and every State principle.” [*World Revolutionary Alliance of Social Democracy* (Berlin: Verlag, 1904)]

“To the Communists, or Social Democrats, of Germany, the peasantry, any peasantry, stands for reaction; and the State, any State, even the Bismarckian State, stands for revolution... Altogether, the Marxists cannot even think otherwise: protagonists of the State as they are, they have to damn any revolution of a truly popular sweep and character especially a peasant revolution, which is **anarchistic** by nature and which marches straightforward toward the destruction of the State. And in this hatred for the peasant rebellion, the Marxists join in touching unanimity all the layers and parties of the bourgeois society of Germany.” [*Statism and Anarchy*]

“Since revolution cannot be *imposed* upon the villages, *it must be generated right there, by promoting a revolutionary movement among the peasants themselves, leading them on to destroy through their own efforts the public order, all the political and civil institutions, and to establish and organize **anarchy** in the villages.*”

“When the peasants have felt and perceived the advantages of the Revolution, they will give more money and people for its defense than it would be possible to obtain from them by ordinary State policies or even by extraordinary State measures. The peasants will do against the Prussians what they did in 1792. For that they must become obsessed with the fury of resistance, and only an **Anarchist** revolution can imbue them with that spirit.”

“But in letting them divide among themselves the land seized from the bourgeois owners, will this not lead to the establishment of private property upon a new and more solid foundation? Not at all, for that property will lack the juridical and political sanction of the State, inasmuch as the State and the whole juridical institution, the defense of property by the State, and family right, including the law of inheritance, necessarily will have to disappear in the terrific whirlwind of revolutionary **anarchy**. There will be no more political or juridical rights—there will be only revolutionary facts.”

“Once the wealth of the rich people is not guaranteed by laws, it ceases to be a power. Rich peasants are now powerful because they are specially protected and courted by the functionaries of the State and because they are backed up by the State. With the disappearance of the State, this backing and power also will disappear. As to the more cunning and economically stronger peasants, they will have to give way before the collective power of the peasant mass, of the great number of poor and very poor peasants, as well as the rural proletarians—a mass which is now enslaved and reduced to silent suffering, but which revolutionary **anarchy** will bring back to life and will arm with an irresistible power.” [*Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*]

“We **revolutionary anarchists** who sincerely want full popular emancipation view with repugnance another expression in this [Social Democratic] program – it is the designation of the proletariat, the workers, as a *class* and not a mass. Do you know what this signifies? It is no more nor less than the aristocratic rule of the factory workers and of the cities over the millions who constitute the rural proletariat, who, in the anticipations of the German Social Democrats, will in effect become the subjects of their so-called People’s State.” [*Letter to La Liberté*]

“The road leading from concrete fact to theory and vice versa is the method of science and is the true road. In the practical world, it is the movement of society toward forms of organization that will to the greatest possible extent reflect life itself in all its aspects and complexity.

Such is the people’s way to complete emancipation, accessible to all—the way of the **anarchist social revolution**, which will come from the people themselves, an elemental force sweeping away all obstacles. Later, from the depths of the popular soul, there will spontaneously emerge the new creative forms of social life.”

“We, **the revolutionary anarchists**, are the advocates of education for all the people, of the emancipation and the widest possible expansion of social life. Therefore we are the enemies of the State and all forms of the statist principle. In opposition to the metaphysicians, the positivists, and all the worshippers of science, we declare that natural and social life always comes before theory, which is only one of its manifestations but never its creator.”

“Such are our ideas as social revolutionaries, and we are therefore called **anarchists**. We do not protest this name, for we are indeed the enemies of any governmental power, since we know that such a power depraves those who wear its mantle equally with those who are forced to submit to it. Under its pernicious influence the former become ambitious and

greedy despots, exploiters of society in favor of their personal or class interests, while the latter become slaves.”

“Our polemic had the effect of making them [the Marxist Social Democrats] realize that freedom or **Anarchism**, that is, the free organization of workers from below upward, is the ultimate aim of social development, and that every State, their own people’s State included, is a yoke, which means that it begets despotism on one hand and slavery on the other.”

“They say that this State yoke—the dictatorship—is a necessary transitional means in order to attain the emancipation of the people: **Anarchism** or freedom is the goal, the State or dictatorship is the means. Thus to free the working masses, it is first necessary to enslave them.”

“While the political and social theory of the anti-State Socialists or **Anarchists** leads them steadily toward a full break with all governments, and with all varieties of bourgeois policy, leaving no other way out but a social revolution, the opposite theory of the State Communists and scientific authority also inevitably draws and enmeshes its partisans, under the pretext of political tactics, into ceaseless compromises with governments and political parties; that is, it pushes them toward downright reaction.” [*Statism and Anarchy*]

“Between the Marxists and ourselves there is an abyss. They are the governmentalists; we are the **anarchists**, in spite of it all.” [*Letter to La Liberté*]

“In accepting the **Anarchist** revolutionary program, which alone, in our opinion, offers conditions for a real and complete emancipation of the common people, and convinced that the existence of the State in any form whatever is incompatible with the freedom of the proletariat, and that it does not permit the international fraternal union of nations, we therefore put forth the demand for the abolition of all States.” [*Program of the Slav Section (Zurich) of the International*]

However, I maintain that there is something in what I wrote in *Social-Democracy & Anarchism*: although Bakunin occasionally claims to be an anarchist, he nevertheless did it rarely and reluctantly.

The best is to go and see the texts. Robert Graham gives 14 quotations of Bakunin using the word “anarchy”, but I’m afraid he is not convincing.

Examination of Robert Graham’s quotations

◆ Among the 14 quotations, seven refer to “anarchy” as chaos or disorder, which is the way Bakunin usually understands the word.

In the second quotation [*Circular Letter to My Friends in Italy*], Graham makes a mistake because in the original Italian text Bakunin does not use the word “anarchism” [political doctrine] but “ANARCHY” (in capital letters – chaos).

◆ In 4 cases Bakunin uses the word “anarchy” or “anarchist” but feels necessary to add an explanation, as if the concept was not immediately understandable by the reader. As in *God and the State*: “...It is in this sense that we are really Anarchists”...

◆ Concerning the third quotation [*Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*]: this quotation comes from a text (Letter I) where the word “anarchy” can be found 5 times:

a) “the present-day economic anarchy”. In other words the perfectly ordinary meaning of the word: disorder, chaos.

b) They [*the authoritarian revolutionaries*] don’t understand “the power and life that lies in what the official people of all colors, from lily [*royalists*] to dark red [*communists*] call anarchy”. Obviously, Bakunin refers to disorder, chaos: the power of popular uprisings to move the masses.

c) The French revolutionaries of 1789: “Far from restricting freedom of popular movements for fear of anarchy, they provoked them in all ways.” Here again, Bakunin means chaos: the outbreak of a popular uprising creates the conditions for a revolution – a perspective Bakunin sees favorably, but which has nothing to do with a particular doctrine or social system.

d) & e) The French revolutionaries of 1789: “Revolutionaries for good, they soon recognized in the masses the true revolutionaries, and allied themselves with them so as to instil the revolution, anarchy, and to organize the popular revolutionary anarchy.” Same as above. Apart from the fact that nobody thought of anarchism (in the modern political sense of the word) in 1789 in France.

◆ In 3 of the quotations, the word “Anarchy” could be understood as a political doctrine or system.

◆ One of the quotations Graham makes seems to me totally counter-productive if his intention was to prove Bakunin was an “anarchist” in the modern and positive sense of the word. Graham quotes Bakunin saying that “the lack of a government begets anarchy, and anarchy leads to the destruction of the State, that is, to the enslavement of the country by another

State” – in other words anarchy=enslavement. I don’t quite see where the positivity of anarchism lies.

Robert Graham’s 14 quotations show that if Bakunin undoubtedly used the word “anarchy”, a close (and critical) examination of these texts shows that Graham most of the time (not always, though) misinterprets what Bakunin really says.

It is of course not my intention to dispute the fact that Bakunin uses the word “anarchist” and its derivatives in the positive sense of social or political doctrine – but he does it quite rarely. I just want to show that if we want a somewhat serious approach to the issue, we must analyze the texts closely. One then realizes that things are more complicated than some believe:

- Bakunin felt really uneasy in the use of the word.
- When he wanted to define his membership to a political current, he would call himself a collectivist, a revolutionary socialist or a federalist.
- He never uses the word “Anarchism” (except once).

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I made a study on Bakunin’s use of the word “anarchy” because all along my thorough reading of the Russian revolutionary’s works, I often found passages where he uses the word, and rarely in a positive way.

So I made a search in the CDROM of his works issued by the Amsterdam Institute of social history and I divided his writings in several parts:

- Positive references: 11 texts, 0,7Mo
- Negative references: 38 texts, 4,05 Mo
- Ambiguous references: 17 texts, 2,4 Mo
- Positive claim as anarchist: 9 texts, 0,5Mo
- “Anarchy” as a simple historical fact: 11 texts, 0,6Mo.

Of course someone else can do the same job as I did and find differences in the results, but not substantially, I think.

This shows that the reference to “anarchy” in Bakunin deserves *at least* a critical examination.

Peter Kropotkin wrote that Bakunin and his friends “even avoided to claim the anarchist name. The word an-archy (that is how it then was written) seemed to link the party to the Proudhonists whom the International at that time was fighting the ideas of economic reform.” (*Paroles d’un révolté.*)

“Collectivist”, “revolutionary socialist” or “federalist” were the words Bakunin and his friends used to call themselves.

Of course, this is a blog, and I will not develop this question, but I invite those who read French to refer to a study I wrote (which is still provisional)

on the occurrence of the word “anarchist” and its derivatives in Bakunin’s works:

L’usage du mot “anarchie” chez Bakounine (The use of the word “Anarchy” in Bakunin. — <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article185>)

Most of the times, Bakunin uses the word in its normal sense, that is chaos, disorder. In a letter to Celsio Ceretti (13-27 March 1872), mentioning the situation of the International in Turin, he complains that “there is nobody in Turin to bring order to this disgusting anarchy”. This is how most of the time he uses the word “anarchy”, even in his “anarchist” period – after 1868. One month later, Bakunin writes to Tomás González Morago (21 May 1872) saying he defends the idea of open debate within the International and says it must not adopt a unique, mandatory program. And he adds:

“I challenge you to formulate any explicit doctrine that could unite under its banner millions, nay, tens of millions of workers. And unless you impose the beliefs of one sect to all others, it will lead to the creation of a multitude of sects, that is to say, the organization of genuine anarchy in the proletariat for the greatest triumph of the exploiting classes.”

One is entitled to question a writer who is qualified as an anarchist but who so often uses the word in the common sense of disorder. This issue deserves to be seriously examined.

In the texts which I point as “ambiguous”, Bakunin may use the word positively, but he takes great care to precise the sense of the word, as if he was reluctant to use it: “we, anarchists, that is to say...”

In “The Slavic question”, a text he sent to Herzen in August 1867, Bakunin says: “I am an anarchist”, but he adds that “not to give good reason to my enemies for so little, I am a federalist from head to foot”. It follows that it is his enemies who qualify him as an “anarchist”, and that the term is synonymous with federalism. Bakunin feels necessary to provide an alternative term – which he does quite often.

In a letter to Albert Richard of March 12, 1870, Bakunin evokes anarchy, but he feels obliged once again to give an explanation: “...that is to say, the true, the frank popular revolution”.

In a chapter of “Knouto-Germanic Empire” entitled “Historical Fallacies of the School of doctrinaire German Communist” he uses the word “anarchist” but he adds “This is the way we are really Anarchists”.

In “Mazzini’s Political Theology and the International”, he writes: “...the social-revolutionaries, otherwise known as anarchists”,
Etc.

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The most interesting class of texts is probably what I call "Anarchism as a simple historical fact" and which causes quite a number of misinterpretations, including with Robert Graham, it seems. In these cases, Bakunin uses the word in the normal sense of chaos, disorder, particularly the subsequent chaos to large political and social crises in which society disintegrates and no global organization survives.

And this is exactly what Bakunin means in the very first quotation Graham makes and that he uses as the title for his book: : "We do not fear anarchy, we invoke it. For we are convinced that anarchy, meaning the unrestricted manifestation of the liberated life of the people...", etc. The anarchy Bakunin (and Graham, obviously) refers to in this text is nothing but the chaos following the collapse of a social system, it is by no means a positive political or social doctrine or system.

Insofar as this quote uses the word "anarchy" in the common sense of "chaos", it was maybe not necessarily a good idea to refer to it in the title of a book about the First International...

Of course, ordinary bourgeois consider such situations of chaos/anarchy with horror. Bakunin also sees anarchy as chaos, but unlike the members of the ruling class, this chaos does not frighten him, because, according to him, the destruction of a social order is necessarily followed by its reconstruction on new foundations. His Hegelian training is never far away, but this kind of dialectics remains highly questionable.

And Bakunin never refers to "anarchism" (as a political doctrine, except once and rather ironically concerning Carl Vogt). He always speaks of "anarchy".

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My book (Social Democracy & Anarchism in the International Workers' Association, Merlin Press) develops an idea with which Robert Graham disagrees, and which can be discussed of course, but it is based on facts: after the Congress of Saint-Imier (1872) two currents, which had been hitherto (relatively) inconspicuous, eventually confronted within the "anti-authoritarian" International. I also say that one of these currents, which was to become the anarchist movement, totally contravened (Verviers Congress, 6-8 September 1877) the principles set forth by Bakunin, who repeated that the International should not develop a mandatory program, even if it was anarchistic. This can easily be verified.

In other words Bakunin clearly distinguished the work of activists in the mass organization (IWA) and their activity as a specific group (the Alliance). The two activities were to be *complementary* in Bakunin's view, but they never were. This can also be easily verified.

And I say that by imposing an “anarchist program” to the IWA in 1877, the anarchist current did exactly what Bakunin had accused Marx of having done.

The thesis I develop in my book is that these two currents, whose opposition had remained strangely unseen, anticipated anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. There is nothing really original in such a statement, but whether you agree or not with this thesis, it remains that I provide a number of arguments that deserve being examined.

An Italian historian, Maurizio Antonioli, provides powerful insights concerning the links between Bakunin, James Guillaume, revolutionary syndicalism and anarchism in a text written 40 years ago:

*Bakunin tra sindacalismo rivoluzionario e anarchismo :
organismi specifici e organismi di massa* / Maurizio Antonioli,
L'Antistato, Milan 1977,

and recently translated into French:

Bakounine entre syndicalisme révolutionnaire et anarchisme /
Maurizio Antonioli ; postface de René Berthier / Paris : Noir &
rouge, 2014.

Perhaps it is time to translate it into English?

I conclude my remarks by saying that I took great pleasure in reading *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It*, in which I learned a lot. The international libertarian movement has produced during the past twenty years a number of books that will remain references. The only regret I have is that these works are rarely translated into other languages and are confined to their original language sphere.

In solidarity
René Berthier