Introduction

Between 1880 and 1914, the French anarchists formed and maintained close connections with their British counterparts. During the 1860s and early 1870s, anarchism emerged as an active political movement within the First International, especially among the Jura-based Swiss sections of the organisation, and went on to spread across Europe and far beyond. Like Italy or Belgium, from the late 1870s onwards France harboured a large and active movement – relatively speaking of course, since anarchism was always a minority, radical pursuit. Great Britain, which is frequently but inaccurately regarded as an inhospitable milieu for anarchist ideas, also counted a fair number of anarchist groupings. The French and British movements were in close contact from the early 1880s onwards; the International Revolutionary Socialist Congress held in London in July 1881 helped foster personal ties among militants from various countries. During the 1880s, little groups of exiled French companions (the nickname adopted by the French anarchists) were formed in London. They became larger, far more active and influential in the first half of the 1890s, when the theory of ‘propaganda by the deed’ gained ground among anarchists. The concept of propaganda by the deed, developed from 1876–77 among the anarchists of the First International, justified acts of violence as a way of publicising anarchism and initiating the revolution. The main consequence of its propagation was a series of anarchist-inspired terrorist attacks which swept over the Western world throughout the 1890s and early 1900s, peaking in France between 1892 and 1894. The authorities of the Third Republic retaliated with a fierce repression,
resulting in the arrest or silencing of most comrades. Hundreds of them were forced into exile, just like the defeated supporters of the Second Republic after Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte’s 1851 coup, and the Communards after their insurrection was crushed in 1871.

Britain, the only country in Europe whose asylum policy remained fairly liberal, became the destination of many active anarchists; about 500 French-speaking individuals settled there in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In London, a safe if unpopular refuge, Francophone and British militants came into contact and formed closer links with anarchists of other nationalities, similarly exiled. Despite their relatively small size, the London anarchist groups and the terrorist peril they seemed to embody captured the public imagination in France, Britain and many other countries, to the extent that their presence prompted a development of political surveillance and contributed to the redefinition of asylum and immigration policies. Most comrades ended their forced stay in Britain in February 1895, when an amnesty allowed them back into France. It then had a significant impact on the course of the French and international labour movements, through its reflection on and promotion of trade union infiltration by anarchists. After 1894, the example of British trade unions became a central reference in the pro-union propaganda which was now the main strategic goal of the French communist-anarchists. The Franco-British connection proved essential in the elaboration and dissemination of the body of ideas which were increasingly referred to as syndicalism – a process of ideological cross-fertilization which continued until the First World War.

This book is a political and social history of the French anarchists’ exile years in London between the late 1880s and early 1890s, tracing their legacy until the First World War and replacing them in a broader historical context of exilic and transnational activism. The first chapter charts the origins of the French and British anarchist movements, highlighting their significant ideological differences and divergent fates, which were nonetheless bridged by the links formed between them in the late 1870s and early 1880s and reinforced in the 1890s, at the peak of the exile period. Chapter 2 is a sociological description of the exile circles. Who were the exiles? Where did they come from, settle, and work? How did they get
by in a foreign country whose language they did not master, and how were they received there? Chapter 3 examines their exile politics – the central role of print propaganda as a vehicle for transnational activism, as well as the crucial question of the internationalisation of political ideologies and practices through exile. Did this period abroad allow an opportunity to actualise the internationalist tenets of anarchism? How did the movement’s increasingly diasporic composition affect it? After the less sensational aspects of this exilic militancy, chapter 4 turns to the thorny terrorist question, and draws the ever problematic line between the many myths surrounding the London groups and the actual extent of propaganda by the deed among them. Chapter 5 analyses how anarchists gradually became a political and diplomatic football in contemporary debates on asylum and, despite their small numbers, played a significant part in the passing of the 1905 Aliens Act. The last chapter examines the aftermath of this exilic episode for the international anarchist and syndicalist labour movement, highlighting the small but very active personal networks remaining after these ‘London years’, and their key role in the elaboration and dissemination of syndicalism from the mid-1890s onwards.

These few years of exile have so far been regarded as peripheral to the history of French anarchism, although a process of revision is under way. They are barely mentioned in Jean Maitron’s authoritative Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1975), although Maitron acknowledges the impact of the influential journalist and theorist Émile Pouget’s time in London on his views on syndicalism.¹ Neither is the question of exile investigated in depth in Vivien Bouhey’s more recent Les Anarchistes contre la République (2009), even though Bouhey rightly stresses the importance of the London outposts for the French anarchist movement.² The biographical dictionary of French anarchists, Le Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français (also known as the DBMOF and Le Maitron),

similarly brushes over the international activism of many French-speaking militants, devoting little space to their experiences abroad or international contacts. A noteworthy early study of transnationalism among London’s anarchist refugee circles was provided by François Bédarida’s short but remarkable article, ‘Sur l’anarchisme en Angleterre’, a survey of exilic and indigenous anarchist currents in Britain before the First World War, offering compelling interpretations for their relative failure in the liberal Victorian era. However, this was a historiographic exception, and until the new approaches initiated by the ‘transnational turn’ started in the late 1980s, French anarchism has been studied almost exclusively in isolation.

Tellingly, the updated edition of a ‘Maitron des anarchistes’, currently in preparation, should partly rectify this national bias, since the numerous links with Francophone anarchists in France and abroad as well as the international endeavours of the French comrades are incorporated in this volume.

In Britain, there was an early wave of studies on British and, to some extent, international anarchism in the late 1970s and early 1980s; understandably, these tended to focus on issues of terrorism. John Quail’s *The Slow-Burning Fuse. The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (1978) provided a thorough and, at the time, groundbreaking history of the British movement, but was uninformed by theoretical underpinnings and, once more, had a predominantly national perspective. Hermia Oliver’s *The International Anarchist Movement in Late-Victorian London* (1983) offered a factual account of the international London milieu, veering towards the sensational (that is to say terrorism), and therefore paying considerable attention to the French groups. Bernard Porter has written several excellent chapters on the reception of anarchists in the context of late nineteenth century moral panics, highlighting the strong impact made by these small groups on British society, and consequently foregrounding

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terrorist activities to the detriment of day-to-day life and other forms of political activity. Haia Shpayer-Makov also studied the reception and representation of the British anarchist movement in her doctoral thesis and a landmark article.5

In recent years, the history of the French and international anarchist groups in Britain has attracted significant interest within academia as well as from a wider audience. This is mainly due to the belief that all these companions were involved in terrorist plots – that London, ‘the city which incarnated subversive actions’ in the minds of many contemporaries, was the headquarters of the international anarchist movement, which in turn was equated with its extreme terrorist wings.6 This belief was partly founded: the most advanced French comrades did flee to London, where they congregated with fellow anarchists of other nationalities, and especially some very radical Italians. Their endeavours resulted in a number of failed attacks, two of them plotted by French nationals. This made the anarchist refuge a key stake in national and international debates over immigration, political asylum and police surveillance. As a result, the progress and radicalisation of anarchism and the fears they gave rise to played a significant role in the closure of borders which marked the period, as countries like Belgium, France, Switzerland and the United States changed their policies in order to keep out anarchists. In Britain too, the ‘anarchist peril’ was instrumental in the implementation of a more restrictive approach to immigration and political asylum and the reinforcement of political police surveillance. As the world’s largest Empire entered a multifaceted crisis of confidence at the close of the nineteenth century, immigration was increasingly stigmatised as an economic, political, cultural and racial threat. The hundreds of thousands of immigrants fleeing anti-Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe were the main bête


6 Karine Salomé, L’Ouragan homicide. L’attentat politique en France au XIXe siècle (Paris : Champ Vallon, 2010), p.126. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from French have been translated by the author.
noire of those who started advocating such anti-immigration, ‘restrictionist’ views, but anarchists were also seen – or at least purposely depicted – as another population to be kept out of the country. This is how a few hundred French anarchists came to play a role in the epoch-making revision of Britain’s flagship immigration and asylum policy, with the 1905 Aliens Act.

Striking albeit overstretched parallels with current events have meant that pre-WW1 transnational anarchist networks have been studied as an early example of the post-2001 wave of terrorism. The role of London as a surprisingly tolerant refuge for suspected terrorists has appeared as a comparative theme of choice. A number of studies have also centred on the themes of immigration and asylum in conjunction with terrorism, pointing out that the main parallels between both terrorist waves are to be found in the reception and instrumentalisation of these events, with a view to stigmatising foreigners and restricting civil liberties. The idea that anarchist-inspired terrorism was born out of poverty and exclusion was also stressed, suggesting similar causes for recent attacks. Another interesting ramification of these comparative endeavours came to light when the researcher Alex Butterworth sought access to the surveillance archives of the Metropolitan Police’s Special Branch for his monograph The World that Never Was (2010); the refusal to disclose or allow quotations from this material resulted in a contentious Freedom of Information case, which testifies to the enduringly

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sensitive nature of the question of political surveillance in Great-Britain. The search for contemporary echoes culminated in an academic debate initiated by the publication, in 2008, of an article by James Gelvin comparing Al-Qaida’s terrorism and the 1890s wave of anarchist-inspired terrorism, presenting extremist Jihadism as a form of Islamic anarchism. Gelvin argued that anarchism and Jihadi terrorism shared a preference for ‘action over ideology’, that both relied on ‘a highly decentralized structure built upon semi-autonomous cells’ and represented an external, comprehensive treat to ‘the system’. In both cases, according to Gelvin, the terrorists sought to defend a culture perceived to be under attack. A prompt reply by Leonard Binder challenged Gelvin’s use of a Western definition of anarchism and terrorism to comprehend Islamic notions. Richard Bach Jensen, a specialist of nineteenth-century anarchism, conceded the existence of a number of similarities between both waves of terrorism, such as their worldwide scale and radical, anti-system targets and ambitions, the emphasis on direct action and the use of suicide attacks. However, Jensen rejected the conflation of anarchism and Islamic terrorism and pointed to areas of profound incompatibility between both, starting with their antithetical views on religion. The causes and forms of political violence in both cases also differed, Jensen stressed.

These parallels cannot but lurk in the background of any contemporary study on Belle-Époque anarchism. However, while it focuses on one of the main groups suspected of terrorist dealings, the London French, the present book is not meant as a contribution to these debates, except in so far as it argues that these exiles were in fact more moderate than they were rumoured to be, and that the obsession with propaganda by the deed was to some extent a spies’ construct. It also contrasts alleged terrorist activities with the proto-syndicalist

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reflection conducted in exile circles, and shows that the London groups’ political involvements were more complex than is usually claimed, and had a different orientation.

One consequence of the disproportionate focus on anarchist terrorism has been to compound an earlier ‘image problem’ which, historically, participants in the anarchist movement have both cultivated and suffered from, and which has resulted in distorted representations of their aims and methods. The three decades before the First World War, dubbed the ‘heroic period’ of anarchism, and the short-lived popularity of propaganda by the deed largely account for the movement’s negative characterisation. Closely related to propaganda by the deed was the broader notion of anarchist illegalism (‘illégalisme’), which was defined in the early 1880s as a kind of publicity strategy for the movement: ‘permanent rebellion through writings, speeches, through daggers, rifles, dynamite… everything is good for us, which is not legality’. In practice, it included more benign gestures, such as swindling (‘estampage’), moonlight flits and robberies on various scales – theorised by the comrades as ‘la reprise individuelle’, or ‘individual taking back’. Illegalism was a symbolical protest gesture against the law and social conventions, ‘a direct and violent reaction against economic and social organisation by those left behind by the system.’ But of course it was also a convenient excuse for robbers and gangsters who used anarchism as a pretence, and considerably tarnished the movement’s reputation.

While it is notoriously difficult to define anarchism, for the purpose of this study it will be understood as a libertarian strand of nineteenth-century socialism, based on the rejection of the state in favour of spontaneous and voluntary political and economic organisation. The present work follows a number of anarchist communists (as opposed to individualist anarchists), who advocated economic equality and sought a new collective economic organisation. Anarcho-communist conceptions were derived chiefly from the writings of Peter

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Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus; however, anarchism as it emerged in the 1870s was the offspring of diverse intellectual and ideological influences, in specific socioeconomic contexts and therefore with significant local and national variations. Far from being an irrational and extremist movement akin to lunacy, as its detractors so often portrayed it, or just a violent, inarticulate response to the increased proletarianisation and alienation of the working classes, it was rooted in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the revolutionary and socialist traditions of the nineteenth century. Its broad agenda was deeply rooted in a humanist and progressive filiation, for instance with respect to ecology, education, or gender equality. Robert Graham has emphasised

How remarkable was the breadth and depth of anarchist thinking for its time. Anarchists and their precursors... were among the first to criticise the combined effects of the organization of work, the division of labour and technological innovation under capitalism. Anarchists recognized the importance of education as both a means of social control and as a potential means of liberation. They had important things to say about art and free expression, law and morality. They championed sexual freedom but also criticized the commodification of sex under capitalism. They were critical of all hierarchical relationships, whether between father and children, husband and wife, teacher and student, professionals and workers, or leaders and led, throughout society and even within their own organizations... they opposed war and militarism in the face of widespread repression.

In the light of these ideological orientations and of the transnational, network-based organisation of the anarchists, if a relevance to contemporary issues must be highlighted, it is to be found in the parallels with the alterglobalization movement which has emerged in the last two decades. Like the present time, the period 1880-1914 saw a process of dual

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globalization based on new transnational spaces and connections – one state-led and capitalist, the other anti-hegemonic. It can be argued that the anarchist and syndicalist diaspora, in which the London French played an important role, presents us with an early instance of alterglobalization protest – a transnational movement seeking to oppose capitalist globalization by suggesting a different political and social agenda, and using new means of communication to improve its organisation and impact. In a more pragmatic perspective, Van der Walt and Schmidt have also argued that in response to the perceived failure of neoliberalism, anarchism provides a repertoire of action which is of great contemporary relevance.13

Within academia, the renewed interest in pre-WW1 anarchism owes largely to the rise of transnational labour history, of which the anarchist and syndicalist movements constitute prime examples. Individual and collective mobility – through exile, temporary or permanent migration – played a key role in the development of the international labour movement in this period, which saw a shift from a very idealised, slightly tokenistic internationalism, to much more practical and integrated ideas on international collaboration and great organisational effort.14 The global anarchist and syndicalism diaspora, ‘the world’s first and most widespread transnational movement organized from below and without formal political parties’, thus offers fascinating lines of investigation.15 The publication of numerous


monographs on individual groups has allowed a tentative map of transnational anarchism and syndicalism to be sketched out, highlighting important anarchist ‘hubs’; the present book is a contribution to this collective effort.\footnote{Pietro Dipaola, ‘Italian Anarchists in London (1870-1914)’ (PhD Diss., Goldsmiths College, 2004); Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt, Anarchism and syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940. The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism and Social Revolution (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010) offers a remarkable coverage of the global south and Ireland; Tom Goyens, Beer and Revolution. The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007). See also studies on socialist groups with minority anarchist affinities: Nancy Green, The Pletzl of Paris. Jewish Immigrant Workers in the Belle Époque. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986); Gaël Cheptou, Le Club de lecture des sociaux-démocrates allemands de Paris : de l’exil à l’immigration (1877-1914), in Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps 84 (2006), pp. 18–25.} The individual level has also been examined, identifying significant mediators with varying degrees of fame; the Italian Errico Malatesta has attracted special interest.\footnote{Michel Cordillot (ed.), La Sociale en Amerique Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement social francophone aux Etats-Unis (1848–1922) (Paris: L’Atelier, 2002); Michel Cordillot, Révolutionnaires du Nouveau Monde. Une brève histoire du mouvement socialiste francophone aux Etats-Unis (1885-1922) (Montreal : Lux, 2009); Benedict Anderson, Under Three Flags. Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination (London: Verso, 2005); Constance Bantman, ‘The Militant Go-Between : Émile Pouget’s Transnational Propaganda, 1880–1914)’, in Labour History Review, 74.3 (2009), pp. 274–87 ; Yann Béliard, ‘From Gustav Schmidt to Gus Smith : A Tale of Labour Integration (Hull, 1878–1913)’ and Dieter Nelles, ‘Internationalism in the Border Triangle : Alfons Pilarski and Upper Silesian Anarcho-syndicalism during the Interwar Years’, in Berry and Bantman, New Perspectives on Anarchism, pp. 44–60 and 80–93 respectively. See also Carl Levy’s and Davide Turcato’s forthcoming biographies of Errico Malatesta.} Edited volumes and conferences have elaborated on specific questionings, such as the interplay between scales of analysis, the reinvigorated comparativism allowed by transnational approaches, as well as the intersection of anarchist
and syndicalist transnationalism and anti-nationalism with questions of race and imperialism.\textsuperscript{18}

These transnational approaches share a strong methodological concern. Recurring themes include the role of individual mediators, the personal networks they assemble into, ideological exchanges through the press or private correspondences, the importance of a few large cities and other locales as international anarchist centres (Paris and London both rank high in this category), as well as the international diffusion and appropriation of foreign militant models, not least British trade unionism and then the French CGT’s syndicalism. London became a key forum for European socialists after 1848 and provided the main haven for European anarchists after 1880. This study concentrates on prominent individuals, personal networks and ideological transfers.\textsuperscript{19} The French anarchists’ exile years in London provide an insight into the formation and functioning of networks and the dynamics of transnational militancy, which were so central to the international labour movement during this period of intense activism. The notion of network as it is used here corresponds to Michel Cordillot’s definition, as a mode of organisation and a scale of analysis located between the individual level and purely institutional approaches: ‘The aim is…to replace an approach focused on ideology, programmes, organisational structures, the parallel action of collective entities which are often personified and transformed into historical actors, with an approach based on a constant to and fro between the individual and the collective’.\textsuperscript{20} In this sense, the concept stresses the importance of flexible cooperation – even if its overly informal use by

\textsuperscript{18} See for instance Berry and Bantman, \textit{New Perspectives on Anarchism}; Hirsch and Van der Walt, \textit{Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World}. The 2010 (Ghent) and 2012 (Glasgow) editions of the European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) have both showcased the current dynamism of transnational anarchist and syndicalist history and historiography.

\textsuperscript{19} James Bennett, ‘Reflections on Writing Comparative and Transnational Labour History’, \textit{History Compass} 7.2 (2009), pp. 376–394.

\textsuperscript{20} Cordillot, \textit{La Sociale en Amérique}, p. 9
historians has come under attack.\textsuperscript{21} The case of the French anarchists in London is indeed an excellent illustration of the ‘informal internationalism’ on which much of pre-WW1 anarchist activism rested; while the period saw countless attempts to set up an anarchist International in order to formalise the anarchists’ internationalism, small but very active personal networks were the main basis of libertarian organisation.\textsuperscript{22} The reference to ‘groups’ as the main basis for anarchist organisation, favoured at the time, made it possible to comprehend the links woven between the comrades, especially against party-based activism.\textsuperscript{23} However, the term ‘group’ fails to capture the transience and plasticity of international militant sociability. Relatively stable groups existed locally, on a narrow geographical basis; at the international level, occasional and informal collaborations prevailed, and are best described as networks.

In addition to this synchronic approach replacing the London groups in the context of the anarchist and syndicalist diaspora, they must also be considered from the diachronic perspective of existing studies on political exile. The role of Britain and above all London as ‘the asylum of the people’ in the nineteenth century has been acknowledged in a rich historiography.\textsuperscript{24} However, in the case of France as with other countries, research has focused


\textsuperscript{24} Bernard Porter, The Refugee Question in mid-Victorian Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Sabine Freitag (ed.), The Asylum of the People. Exiles from European Revolution:
on the post-1848 refugees and the Communards, leaving aside the anarchists until recently. A long-term perspective, comparing and contrasting the anarchists’ exile with previous generations of refugees, proves very fruitful, since exile politics were quite codified. In every proscription, declarations of internationalism were usually juxtaposed with national isolation, and solidarity with conflicts. Refugees abided by similar rituals and their political endeavours were structured by meetings and exile publications. In almost all cases, elites were overrepresented among refugees, and the groups dominated by intellectuals who were the most cosmopolitan exiles; Kropotkin may be seen as an epigone of Marx in this respect. The anarchists, like their hosts, were very aware that this exile was part of a long tradition of exile and asylum in Britain, and this continuity is essential to understanding the reception of this generation of refugees – and the shift represented by the passing of the 1905 Aliens’ Act.

However, there were also profound differences between the anarchists and their predecessors. By contrast with the romantic exiles of the previous generations, many of whom went on to glorious political careers or other forms of posterity, the anarchist refugees were usually marginalised radical figures, who were and remained unknown outside their own circles and the police authorities watching them obsessively. They left few testimonies which can be used by historians. The companions’ exile was short-lived, ranging from a few months to a year or two on average. Only in a handful of cases did exile turn into migration, a fact which distinguishes the French anarchists in London from their predecessors. This means that the traditional questionings of migration studies are of little relevance in the present case, starting with the analysis of social, economic and political integration and processes of

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assimilation and acculturation. Moreover, in the refugees’ experience, an important difference induced by this temporal shift is the striking absence of pathos from all exilic accounts; a leitmotiv in the laments of exiles is the pain of finding oneself marginalised, and it is easy to imagine that anarchists, who so thrived on marginality, were unlikely to express such grievances.

Lastly, adopting the perspective of Franco-British exchanges, the study of personal networks and cultural transfers yields significant conclusions. The rise of intercultural studies, a genre closely related to transnational history, has reinvigorated the interest in the famously complex relationship between the French and the British, a trend further reinforced by the centenary of the 1904 Entente Cordiale and its commemorations. There has been a shift towards more grassroots approaches, away from institutional and diplomatic analysis; the historiography of cross-Channel migrations has also become less elitist in its focus. The development of aristocratic and upper-class tourism from one country to the other is well-known and intellectual cross-influences have also been highlighted, for instance between liberal or republican circles. However, the popular classes are under-represented in the study of Anglo-French relations; worse, they are generally assumed to be mired in jingoism and xenophobia. Whilst there is some truth in such a depiction, the case of the anarchists confirms that there already existed a tradition of working-class travel between both countries,

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in the form of political exile and labour migration.\textsuperscript{27} It also emphasises the importance of international solidarity for at least a segment of the working classes, even in the dark years of the Fashoda crisis. From a comparative perspective, this case study challenges the traditional opposition between British political reformism and the French revolutionary model, especially in the sphere of trade unionism. It is indeed difficult to uphold the supposedly canonical contrast between Britain’s well-established and conservative trade unions on the one hand and, on the other, France’s revolutionary \textit{Confédération Générale du Travail} (CGT), as it appears that they were influenced by each other and both presented their own combinations of reformism and revolutionary ideas. Similarly, the CGT, often described as all-powerful, admired and imitated all over the world, is also shown the be the recipient of foreign influences.\textsuperscript{28}

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\textsuperscript{28} For a study of the CGT’s international influence, see Wayne Thorpe, ‘Uneasy Family: Revolutionary Syndicalism in Europe from the \textit{Charte d’Amiens} to World War One’, in Berry and Bantman, \textit{New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism}, pp. 16–42.
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1. From the Socialist Revival to a Terrorist Epidemic: Anarchism in the 1880s

The late 1870s were a time of rebirth for the international labour movement, after a decade marked by muffled social tensions. The drastic repression which followed the 1871 Paris Commune decimated the First International, and in many countries, the economic depression and widespread hostility drastically reduced labour militancy. In France, the contrast was stark with the social buoyancy of the last years of Napoleon III’s Second Empire: the Third Republic set up in 1871 was young and fragile, under the constant threat of monarchical restoration, and its leaders were anxious to silence any opposition which might jeopardise stability. However, as the regime gained strength and confidence following the Republicans’ victory at the 1876 legislative elections, anti-socialist repression was eased. In 1879 and 1880, amnesty measures allowed back into the country many of the former Communards previously exiled in Belgium, Britain or Switzerland, or deported to New Caledonia. Their return reinvigorated socialist agitation, and labour forces and radical ideas soon gained momentum. While free from such intense political repression, Britain had also been affected by the decline of the First International in the late 1870s. Since 1848, the country had been the shelter of the revolutionary elite of most European countries affected by repression, starting with France. However, these refugees, busy as they were trying to settle old disputes, fighting for survival in dire poverty or just focusing on events their own countries and keeping a very low profile, usually stayed away from British politics. The native labour movement was largely separate from these refugee circles and the economic downturn of the 1870s affected trade union militancy. Nonetheless, a decidedly combative mood appeared in the late 1870s, and more advanced ideas were formulated in the radical clubs of London, both by native militants and exiles importing socialist theories from the Continent – a process known as the Socialist Revival. Anarchism was one of the most striking expressions of this newfound bellicosity, and it was in those years that the budding movement spread beyond the confidential exile circles of the Swiss-based anti-authoritarian International, gaining converts in most European countries and achieving a high degree of visibility and influence, without ever becoming a mass movement.
The early years of French anarchism

France quickly proved a fertile ground for anarchist ideas and activism. There was an obvious continuity between the country’s revolutionary tradition and the ideology and sociology of anarchism. The political ideal of Peter Kropotkin, the leading anarcho-communist theorist until the First World War, was focused on the emancipated craftsman, dedicated to his work and retaining control over time and production mechanisms. This had great resonance in France, where production structures were still predominantly artisanal, yet where the artisans’ autonomy was increasingly threatened by the development of the modern factory system and the levelling-down processes accompanying it, in terms of skills and occupational status.¹

Anarchist ideas started spreading in France from the late 1870s onwards, mainly through contacts with militants of the Jura Federation, a libertarian splinter organisation from the First International. Dozens of newly-appeared local discussion groups provided a forum for socialist and anarchist ideas. At the national level, a number of workers and socialist congresses were held at that time, resulting in the formal separation of the different left-leaning currents and the emergence of anarchism as a self-standing political tendency after the 1881 Congrès du centre.² The first major French anarchist paper, *La Révolution sociale*, was launched in September 1880. It played a significant organisational function, establishing contacts between the Paris anarchists (it was printed in the Latin Quarter), the provincial groups, and the international movement, including London, where it was in contact with Communist veteran Victor Richard and Gustave Brocher, one of the organisers of the 1881 Revolutionary Socialist Congress. In conjunction with the latter, *La Révolution sociale* contributed to the Congress’s preparation; it also provided extensive first-hand information on the revolutionary movement in Britain and attempted to foster links with London-based groups, through

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newspaper subscriptions for instance. But it was not long before the paper was exposed as a catch funded by the police prefect Louis Andrieux through the provocateur Égide Spilleux (known as Serreaux), and *La Révolution sociale* disappeared later in 1881.

Many future well-known anarchists became involved in the movement in those years. Two of the foremost theorists and militants of anarchist communism were closely linked with the French movement. The first one was Peter Kropotkin, who, after a spell in exile in Switzerland, now found himself in France’s Savoie region. The other was Kropotkin’s friend and fellow geographer Élisée Reclus, a Commune veteran who had fled to Britain, then on to Switzerland and eventually Belgium. Though banished from France for life, Reclus remained in contact with some French activists. In 1879, along with the Russian exile Warlaam Tcherkesoff, Kropotkin and Reclus launched the French-language anarchist monthly *Le Révolté* in Geneva. The paper was smuggled into France, where it proved influential in disseminating a brand of humanist and philosophical communist anarchism.

None of these early-days militants was more famous than Louise Michel, the iconic *communarde* formerly known as *La Vierge Rouge* (The Red Virgin) and renamed *La Vierge Noire* (the Black Virgin) after her conversion to anarchism in the early 1880s. New recruits into the French movement also included Kropotkin’s soon-to-be protégé, Jean Grave, a shoemaker in his early twenties active in the Latin Quarter revolutionary groups. At Kropotkin’s and Reclus’s request, Grave took over the editorship of *Le Révolté* in 1883, turning it into a fairly successful venture before relocating it in Paris, where, in its various incarnations as *La Révolte* (after 1886) and *Les Temps nouveaux* (from 1895), it became and remained the main forum of anarchist communism until 1914. Émile Pouget was an Aveyron-born craftsman living in Paris, who took to political militancy at school as a newspaper editor, before turning to trade unionism in the late 1870s and anarchism in the early 1880s. His

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journalistic calling was soon reignited: in 1889, he launched *Le Père pinard*, the flagship paper of French plebeian anarchism.  

Anarchism was hardly significant numerically and always remained a marginal – if not sect-like – movement: even when it reached its peak, in 1894, it was estimated that there were only 4772 anarchists in France, and these numbers were most likely inflated as a result of the authorities’ habit of regarding even the most occasional reader of the anarchist press as a dedicated militant. Even in these very early days, however, anarchists received a great deal of attention, through their own efforts and the interest they aroused in public opinion and the police. Although a carefully orchestrated secrecy shrouded anarchist activity, the comrades were keen to attract as much attention as they could, starting with the names of their groups, which flaunted their angry, provocative stance: appellations like *Le Forçat* (The Convict), *La Haine* (Hatred), or *Le Revolver à la main* (The Gun in Hand) must have resonated like terrifying declarations of social war to contemporaries in the bourgeois Third Republic still haunted by memories of the Commune. As the movement grew in size and audacity, in the early 1880s, several incidents raised its profile dramatically. In January 1883, at a time of social unrest in the mining area near Lyon, panicked by what they perceived to be a conspiracy threatening political and social stability in France, the authorities arrested and put to trial 66 anarchist militants in the highly-publicised *Procès de Lyon*. Kropotkin, Michel and Émile Gautier, a lawyer who was a prominent anarchist writer and organiser at the time, were among those who received prison sentences. One effect of these convictions was to disorganise the movement, which at the time was centred on Lyon. However, the public sympathy which manifested itself following the trial exemplifies how constant and exaggerated suspicions towards anarchism actually drew attention to it, by endowing it with a rather attractive aura of transgression and martyrdom and offering the comrades an ideal platform to publicise their ideas. Then, in March, a hunger march led by Michel and Pouget in Paris’s Invalides area degenerated into a riot and several bakeries were looted. Since this was also

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6 Archives Nationales de France (AN) F7 12506, list dated 31 July 1894, paper 304.
the first time that the anarchist black flag was waved in France, the connection between illegality and anarchism became entrenched in collective consciousness.

Who were the anarchists?

In conformity with dominant representations, and much like the revolutions and upheavals which had shaken the country since 1789, French anarchism was to a large extent a movement of skilled or semi-skilled craftsmen. The push for increasingly intensive and mechanical forms of production within workshops, the development of subcontracting and more hierarchical production relations led many craftsmen to search for ways of reasserting their autonomy, both on a practical and symbolical level – which is just what anarchism enabled them to do. The setting of the workshop, with its strong tradition of political activism, where one could debate ideas while at work, is often regarded as conducive to the development of radicalism. The best-known and most vocal anarchists were indeed cabinet-makers, locksmiths, weavers, or tailors. Shoemakers – les cordonniers – held pride of place, confirming this trade’s tradition of political radicalism.⁷ Several leading anarchists were indeed shoemakers, starting with Grave. Pouget’s Père peinard was subtitled ‘Les Réflecs d’un gniaff’ which, in this publication’s trademark slang, meant ‘Thoughts of a shoemaker’. Woodworkers were another important contingent, as exemplified by Joseph Tortelier, an indefatigable militant and one of the earliest champions of the general strike in France.

Views of nineteenth-century anarchism remain influenced by Karl Marx’s famous sneer that the philosophy of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon – the main exponent of anarchism at the time – were ‘bourgeois’ and fraught with mysticism.⁸ The romantic identification between craft employment and anarchism has overshadowed the importance of two other groups in the movement’s sociology. The


least well-known is factory workers. While French industry remained predominantly based on small or medium-sized production units, the modern factory gained ground from the 1870s onwards. Many craft workers whose skills had been made redundant by the developments in machinery found themselves forced to take up factory work. The overwhelming majority of politicised industrial workers, especially in the factory-based textile and mining sectors, became supporters of the parliamentary socialist Marxist party formed in 1881, the *Parti ouvrier français*, led by Jules Guesde, but anarchism appealed to the least skilled among these workers. Factories were often based in the newly-emerging *banlieues* of France’s largest cities, desolate suburbs which were a breeding ground for anarchism. The mushrooming growth of these industrial towns, harbouring many working-class ghettos, was linked to the progress of industrialisation as well as the Haussmannisation of Paris during the 1860s, which destroyed many old popular enclaves and pushed their inhabitants out of the city centres.  

It is likely that frequenting anarchist groups offered a form of solace and above all sociability to individuals stranded in this no-man’s land of the modern industrial world. In Paris, the anarchist *banlieues* were concentrated on the Northern and Eastern borders of the capital, such as Saint-Denis, Saint-Ouen, Clichy, Levallois, matching the map of suburban industrialisation. Similarly, in Lyon, the thriving local anarchist movement recruited significant contingents from the neighbouring mining area and the metallurgy and building industries. Most workers also combined several positions at the time, crossing the boundaries between sectors and blurring the distinction between types of employment and highlighting the limits of the anarchist artisan stereotype. Moreover, while anarchism is often caricatured as a conservative or even a utopian set of beliefs, striving for a return to an idealised pre-industrial golden age, the awareness of machinery and modern industrial relations informed anarchist ideology; many of its aspects were based on the premise that the modern worker was usually employed in a factory and that there was no going back to a world without modern

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machines. While the ideal of the *bel ouvrage* produced in the harmonious workshop of yore was central to the anarchist-communist political vision, the potential benefits of machinery were acknowledged and embraced, although of course it can be argued that it was only with the syndicalism evolved in the late 1890s that anarchist ideas were fully developed into an ideology of the industrial age.\(^1\)

French anarchism also gained great strength, creativity and visibility through the rallying of a number of artists and literary figures. It was connected with modernist circles and the artistic avant-garde, with whom anarchists shared an irreverent rejection of rules, formal authorities and the establishment, celebrating instead the individual’s absolute freedom. In pictorial terms, anarchism and the lives of labourers in general provided artists with a number of themes to explore – such as the realistic or idealised representation of workers, or satires on class issues, often with an acerbic caption. In return, anarchist propagandists repeatedly called for militant social art.\(^1\)\(^2\) Neo-impressionist painters like Théophile Steinlen, H. G. Ibels, Maximilien Luce or Lucien Pissarro supported libertarian ideas by donating works to the anarchist press, boosting sales and thus helping raise money for the cause. Most issues of *Le Père pinard* featured such works, and after 1896, so did *Les Temps nouveaux*, the successor of *Le Révolté*. The movement also had its literary champions. Symbolist writers, many of whom were close to the neo-Impressionists, were interested in anarchism: promising literary figures like Octave Mirbeau, Laurent Tailhade or Paul Adam were durably connected with the movement, while Stéphane Mallarmé, Anatole France or Joris-Karl Huysmans supported it intermittently. The then-thriving symbolist reviews were especially receptive to libertarian ideas, which chimed with their own eclectic and individualistic philosophy. There were nuances between their positions: *Les Entretiens politiques et littéraires* and *La Revue blanche* had a more social and politicised outlook than *le Mercure de France* or *La Plume*. Reciprocally, the literary anarchist review

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L’En-dehors published the contributions of Symbolist writers like Saint-Pol-Roux or Émile Verhaeren, as did the prestigious literary supplement of Les Temps nouveaux. On the fringes of the movement were a number of bohemian, eccentric figures, often of bourgeois origin. Zo d’Axa and Felix Fénéon are the main examples of this brand of existentialist, irreverential and playful anarchism. D’Axa, whose real name was Alphonse Gallaud, came from an upper-middle-class family and trained at the highly selective and conservative military École Saint-Cyr, although he deserted from the army within months of entering it. Back in France after a spell in exile, he set up L’En-dehors (The Outsider, 1891-1893), a literary publication to which both anarchists and non-affiliates contributed, whose title epitomised the anarchist celebration of marginality. Felix Fénéon took a similarly humorous and provocative anarchist stance, combining for several years a position at the War Ministry with anarchist militancy and a thriving career as an art critic and discoverer of new artists.

The support of these artists and avant-garde groups was not without ambiguities. It drew attention to anarchism, raising its profile and increasing its impact, and resulted in collaborations which lasted into the early twentieth century. It also reflected the nature of fin-de-siècle anarchism, which was a movement of social protest aimed at the defence of workers, but also a philosophy based on the emancipation of the individual and a celebration of marginality against bourgeois integration. And indeed, when a clear split occurred between communist and individualist anarchists, in the mid-1890s, those artists who had been drawn to the more philosophical and libertarian contents of anarchism usually espoused individualist creeds, whose social message was hushed in favour of a more abstract philosophy. On the other hand, with increased publicity came some unwelcome recruits: the transgressive aura of anarchist illegalism attracted some idle bourgeois and poseurs for

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whom anarchism was mere snobbery. The apocalyptic undertones of revolutionary discourse and the idea of redemptive violence also possessed a heightened resonance in this fin de siècle obsessed with ideas of doom and decadence.16 This anarchist fad, perceptively derided in Émile Zola’s novel Paris, contributed to the caricature of French anarchism as a narcissistic bourgeois movement, which was quite paradoxical considering its actual sociology. This enthusiasm often proved short-lived, and they usually defected in the early 1890s when anarchist-inspired terrorism took transgression a step too far.

As well as a movement of social protest and a philosophy, anarchism could be described as a lifestyle, underpinned by many shared codes and references. It had its own language: anarchists addressed one another as compagnons and acquired a wealth of slang from sources like Le Père peinard, with its constant mocking of ‘le capitalo’, ‘les bouffe-galette’ (the bread-munchers, i.e. State employees), or ‘la chambre des amputés’ (‘the amputated chamber’, a pun on ‘la chambre des députés’). Papers, pamphlets and books, both fictional and theoretical, also formed an essential part of the anarchists’ relentless propaganda, as the movement had an intensely bookish culture. Sociability was crucial to their daily lives and most anarchist groups held weekly meetings, with special workshops on other weekdays. Local groups provided a sense of community to migrant workers. Above all, social posturing was at the heart of anarchism and its image: the anarchist ethos was a mixture of diffidence, provocation and humour, and a refusal to subject to any form of authority. Whenever companions were arrested, they would refuse to recant, often vindicating their beliefs in court and facing the ensuing indictments. A number of anarchist professions of faith at the bar became legendary as a result – such as those of Ravachol or Émile Henry, both of whom were sentenced to death for carrying out terrorist attacks.17 Of course, anarchist ideals were not always embraced consistently: for instance, while the movement celebrated trimardeurs, wandering militants dedicated to their propaganda and free of the bourgeois lures of patriotism or family life, in practice, most companions were deeply attached to their local neighbourhoods and rather indifferent to

internationalist militancy. Moreover, while companions claimed to be more open-minded than any other socialist group, arguing that their meetings were accessible to all, in practice, sectarianism, internal rivalries and conflicts were rampant in anarchist circles.

In geographical terms, anarchism tended to be an urban phenomenon, its implantation roughly coinciding with the distribution of industry and the regions with a strong tradition of political radicalism. By the mid-1880s, anarchist groups existed in dozens of French cities and towns all over the country, and were especially thriving in and around Paris, Lyon and Northern France. Even relatively small towns harboured anarchist groups, which may have contributed to impression that France was succumbing to an anarchist epidemic, although official headcounts cannot be taken at face value. Paris, the centre of the nineteenth-century revolutions and of the traditional crafts, was the heartland of anarchism. The map of anarchism within the city was complex. The Latin Quarter, the historical, intellectual and political centre, counted quite a few anarchists with literary or journalistic aspirations. For instance, Jean Grave was so closely linked with the neighbourhood located just behind the Panthéon that he came to be known as Le Pape de la rue Mouffetard – a kindly mocking nickname given to him by fellow anarchist journalist Charles Malato, in reference to his legendary seriousness and high-brow anarchism. Perched on its hill in the shadow of the much-hated Sacré-Cœur, Montmartre also sheltered many comrades, such as Émile Pouget, who started his Père peinard in a little room on the rue des Martyrs. To the east of the capital, the areas of Bastille and the Faubourg Saint-Antoine reflected the craft component of anarchism and its connection with the city’s revolutionary past, while the implantation in Paris’s industrial suburbs showed that anarchism was also product of the new industrial order and the social helplessness it generated. Both as a result of their revolutionary legacy and of the closeness of Switzerland, Lyon and the Rhône region had been the first centres of French anarchism, until the Procès de Lyon put a short-lived halt to the

movement’s local advance. The area remained a militant centre, benefitting from the presence of Italian militants exiled from their country. There was another anarchist concentration in Marseille, reinforced by the presence of many Italian and Spanish anarchists. Similarly, in the South-West of France and Bordeaux, anarchism was greatly strengthened due to the proximity of Spain.\textsuperscript{21}

While the development of anarchism can primarily be understood in the light of France’s industrial, sociological and cultural evolutions, many local factors must also be reckoned with – the influence of a single militant or of a cluster, the crisis of an important industry, the presence of anarchist immigrants. For instance, the movement in Toulouse was largely initiated by the arrival of comrade Debrai from Bordeaux in 1886, who endeavoured (quite unsuccessfully) to create groups in every district of the city, liaised with national publications like \textit{Père peinard}, \textit{Le Révolté} and \textit{La Lutte Sociale}. The example of Toulouse also illustrates the impact of famous anarchist activists and orators – in this case, Joseph Tortelier, who drew an audience of 350 listeners in 1886, and Sébastien Faure, who singlehandedly resurrected Toulouse-based activism when he gave a conference there in 1889.\textsuperscript{22}

In view of such local factors, anarchism may be described as a treasure trove of slogans, tactics and ideals, which could be tapped into and fitted to different circumstances, and this was one of the reasons why it fared so well in France. It is therefore possible to analyse how and why anarchism was appropriated, interpreted, and localised in the various places where it took root – at the local and national level.\textsuperscript{23}

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\item\textsuperscript{21} René Bianco, ‘Le Mouvement anarchiste à Marseille et dans les Bouches-du-Rhône (1880-1914)’ (PhD Diss., Université de Provence, 1977), 2 vols.
\item\textsuperscript{23} Arif Dirlik, ‘Anarchism and the Question of Place’ in Hirsch and Van der Walt, \textit{Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World}, pp. 131–46.
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**Propaganda by the deed strikes France**

Theories of political terrorism and illegalism held currency in anarchist circles from the late 1870s onwards, and were enshrined by the 1881 Social Revolutionary Congress held in London. They became an integral part of anarchist rhetoric and behaviour, and were often no more than mottos, stock phrases and poses to show allegiance to the group’s collective codes. Even an ‘intellectual’ militant like Jean Grave later owned up to having attempted to make bombs in the early 1880s, not out of conviction or for a concrete purpose, but because it was the ‘done thing’ at the time. Anarchist newspapers published recipes for the fabrication of explosives, articles on political assassination or invitations to ‘put the new developments of chemical science to good use’. This changed on 5 March 1886, when a man called Charles Gallo threw a bomb and fired three shots in the Paris Stock Exchange. No one was hurt, but the attack caused a great stir after Gallo declared himself to be an anarchist during his trial, shouting out ‘Vive la révolution sociale! Vive l’anarchie! Mort à la magistrature bourgeoise! Vive la dynamite!’. Gallo’s ‘anarchist’ bomb opened the period of active propaganda by the deed. The May Day demonstrations of 1890 and 1891 paved the way for more aggressive interventions and greater public fears. On both occasions, the companions’ riotous behaviour resulted in arrests. In 1891, three anarchists from the Paris suburb of Clichy were arrested and roughed up by the police after firing shots during the demonstration. Two of them, Charles Dardare and Henri Decamp, received prison sentences of several years, which established them as martyrs to police persecution. From 1892 onwards, anarchist terror swept over the country. On 11 March, François-Claude Koenigstein – aka Ravachol – set off the explosion of a building in Paris’s affluent boulevard Saint-Germain. On 27 March, he set up another device in a building of the rue de Clichy, to take revenge on the policeman responsible for the May Day arrests. Ravachol was arrested a few days later, but in the meantime a bomb detonated at barracks on Paris’s rue Lobau. On 25 April,
an explosion at the Restaurant Véry killed two diners. On 8 November, a bomb killed five people in Paris’s rue des Bons Enfants. In December 1893, Auguste Vaillant threw a bomb in the French deputy chamber – a symbol of the anarchists’ radical rejection of any political authority. This wave of anarchist attacks climaxed on 24 June 1894, when the French president Sadi Carnot was assassinated by the exiled Italian anarchist Santo Caserio in Lyon. In total, thirteen terrorist attacks inspired by anarchism had been perpetrated, killing ten people. While France was one of the countries worst hit by this political violence, extreme attacks took place in many countries, in a context of growing labour unrest. This led to the idea of a dangerously uncontrollable movement, organised by a large-scale conspiracy. National and international public opinions and the police were in a state of alarm. Fears were heightened due to the sheer scale and radically new nature of this anarchist terrorism, which could strike anyone at any time – rather than clear political targets in a clear political context, as had been the case with previous waves of attacks in France. This lack of intelligibility meant that attacks seemed bound to repeat themselves according to an undecipherable logic.27

French anarchism entered a critical phase in the early 1890s, reaching a numerical peak while anti-anarchist psychosis took over the country, leading to a complete demonization of anarchists. Both the press and the police became obsessed with the notion of an anarchist conspiracy and anarchism ceased to be regarded as a political movement, however atypical, becoming synonymous with terrorism. Tellingly, the verb ‘ravacholiser’, meaning to attack aggressively, with terrorist intents, entered mainstream vocabulary. Anarchism was constantly described in the mainstream press as a cult followed by devotees and fanatics. These years saw the French publication of the influential study by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, *Les Anarchistes*. Lombroso sought to provide a scientific explanation for anarchism, by analysing the anarchist ‘type’.28 While his work is not without empathy, especially in its endeavour to track down the socio-cultural causes of deviancy, his quest for the etiology and symptoms of ‘congenital criminality’ make it a perfect product of its crime-obsessed times. Lombroso’s text can be regarded as the template for most anarchist depictions made in these


years, pointing to the ‘hysteric’ and ‘epileptic’ disorders supposedly frequent in ‘anarchist criminals’.

It is of course more enlightening to regard anarchist terrorism as the tragic outcome of the ongoing apology of violence within the movement. Such acts also expressed the irrepressible revolt of a handful of individuals profoundly alienated from contemporary society; but for public opinion, in France and beyond, these attacks of a new kind due to their indiscriminate nature were unfathomable. This gave them an incomprehensible and therefore utterly terrifying character. 29

The terrorist attacks marked the peak of the ‘heroic period’ of French anarchism. They sent the movement into turmoil, igniting dissensions among the anarchists and forcing most militants into prison, exile or inactivity. The best-known anarchists, the ‘ideologues’ of the movement, wavered between an empathic understanding of the terrorists and the condemnation of their actions; Kropotkin saw mass attacks in public places as a poor way of promoting brotherhood, peace and justice, but many comrades also admired the perpetrators’ courage and resistance to social injustice. 30 Ravachol and Vaillant, both of whom were executed for their attacks, became new martyrs of the cause, but among the libertarian intelligentsia, only Élisée Reclus praised the terrorists unreservedly. The comrades found themselves marginalised in the eyes of the other socialist currents and public opinion, and subjected to intense repression. A series of house searches and arrests began in March 1892. In May, in just a few days, about a hundred companions – both distinguished and unknown – were arrested; Grave and Pouget were among them. There were 40 arrests in Lyon, ten in Marseilles, and as many as 15 in Amiens, which was not even famous for its anarchist activities. 31 In 1893-4, Parliament passed the Lois Scélérates (the Wicked Laws), in an attempt to completely eradicate the movement – laws so drastic that their name was given by a group of deputies shocked by their harshness. In order to do away with anarchism, existing laws were altered in order to make convictions easier. Anarchism would now be dealt with as a common-law offence rather than a political one. Sentences were to be

29 Salomé, L’Ouragan homicide, pp. 263–72.
30 Grave, Le Mouvement libertaire sous la IIIe République, pp. 102–12.
harsher for terrorist attacks, and the possession of explosives a punishable offence.\textsuperscript{32} The battle against the most benign manifestations of anarchist inclinations started. There were dozens of house searches and undiscriminating seizures of anarchist publications. It was not unusual for the police to assault suspects, and the repression was also underhand, for instance when presumed sympathisers were actively prevented from finding employment. A very broad definition of anarchism was given: the mere possession of anarchist publications was regarded as a sign of involvement in active propaganda. By virtue of the \textit{Lois Scélérates}, individuals were sent to jail or penal colonies simply because they had once attended an anarchist discussion, listened to a provocateur, carried a red flag or sung a revolutionary anthem.\textsuperscript{33} The subscribers’ lists of the main anarchist papers were passed on to the \textit{Préfet de police} and the letters sent to anarchist prisoners in jail were systematically read. Many foreign anarchists were arrested, especially among the Italians. By the beginning of 1894, the best-known militants were under arrest or on the run. The main papers were suspended, having been subjected to legal harassment for several years, their editors repeatedly sued and fined. Grave had been in prison since 1893, because of his essay \textit{La Société mourante et l’anarchie} and an 1882 pamphlet praising propaganda by the deed. The prominent Parisian activist Sébastien Faure was among the dozens of companions under arrest and awaiting trial. Charles Malato, the Franco-Italian editor of the paper \textit{La Révolution cosmopolite}, had been expelled from France and was now in London.

Prosecutions began. Between 1892 and 1894, all those who had conducted terrorist attacks were sentenced to death. The August 1894 \textit{Procès des Trente} marked the end of this period of intense repression. The most famous French militants were indicted, such as Grave, Faure, and the influential journalists Fénéon, Armand Matha and Charles Châtel. The list of those put on trial points to the profound confusion as to the status of anarchism, as sincere and occasionally distinguished militants


were mixed with petty crooks or robbers from disreputable anarchist circles. Among the latter, Léon Ortiz, a famous illegalist with a flourishing career as a robber, was especially notorious. All were judged for criminal conspiracy, but most of the accused were eventually released and only the least political among them were condemned: Ortiz was sentenced to fifteen years’ hard labour, Pierre Chiericotti (another robber with anarchist connections) received eight years, and Orsini Bertani got a sentence of six months in jail for carrying a prohibited weapon. Four men were condemned in absentia: Émile Pouget, the Dutchman Alexander Cohen, Louis Duprat or Paul Reclus (the nephew of Élisée Reclus, himself an engineer and anarchist journalist). All of them had crossed the Channel to seek refuge in Britain. Indeed, in the face of repression, anarchist militants had been left with few options. One was to give up political activity or keep it up very discreetly. For the most irreversibly compromised individuals, exile was the way forward.

**Across the Channel: the slow rebirth of British socialism**

Once in Britain, these French refugees were confronted with a very different situation and a radically new culture. Most of the 1880s had been characterised by a relatively calm labour movement, but the end of the decade saw a dramatic change, with the great strikes of 1886-1889 and the emergence of New Unionism.

As in France, the late 1870s witnessed a revival of militancy and a circumscribed spread of socialist ideas, which provided the background for the emergence of anarchism. The social compromise which had prevailed since the defeat of Chartism in the late 1840s faltered in the late 1870s: until then, Lib-labism, a political alliance between the Liberal Party and skilled workers organised in trade unions, was the dominant mode of resolution of labour conflicts. In the spirit of self-help so dear to mid-Victorian minds, costly and exclusive trade unions represented skilled workers, who cultivated an aura of respectability and carefully distanced themselves from the highly-stigmatised unskilled workers. Conciliation and arbitration were sought when work conflicts occurred, while strikes were very much out of favour.\(^34\) The 1867 Reform Act reinforced the political integration of the urban working-class elite by enfranchising many skilled workers. In terms of votes,

this mainly benefitted the Liberal Party, and the calls for a specific political representation of the working-class remained almost inexistent. Even after the 1884 franchise extension, the most vulnerable workers remained excluded from the vote. In this political context, revolutionary currents from the Continent were unlikely to meet with any echo: ‘Socialism and independent labour politics came to be regarded as exotic plants which could never flourish on British soil’. Kropotkin, who briefly stayed in England in 1881-82, was unremitting in his depiction of British social apathy: ‘The year that I then passed in London was a year of real exile. For one who held advanced socialist opinions, there was no atmosphere to breathe in’. He soon chose to return to France despite the repression and police surveillance he was subjected to there: ‘Better a French prison than this grave’.

In fact, socialist agitation was reappearing at the time of Kropotkin’s stay, albeit very discreetly. In the late 1870s, the social status quo was put under strain. The economic prosperity and industrial development which had sustained the mid-Victorian ideology of progress were weakening, undermining the economic foundations of the Liberal consensus: the depression which loomed after 1873 and increasingly fierce competition from the United States and Germany led to a questioning of free trade, one of the pillars of Victorian liberalism. In 1879, the essay of the American writer Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, was received with great attention. It discussed the question of social inequalities in terms of class and underlined the role of the State in fighting poverty. This drive towards a more interventionist social outlook was compounded by an increased awareness of the social evils caused by casual labour, chronic unemployment or uncontrolled urban growth. Radical workingmen’s clubs started proliferating in London, functioning as ‘centres of political discussion and self-education which both contributed to the development of the new socialism and provided it with an audience’.

Some of these clubs saw the transition between two socialist generations: the older Chartists, Republicans, O’Brienites and Internationals were gradually relayed by the young guard of

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The future anarchist Frank Kitz was one of the outstanding personalities of this new urban radicalism. Born in 1848, half-German and half-English, he was a mediator between the advanced immigrant circles of London and native militants. After growing up in poverty, Kitz joined the army, deserted, and travelled in the north of England, where he saw the damages of uncontrolled industrialisation. He was politically active in London after 1873 and came into contact with the Internationals. He was a member of the Democratic and Trades Alliance, where a wide spectrum of political views was represented, and of the Manhood Suffrage League, a radical splinter group of the latter. In 1877, Kitz set up an internationalist revolutionary group in London, the English revolutionary Society, which became a hotbed of immigrant anarchism after the arrival of German exile Johann Most in 1879. Most, a former socialist deputy at the German Reichstag, was expelled in 1878 after Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws were passed. He settled down in London, gradually taking over the Rose Street Club, where most advanced foreign refugees met, and turning it towards anarchism, as he himself became more radical. He edited a paper called Die Freiheit, and it was in its pages that, on 18 March 1881, he praised the assassination of Czar Alexander II in Russia and called for similar assassinations. He was arrested and sentenced to 16 months in prison. The vigorous campaign organised in his defence helped crystallise anarchist agitation. A Freiheit Defence Committee was launched, meetings were organised and Frank Kitz briefly took over the editorship of Freiheit, followed by Most’s former collaborator Victor Dave. Most’s trial accelerated the split between anarchists and social democrats in the exile circles, leading to the foundation of a new, exclusively anarchist club – the Stephen Mews International Club, in Rathbone Place, north of Oxford Street.

Joseph ‘Joe’ Lane was another active militant in these early years. He too had entered politics at a young age. Born in 1851, he had joined John Stuart Mill’s Land Tenure Reform Association in the 1870s, and had then actively supported the Republican campaign led by the Liberal MP Charles
Dilke. He attended the meetings of the Manhood Suffrage League after 1879 before joining the socialist groups which were set up in the early 1880s.

The London Social Revolutionary Congress

Along with the Freiheit prosecution, the ‘International Revolutionary Socialist Congress’ held in London in the summer of 1881 spurred the spread of anarchist ideas and helped coordinate militant forces. The project of a congress was put forward by Belgian anarchists in 1880. The belief that working-class internationalism ought to become institutionalised was a legacy of the First International – albeit a rather paradoxical outlook for anti-authoritarian and anti-centralisation militants. Strategic concerns also prevailed, since the repressive context of the early 1880s called for the union of revolutionary forces. The multilingual paper Le Bulletin du Congrès de Londres was launched in London in June 1881 for the sole purpose of organising the congress. It was edited by the French internationalist militant Gustave Brocher, an extraordinary trimardeur who had fought in the Commune and later established himself in London as a language tutor. He wrote Le Bulletin under the assumed name Rehcorb, and the paper’s administration was based in Brussels. A number of participants had already signed up for the Congress at the end of 1880, coming from the United States, Belgium, Spain, Italy or Russia. At that stage, there was only one British signatory, one ‘C. Hall’, about whom little is known and who may well have been a spy. In Switzerland, the group of Le Révolté had signed up, as had, in France, those of La Révolution Sociale, including Michel, Gautier, and the provocateur Serreaux/Spilleux. Dissensions within the international anarchist movement already manifested themselves at that preparatory stage, in particular over organisational matters, as the inextricable dilemma of libertarian politics emerged: how could groups based on the rejection of traditional militant and political institutions function? On this point, all the papers involved in the London Congress remained deliberately vague, although there was some sort of consensus on the necessity of establishing a ‘lasting revolutionary organisation’. The problem was all the more

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38 Bulletin du Congrès de Londres, I, 1, 15 June 1881.
39 Quail, The Slow-burning Fuse, p. 16.
40 Bulletin du Congrès de Londres, I, 1, 15 June 1881.
pressing as the Congress was not intended for anarchists only, aiming instead to bring together ‘all the revolutionaries – centralists and federalists, statists and anarchists’. And even when it came to the conditions of admission into the Congress, there were disagreements between those who thought that only established militant groups should be allowed, and those who argued that all genuine revolutionaries – either isolated or in groups – should be welcomed. After rather heated debates, it was agreed that delegates nominated by groups would attend.

The numerical and geographical outreach of the Congress was impressive, with 43 individuals representing some 60,000 militants.\(^\text{41}\) They were revolutionary socialists but came from groups with still undefined and wide-ranging political views. More than half of them – 24 out of 43 – lived in Britain, but only six were actually British, testifying to the country’s very cosmopolitan character and its centrality in the international social revolutionary movement. Lane represented the Homerton Social Democratic Club, and Kitz had received a mandate from the English section of the Rose Street Club, along with two other militants. The German groups in London were chiefly represented by Sebastian Trunk, on behalf of the Kommunistischer Arbeiterbildungsverein, and Johan Neve, who lived in London but had a mandate from the New York section of the Working-Class Socialist Party. Nikolaus Tchaikovsky came from London’s Slavonic Society and Jan de Bruyon stood for the Dutch group of Theobald Street. There were several French militants who lived in Britain, such as Maynier and Charles Robin from London’s Cercle d’Études sociales, a parliamentary socialist group formed by Communards where an anarchist minority developed. London-based Brocher attended on behalf of the Icarian Community in Iowa – a fine illustration of the complexity of the transnational militant networks created through exile. The French delegation was representative of the anarchist movement at the time. Louise Michel was present, as were Émile Gautier and the former communaarde Victorine Rouchy. There were a number of lesser-known delegates, like Émile Violard of L’Alarme, a group from Narbonne. Provincial anarchism was also represented by François Guy, from the Southern town of Béziers. Kropotkin stood for the Geneva group of Le Révolté and the ‘Parti révolutionnaire

\(^{41}\) Max Nettlau, Anarchisten und Sozialrevolutionäre, Geschichte der Anarchie (Taunus: Verlag Detlev Auvermann KG, 1972), vol. 3.
lyonnais’. An important Italian diaspora was also in attendance, symbolised by the Italian activist Errico Malatesta, who had been sent by a group from Marseille, the Tuscany Federation of the International, as well as various groups in Piedmont and Egypt – a good example of the transnational nature of anarchist circles even at this early stage.

The Congress was a disappointment, but nonetheless a crucial landmark in the evolution of the anarchist movement. It clarified its specific objectives within the broader revolutionary movement and stimulated international cooperation, including with provincial groups. But the resolutions painfully agreed on did not lead to the setting up of a lasting International, a fitting framework for propaganda wished for by the companions. The Congress featured vigorous debates about the modalities of a possible international organisation. These discussions opposed again the champions of minimal organisation with those who called for a more structured organisation. The attendants were at one on the necessity of some form of international coordination for all the militant groups committed to preparing the revolution by all possible means. However, while some advocated the absolute autonomy of groups, uncompromising libertarians favoured individual autonomy, rejecting all proposals of a ‘new International’ or a ‘Bureau’.

The much-debated International was eventually created, but without a clear agreement on these issues. An Information Bureau was founded and, in the following months, affiliated national sections were set up. The Bureau, consisting of three members, including Malatesta, was based in London’s International Rose Street Club. Plagued by poor finances and a shaky legitimacy, it could not achieve much and slowly died away. In the end, this rejection of national and international organisation was a strategic turning point for anarchism: the de facto prevalence of a complete autonomy of groups and individuals favoured insurrectional revolutionary tactics, that is to say, propaganda by the deed in its most radical implications.

The very violent inflexions of this ideology proved disastrous in the long term. The Congress was also the first of many gatherings to highlight the inherent impossibility of setting up anarchist organisations, which meant that international militant networks provided the most efficient means of concerted

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42 IISG, Gustave Brocher Papers, file on ‘Congrès de Londres’; Nettlau, Anarchisten und Sozialrevolutionäre.

action, even if they were never truly considered in this light, as militants continued to strive for a formal organisation.

**Socialism and Anarchism in the 1880s**

The period of the Congress saw the clubs’ scattered radical agitation become increasingly organised. The process began in 1880 with the foundation of the Marxist-inspired Democratic Foundation (renamed the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) in 1884), led by Henry M. Hyndman, who also came from the club scene. The new party included former Chartists, like James and Charles Murray, bourgeois revolutionaries and reformers like William Morris, Hyndman or Henry Champion, and several of its members would later become prominent trade-unionists, such as John Burns, Tom Mann, and Will Thorne. Future anarchists like Lane, Charles Mowbray and John Turner were also early members. The Socialist League, which became an anti-parliamentary and then an anarchist group, was born after a split within the SDF in 1884. The dissidents were chiefly united by their rejection of the SDF’s parliamentarianism and Hyndman’s nationalist positions, autocratic methods and shady financial dealings. The League defined itself as ‘revolutionary socialist’ and was predominantly Marxist – probably through the influence of members Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling and Friedrich Engels. Its positions remained officially eclectic, so that anarchist ideas were occasionally presented in *Commonweal*, the League’s paper launched in February 1885. In November 1885, for instance, a very lyrical Eleanor Marx praised the French anarchists, describing Louise Michel as ‘the gentlest, tenderest, most womanly of women, while at once the strongest, most uncompromising and determined of revolutionists’. The coexistence of anarchists and revolutionary socialists within the League remained amicable until 1887, when a rift appeared between the champions of parliamentary action and the antiparliamentarians, who rejected any cooperation with the existing ‘powers that be’ and any use of palliatives delaying the advent of the revolution. The latter were not all anarchists, since they counted among them William Morris and Harry Sparling, as well as some trade unionists. The parliamentarians were defeated in 1888, at which point they left the

44 *Commonweal*, November 1885, 1, 10, ‘Record of the international movement’, p. 99.
antiparliamentarians in control of the League. The door was open for the anarchists to take over the organisation.

In the meantime, anarchist ideas had also made a few converts within the Fabian Society, founded in 1884 by a handful of intellectuals interested in Positivism, the ideas of Henry George, Owenism, and Christian Socialism. Only later did the Fabian hallmarks of municipalism, gradualism, and permeation come to be formulated. The early Fabians’ eclecticism and enthusiasm for libertarian ideas contributed the diffusion of anarchism. Grassroots exchanges were frequent, since it was fairly common for joint events to be organised by the various London socialist groups, or for shared meetings to take place. Even George Bernard Shaw, who joined the Fabians in 1885, expressed some interest in anarchist conceptions, for instance in his 1885 tract ‘Anarchism vs. State Socialism’ – although he later retracted himself quite abruptly. A very enthusiastic anarchist Fabian was Charlotte Wilson, a Cambridge graduate and banker’s wife, who played an essential role in the circulation of anarchist ideas in Britain, at a time when almost none of Kropotkin’s works had been translated into English. Elected to the Fabians’ Executive Committee in December 1884, she led a faction of anarchist sympathisers while pursuing her own propaganda through conferences and articles. In 1886, she drew away from the Fabians to devote herself fully to anarchist propaganda.

An autonomous anarchist movement emerged in 1885 with the creation of the monthly paper *The Anarchist* under the aegis of Henry Seymour. This individualist paper was mainly inspired by the ideas of the anarchist forerunner Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the American individualist Josiah Warren but was not sectarian. It soon evolved into ‘a combined operation of natives and foreigners, Proudhonists, communist-anarchists and sympathisers’; Wilson was the co-editor, along with the exiles Merlino, Stepiak and Tchaikovsky. The paper had connections with anarchist movements in France, with Élisée Reclus, and in America. 1886 was pivotal in the development of anarchism: Kropotkin, now out of jail, returned to Britain’s safe shores where, at the behest of Wilson, he joined the group of *The Anarchist*, which in April was renamed *The Anarchist, Communist and Revolutionary*. Within a few months, however, communists and individualists were clashing, and

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Wilson and Kropotkin left to launch their own paper, *Freedom, a Journal of Anarchist Communism*, in October 1886. The ‘Freedom Group’ which crystallized around the paper brought together British militants like Wilson, as well as exiles, from Italy, like the anarchist Merlino, or Russia, like Tcherkesoff and Kropotkin. It also benefitted from the support of non-anarchist socialists: William Morris let them use the office of the *Commonweal*, while the Theosophist and social activist Annie Besant allowed *Freedom* to be first published at the office of the Freethought Publishing Company. Intellectuels like Havelock Ellis and Bernard Shaw and trade unionists like John Burns were occasional contributors. From February 1888, the group held monthly meetings in the Socialist League Hall in Farringdon Street. By the early 1890s, *Freedom* had become the centre of a significant network linking up the main cities of the country, with groups in Manchester, Sheffield, Norwich, Brighton, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin. It was militantly internationalist: each issue featured articles on foreign labour movements as well as historical and theoretical contributions from abroad. It sold foreign anarchist and socialist papers, including the French publications *Le Révolté* and *La Lutte sociale* from Lyon. Foreign books and essays were also made available through the paper. *Freedom*, a theoretical and somewhat dry publication with also a significant organisational role, was very much the London counterpart of its ‘Parisian brother-in-arms’47, *La Révolte*. Propaganda was led jointly by both papers, and readers were kept very well informed of events on the other side of the Channel through regular correspondence and reprinted translated articles. The close correspondence between Kropotkin and Grave until the First World War meant that *Freedom* and *La Révolte* played a pivotal role in Franco-British anarchist cooperation over three decades.

Another anarchist hotbed in London was to be found amongst Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, who settled down *en masse* in the East End from the late 1870s onwards, fleeing the

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persecutions and later the pogroms in their homelands. In the late 1870s, these migrants founded mutual help societies and trade unions, and in 1881–82, socialist ideas gained ground in the East End. A key institution for these immigrants was the social and educational Berners Street Club, which became The International Workingmen’s Educational Association in 1885 and was linked to the weekly socialist paper the *Arbeyter Frayn*. An anarchist movement developed in the Association after 1887, leading to a split in 1891 when the anarchists set up their own group and assumed total control of the *Arbeyter Fraynt*. In 1895, Rudolf Rocker, a German catholic anarchist speaking fluent Yiddish, arrived in London from Paris; it was not long before he gained an influential position within the Jewish anarchist movement, in London and provincial cities like Leeds and Manchester. Jewish anarchism was very distinct from the British movement, even if there were important points of contact between them. The main figures in the Jewish anarchist groups were part of a cosmopolitan elite: Rocker, Saul Yanovsky, William Wess were in contact with the international circles of British and Western European exiled anarchists and spoke at important gatherings. Several British comrades interested in the organisation of labour were active in the East End, such as the Leaguers Charles Mowbray and John Turner. However, British and Jewish anarchism followed different chronologies and dynamics: British anarchism reached its heyday before 1900, and then went into a relative decline, whereas Jewish anarchism was on an ascending phase from 1885 to 1914, with a peak just before 1914. Moreover, Jewish anarchists consistently decried propaganda by the deed and terrorism, advocating instead permeation and education which, in the long term, proved to be a factor of resilience and longevity for this movement confronted with many crises and much hostility. Jewish anarchists were more involved in organising labour protest and fighting for improved work conditions.


at an early date – Jewish anarchism had an organic link with workers and trade unions, whereas this proved far more problematic for the British anarchists throughout the 1890s.

Fluctuating groups and networks of exiled French existed in London from the late 1870s onwards, contributing to the socialist revival despite their loose links with their British counterparts. They mainly comprised the few Communards who had stayed after the 1879 and 1880 amnesties, and, more marginally, refugees who had been there since Louis Napoleon Bonaparte’s December 1851 coup. Most of these exiles were organised into The *Club International d’Études Sociales de Londres*, founded in 1880, a group with socialist and parliamentary leanings, whose strict and exclusive organisation was very alien to anarchist principles.\(^{51}\) Anti-socialist repression in Germany brought a new generation to these circles after 1878; under the influence of Johann Most, many of the German exiles and the clubs in which they were organised turned to anarchism. Their groups grew more structured and radical as a result of Most’s trial and the 1881 Congress. At the end of August 1881, after the Congress, a French informer in London announced that a French-language ‘Section of the International’ had been set up, counting 15 to 18 members, ‘composed of revolutionary elements’.\(^{52}\) A 3-member committee was appointed, to prepare the next meeting, due to take place about 10 days later.\(^{53}\) A few months later, the informer reported that the London-based Correspondence Bureau had contacts with several sections of the Anarchist International in Paris and near Lyon. That same year was marked by attempts to federate London’s various international sections, although reports suggest that they were unsuccessful. There was little response from British militants, prompting a spy to note that ‘the English are largely uninterested in the questions which the international revolutionaries in exile here are passionate about’.\(^{54}\) The French group grew regardless: after 1882, the ‘French Section’ left the German Club in Soho’s Rose Street and moved into its own premises on Poland Street,

\(^{51}\) IISG, Regulations of the *Club international d’études sociales de Londres*, file on ‘*Le Travail*’ (ZDK 07036).

\(^{52}\) APP BA 435, report by ‘Etoile’ dated 30 August 1881.

\(^{53}\) APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 19 August 1881.

\(^{54}\) APP BA1474, report by Etoile dated 22 October 1881
following some fundraising efforts. These exiles followed attentively the rebirth of social unrest in France and corresponded with French anarchist groups. However, there was a somewhat ironic contrast between the rather uneventful life of these small circles and, on the other hand, the spies’ repeated claims that the London Bureau was ‘in permanent communication with all the anarchist groups all over the world’. In 1882, an International Club was founded in Stephen Mews, Rathbone Place. Brocher proudly wrote to a French colleague: ‘The International Club is well and truly set up! We have a beautiful club with all possible conveniences – large meeting halls, pools etc.’ The Club became the meeting point for most international anarchists in London, so much so that it was raided by the Police in May 1885, leading to the arrest of 50 to 60 militants and the seizure of numerous books and papers.

Just before this, in 1884, several new companions had arrived from France, importing with them a more radical brand of anarchism than that of the previous generation. These men, named Raoux, Chautant, Gauthier, Bourdin, Lecomte, and Bordes, had run into trouble in France because of their advanced opinions, and Britain appeared as a safer harbour for them. They were described by spies as ‘young energumens more audacious in words and threats than anyone before’. The older generation, dominated by the legacy of the Commune and the humanist anarchism of the First International, was now outnumbered. By the end of 1884, a London correspondent of *Le Révolté* described the French anarchist groups as having greatly progressed within a few years, thanks to the influx of exiled or expelled French and Belgian anarchists, as well as joint meetings with French-speaking German comrades. They organised regular meetings and social events to raise propaganda funds. The results were especially spectacular in the German groups: ‘It is impossible to step into the club of the German anarchist first section without hearing authority and organisation being damaged,

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55 APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 8 December 1882.
56 APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 4 December 1882.
57 IISG, Gustave Brocher Papers, letter dated 29 November 1882.
58 APP BA 1474, report by 27 dated 11 May 1885 and 13 May 1885.
59 APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 10 May 1884.
whereas it used to be only a place for drinking and dancing’. French anarchism was increasingly visible in London. The papers sent by the French companions could easily be found in several spots: *Le Révolté* was sold by Johannes Trunk on Stanhope Street, by the French companion Petitjean, 39 Old Compton Street, and also on 37, Charlotte Street. In a decided gesture of internationalism, several French militants also joined the Socialist League, breaking the national barrier which had hitherto separated the various London groups. New recruits included Auguste Coulon, who was later to play a sinister role as a regular informer and agent provocateur in the French colony, and joined the Dublin branch and then the North Kensington branch in 1885, also contributing to *Commonweal*. At that time, however, he seems to have been a sincere and valuable participant in the group. Little is known about Auguste Bourdin, a tailor married to an Englishwoman, and another new Leaguer. His brother Martial, however, gained a rather sad notoriety in 1894, when he died in Greenwich Park, killed by the accidental detonation of a bomb he was carrying, whose destination remains uncertain. Gustave Brocher was an active member, speaker and singer at the Camberwell branch of the League after 1885. The League also recruited Guillaume Bordes, a staunch advocate of propaganda by the deed, who actively sought to establish connections between the French exiles and British anarchists, for instance by extending invitations to international commemorations:

> The French and German comrades in London have decided to organise a great revolutionary international meeting to take place on March 18. Various comrades will speak each in their language, mainly French, German, Russian, Italian, and each speaker will treat besides the Commune of Paris the political and economical state of his own country…We wish to give to the present occasion the strong character of internationalism.\(^{61}\)

And indeed, from the mid-1880s, a transnational and – for a few years – pan-socialist militant calendar was in place in London. As early as 1885, commemorations of the Commune on 18 March led to internationalist gatherings in the city’s socialist circles, as had been the case in the previous decade. On 12 June 1885, a public meeting commemorated the event; it was chaired by the SDF’s

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\(^{60}\) *Le Révolté*, 3 August 1884, VI, 12, ‘Angleterre’, p. 3.

\(^{61}\) IISG, Socialist League Archives, letter dated 27 February 1887.
Harry Quelch and among the speakers were Bordes, the Belgian freethinker-turned-anarchist Victor Dave, Hyndman, Kitz, Lane, Mowbray, J. Macdonald, William Morris, Aveling, Belfort Bax, James Keir Hardie and the trade unionist JE Williams. The 1888 celebration saw Kropotkin, Merlino and Bordes give a speech alongside members of the League and the SDF. The commemorations of ‘Chicago’ on 11 November, remembering the execution of four anarchists in the United States, became another internationalist ritual after 1887, and so did May Day after 1889.

Even in those early years, reports sent from London to the Paris Préfecture often spoke of conspiracies and terror plots. There were mentions of associations with Fenians:

The revolutionaries in refuge here work in agreement with the Fenians and share in their cause.

As for blowing up Westminster – which they say they want to do – they lack the practical means, but do not despair of managing to do it eventually.\textsuperscript{62}

Reports contemplated ‘imminent…explosions, in agreement with American, Irish and English workers\textsuperscript{63} but such rumours are probably best interpreted as agents’ speculations at a time of heightened Fenian and anarchist activism, when actual and rumoured attacks caused much dread in public opinion and political and police circles. Nonetheless, informers oscillated between mocking the repetitive talks of the anarchist clubs and their lack of following, and depicting extraordinary terrorist schemes allegedly originating in their midst – sometimes in the same letters:

Since the Poland Street Club has been in existence, almost all its sessions have focused on anecdotal internal questions… I have learnt that the ‘Fédération Jurassienne’ has organised several chemical laboratories in Geneva, and that several bombs made of potassium picrate, sulphur and sugar, with a tube in the middle containing sulphuric acid, were made in this laboratory.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{62} APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 30 August 1882; APP BA 1474, report by 27 dated 19 February 1885.

See also report dated 4 March 1885 by 27

\textsuperscript{63} APP BA 1474, note based on a report dated 29 May 1885.

\textsuperscript{64} APP BA1474, report by Etoile dated 8 March 1883.
Quite typically, the personal and political schisms which had been part and parcel of the London exiles’ experience since 1848 already appeared as another recurring theme. In 1886, some German companions founded the Autonomie Club, which soon became the forum of international anarchism in London. The return to an international club had been preceded by the founding of a Franco-German group meeting every week in 1883. Due to overcrowding, the Club moved from its original location in Fitzrovia’s Charlotte Street, to Windmill Street, a few streets away. National sections were set up. The French groups grew substantially as a result of intensified repression in France, and in May 1890, some of them launched the incendiary monthly *L’International*.

**The 1886-1890 workers’ revolts and the banishment of anarchists**

The absence of real links between British anarchists and workers was exposed in the second half of the 1880s, when the great strikes of 1886-89 isolated the anarchists and exposed the dead ends of their propaganda. After 1886, British workers and trade unions entered a very militant phase. The unrest had been simmering for some time, and as the economic crisis peaked in 1886-87, socialist groups started organising demonstrations and processions of unemployed workers in London. On 8 February 1886, a day which later came to be known as Black Monday, the SDF convened a meeting on Trafalgar Square, which attracted some 5,000 listeners and finished with some window-breaking on Pall Mall. 1887 was marked by the infamous Bloody Sunday: on 13 November, 10,000 demonstrators converged towards Trafalgar Square, led among others by Annie Besant, John Burns and the Liberal MP Robert Cunninghame Graham. 2,000 police officers were sent to contain them. In the violent scuffles which ensued, two men suffered lethal injuries and Burns and Cunninghame

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65 APP BA1474, report by Etoile dated 20 March 1883.

66 APP BA 1474, reports by Etoile dated 10 and 16 August 1883.
Graham were arrested. There were further protests in the following weeks, resulting again in confrontations with the police. These riots, which showed the workers’ new fighting spirit, set the labour movement on a new course. For the authorities and the middle classes, they were a terrifying illustration of the threat posed by the urban poor.

Trade union agitation took over in 1888. Union membership soared and, for the first time, significant numbers of unskilled workers joined them. The National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers was founded in March 1889, with the clear purpose of widening trade union membership as much as possible. Strikes were on the increase and took on a more aggressive character. In 1888, the matchmakers of the Bryant and May factory, newly organised into a Union of Women Match Makers, entered a successful mass strike. 12 August 1889 saw the onset of the ‘Great Dock Strike’ in London’s West India Dock under the guidance of trade unionist Ben Tillett, as a result of an unresolved pay dispute. Following calls for inter-trade solidarity, two weeks later, there were 130,000 strikers in the docks. The strike crystallized great public sympathy and lasted until September, when negotiation outcomes satisfied most of the strikers’ demands. The strike is considered to have initiated New Unionism. Between 1889 and 1891, there was a boom in unionisation, among unskilled categories of workers in particular – although by no means exclusively – a such as dockers, gasworkers, or transport workers. Unionisation figures doubled, reaching 1.5 million in 1892, before going over 2 million in the late 1890s. New Unionism was also defined by radical demands, such as the eight-hour working day or the minimum wage, and the industrial and militant functions of trade unions were emphasised. Finally, a younger and more advanced generation of trade unionists rose to prominence, with men like Tillett, Mann, Burns and Thorne, who were often connected with the SDF. While they were only the first steps of a democratisation process which lasted until 1914, the years 1889-92 represented a dramatic evolution for the labour movement, in Britain and beyond. This marked the beginning of a process of democratisation which culminated during the pre-1914 Great Labour Unrest; for the time being, many unions were still strongly hierarchical and skilled unionism also grew alongside unskilled unionism and continued to prevail;
‘new unions’ probably ‘covered less than one-tenth of all trade unionists’ by the late 1890s.\(^{67}\) Despite these less-than-revolutionary traits, the agitation of the late 1880s was perceived as a watershed within and outside Britain.

The anarchists failed to join in this breakthrough of socialist propaganda and revolutionary spirit. They responded very favourably to the outburst of militancy which began in 1886 and greeted the Dock strike with unrestrained enthusiasm. Kropotkin, for instance, wrote exultedly that it adumbrated his anarchist ideal, through the spontaneous organisation of the workers and the importance of mutual aid.\(^{68}\) The strike was decisive in turning him into a keen exponent of trade union organisation and the general strike, a position which soon reverberated across the anarchist movement and accelerated the budding transition towards revolutionary trade unionism. However, the companions of the Socialist League saw the strike as a revolutionary situation to be radicalised by the anarchists, but refused any direct involvement in the conflict. In addition to internal conflicts which weakened the organisation at the time, their non-interventionist attitude derived from a hard-line opposition to all reformist movements and piecemeal improvements, which were considered to delay the advent of the revolution. As early as 1887, the organisation’s council adopted a wait-and-see position regarding the agitation of the unemployed, based on the belief that only a complete abolition of the existing system could improve the workers’ plight. In order to avoid any political recuperation, the League explicitly rejected any attempt at organising the protesters.\(^{69}\) This strategy culminated in 1889, during the Dock strike, when the League issued an official call not to get involved. Seeing this as an absurdity, some pro-organisation Leaguers were profoundly alienated, including William Morris, who grew hostile to both the anarchist Leaguers and anarchism, and left the organisation in


\(^{68}\) La Révolte, 7 September 1889, II, 51, ‘Ce que c’est qu’une grève’, p. 1.

1892. The very first page of his *News from Nowhere*, serialised in *Commonweal* during Morris’s last months in the Socialist League, painted a sorry picture of the anarchists:

Up at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution… there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent Anarchist opinions.\(^{50}\)

Thus began the League’s decline and, with it, the marginalisation of British anarchism. After 1892, *Commonweal*’s unabashed apology of propaganda by the deed drove away many sympathisers and antagonised many who had previously been indifferent to anarchism. The terrorist scandals which hit Britain between 1892 and 1894 caused endless dissensions and disorganisation within anarchist circles, and destroyed the movement’s image.\(^{71}\) At the same time, the presence of foreign anarchists in Britain was increasingly castigated in the press. In 1894, after yet another terrorist scandal, Nicoll was forced to observe:

Most of you derive your opinion of Anarchism and Anarchists from the Capitalist press which is daily informing you that we are nothing but a set of murderers, dynamitards, criminal lunatics… we wish to prove to you that far from being the blood-thirsty monsters we are depicted we are but workers like yourselves, like yourselves the victims of the present system.\(^{72}\)

Little remained of the Socialist League after these turbulent years. It merged with the Freedom Group in 1895, but it was already too late to rescue the movement’s public image. The events of 1889 had exposed the anarchists’ contradictions. Their revolutionary hopes had led them to an uncompromising non-interventionism, even in a situation which seemed to represent a militant breakthrough and the promise of real improvements for British workers. Even if some companions

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71 See chapter 3.

stood for revolutionary trade unionism, the British movement’s prevalent revolutionary purism prevented any significant involvement in working-class organisation. For some historians, the marginalisation of anarchism resulted from the overall evolution of the British labour movement: socialism had now grown out of its original ecumenism, and the developments of the late 1880s meant that political action and mass unionism now appeared to be the way forward for labour and socialist movements. The crisis of anarchism showed the impracticability of its revolutionary stance in the face of contemporary political and ideological realities, whereas the socialist avant-garde and trade unions were increasingly favourable to autonomous political representation for the working classes. The leaders of New Unionism also called for greater government intervention to regulate labour and the TUC declared itself in favour of parliamentary action in 1890. The strikes reinforced this political and reformist evolution and isolated the anarchist-communist movement, which was derived from continental – and mainly French – revolutionary experiments. The anarchists’ marginalisation was sealed by the creation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893. The new party’s objective was to put forward working-class candidates at elections and, in the long term, it called for the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

For all their initial differences, by the early 1890s, the situation of British anarchists was not unlike that of their French counterparts. In France, companions were plagued with the disastrous effects of mass repression, in addition to being ostracised from socialist politics and suffering public opprobrium. But despite this rather grim state of affairs, anarchist and libertarian ideas had much deeper roots in the working class and the country’s political history and culture, which enabled the movement to bounce back within a few years in new incarnations, such as syndicalism and anarchist individualism. But before this, many compagnons had to face political exile in Britain, where they were increasingly unwelcome.

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2. The Francophone anarchist circles in London: between isolation and internationalisation

After 1892, anti-anarchist repression in France sent the movement into turmoil. Most of the companions’ political activities – their publications, their meetings – came to a sudden halt, as many of them were sent to penal colonies, jails or forced into exile. However, anarchist militancy did not stop altogether: even in jails, imprisoned companions could still talk, exchange letters with the outside world and write books.¹ The situation of exiles was relatively propitious to political pursuits, despite the burden of continuous political surveillance and ceaseless internal conflicts; exile allowed for both the continuation of militancy and a reinvention of the companions’ political ideas and practices through sustained foreign influences. It provided a haven where French anarchism could subsist in a context of fierce repression, but also a purgatory where the companions fought one another bitterly for several years. A social history of the London groups is required before their political endeavours can be examined. Who were the exiles? Where did they come from, where did they live, with whom? Conflict and isolation were the hallmarks of their personal experience in London. Open arguments and mutual suspicions brought on by political and personal enmities pervaded the refugees’ daily existence. The French comrades tended to stay within Francophone groups and were isolated from the wider exile circles, but also, more radically, from British society. Like many political exiles before them, the anarchists ‘formed a colourful microcosm of the larger society to which they came as uninvited guests’.² Nonetheless, a few individuals broke out of these small cliques, discovering the country, becoming involved in its politics and forming transnational networks, primarily with British, Italian and German militants.

Who were the exiles?

² Ashton, Little Germany, p. xi.
The 450 or so Francophone anarchist refugees known to have stayed in London between 1880 and 1914, with a peak between 1890 and 1895, were mostly men in their thirties and forties, employed in both skilled and unskilled manual occupations, and coming predominantly from Greater Paris. This apparently simple description is problematic because of the constant mobility into and out of the groups, the lack of information about most of these exiles, as well as the great uncertainty concerning the presence and political role of women.

When this temporary emigration peaked, the estimates of the press and other outside sources, often informed by political and ideological motives, differed widely. Some went as far as to suggest that London sheltered ‘8,000 anarchists’; such large numbers typically appeared in scare-mongering pieces depicting London as ‘the capital of the international anarchist conspiracy’, the centre of the ‘anarchist International’, or ‘an international propaganda hotbed, some sort of anarchist Mecca’.

Counting difficulties stem from the absence of systematic sources, because most of the French colony’s anarchists discreetly trickled out of France over a few years, between 1890 and 1894. There were several peaks in departures, caused by the expulsion of foreign (mainly Italian) companions in the early 1890s, and waves of police raids and arrests in late 1893 and early 1894, and after each terrorist attack. According to Charles Malato, the only writer who documented the exile years in a book, Les Joyeusetés de l’exil (The delights of exile) the London colony grew from 40 to 60, 100 and then 200 within a few years.

Those who left did so as discreetly as possible, using complex itineraries to send police surveillance off-scent. The Dieppe-Newhaven, Boulogne-Folkestone and Calais-Dover boat routes favoured by tourists were deserted for less conspicuous alternatives such as Littlehampton-Honfleur, or crossing the Franco-Belgian border by foot before boarding a Britain-bound ship from Ostend or Antwerp. The refugees also left France in great haste, sometimes being

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6 APP BA 1509, report by Leon dated 14 June 1594; report by Leon dated 7 April 1894.

escorted straight to the border by police authorities or given 24-hour notice. This was Malato’s situation: ‘Learning that he was to be placed under lock and key or expelled this year, he came precipitately across to London, with a walking-stick for luggage’. No inventory of arrivals was kept until the Aliens Act of 1905, and while the surveillance of exiles was very comprehensive, it was also remarkably unscientific in terms of international coordination. Some companions were followed secretly throughout their journey to Britain, with attempts at cooperation between the French and the British police. Notices of arrivals were telegraphed from the ports of Northern France where French and British detectives were stationed and those who arrived might also be followed from the moment they reached London at Victoria, Charing Cross or Cannon Street station; those who tried to return to France briefly or permanently had to escape the same surveillance. During the climactic 1892-95 period, the spies infiltrated among the anarchists on both sides of the Channel provided near-daily information regarding potential crossings and the itineraries which leavers might take, although this was complicated by the fact that the refugees were very careful to escape surveillance.

The gradual reinforcement of surveillance efforts led to the belief in the existence of an international anarchist register containing individual files with photographs. The idea was quickly taken up by the popular press on both sides of the Channel, for which the ‘anarchist peril’ represented a sensationalist boon. The idea of a joint register was repeatedly brought up in the late 1890s, but never came to fruition. Each country kept a register, but international information exchanges were only occasional and unsystematic: ‘UK police depends upon itself to keep up the Anarchist Register’, a Foreign Office memo noted in 1902. The French police held photographs of anarchists and printed a ‘Photographic album’ with photographs and detailed descriptions of individuals requiring ‘special

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8 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 April 1892, ‘The Foreign Anarchists in London’.


10 TNA FO 412/68. Correspondence respecting the measures to be taken for the prevention of anarchist crimes, 1902.
surveillance’ at the borders.\textsuperscript{11} The descriptions contained in these documents were known as ‘portraits parlés’, an identification system based on body measurements conceived by French police clerk Alphonse Bertillon in 1883 and soon taken up by international police forces.\textsuperscript{12} In the album, individual photographs (both a frontal and a profile shot) were listed according to one’s size and nose shape, except for those portraits which were referred to as ‘non classifiable’. The text contained the individual’s full name, their birth details, employment and a physical description containing various quantities of details, and occasionally delving into remarkable precision: one Frédéric Herzig, for instance, was described as having ‘a long nose with a big tip’ as well as ‘hairy knuckles’.\textsuperscript{13} The text also mentioned the place of exile when it was known, so that the 1894 edition provides a snapshot of the ongoing exodus to the British Isles: out of 284 names, 91 were described as being ‘réfugié à Londres’ or ‘en Angleterre’ (only Louis Grandidier was described as being elsewhere, in Birmingham\textsuperscript{14}). About 20 others were said to have been expelled from France, without further information, when in fact they had crossed the Channel.

The main source of information on the London groups is the abundant correspondence sent by the informers infiltrated in anarchist circles and the comprehensive lists drawn by the Police Préfecture in Paris, usually based on the informers’ letters and therefore suffering from the same limitations. Exaggeration was a recurring issue, as informers tended to present anyone they came across as an ‘anarchist’, ‘a very dangerous anarchist’ or a ‘man of action’ – that is to say a potential terrorist. Many individuals only appeared once in substantial files but were nonetheless described as ‘very active’. Errors also abounded, and informers were sent off-piste by the pseudonyms which anarchists used to remain incognito: Charles Malato travelled as Polydore Barbanchu while Paul Reclus ‘borrowed’ the name of his friend Georges Guyou.\textsuperscript{15} Orthographic variations in the reports and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} APP BA 1509, Inventory ‘Angleterre février 1894’; \textit{Album photographique des individus qui doivent être l’objet d’une surveillance spéciale aux frontières} (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1894).
\item \textsuperscript{12} Paul Knepper, \textit{The Invention of International Crime} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 33–34.
\item \textsuperscript{13} \textit{Album photographique}, p. 29N.
\item \textsuperscript{14} APP BA1509, report by Z.6 dated 22 April 1894.
\item \textsuperscript{15} APP BA1509, report by 4 dated 1 August 1892; Malato, \textit{Les Joyeusetés de l’exil}, p. 36.
\end{itemize}
the ever-changing names of those mentioned cast a constant doubt as to the exact identity of the exiles, their whereabouts and social circles, so that the Paris Police Prefect requested that spies be given a map of London to help them spell local names correctly: ‘At every moment one notices in the addresses provided by the London correspondents orthographic differences and a compromising lack of accuracy’.16 One spy referred to ‘Rat Bonne’ for Rathbone place, others to the areas of ‘Fulhanerm’, ‘Great Tchefield Street’ and ‘Phatherbury Avenue’.17

Several estimates mentioned a figure of 400 exiles in the early 1890s.18 A synthesis of all the existing sources taking into account the many Francophone companions active in French-language circles gives a higher number of 450 for the period 1880-1914. But there remains a considerable margin of imprecision regarding the exact size as well as the identity and activity of the lesser-known members of these circles. About 300 out of these 450 or so individuals are almost impossible to trace either before or after a one-off appearance in a spy’s report or an anarchist periodical. Only about 60 militants are easily identifiable and clearly formed the militant hard core of the London groups.19 However, more encouragingly, there are only 21 individuals of whom nothing except their names is known. These discrepancies owe partly to the exiles’ varying degrees of political involvement, which explains the great visibility of some and the fleeting archival presence of others. A number of individuals also attended exile circles as a social rather than a political activity; the opportunities for such non-committal get-togethers were frequent as the main anarchist haunts were in the heart of the

16 APP BA1509, note n.d. (late 1896).
17 APP BA1509, report by Z.6 dated 14 April 1894; report by A.41, 22 September 1894; report by Jarvis dated 2 May 1895.
19 A comprehensive list of all those mentioned across the archives listed in the bibliography can be found in Constance Bantman, ‘Anarchismes et anarchistes en France et en Grande-Bretagne’, appendix 1. All the figures mentioned here are based on this source.
French quarter in London, in the streets around Leicester Square.\textsuperscript{20} Spies’ reports also included a number of petty criminals, pimps and deserters erroneously labelled as anarchists.

The number of women in the groups is also difficult to establish as their presence went mostly unrecorded; only 27 of the 450 exiles inventoried are women. The police’s \textit{Album photographique} contained the photographs of only 9 women, against 173 males, and text descriptions of 14 women, out 284 individuals. Louise Michel and her friend and housemate Charlotte Vauvelle were the only ‘famous’ women in the French groups; the other women who had crossed the Channel were chiefly known as ‘wives of…’ and often appeared in the context of gossip about their romantic involvements. For instance, the wife of Nicolas Nikitine was only mentioned for supposedly having affairs with comrades Carteron and Malato. Spies painstakingly reported on the saga of the marriage of Constant Martin’s mistress with Victor Sicard for legal reasons, after which ‘Sicard found it difficult to renounce his rights as a husband, so much so that some companions had to intervene’.\textsuperscript{21} Guilty of the double offence of being women in radical politics, they were often characterised negatively, with undertones of lunacy and hysteria; writing on ‘Females and anarchy’ in his book \textit{The Anarchist Peril}, Felix Dubois admitted that ‘the temptation is great to class them with the Furies than the Graces’\textsuperscript{,22} It has been noted that anarchists themselves had ambiguous positions on women’s militancy: while committed to gender equality through their writing, more so than the majority of socialist tendencies, anarchists often replicated within their own groups the discriminatory practices which they denounced.\textsuperscript{23}

A surprisingly large proportion of the exiles were married, considering that anarchist theory depicted marriage as an alienating social convention: 46 companions are reported as married or in a

\textsuperscript{20} Richard Tholoniat, ‘Londres vue par les voyageurs français au XIXe siècle’ (Extended PhD Diss, Université Lyon II, 2003), pp. 147–48.

\textsuperscript{21} APP BA1509, report by Satin dated 1 June 1894.

\textsuperscript{22} Félix Dubois, \textit{The Anarchist Peril} (Paris: Flammarion, 1894), p. 83.

long-term relationship, based solely on the informers’ incomplete reports. Malato claimed that the exiles ‘often came with their families’²⁴, but only 22 wives or partners are mentioned as having fled to London with their husbands/partners. 11 comrades are also reported to have brought their children to Britain. Women were therefore present, but under-represented in police reports. Pietro Dipaola reached a similar conclusion concerning Italian anarchist groups in London: while police records barely mention women, other sources suggest that they possibly represented the majority of the anarchist clubs’ audience²⁵; consequently, the estimated 450-strong anarchist groups were probably significantly larger in reality, and more visible as a result of this presence. *L’Écho de Paris*, a paper prone to sensationalism, similarly reported the presence of 500 women at an anarchist meeting in Grafton Hall.²⁶ When mentioned for their political activities, women tended to occupy the role of messengers, go-betweens who, for instance, carried propaganda material to the Continent when they returned to France.

In terms of origins, the refugees came from all over France, most of them from Paris and its *banlieues*, with many arrivals from Saint-Denis in particular. By the late 1880s, Paris had succeeded Lyon as the centre of the French movement, and the proximity of England made it a safe and convenient destination for anarchists. There were relatively few companions from the very active movements around Marseille and Lyon, most likely due to the proximity of Spain and Italy and Switzerland respectively, which offered alternative hideouts. One of the main Paris-based militant networks, the *Cercle Anarchiste International*, was almost entirely reconstituted in London, which provided favourable conditions for socialising and the pursuit of militancy. At least 20 of the *Cercle’s* regulars were present in London: Pouget, Charveron, Brunet, Tennevin, Luss, Viard, Leleu, Weil, Malato, Breuil, Duprat, Petitjean, Garderat, Sicard, Reclus, Vignaud, Mollet, Merlino, Rossignol, Martinet, Renard, Prolo, Magrini, Lombard, Villeval, Aubin… The presence of close relatives was a key factor in prompting one to leave for London, but other personal connections and acquaintances

²⁶ *L’Écho de Paris*, 17 December 1892, cutting held in file APP BA 1508.
also played a significant role. For instance, in 1894, Rhône-based comrade Désiré Brothier was mentioned in a report which stated: ‘He is very close to comrade Lombard, who is currently in London, and both are in close correspondence’.\(^\text{27}\) It is therefore hardly surprising that Brothier himself arrived in London a few months later.\(^\text{28}\)

The companions left France for various reasons and in different circumstances. Most of them had run into trouble with the French authorities prior to their departure; a quarter of the comrades are listed as being sought or watched closely by the police. A large number fled France after being indicted for a press offence by virtue of the Wicked Laws. All five of those sentenced \textit{in absentia} in the 1894 \textit{Procès des Trente} fled to Britain: the journalists and militants Pouget, Paul Reclus, Alexandre Cohen, François Duprat, the editor of Lyon’s \textit{Lutte sociale}, and Constant Martin, a former editor of the \textit{Père pinard}. Many Francophone Italian, Belgian and Russian anarchists also joined the London circles after being expelled from France in 1890–91, having been there since the early or mid-1880s. Along with the activists and journalists Charles Malato (expelled in 1892) and Antonio Agresti, this contingent with strong French ties included notorious figures like the robbers Luigi Parmeggiani and Vittorio Pini, or the Belgian companion from Saint-Denis, Joseph Altérant, who left France in December 1893. These non-French nationals remained close to the French colonies in London, giving them a cosmopolitan character. ‘Preventive’ departures after close encounters with the police were frequent: many of the exiles had left France after having their houses raided by the police, for political reasons or other offences. This was the case of the entire Bastard family from Saint-Denis: the son Élisée (also spelt Élysée), aged 23 in 1894, was arrested several times before he left for London. His father, Joseph, was also known to police services as the perpetrator of several burglaries in the Paris suburbs. A number of dubious individuals populated exile circles, hiding away from the French police, sometimes planning \textit{coup}s or bringing along stolen goods to resell in London. While it is clear that some of these individuals were targeted by the police solely because of their political pursuits, others undoubtedly engaged in various illegal dealings and petty crimes; unsurprisingly,

\(^{27}\) AN F7 12509, 9 August 1894, ‘État des perquisitions (Rhône).

\(^{28}\) APP BA 1509, report by Lapeyre dated 3 May 1895.
reports frequently mentioned comrades running into trouble with British authorities and appearing at Bow Street Magistrates’ Court.\textsuperscript{29}

Draft-dodgers and deserters were an important sub-group of at least 30 individuals. Anarchists led an intense antimilitarist and antipatriotic propaganda campaign throughout the 1880s. These themes featured in the club discussions of exiled socialists even in the early 1880s; in November 1884, a concert was organised at the Stephen Mews Club for the benefit of the paper Terre et Liberté’s campaign ‘for the dissolution of the army’.\textsuperscript{30} In 1886, the Ligue des Anti-Patriotes was set up in France to carry out propaganda, encourage desertion and counter the nationalist propaganda of the influential Ligue des Patriotes. Throughout the 1880s, French anarchists kept a solidarity fund ‘to help those with no taste for the military profession escape bourgeois persecution’.\textsuperscript{31} It enabled several members of the Ligue to escape to London, including its founder, secretary and treasurer Émile Bidault, who arrived in the late 1880s. A French section of the Ligue was created in London in 1887; in the 1880s, there was also a Groupe des déserteurs et réfractaires anarchistes de Londres. The period’s main antimilitarist novelist, Georges Darien, also sought shelter in London when his bestseller Biribi landed him into trouble. This antimilitarist and antipatriotic strand in the London groups remained central to Franco-British anarchist agitation even after the heyday of exile, undergoing an important revival in the run up to the First World War.

The French Quarter

The companions’ geographic implantation, as with the previous generations of exiles, was very much concentrated in London’s Soho and Fitzrovia and, to a far lesser extent, around Euston Street. Most of the refugees found lodgings in streets laying north and south of Oxford Street. To the north, they lived on Charlotte Street and Fitzroy Square, Cleveland Street, Whitfield Street, Gough Street, Rathbone Street, Percy Street, Gresse Street, Stephen’s Mews, Newman Street, Great Titchfield Street, Windmill Street. To the south, Frith Street, Dean Street, Rupert Street, Alfred Place and

\textsuperscript{29} APP BA 1509, report by Z.6 dated 1 February 1894; report by Z.6 dated 15 September 1894.

\textsuperscript{30} APP BA 435, reports by Etoile dated 16 September 1884 and 7 October 1884.

\textsuperscript{31} La Révolte, 23 December 1888, II, 15, ‘Correspondances’.
Wardour Street. Settling down in Soho, ‘the almost automatic venue for the exiles’ since the 1848 revolutions, was a well-established custom for French immigrants and continental exiles in general.\(^{32}\)

It was also a political choice, and the companions clustered or struck out on their own according to their political affiliations. Spies and newspapers frequently spoke of two exile groups, the *Groupe Tottenham Court Road* and the *Groupe Islington* – the latter allegedly included more secretive and influential affiliates such as Pouget and Malatesta and was based further north\(^{33}\); these may well have been a figment of their collective imagination, but the connection between geographic areas and political ideas was nonetheless quite real and corresponded to different social and ideological strands of anarchism.

Soho was the place where one hoped to find old acquaintances and support networks upon arriving, although one informer’s remark that ‘any companion, any deserter arriving in London will immediately find brotherly assistance, an abode, a table and a job the very next day’ was exaggerated.\(^{34}\) Travellers would generally head off to the ‘French quarter’ in Soho. Slightly to the north, Charlotte Street and Fitzroy Square were the main anarchist haunts: in Victor Richard’s grocery shop at number 67, Charlotte Street, they could meet people they knew and get useful information. Richard, a former Communard supportive of anarchists, was a notable figure, as recounted by the political commentator Alexandre Zévaës: ‘I enquired about his address to a policeman on Tottenham Court Road: ‘Oh, he said, the French anarchist’s shop? … Just over there, Sir, on Charlotte Street. You will see a fine crowd there!’\(^{35}\) At number 28-30, Fitzroy Street, comrade Delebecque rented out rooms where many spent their first few nights in London. Louise Michel also lived briefly on Fitzroy Square and her house was a frequent stopover, especially if one held a reference letter from a common


\(^{34}\) APP BA 1509, unsigned extract a report dated 20 June 1894.

The companions’ dominant installation in Soho, the traditional home of outcasts and foreign exiles, reflected their marginal status in London and British society and made them more visible. By the end of the nineteenth century, the seedy French quarter, rife with personal and political quarrels, was ‘a double cause of shame for French travellers: the refugium peccatorum exposed to the mockeries of locals not only the poverty, vice and dishonesty of some French people, but also the divisions of the motherland’. The most eminent companions tended to live further out, probably to avoid its assortment of companions, petty criminals and spies; this was the case of Kropotkin (successively a resident of Harrow, Bromley, Highgate and Brighton), the Austrian historian of anarchism and theorist Max Nettlau (Willesden), Charles Malato (Hampstead) Pouget (living ‘in the top floor of a small house’ on King Edward Street, Islington), Enrico Defendi and Malatesta. Louise Michel eventually moved to East Dulwich.

Little is known about the handful of comrades who lived outside London, where there were no informers. For them too, personal networks and work opportunities were a key factor in deciding where to live. Paul Reclus provides a case in point: shortly after arriving in Britain, he moved to Scotland, where he stayed even after the 1895 amnesty. Whilst working as a school teacher, he collaborated with Patrick Geddes, a friend of his uncle Élisée. Both men shared an interest in educational reform which they pursued beyond those years, later working together at the Collège des Écossais in Montpellier. Several provincial companions kept in touch with London’s anarchist circles. The most active was Gustave Mollet (or Molet), a shoemaker and deserter from Roanne, near Lyon, who arrived in Norwich in 1891, where he soon became a pillar of the thriving local movement. In 1894, having received an inheritance worth 20,000 francs, he moved to Liverpool, where he helped


Tholoniat, ‘Londres vue par les voyageurs français’, p.152.


the companions travel on to the United States. More than ten years later, he remained a subscriber to
the English anarchist press, but was now known as ‘Mollett’\(^{40}\) – a recording mistake or a sign of his
growing Anglicisation. The occasional presence of a French companion or two was also mentioned in
Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds and Brighton.\(^{41}\)

Despite some atypical itineraries, installation patterns tended to follow national and linguistic
dynamics, and companions recreated pre-existing militant, friendship and professional networks. They
often shared lodgings with comrades from the same country or other French speakers: for instance,
the shoemaker Vignaud lived in Delebecque’s house, and the latter also put up Delorme’s children. It
was not uncommon for families to be split up for financial reasons.\(^{42}\) Franco-Italian houses were not
rare; Delebecque briefly sheltered a group of 15 Italian anarchists expelled from Lugano in 1895.\(^{43}\)
The main two meeting points of the French, Victor Richard’s grocery and Lapie’s bookshop, were
French businesses and aimed to facilitate contacts within the French groups and with France. The
names of the few restaurants visited by the exiles had French consonances, such as the Restaurant
International on Charlotte Street and the Hôtel et Restaurant des Vrais Amis, 4 Old Compton Street,
Soho Square.\(^{44}\)

**Working: between survival and new opportunities**

Life in London was often miserably hard and work was difficult to come by. The anarchists,
most of whom were craftsmen, both skilled and unskilled, lived in poverty and often depended on

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[^40]: IISG, *Freedom* archives, ‘Daybooks’, January 1908. Mollet also appears in the 1901 British census returns,
under the name ‘Gustav Mollett’.

[^41]: APP BA 1509, report by Z.7 dated 24 May 1894, report by Z.6 dated 22 April 1894, report by Satin dated 13
June 1894.

[^42]: APP BA 1509, report by Satin dated 22 September 1894.

[^43]: APP BA 1509, report by Argus dated 17 February 1894 ; report by Tournier dated 5 March 1895.

[^44]: APP BA 1509, unsigned report dated 15 February 1894. The agent noted that the Restaurant International was
run by a Turk who was not an anarchist himself but had taken over from an anarchist owner. Adolphe Smith,
very precarious jobs, or charity: ‘Highly skilled artisans, baccalauréat and university graduates flocked to the kitchens’, Malato later recalled. While the material difficulties faced by artisan exiles is a recurring theme in studies of previous refugee groups in Britain, previous exile generations from France had been more fortunate: for the seventeenth-century Huguenots, skilled artisan work had proved to be an important integration factor, and the most skilled Communard refugees achieved significant material prosperity and stability of employment. However, by comparison, the relative brevity of the anarchists’ exile and, for many, their initial lack of social and occupational status meant that they did not suffer from the psychological trauma of downward social mobility so often experienced by exiles.

For the anarchists, destitution forms the background of almost all exilic accounts. In January 1893, an informer quoted comrade Charveron who had decided to go back to France: ‘I’d rather risk jail than starve to death’. In the autumn of 1893, comrade Bordes and his family were repatriated by the Société de Bienfaisance Française, and so were others later. Two weeks later, two young anarchist deserters, wood engravers by trade, died of starvation in London. Others, like Mrs Pemjean, left for South America in search of better conditions. The most tragic illustration of the hardships of exile is that of Gardrat (also known as Garderat), an educated man and former editor of the Père peinard. Having fled Paris in the early 1890s, he briefly washed the dishes in a London restaurant but was ‘driven out by destitution, which earned him his first coughing fits during cold

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47 APP BA 1508, report by Roger dated 16 January 1893.

48 APP BA 1508, report by Monte Carlo dated 26 November 1893.

49 APP BA 1508, report by Satin dated 6 December 1893.

50 IISG, Gustave Brocher Papers, correspondence, letter from Malatesta to Brocher du 21 May 1896.
nights sleeping rough in Hyde Park’.\textsuperscript{51} Back in Paris, he was jailed in Sainte Pélagie and then at the Conciergerie, where he eventually succumbed to his illness. His death became a political football among the London anarchists, and individualist anarchists used it as an example of the lack of solidarity among their communist opponents:

The editor for whom he got sentenced [Émile Pouget]… still cashed in most dignifiedly on the contributions of the devotees of ‘the Cause’; but Garderat, now declared unworthy, coughed away in the fog…Garderat died, oh you dealers in solidarity, because of your doctrinal lie!\textsuperscript{52}

Unlike previous generations of exiles, the anarchists were greeted with a mixture of indifference and hostility from the very outset, and only advanced socialist or anarchist circles sought to help – rather parsimoniously – the victims of the Wicked Laws. While the communard refugees had received significant short-term material help, the anarchists could only rely on their own networks, although one Ida White wrote in Paris’s \textit{Libertaire} of her endeavours to turn her Irish house into a shelter especially meant for London’s wretched anarchist exiles.\textsuperscript{53} In the late 1890s, Louise Michel launched the project of an \textit{Asile des Proscrits}, a libertarian colony doubling up as a shelter. She organised a speaking tour in the United States to fund it but the initiative fizzled out.\textsuperscript{54} The comrades tended to the most basic needs of one another: a soup kitchen called \textit{la marmite} (the cooking pot) was set up at the Autonomie Club, which also served as a last-resort shelter, as did the bakery shop of Monsieur Vauvelle (Charlotte’s father) and Delebecque’s house.\textsuperscript{55} The refugees organised international soirees to collect funds for propaganda, the legal fees of those indicted and the families of jailed comrades. Such collections also supported companions seeking to leave London or the country.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{51} Zo d’Axa, \textit{De Mazas à Jérusalem}, p. 218.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{L’Esprit d’initiative}, 24 November 1895, ‘Misères et mort de l’anarchiste Garderat pour cause d’Altruisme’.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Le Libertaire}, 29 November 1895, I, 3, \textit{Une Amie d’Irlande’}, Ida White.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Le Libertaire}, 27 March 1898, IV, 122, ‘Appel pour un asile de proscrits’.

\textsuperscript{55} APP BA 1508, report by Jarvis dated 12 December 1893; Malato, \textit{Les Joyeuseténs de l’exil}, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{56} APP BA 1508, Inventory of the anarchists dated 27 December 1894.
Finding a job was difficult. According to Michel, ‘coming from France was frowned upon and those who found a menial job … considered themselves lucky’. The pre-exile occupations of 180 companions out of the 450 are known. Most were skilled artisans, in conformity with the overall sociology of the French anarchist movement; no less than 47 different manual occupations are listed: 13 tailors, 11 shoemakers (an occupation with a long-standing tradition of political radicalism), 7 mechanics, 6 cabinet makers, 5 engravers, 5 hairdressers, 4 joiners and 4 typographers. A small number of professionals were present in the London groups: two lawyers, two engineers, a solicitor, an accountant, and a medical student. This was characteristic of the broader movement, which juxtaposed a predominantly working-class following with some middle-class recruits. However, once in exile, most companions simply tried to get by, which often entailed changing jobs or combining activities. Some advertised their services in Le Tocsin, an exile paper launched in December 1892. Defendi promoted his French and Italian food and wine business and Louis Bertgues, his electrical shop on Carburton Street; Henri Pâteau had a ‘boulangerie parisienne’ on Tottenham Street. Charles Capt offered work as a roofer, plumber and gas installer, and was based at 26, Fitzroy Square. Such ads, by the French for the French, shows how closed off these groups were from their environment. Others worked in the two traditionally French sectors: the restaurant industry and language teaching. The latter was the preserve of an educated minority among the anarchists, such as Brocher and Malato, who taught French in well-to-do families, Auguste Coulon, who taught French and German and Louise Michel who gave French lessons. A comrade known as both Muller and Samarine, formerly an active companion, is reported as leaving London in 1883 to take up a teaching post in Bideford, Devonshire. Reclus taught in a secondary school in Peebles near Edinburgh. The association of France with gastronomy being already enshrined, unsurprisingly, a dozen comrades

worked in a broad catering sector, either as waiters (including Bouvet/Bouzet/Lafleur at the very chic Café Royal), bakers, cooks, wine merchants or grocery shop owners.

A notable feature is the strong representation of journalists among the exiles, with 20 of them for the period 1880–1895, all of whom were active during their time in London and contributed to making the French colony an influential ideological laboratory. Pouget launched a London series of his Père peinard in 1894, also contributing to the Anglo-Italian publication The Torch, as did Mollet, Malato and Michel. However, this line of employment did not guarantee any financial security and was often backed by another activity: language teaching and secretarial work for Malato, smuggling for Luigi Parmeggiani, for instance. Even Louise Michel went through her London years in dire straits, supported from Paris by her friend Ernest Vaughan.

For some, exile opened up some professional opportunities, in the form of new personal contacts rather than additional income. Paul Reclus, an engineer by trade, continued his research while in Scotland; he submitted to The Times a study on a canal project for the Clyde. He also publicised the geographic works of his uncle Élisée, ran The Edinburgh Current Events Clubs and kept up his own journalistic writings, publishing a pamphlet on the Dreyfus Affair with Patrick Geddes’s Outlook Tower Press. Similarly, whilst in London, Malato published an article called ‘Some Anarchist Portraits’ in the Fortnightly Review. Augustin Hamon, a man with a keen eye for networking opportunities, sought to capitalise on his forced travels by ceaselessly offering his

61 IISG, Louise Michel Collection, Correspondence; 2 January 1890; 13 January 1891; 3 April 1891.
62 Papers of Sir Patrick Geddes, University of Strathclyde, letter by Geddes written on Reclus’s behalf, addressed to Mrs Cairns, Mackintosh and Watson, towards the preparation of a contract for the construction of a globe.
65 Fortnightly review, 56 (1894), pp. 315–33.
reviewing or writing services to prestigious British journals – usually eliciting negative responses. Upon his return to France, he launched an anarchist paper, *L’Humanité nouvelle*, which received contributions from British militants and intellectuals with whom he had made contact. He corresponded with Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, both of whom had an interest in anarchism. After 1900 he and his wife became the official French translators of George Bernard Shaw, and when he came back to London during the First World War, he used his Fabian connections to get appointed as a lecturer at the London School of Economics. Louise Michel was approached to publish translations of her work and occasionally contributed conference papers or paid articles to journals through the intervention of Rochefort or Kropotkin. Unlike Peter Kropotkin, whose scientific work as a geographer was greatly respected, Michel was only known as a militant but her international aura allowed her to enter more moderate circles, especially among British socialists.

A considerable number of companions resorted to robbery and other illegal practices, which brought much negative publicity on the anarchists and led to a great deal of mutual suspicions inside the groups. 22 anarchists are mentioned as engaged in robbery or smuggling in London, but the figure does not include the numerous comrades known to have had trouble with the police for similar pursuits prior to their arrival. Several exiles were already notorious robbers or swindlers when they arrived in London, like the brothers Rémy and Placide Schouppe, the Bastard brothers or Parmeggiani. A wide range of offences were practised, including robbery, *estampage* (a form of extortion), counterfeiting, international cigar trafficking and stamp forgery. One spy claimed that criminals funded a *caisse noire* (black chest) to provide money for anarchist attacks; however, it is essential to distinguish between the informers’ descriptions of the great riches allegedly owned by some, the activities of actual robbers (some of them also being illegalist anarchists) and, lastly, criminals with no anarchist connections whatsoever. Spies or exiles intent on stirring trouble often claimed that the most famous communist anarchist comrades lived in opulence while most exiles


67 APP BA 1510, ‘L’Anarchie à Londres’, p. 41–2, n.d. (1901 ?).
suffered great hardship; such rumours were in constant, dizzying circulation both inside and outside
the proscription. Malato tells how a group of companions posing as Kropotkin, Malatesta, Élisée
Reclus and himself once gave an interview to a journalist from the French conservative daily Gil Blas
on a visit to London, while feasting on caviar, chianti and other delicacies, thus giving a completely
distorted image of life in exile.\textsuperscript{68} Such rumours abounded in the pages of Le Révolutionnaire, a paper
published by the ex-comrades Otto and Mayence, who by 1896 had become die-hard xenophobic
nationalists.

The robbers and crooks present in anarchist circles were often Italians or Belgians who had
spent time in France before coming to London; the former, under the aegis of Luigi Parmeggiani,
were especially active. Back in Paris, Parmeggiani had been the associate of Vittorio Pini, a sincere
champion and practitioner of la reprise individuelle. Together, the two men set up several gangs of
robbers, such as Gli Intransigenti di Londra e Parigi, Gli Straccioni di Parigi, I Ribelli di Saint-
Denis, Il Gruppo degli Introvabili. Other figures from these groups came to London too, like the
Egyptian Alexandre Maroucq/Marocco and the Italians Cajo Zavoli and Giacomo Merlino. The group
La Libra Iniziativa, led by Parmeggiani et al., advocating and practising expropriation as the
revolutionary activity par excellence, drew up to 80 members to its meetings.\textsuperscript{69} Spies frequently
reported on such illegal activities and the financial situation of their perpetrators. In October, one of
them mentioned the arrival of a Paul Chabart and his wife from Paris and claimed that they held
paintings by Gustave Courbet which they were planning to resell; one was allegedly bought for 200
francs by Henri de Rochefort, a French aristocratic politician and journalist also in exile at the time.\textsuperscript{70}
Marocco’s umbrella shop on Dean Street was described as a mere cover for a large-scale operation
concealing art objects\textsuperscript{71}. Parmeggiani, who evolved from anarchism to sheer banditry and eventually
bourgeois integration, is a remarkable case of social climbing through stealing. He ended up opening

\textsuperscript{68} Malato, Les Joyeusetés de l’exil, pp. 238–41.

\textsuperscript{69} Dipaola, ‘Italian Anarchists in London’, p. 59–60.

\textsuperscript{70} APP BA 1508, report by Z n.6 dated 2 October 1893.

\textsuperscript{71} APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 4 June 1894.
an antiques shop on London’s Bedford Square, which Queen Victoria and her daughter the empress of Germany visited in 1898.\textsuperscript{72} Of course, by then, Parmeggiani had fully turned his back on anarchism: ‘I never ever was in any community of ideas with either you or your party’, he wrote to Jean Grave in 1905.\textsuperscript{73}

Prostitution brought additional funds to some, with eight comrades described as providers, including one Laroche ‘living only on his wife’s income from prostitution’\textsuperscript{74}, and growing numbers in the very late 1890s.\textsuperscript{75} A tenuous connection between anarchism and prostitution already existed in France, even though procurers were frowned upon by most comrades. Moreover, there was a long tradition of French prostitutes working in Soho, and Fitzrovia had been known as a pick-up place since the eighteenth century at least. However, such conflations stemmed mainly from the tendency for outsiders to associate anarchism with all sorts of vices, while the anarchists’ feminist or free love propaganda was easily misinterpreted into all sorts of stereotypes of sexual deviancy.

One last type of ‘alternative’ employment was to work as an informer for the French or British secret services: five comrades have been clearly identified as regular police informers, and many more were suspected of it. Coulon achieved a fairly comfortable existence by working for the British police as a ‘foreign informer’ from the late 1890s until early 1904, which is rather bewildering considering that he was exposed and ostracised in 1893. He worked for the Special Branch for 13 years (a duration which far exceeds the peak of anarchist activities), during which he received over £800 (the equivalent of about £50,000 today).\textsuperscript{76} Reporting under the aliases Pyat or Pyatt, he received a substantial pay of one or two pound sterling a fortnight, with occasional bonuses. In January 1892, he was paid four pounds for his services in the Walsall case (see chapter 4). This attractive remuneration

\textsuperscript{72} Dipaola, ‘Italian Anarchists in London’, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{73} IFHS, Grave Correspondence, letter dated 11 November 1905.
\textsuperscript{74} APP BA 1509, report by Bourgeois dated 29 June 1895.
\textsuperscript{75} APP BA 1510, report by Jackson dated 10 May 1897.
made it a desirable position, and both French and British authorities often received spontaneous applications from individuals offering their services.\textsuperscript{77} Hence also the many mutual suspicions among the companions, with greed being seen as a reason for selling out.

\textbf{The daily lives of exiles}

For all their professed internationalism, the anarchists were very much focused on French politics and suffered greatly from their forced inactivity in a period of heavy repression. This is of course a classic theme in all exilic accounts, although there was little pathos in the way the comrades referred to their sense of political powerlessness. This is probably because the exiles expected to be able to return to France shortly, and also because mourning for the motherland would have been contradictory with the anarchists’ views. Malato summarised the dullness of his daily existence in those words: ‘Bi-monthly correspondences, grammar lessons, bread-making and making banana wine broke the monotony of this exilic life – most fortunately, since inaction, usually forced, in this big cold city, is both lethal and depressing’.\textsuperscript{78} On a lighter note, he also recalled how the journalists Zo d’Axa and Armand Matha spent most of their days chasing women in the streets of London. Above all, the comrades’ political pursuits were drastically restricted by their financial hardship: ‘They are busy trying to face material needs rather than conspiring against society’,\textsuperscript{79} a spy wrote to Paris in 1894. A great deal of the reports sent by informers contained nothing but anecdotes and gossip, a clue to the very slow pace and often hidden nature of political activities in the groups. London life was largely conditioned by French events, whether these brought good or bad news: ‘The Paris arrests are causing a panic here. Many do not dare go out, and the Club is shut’.\textsuperscript{80}

Boredom led to conflict, which was the true bane of the French proscription. After more than a century of steady political migration to Britain, the tense atmosphere of exile circles was well-known. The Paris-based anarchist daily \textit{Le Libertaire} summarised this all-too familiar dynamics: ‘In London,

\textsuperscript{77}Archives du Quai d’Orsay, ‘Anarchistes, 1890-1906’, letter dated 24 August 1903.

\textsuperscript{78} Malato, \textit{Les Joyeusetés de l’exil}, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{79} APP BA 1509, report by Leon, 18 September 1894.

\textsuperscript{80} APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis, 7 March 1894.
like in all proscriptions, the well-known moral disease engendered by prison and exile is rife; some comrades turn excessively bitter and defiant; out of the battling ground, unable to act for their ideas, they pour their bile on everything around them’. A spy similarly reported: ‘They are fighting tooth and nail. This is the old story of the empty hayracks around which the horses are kicking away at one another’. This was not specific to anarchists: ‘Divisions are so to speak one of the recurring traits of all exiles… they serve to exclude, to designate representatives, to give oneself political credit’. In fact, it was common for each new generation of exiles and each nationality to claim that they were divided and isolated to an unprecedented degree; the themes of conflict and division were familiar exilic tropes, which one almost had to abide by as a rite of passage.

Personal antagonisms could be purely gratuitous:

Malatesta and Malato, who used to be inseparable friends, are now down to abusing each other. Cohen has started several fights with Malato, who has also fallen out with Pouget. All the old managers of the Père peinard badmouth and insult Pouget. Dupont is called an agent and vilified. Hamon, faced with a torrent of insults and attacks, has had to escape to Nottingham.

But conflicts often stemmed from political divisions, in particular the violent quarrel between anti-organisationalist and illegalist anarchists on the one hand and, on the other, the figureheads of French anarchist communism, who were increasingly favourable to organisation. The first trend was spearheaded by the group publishing L’International: comrades Bordes, Dupont, Parmegiani, and Jean Molas. The conflict was Franco-Italian rather than specifically French and was ignited by the pro-organisation writings of Carlo Cafiero, an Italian exile in London and then Paris. The debate

81 Le Libertaire, 29 November 1895, I, 3, ‘Petite correspondance’.

82 APP BA 1509, report by Leon, dated 18 Septembre 1894.

83 Aprile, ‘Du singulier au pluriel’, p. 188.

84 APP BA 1509, report by Leon dated 18 September 1894

85 Pietro Dipaola uses the terms ‘individualists’ and ‘associationists’, ‘Italian Anarchists in London’, p.55. The dyad ‘organisationalists’ and ‘anti-organisationalists’ is also used.

started in France and Britain in the 1880s and opposed the champions of individual action and terrorism to communist anarchists increasingly sceptical of terrorist attacks and favourable to trade union militancy and educationalist approaches. When leading communist anarchists called for organisation during terrorist onslaught of the early-1890s, the champions of individual action sought to counter what they saw as a pacific corruption and a loss of radicalism by restating the effectiveness of propaganda by the deed. The polemic bore both on the use of violence as a revolutionary strategy and on the need for organisation. Implicit was also a disagreement over the identity and strategy of the anarchist movement – should it be aggressively plebeian or more elitist and intellectual? Pro-action or pro-organisation? Strategic disagreements also exposed a difference in style between the ‘big names’ and the ‘downtrodden’ of the movement, compounded by the massive infiltration of individualist circles in London by police agents, as ‘this fraction of militants was largely manipulated by the police for whom it was very convenient to keep up divisions among the anarchists’. 87 The argument was partly led through pamphlets of the anti-organisationists. The most famous of these were L’Anonymat aux Pitres et aux Pleutres de l’Anarchie religieuse (From L’Anonymat to the clowns and cowards of religious anarchy) and À bas les bourriques (Down with the pig-headed). Their raging tone testifies to the prickly atmosphere in the exile milieu. They emphasised the watchwords of individualist anarchism against the ‘anarcho-moralists’, the ‘anarchist cowards’, ‘the little popes’, ‘doctrinaires’ and ‘prelates’ of the movement 88, rejecting organisation and temporising, pressing instead for immediate individual action.

It is not by posing as an eminent personality that the social problem finds its solution but by hitting at tyranny while you can, and since the bourgeoisie has taught us that the blows from the unknown are the most terrible, let us use this last tactic, then… At the moment, there is no task more useful to propaganda than to fight the pontiffs and pig-headed individuals of anarchy, since they really are a danger for the revolutionary élan which shook the old world during these last few years. 89

88 L’International, June 1890, I, 2.
89 Manifesto À bas les bourriques, n.d. [1895]. A.N. F7 12518.
The spies documented these conflicts on a daily basis. ‘Bordes has a little group of ‘bigmouths’ who are trying to pitch the comrades against Malatesta and Malato and a few others’. The spy Jean described the same conflict between the ‘theoretical pontificate’ (Kropotkine, Malatesta, Malato) and the ‘wretched’. Individualists were widely suspected of being spies or using the idea of *reprise individuelle* as an excuse for plain stealing. But beneath the *ad hominem* attacks lurked a political and identity crisis of anarchism at a key stage in its evolution. Conciliatory attempts, mainly on the part of communist anarchists, fell through; the quarrel continued to poison Italian circles until the late 1890s and lasting enmities remained in France too. As late as 1897, Constant Martin wrote about them in *Le Libertaire*: ‘The individuals who dribble the anonymous manifestoes in London are nothing but castrated reptiles… small-time Machiavellis, neutered servants, neither individualists not anarchists, poor devils, sharks following a ship’. But by then, the battle had lost its intensity; after the conflict-ridden London years, individualism changed and split into different trends, undergoing a crisis before its revival around 1900.

Another endless bone of contention was the obsession with spies and informers. Several spies were unmasked in the early 1890s and anarchist clubs were under constant surveillance, both overt and covert (see chapter 4); the anarchist principle of open meetings favoured the infiltration of spies and shady individuals. Kropotkin complained of the consequences:

> That Sunday Louise Michel came to me with 2 Frenchmen whom she brings with her from Paris. Absolute strangers to her and to anyone of the comrades… Both produce a most unpleasant impression. Both are not anarchists. With people who use Louise to enter into our acquaintance we have all reasons to be doubly on our guard.

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90 APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 25 February 1893.
91 APP BA 1508 report by Jean dated 20 April 1893.
94 Alfred Marsh Papers, IISG, letter from Kropotkin to Alfred Marsh, 9 January 1900.
Some spies were well integrated in anarchist circles, with a very sound political judgment too. This was the case of Nicolas Nikitine, who attended the circles where the infiltration of trade unions by anarchists was first discussed, and Eugène Renard, who was both an informer (alias Finot) and a dedicated militant.\footnote{Maitron, \textit{Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France}, p. 251 ; Manfredonia, ‘L’Individualisme anarchiste en France’.
} However, the majority of informers sent to London had a poor understanding of the groups under their surveillance and of politics in general. One described the Fabian Society as ‘anarchists’ advocating ‘plunder, war on the rich’, and a SDF branch as an ‘anarchist club’.\footnote{APP BA 1508, unsigned note dated 3 May 1892 ; APP BA 1509, report by Serge dated 25 January 1894.
} Most spies provided piecemeal and immensely repetitive information, which was often avowedly unreliable and alarmist. While spies rarely represented a serious political threat, they were hated due to the opprobrium they brought onto the movement and were described as morally and physically repulsive:

‘All day long, filthy-looking individuals, recruited in the pits of the French quarter, would station in front of [Victor Richard’s] grocery shop, a faction they would only interrupt to go for a tipple at the neighbouring public house’.\footnote{Malato, \textit{Les Joyeusetés de l’exil}, p. 83.
}

The obvious presence of spies among the companions heightened the atmosphere of mutual suspicions and denunciations typical of both anarchist groups and exile circles. Conversely, the paranoia fuelled by the presence of informers was reinforced by the central importance of gossip in exilic life.\footnote{Sylvie Aprile, ‘L’espion, frère du proscrit. Regards croisés sur la surveillance politique des exilés sous le Second Empire’, \textit{Cultures et Conflits}, 53.1 (2004), pp. 9–23.
} False accusations of spying were also one of the rituals whereby the exiles staged themselves as important political actors, worthy to be spied on; in this respect, the comrades actually needed the spies’ presence.\footnote{Aprile, ‘L’espion, frère du proscrit’ ; Alain Dewerpe, \textit{Espion. Une anthropologie du secret d’État contemporain} (Paris : Gallimard, 1994), p. 248.
} Allegations of spying circulated at a frantic pace. In January 1893, Gardrat, a well-respected companion, was suspected.\footnote{APP BA 1508, report by Z.2 dated 12 January 1893.
} A few days later, another report mentioned
the distrust towards comrade Jourdan. In June 1893, Dupont, Morel and Coulon were accused – the latter rightly so. In June 1895, the bookshop owner Lapie came under attack. This *affaire Lapie* caused quite a stir, even in France where it was followed by the anarchist weekly *Le Libertaire*. When comrades Delebecque and Cini forged the signature of Malatesta in a letter against Lapie, many companions rose to his defence, including Michel, Vauvelle and some Italian comrades. ‘It is well-known that in London comrades become excessively bitter and suspicious’, Constant Martin concluded. Suspicions led to endless accusations and confrontations, sometimes on a grand scale, such as the planned duel between Coulon and Matha: the latter, accused of snitching by the former, challenged him to a duel but did not show up on the day it was supposed to take place. Another agent reported that ‘Bertgues, who meddles in with everything in London, has been kicked out of Delebecque’s house by Capt’s wife, who accused him of being an agent. This woman wants to throw acid at Lapie’s face’. When true, accusations led to serious confrontations and elaborate stagings. Italian anarchists started setting up ‘revolutionary tribunals’ (a nod to the French revolution) for traitors in the early 1880. The French spy Cottance (reporting under the alias ‘A41’), unmasked in December 1894, was put in front of such a tribunal, although in practice it seems that he was mainly ‘cornered’ by some comrades and fled back to France immediately afterwards (see chapter 4).

Mutual hatreds were so intense that they hindered any large-scale concerted action; in the words of agent Z n. 6, ‘nor is there any permanent *Comité Révolutionnaire*, this is untrue and cannot be, as the comrades usually act in isolation because of personal hatreds’. Another informer similarly remarked: ‘Anarchy rules in Anarchy, no discipline, no cohesion, no understanding’. However, spy fever and repression could occasionally foster solidarity within the groups, since mocking clueless

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101 APP BA 1508, report by Z.2 dated 19 January 1893.
103 APP BA 1508, report by Y.3 dated 19 July 1893.
104 APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 25 January 1896.
106 APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 19 April 1893.
107 APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 27 May 1893.
spies and police agents was a much-loved anarchist pastime, as illustrated by Malato’s *Mariage par la dynamite* (Dynamite Wedding), staged at the Autonomie Club, a vaudeville whose main characters were Parisian policemen.\(^{108}\)

**The French anarchists and Britain**

Unlike the mid-century German refugees and, to some extent, the Communards, the anarchists wrote little about their host country and, with the notable exception of Malato, there were very few chroniclers of their existence across the Channel. This can be put down to the belief that exile would be short, to the need to keep a low profile in repressive times, or simply to a lack of interest, if not downright hostility, which testifies to the anarchists’ lack of integration into their host society. In any case, pathetic exilic writings were in short supply; the terseness and usual lightness of tone of the anarchists in their rare discussions of Britain contrast with the romantic exiles of previous generations. Their expectations regarding their refuge were most likely rudimentary, derived from the anarchist papers’ occasional discussions of Britain and a few stock representations.

For some, hostility towards Britain derived from political objections. Zo d’Axa, a prominent journalist and art critic in France, castigated British reformism. After an international socialist meeting in London at the end of 1895, he commented sarcastically: ‘Not for one minute did we get bored. The eight hours and the general strike were vaguely discussed; ‘officers’ were named and a dynamic decision was made to gather again, the following year, to discuss urgent matters’.\(^{109}\) Having lost any hope of involvement in local and international politics, d’Axa expressed nothing but contempt for his host country and his own condition as an exile, cursing ‘London where, for three months, I have been vegetating in banishment… The absolute reserve of the locals cannot be overcome, the ambient environment cannot be penetrated… Isolation hangs heavy in the compact


\(^{109}\) Zo d’Axa, *De Mazas à Jérusalem*, p. 77.
sadness of the fog.’

Malato later recalled that d’Axa made a point of not learning English apart from the two words ‘street’ and ‘fish’, spending his days wooing women in the streets of the capital.

D’Axa’s damning judgement is reminiscent of a long tradition of stereotypical depictions of British coldness and grey weather – themselves metaphors for the exile’s neurasthenia: ‘Each Englishman strangely symbolises the country: these insulars standing like so many little inaccessible islands … and it’s monotonous, and it’s neutral, and it’s grey… and I have had enough!’

Similar stereotypes punctuate the writings of Émile Pouget, who wrote very little about Britain despite spending an entire year there, except for a number of clichés French socialists would have been familiar with, such as the opposition between shallow British materialism and French generosity. The rest of the exile press similarly spoke little of Britain and focused on life within their groups, and spies’ reports showed a similar indifference towards Britain.

Nonetheless, a few exiles turned out to be Anglophiles and set out to discover the country, its customs and inhabitants. The antimilitarist and anarchist sympathiser Georges Darien was one of those who stayed on after the amnesty of 1st February 1895 allowed most comrades back to France: ‘Leaving the French comrades to wallow in their spleen and discuss the Society of the Future in the backroom of the New Inn, he immersed himself into the slums of the city, wandered in the populous areas, made friends with girls, pimps, and crooks’.

Darien returned to France in 1897 and remained an Anglophile long after he ceased to be an anarchist. Malato’s 1897 memoirs *Les Joyeusetés de l’exil* conveyed a very distanced brand of Anglophilia. Whilst underlining the hardships facing the exiles, he painted a humorous portrait of his time in exile, which evidenced a real familiarity with British life, society, culture and language, as well as the geography of London well beyond Soho. Against the old stereotypes about the English weather, Malato conceded that fog ‘has something very poetic about

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110 Zo d’Axa, *De Mazas à Jerusalem*, p. 103.


112 D’Axa, *De Mazas à Jérusalem*, p. 106.

Louise Michel was the staunchest internationalist among the refugees, through both her personal acquaintances and her declarations. A genuine Anglophile, she was in regular contact with many Britons and foreigners whilst in London. Her London address book testifies to her very international connections; it featured a very eclectic list of addresses and contact details, including those of Tom Mann, Joe Perry, Stepniak, and many other anarchist and socialist groups and individuals in Britain.\textsuperscript{115}

Her nostalgic musings testify to her love of the place and its inhabitants:

I wish I could write at greater length of my friends … Mrs Dryhurst, Zimmerman, Shanon. Of everything we loved to read, from Shakespeare to Bjornson, from Zola to Chelly [sic], of these places where I was happy meeting up with them in the evening, Lincoln’s Inn Square and Bishops Gate, St Marc Square bird cage [sic], Bromley.\textsuperscript{116}

Her friend Marie Vernet remarked on her affection for the city: ‘I was hoping you would come back to France, but I can see that you like the Thames fog even better than the mephitic exhalations rising up from the depths of Paris’.\textsuperscript{117} Michel remained in London well after 1895 and was frequently heard praising British tolerance and liberalism whenever she returned to France.

As with previous generations of exiles, British liberalism was indeed a source of anarchist Anglophilia for the small minority of anarchists whose thoughts on the matter are documented; comrades contrasted ‘monarchical England’ – liberal and tolerant – with the French Republic and its so-called ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity: ‘[Michel] started by talking about the freedom people have in England to gather as they please. She pointed out that in some meetings, when there is considerable attendance, people are never afraid of running into trouble with the police – on the

\textsuperscript{114} Malato, \textit{Les Joyeusetés de l’exil}, p. 150.  
\textsuperscript{115} IISG, Louise Michel Collection, ‘Adresses de ses correspondants’, Address book (document 674).  
\textsuperscript{116} Michel, \textit{Histoire de ma vie}, p. 160.  
contrary, they protect meetings’. Malato stressed that ‘libertarians were left to demonstrate in broad daylight, freely’ in London, whereas ‘in Paris, the police will charge with the slightest excuse’. For him, ‘England became great through its virtues of initiative and persevering courage; for several centuries, the exiles of all defeated ideas have been indebted to her for her hospitality, of which she is right to be so proud’. For Pouget, ‘you can frown at its rulers and aristos – fair enough. And yet, it is from this land that the ideas of freedom, initiative and human dignity have come to the continent’. Both as exiles and political radicals, the anarchists were indeed in a propitious position to experience the ‘freedoms and the limitations’ of English life. Zo d’Axa, however, saw liberalism as a decoy:

Revolutionaries who come to London on the strength of traditional hospitality fall into a trap… the ‘Siren’ with all its sworn liberties, attracts refugees and entices them to no longer care to beware. They come unmasked. They are welcomed. There is no such thing as an expulsion here! Indeed – but they are constantly spied on. Refugees are followed, their addresses and activities investigated. Revolutionaries are pent up on the island; they are kept under surveillance and almost at hand – there is an agreement with the continent. They could be arrested any time.

The Paris-based Libertaire, which had tight links with the London groups, was similarly disillusioned concerning British liberalism:

All those who are here and congratulate one another on the freedom they enjoy to say and write what they think do not see that this codified liberty castrates them by making them waste away all their

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118 APP BA 1497, unsigned report dated 12 September 1897, ‘Réunion publique organisée par les libertaires au profit des martyrs de Montjuich’.

119 APP BA 1497, unsigned report dated 6 June 1897, ‘Conférence faite par Louise Michel, Malato et Sébastien Faure au théâtre des Menus-Plaisirs’.


122 Ashton, Little Germany, p. xii.

123 D’Axa, De Mazas à Jérusalem, p. 90.
activity, all their forces into sterile agitation, keeping them in the respect of legality, for fear of losing the illusion that is political freedom within economic slavery.\textsuperscript{124}

However, it is notable that most of those who actually went into exile lauded Britain for its tradition of liberalism – although, ironically, political liberalism was one of the main reasons for the weak appeal of anarchism in Britain, as it made its anti-authoritarian contents less relevant.\textsuperscript{125} Equally ironically, this admiration for British customs brought anarchists at one with some mainstream currents in contemporary French politics, as it espoused a broader trend whereby England was regarded as the pinnacle of political modernity.\textsuperscript{126}

So, despite their apparent lack of interest in their host country, several anarchists left testimonies about it, which nodded to many traditional stereotypes\textsuperscript{127}, such as the enormous alcohol intake of the population to its coarse eating habits\textsuperscript{128}, from the geography of London to its social peculiarities\textsuperscript{129}, from the political mores of the workers to the shortcomings of the public assistance system.\textsuperscript{130} Through their occasional celebrations of liberalism, and despite the odd criticism or wonder in the face of cultural differences, they went against the widespread contemporary Anglophobia and its crass clichés, which depicted the ‘Perfidious Albion’ as the hereditary enemy, peopled by Jews and masons, fraught with vices like greed, irrationality, immorality, slyness, laziness and a lack of willpower and honour.\textsuperscript{131} This made them enlightened exceptions in an age of exacerbated

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\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Le Libertaire}, 20 November 1897, III, 106.\\
\textsuperscript{125} Bédarida, ‘Sur l’anarchisme en Angleterre’, p. 24.\\
\textsuperscript{126} Tholoniat, ‘Londres vue par les voyageurs français’, p. 220.\\
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Le Révolutionnaire}, 3 June 1899, I, 14, ‘Inferiorité des Anglo-saxons’.\\
\textsuperscript{129} Malato, \textit{Les Joyeusetés} ; especially chapter 2, ‘Urbs London ’, pp. 11–23.\\
\textsuperscript{130} Louise Michel, \textit{Mémoires de Louise Michel écrits par elle-même}, (Paris : F. Roy, 1886 (1896 ?)), pp. 384–88.\\
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nationalism. Nonetheless, in their everyday lives and in rather innocuous ways, the exiles shared the questionings and mixed responses of previous French visitors in Britain, both fascinated and perplexed by their neighbours across the Channel.
3. Exilic militancy

‘In theory, there is no such thing as exile for the anarchist, nor actually for any consistent internationalist,’ the Encyclopédie anarchiste stated in 1934.¹ Such claims have become a central line of investigation for transnational labour historians who tend to emphasise a central paradox: ‘If the lived experience of transnationality helps account for the appeal of internationalist ideas amongst mobile workers in the first globalization, then, it does not follow that there was any simple linkage between transnational lives and internationalist politics’.² The very cosmopolitan London milieu provides an excellent testing ground for the perennial claim that anarchists have no motherland, but also for the counter-argument that sectionalism dominated exilic politics. In a place where several libertarian movements – chiefly French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian – coexisted in large numbers, along with significant socialist contingents, the French comrades did indeed put their proclaimed internationalism into practice, sometimes to a remarkable extent. Anarchist militancy in Britain was at least twofold: there were numerous collaborations among the elite, by-passing national fault lines and resulting in influential tactical initiatives; simultaneously, a heartfelt yet rudimentary and symbolical internationalism prevailed at grassroots level. Nonetheless, by comparison with previous generations of exiles, anarchism appears especially propitious to international contacts, through its emphasis on practical internationalism and ferocious critique of nationalism and patriotism. This insistence, along with the joint reflection at elite level over the question of the anarchists’ entry into trade unions, make this period a golden age of practical and strategic internationalism. The forms and contents of exile politics raise other questions. Was this period a parenthesis in the comrades’ political activism, confirming the stereotypical depiction of exile as a time of sterility and boredom? What links did they maintain with the country they had left, with the one they were living in? How did exile

modify the refugees’ political conceptions and practices? Despite the intense conflicts within the groups and recurring talk on the political emptiness of exile, this forced spell abroad proved very fruitful: it provided the conditions of a strategic reorientation through trade union militancy, out of the ostracism where the comrades had found themselves since the late 1880s. Newly-formed informal international networks provided an efficient *modus operandi* in a movement fraught with organisational dilemmas.

**Exilic writings: a prolific and multifaceted propaganda**

The role of the press as an organisational tool for the anarchist movement has been repeatedly emphasised, especially in a transnational context. Any significant group in the global anarchist diaspora produced at least one newspaper, and the French colony in London was no exception. The francophone groups in London had an intense journalistic and pamphleteering activity, which connected them with France and the international movement. Five French-language anarchist papers appeared in London between 1890 and 1895, most of them irregular and short-lived, a common trait for anarchist periodicals: *L’International* (May 1890-91; 8 issues), *La Tribune libre* (November 1890 – March 1891; 4 issues), *Le Rothschild* (15 June 1891 – ? ; 3 issues); *Le Tocsin* (December 1892 – September 1894 ; 9 issues), *Le Père peinard, série londonienne* (September 1894 – January 1895; 8 issues). Several other projects were discussed but never materialised, including a trilingual (Spanish – French – Italian) project called *Germinal* and Guillaume Bordes’s *Droit au Bonheur*, a ‘libertarian organ open to all the victims of social disorder’, in 1899. This output can be described as prolific, given the comrades’ financial difficulties and the controls enforced over this exile press through informers and censorship. Moreover, while their circulation and readership are

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4 APP BA 1510, report by Eureka dated 1 November 1897; report by Jackson dated 13 November 1897.

difficult to quantify, these writings were influential in France and beyond. Far from being confined to theoretical contents, they fulfilled an essential liaising function and ‘carried news, letters, messages from people trying to locate kin and comrades, cryptic ones about conspiracies, revolutionary iconography, and pleas for material support for local causes’.6

The editors of *L’International* remained anonymous but were part of *La Libre Initiative*, a group based at the Autonomie Club. The main writers were Bordes, Parmeggiani and Jean Molas, whose extremely radical views aroused suspicions that they were provocateurs. In any case, the paper’s incendiary talk reflected the radicalisation of anarchism in the early 1890s. Its first editorial proclaimed:

> Thus, next to robbery, murder and fire, which naturally become our legal means to tell all the rulers of today’s society about our ultimatum, we shall not hesitate to place chemistry, whose powerful voice becomes absolutely necessary to dominate the social tumult.7

The apology of propaganda by the deed was insistent and after May 1890 the paper reprinted *L’Indicateur anarchiste*, ‘an extremely specific and well-written opuscule giving all useful advice for the fabrication of dynamite, nitroglycerine, and fulminate capsules’ and listing ‘all the various ‘targets’ to be destroyed as a priority on the day of the Revolution’.8

*L’International* had a circulation of 2,000 copies. It was read in France and beyond; it could be bought in the United States, through the Hastings-based Francophone paper *Le Réveil des mineurs*. In France, Émile Pouget recommended it to its readers and applauded its energy. In November 1890, *L’International* was banned in France, although it could still be obtained clandestinely. Its readers were kept under surveillance and the houses of suspected subscribers were searched. In April 1891, comrade Breuil was sentenced to two years in jail for selling the paper, which shows the very direct impact of publications by the London

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8 René Bianco, *100 ans de presse anarchiste*, section on ‘L’Indicateur anarchiste’.
French on the movement in France and the repression it suffered.\textsuperscript{9} The paper was briefly resurrected in May 1893 by Dupont, Morel and Coulon – all of whom were suspected of being undercover agents. ‘It is believed that the task of this sheet will be disunity rather than the reorganisation of the anarchists,’ a spy noted.\textsuperscript{10} By June, the publication was suspended: ‘Dupont, Morel and Coulon cannot do anything anymore because they are reported to be agents of the French Interior Ministry’.\textsuperscript{11}

The true successor of \textit{L’International} was \textit{La Tribune libre}, an ‘international anarchist revolutionary socialist’ weekly. There were only four issues between November 1890 and March 1891, but they had a substantial international circulation of 3,000, reaching readers in Belgium, Italy and the United States. The paper was written and printed at 26 Warren Street, by the companions Olivon and Schiroki (the latter was in fact the illegalist Léon Ortiz). While declaring itself open to all anarchist tendencies, it shared the mordant style of \textit{Le Père peinard}, castigating the high and mighty and extolling ‘anti-bourgeois products’ and ‘inflammable goods’.\textsuperscript{12} Its first issue provided the recipe for the dissolution of phosphorus, as part of its exalted promotion of propaganda by the deed.

The more moderate but nonetheless sharp-tongued \textit{Rothschild} was published under the alias J. Prudhomme Fils by Lucien Weil, formerly a writer at the Paris \textit{Père peinard}. Entirely written from the point of view of rulers and employers, probably to detract censors and increase satirical impact, it was a virulent opposition sheet, whose full title was \textit{Le Rothschild. Organe de la classe dirigeante} (‘The Rothschild. Organ of the ruling classes’). It was communist anarchist and focused on the critique of parliamentary socialism; launched after the second May Day demonstration, it attacked this new practice in its reformist understanding, pitching it against anarchist spontaneity: ‘Everything that could be done to

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Le Père peinard}, 19 April 1891, III, 109, ‘Au Palais d’Injustice’, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{10} APP BA 1508, report by Monte Carlo dated 16 May 1893.

\textsuperscript{11} APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 29 June 1893.

stifle the spirit of revolt has been done by labour delegates. Having mesmerised the people with universal suffrage, as soon as the trick stopped working, they resorted to ‘pacific demonstrations at set times’.

By contrast, the writers stressed, anarchists were not in favour of fixed dates, and preferred permanent and spontaneous action.

*Le Tocsin*, launched the following year by Malato and Nicolas Nikitine, printed in Malato’s Tavistock Square home, was also communist anarchist. Whilst not deprived of humour, it was far more violent and revolutionary in tone than the *Rothschild*: ‘The bourgeois republic is bursting; bursting like an abscess, bursting with its sovereign in disguise, its senate of dodderers and its parliament of crooks… It is bursting and the Prole would be quite mad to dream of salvaging it’.

The theme of the corrupt republic featured prominently, as did the collusion of public authorities with anti-anarchist repression. President Carnot was repeatedly vilified, amidst numerous references to anarchist terrorism: an article in the first issue was signed by ‘Mélinite’ (an explosive product) and a section called ‘capitalist menu’ offered a ‘tête de veau à la sauce Carnot’ and ‘to finish, ANARCHIST BOMB’. But such references were above all rhetorical and polemical. The September 1894 issue declared itself in favour of trade unions and disapproved of the increasingly rigid distinction between ‘theorists and terrorists’, between ‘bourgeois scribblers’ and the champions of action: ‘There cannot be a privileged aristocracy, protected by its moderation, and a prole whom the ‘terrorist’ label would sentence to be disdained or treated harshly. Neither theorists nor terrorists: equal, fighting anarchists’.

The paper served both a local and an international network. It advertised the businesses of several London comrades as well as the international bookshop of Achille Leroy and the shops of Constant Martin and Duprat in Paris. It reported on Parisian events and the continental labour movement. Rather unusually, it devoted considerable space

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to the activities and daily lives of the London groups; its second issue featured a long article on the French police’s failed endeavours to recruit informers among the London groups.

The London series of Émile Pouget’s *Père peinard* started in September 1894; it was an extremely influential exile publication, and has been credited with setting out the new pro-union direction of anarchist communism.\(^1^7\) It was widely distributed, with subscribers in the United States and South America. It followed on its Parisian predecessor – ‘before and above all proletarian’ and polemical\(^1^8\) – and dealt with repression in France, the international labour movement and general strategic themes. Apart from occasional remarks, Pouget glossed over Britain and the life of the London groups, but in January 1895, an entire issue entitled ‘Judas!’ discussed the case of the informer Cottance, who had just been unmasked by the comrades in London (see chapters 4 and 5).

The French colonies also produced and sent out significant amounts of manifestoes and placards: the London-based group *L’Anonymat* is believed to have authored 14 placards in French between 1894–98, extending the campaign started by *L’International* against high-profile anarchist communists and the permeation of trade unions by the anarchists, all written in an aggressive and bilious – albeit quite humorous – tone. Titles like *L’Anonymat aux Pitres et aux Pleutres de l’Anarchie religieuse* (From *L’Anonymat* to the clowns and cowards of religious anarchy) or *In Memoriam. Malatohohoho et le génie Pouget* speak for themselves. Other groups also produced general propaganda posters, often with an emphasis on antimilitarism, such as *Aux Conscrits* and *Dynamite et Panama*.

The usual circulation of these publications ranged from 500 to 5,000 (exceptionally), although their actual readership is likely to have been larger, especially for the more famous publications.\(^1^9\) Informers overplayed the circulation of anarchist literature, possibly as a result of the comrades’ own boasts: for instance, a note from 1893 claimed that 100,000 copies of a


\(^{19}\) APP BA 1508, reports by Z.6 dated 15 November 1893 and 17 November 1893.
London manifesto were to be printed in France, a figure inconsistent with both the anarchists’ financial difficulties and the scale of the surveillance exerted over them.\textsuperscript{20} Newspapers and manifestoes were usually sent in packets of a few hundreds, with a maximum of 1,000–2,000 copies being printed in most cases.\textsuperscript{21}

These were typical exile publications, very much or even exclusively oriented towards France through both their contents and target audience. The first three issues of \textit{Le Rothschild} did not contain a single reference to political events outside France, apart from the brief mention that it was ‘reproduced courtesy of an anarchist group’ based in Windmill Street. They were sent abroad through elaborate manoeuvres.\textsuperscript{22} Using a postal parcel was feasible but risky: in December 1893, the Trélazé-based anarchist Henri Mercier was reported to the police after receiving two bundles of the London manifesto \textit{Les Dynamitards aux panamitards}.\textsuperscript{23} In Paris, comrade Lucas was also reported as distributing manifestoes from London, and Boirond as being the correspondent of the London \textit{Père peinard}.\textsuperscript{24} The London series of the \textit{Peinard} may indeed have been printed by acquaintances of Pouget’s in Belgium and smuggled into France from there.\textsuperscript{25} Women crossing the Channel often carried material: ‘The \textit{femme Bidault} smuggles a few hundred \textit{Père peinard} when visiting her husband in Nantes,’ a spy reported, while the \textit{femme Cohen} went to Paris ‘heavy with various messages for several comrades’.\textsuperscript{26} To prevent easy identification, issue 8 of \textit{L’International} appeared under the title \textit{L’Industrie Francaise à Londres} and issue 9 as a supplement to \textit{Courrier de Londres et de l’Europe}. The multilingual pamphlet ‘\textit{Résolution et Révolution},’ was sent from

\textsuperscript{20} APP BA 1508, report by Monte Carlo dated 30 November 1893.
\textsuperscript{21} APP BA 1509 report by Z.6 dated 21 July 1894; report by Jarvis dated 20 September 1894; report by Lapeyre dated 15 January 1895.
\textsuperscript{22} Andrew Carlson, \textit{Anarchism in Germany} (Metuchen. NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1972), pp. 205–14.
\textsuperscript{23} AN F7 12504, 20 December 1893, letter from the \textit{Préfet of Angers}.
\textsuperscript{24} APP BA 1503, 21 December 1893.
\textsuperscript{25} APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 7 February 1894.
\textsuperscript{26} APP BA 1509, report by A41 dated 17 September 1894; report by Jarvis dated 9 May 1894.
London in the pages of the respectable *Bulletin de la Société des Femmes de France*.\(^{27}\) Another editorial strategy was the use of antiphrasis, as in the *Rothschild*: ‘Social revolution, that’s the enemy! We cannot ignore it, it is coming and if we do not pay attention, it will soon break out. The danger is imminent’.\(^{28}\) The article concluded with a parodic call: ‘Exploiters of the world, unite’.

Loose but efficient cross-Channel networks ensured the distribution of written propaganda all over France, unless intercepted by the police: a 1892 report from the *Préfet* to the Home secretary mentioned 31 anarchists ‘serving as correspondents in a number of French cities for the *Comité central anarchiste*’ in London.\(^{29}\) This network was not the well-organised permanent structure which informers and authorities so often alluded to; this would have been in contradiction with anarchist views on organisation and was not even a material possibility. Instead, there were small personal and often transient networks which were essential for the dissemination of written propaganda material. Henri Mercier of Trélazé received posters from England; late in 1893, two parcels containing a hundred copies of the pamphlet *Les Dynamitards aux Panamitards* addressed to him were ‘found’ at the local post office.\(^{30}\) In the French area of Meurthe-et-Moselle, comrades Joubert and Serrure were in contact with London and other French comrades.\(^{31}\) Spies reported very closely on the circulation of print material, giving the names of its French recipients when possible.\(^{32}\) This surveillance work extended beyond flows of print material: ‘You should open Bidault’s

\(^{27}\) TNA HO 144/258/A55684, June 1894.


\(^{30}\) AN F7 12504, 20 December 1893, letter from the *Préfet of Angers*.

\(^{31}\) AN F7 12504, report from Meurthe et Moselle, n.d. (1893).

\(^{32}\) APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 15 November 1893.
letters… We know that he is in contact with the main provincial anarchists, including those of Roubaix.’

The anarchist press from France was available in Britain, at the Autonomie Club, in the bookshops of the exiles Lapie and, after 1895, Pelletier on Charlotte Street. A cautious subscription system operated for most papers: readers were referred to by numbers and initials to prevent circulating nominal lists. Some exiles occasionally wrote in the papers based in France, although the French anarchist press was moribund during the peak of exile. *La Révolte* played a pivotal role in putting comrades in contact; during the exile years, the ‘*Petite Correspondance*’ section of the paper ran ads dealing with propaganda or more personal issues:


The London comrades would like to inform their continental friends of the death of comrade Saint-Martin, a cook in London.

Selling pamphlets across the Channel was common: ‘London. A group has just published [Kropotkin’s] *Entre Paysans* in Armenian. Write to M. Voymich, 15 Augustin (sic) Road’.

In addition to French-language propaganda, several Francophone comrades contributed more or less regularly to British papers, resulting in significant collaborations between the French and the British anarchist press. Pouget, Michel, Hamon and Mollet wrote in *The Torch* (1891–92; 1894–96), which was a meeting place and discussion forum for French, Italian and

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33 APP BA 1510 report by Jarvis dated 16 December 1893.

34 *La Révolte*, 15 July 1893, VI, 44, ‘Communications et correspondance’.

35 *La Révolte*, 15 July 1893, VI, 44, ‘Communications et correspondance’.

36 *La Révolte*, 19 August 1893, VI, 49, ‘Communications et correspondance’.
British comrades. Merlino was a regular contributor, along with Antonio Agresti. Pro-union British militants such as Edward Leggatt were also connected with the paper. Louise Michel published her *Histoire de la Commune* in instalments in James Tochatti’s *Liberty*, which also announced in warm terms the reappearance of *Père peinard* in London, giving details for readers to order it and wishing Pouget ‘all the success his pluck and energy so thoroughly merit’. Malato was the French correspondent of *Freedom* from the late 1880s onwards; from London, he also contributed to Paris’s non-anarchist paper *L’Intransigeant*, under the pseudonym ‘Cosmo’. However, the most significant and long-lived Franco-British endeavour was *La Révolte*, which was published in very close association with *Freedom*.

**A two-tier international militancy**

A small degree of internationalisation had been typical of previous generations of revolutionary refugees in London, most of whom only formed occasional and mainly symbolical links with their hosts, before the latter grew indifferent to this radical presence, or hostile to the revolutionary threat it seemed to embody. The anarchists were no exception: militant and social internationalisation was an elite phenomenon. However, the degree of international sentiment shown at grassroots level among the comrades could be surprising. This was summarised rather perceptively by agent Serge: ‘While, for the language, the mores,
the way of thinking, they gather according to their origins, they do get together for joint discussions, large audiences or shows’. 40

One of the earliest concerns of the international anarchist colonies in London from the 1880s onwards – and perhaps a sign of their Anglicization – had been to set up clubs where they could meet up. The Autonomie Club, originally based on Charlotte Street and later relocated to Great Windmill Street, was the main venue where international anarchists congregated during the eventful early 1890s. *Freedom* depicted an evening at the Club in early 1891 in a rather genial way:

A glance round the large room, with its pleasant little tea tables, each brightened by the music of friendly talk, showed Germans and Frenchmen from the Autonomie in conversation with Englishmen from the provinces, Jewish comrades from Berners Street, laughing and talking with members of the Italian group, the editor of the *Arbeter Fraint* in amicable discussion with one of the *Freedom* staff, friends from the Hammersmith Socialist Society, the London Socialist league, all cordially mingling with anarchist-communists from every group in London. 41

This pleasant evocation probably stemmed from a desire to give a positive, brotherly and pacific image of the comrades, a key stake at the time. The reality was less idyllic, as suggested by Scotland Yard’s first detective-sergeant Patrick McIntyre’s evocation: ‘Here the malcontents of all nations fraternised and denounced their various Governments’ to their hearts’ content, mixing with their denunciation the largest possible quantities of lager beer and miscellaneous liqueurs’. 42 The Club was usually described as shabby and cramped:

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40 APP BA 1509, report by Serge dated 25 January 1894.


according to Malato, it consisted of a long and narrow room with a canteen and two or three small rooms.43

It started in 1890 as a meeting and discussion place for the comrades in the capital and became the hub of international anarchist militancy, in particular for the French. It was organised in national sections meeting each on a specific weekday44, although it is uncertain whether this practice carried on as years went by. Nonetheless, the Club provided a setting for international encounters, occasionally fostering lasting ties between the comrades. Pietro Dipaola has shown that

the anarchist clubs in London brought together different traditions of sociability and to some extent different traditions melted together. These clubs were centres of cultural production… Educational circles for the education of the working class were also often established. The clubs were the most visible sign of the colony of foreign anarchist refugees and for this reason they were the easiest source for popular magazines and newspapers in the construction of the image of the anarchist.45

During its brief and eventful existence, the Club played all these roles. Malato described it as a ‘shelter’ for homeless refugees and the stage for many conflicts.46 It provides the background to many spy reports and was attended by strollers, scandal-hungry journalists, anonymous comrades and, occasionally, high-profile militants. Above all, it was the haunt of the most extreme French and Italian companions and those from L’Anonymat. The least reputable French militants, such as Guillaume Bordes, were regulars at the club and spies soon infiltrated it, making it ‘notorious as a rendezvous for spies in the pay of almost every European Government’, so that many comrades chose to avoid it. A fire, followed by a police search in the aftermath of the Greenwich explosion, led to its closure in February 1894,

43 Malato, Les Joyeusetés de l’exil, p. 100.

44 La Tribune libre, 15 November 1880, I, 1, ‘Convocations’, p. 16.


although it reopened in July. But from then on, the comrades’ separation was reinforced by the existence of national clubs, such as the Italians’ Club in Clerkenwell, the Scandinavian Club on Rathbone Street, the Berners Street Club or the German communist Club on Grafton Street (visited by the anarchists and ‘the dregs of the refugees’, according to one informer). Apart from the Grafton Street Club, these places almost never appear in the French informers’ reports, which suggests that they saw few international exchanges. The French increasingly met in private houses or unofficial meeting points, like an Italian restaurant on Rathbone place or Delebecque’s house, before heading back to France en masse at the beginning of 1895. Some clubs outside London were similarly propitious to socialisation and internationalisation, on a much smaller scale; a notorious example is the Walsall anarchist club, where the French, Belgian, Italian and British comrades involved in the 1893 bomb-making scandal had met.

Another cornerstone of international militancy and sociability was the militant calendar which brought together militants from the different national groups on a number of key dates. It provides a striking illustration of the role of celebrations as a militant ritual:

Any celebration… has a double function. It is a constitutive element of a group’s cohesion and helps its members become aware of their strength. Everyone finds themselves more mobilised and motivated to defend shared ideals. In the face of the outside world, celebrations express the group’s identity and give it an opportunity to display its vitality.

These meetings were instrumental in building up solidarity; they were the main symbolical manifestations of anarchist internationalism, which they also reinforced through their pedagogic and emotional impact. Through this statement of unity, celebrations were a staging of the brotherly society to come, beyond the divisions of everyday life. These international

47 APP BA 1509, report by Bourgeois dated 22 January 1895.

gatherings commemorated central events in the collective memory of anarchism. The key
dates in the anarchist calendar were 18 March, the commemoration of ‘Chicago’ on 11
November and May Day, a militant practice still in its infancy. Occasional gatherings also
occurred for the funeral of a comrade or one-off political events, notably after the accidental
death of Martial Bourdin in the 1894 Greenwich explosion. Other exceptional events included
visits from eminent personalities from somewhere else in Britain or abroad; thus with Lucy
Parsons in 1888, Sébastien Faure’s 1895 tour or Emma Goldman’s 1899-1900 visit to
London.\(^\text{49}\) Meetings were also organised in line with political events, to protest against anti-
anarchist repression, war threats, visits of foreign sovereigns and of course during Queen
Victoria’s 1897 Jubilee.

On these occasions, the companions expressed their solidarity and unity through more
or less elaborate political stagings and symbols. The funeral of Mrs Mowbray, the wife of the
British comrade Charles Mowbray, illustrates the pattern of these events: songs were sung,
followed by a collection, a speech and a procession fronted by a banner bearing the words
‘Remember Chicago’.\(^\text{50}\) It was above all in order to see Louise Michel, Kropotkin and
Malatesta that the public came. Other regular speakers were Rocker, Yanovsky, Mowbray,
Merlino, the British anarchist Agnes Henry and John Turner, the Leaguers HB Samuels,
Samuel Barker, David Nicoll, Leggat, Liberty’s James Tochatti, the Italian Pietro Gori …
This is evidence of the role played by individual personalities, and none more so than Louise
Michel, in establishing both grassroots and elite internationalism.\(^\text{51}\) Malato depicted a typical
May Day celebration in \textit{L’Intransigeant}, with its mixture of strategic discussions, emotional
motives and recurring symbolism:

\(^{49}\) Emma Goldman, \textit{Living my Life}, (London: Duckworth, 1932), 2 vol.; APP BA 1510, report by
Eureka dated 3 January 1900.


\(^{51}\) Georges Haupt, ‘International Leading Groups in the Working-Class Movement’ in \textit{Aspects of
International Socialism}, pp. 81–100.
Using one of 16 platforms, around two black flags and a red flag, the anarchists started talking. Our friend Louise Michel hailed the breaking dawn of the Revolution. Malatesta… Defendi… and many writers from Freedom and Commonweal also address the audience. At 5 o’clock, resolutions in favour of the 8-hour day are decided at every platform, and adopted through acclamations. The fanfares then play the Marseillaise and the exit parade begins.52

Speeches were sometimes very lyrical and incantatory, celebrating the coming revolution; others were critical and theoretical, fulfilling a pedagogical function, especially if their speaker was renowned; Kropotkin excelled at turning commemorations into pedagogic occasions. These were golden opportunities for internationalist exhortations:

The people of no one country can afford to neglect the affairs of another; the essence of the workers’ movement is its internationality, and the wrongs of one part are the wrongs of all … the workers of each country should encourage the workers of others to resistance of such things as the Chicago affair.53

In those critical years, commemorations also provided a platform to discuss anarchist attacks and trade unionism. These occasions generally concluded with individual or collective revolutionary singing.

Commemorations also took place outside London, with French comrades occasionally playing a significant part. In Norwich, Mollet frequently concluded proceedings by singing a revolutionary anthem. In Edinburgh, the Commune veteran Lebeau’s rendition of the La Carmagnole, sometimes supported by fellow Communard Léo Melliet, was given pride of place year after year. This kind of foregrounding suggests that France still had a unique status as the motherland of the Revolution, which also contributed to developing the French comrades’ international connections; a similar process has been highlighted among

52 L’Intransigeant, 4 May 1892, ‘Le 1er mai à Londres’, cutting contained in file APP BA 1508.

Francophone socialist exiles in the United States in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{54} The centrality of French revolutionary culture in the international movement also appears in the recurrence of French songs during these events, such as \textit{La Carmagnole} or even \textit{La Marseillaise}, which, ironically, French comrades detested because of its connection with the republican regime. Such adaptations testify to the symbolical adjustments required by the transposition of French militant culture to another setting, where connotations were lost or gained in translation, or hushed as a consequence of nostalgia among the exiles. Local commemorations were connected with the rest of the international anarchist movement: messages of brotherliness were sent to comrades in other locations and the gatherings were reported in the press, unfailingly and at length. For some time, these events created links between the different socialist groups in Britain, especially on May Day and the anniversary of the Commune, which were important symbols for the socialist movement as a whole.\textsuperscript{55} The posters printed on these occasions testify to their cross-socialist character until the early-1890s watershed. However, this ecumenism grew rarer as anarchists became increasingly ostracised: from May 1890 onwards, the anarchists occupied a separate podium on Hyde Park.\textsuperscript{56}

Multilingualism was a key feature of anarchist circles, as evidenced by Paul Delesalle’s remark on one of the London clubs in the early twentieth century: ‘I do not know of a language which is not spoken there’.\textsuperscript{57} Nonetheless, practical internationalism required solutions to overcome the linguistic barriers between the comrades. In Aberdeen, French


\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Les Temps nouveaux}, 29 June 1901, VII, 9, ‘Mouvement social’, p. 2.
lessons were organised in the Revolutionary Socialist Federation: ‘We have formed a French class to enable us to read those revolutionary works which are published in French, and hope ere long to have quite a knowledge of the French anarchists’. Multilingual comrades sometimes translated speeches given in other languages; Kropotkin and Coulon were Louise Michel’s main interpreters. When Michel eventually decided to learn English, this was announced as a great internationalist gesture. While Esperanto was championed by the anarchists in France as a prerequisite of internationalism, there are virtually no traces of endeavours to use it as a way of overcoming problems of communication among the exiles.

Militant entertainment also played an important role in international anarchist sociabilities. Charity evenings were organised to collect funds for a manifesto or a paper, for the Autonomie Club, in support of a specific group (like the Spanish anarchist refugees who arrived in Britain in 1897) or an individual in great difficulty. Libertarian entertainment consisted of balls, even masked balls sometimes, recitals or ‘socials’. In a recreational rather than militant perspective, the comrades organised walks or picnics every summer. In their standard format, ‘socials’ opened with a speech given by a famous comrade, after which pamphlets and papers were sold and individual or collective songs were sung. These were not necessarily revolutionary anthems: Malato mentions an Italian opera concert alongside popular songs or stories with a political content (Le Bal de l’Hôtel de Ville, La chanson du chiffonnier). There were also theatrical performances, usually of militant plays, either lyrical (such as Michel’s) or comical (Malato’s). The latter’s ‘one-act vaudeville’, Mariage par la dynamite, was performed at Grafton Hall on 27 March 1893. Performers included Émile Voyer (or Voyez), Mme Bertgues and Mme Réval, the Italians Agosto and Giaccone. Delorme played the part of Goron, the head of the Sûreté at the Préfecture, Malato that of Inspector Fédée, two anarchist nemeses and laughing stocks from the French police. Armand

59 Malato, Les Joyeusetés de l’exil, p. 175.
Matha was a prompter. Malato’s intention was satirical; he claimed to have cast himself as Fédée due to a ‘secret sympathy for the outstanding policeman who watches over us so well’. The performance was followed by a speech by Michel on ‘l’Art Futur’ and a ball. Several renowned personalities attended the evening, including the Scottish poet Robert Buchanan and the writer Harriet Jay, and some journalists from the Pall Mall Gazette and the Morning, no doubt in search of new material to feed their anti-anarchist tirades.

These gatherings inspired outside observers with terror and were perceived as very threatening revolutionary meetings. Although it was quite uneventful, The Times depicted the funeral of Mrs Mowbray as evidence that anarchists were bent on ‘disturb[ing] the public peace’, which points to the discrepancy between the perception and the realities of anarchist political life, and the alarm caused by the sheer sight of the companions. Almost twenty years after its demise, paying tribute to the Commune remained a most subversive gesture:

The London celebration of the anniversary of the Paris Commune on the night of March 18, 1889, consisted of a small crowd of boozy, beery, pot-valiant, squalid, frowsy, sodden Whitechapel outcasts who shrieked and fought in a small hall in their district under the eye of a single policeman … All of the women had soiled red flags and handkerchiefs, which they waved in the air as they shrieked ‘Blood!’ in chorus. Then they would sink back into drunken indifference till the word ‘blood’ was mentioned again.

These fears point to the visual, aesthetic dimension of these festivities, ‘meant to be seen, not heard’; appearances indeed played a key part in the conspiratorial imagination surrounding anarchism. This transpires in the belief in the existence of specific anarchist signs of allegiance and the scrutiny of anarchist physiognomy. The description of comrade Gallau on the occasion of Bourdin’s funeral is a good example; Gallau, The Times claimed, sported ‘a splendid necktie of black and red satin of the most expensive quality and there is, we believe,

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excellent reason for supposing that this constitutes the badge of the most dangerous group of extreme anarchists’. Representations of anarchist gatherings in the mainstream press echoed such stereotypes, with a constant search for cryptic signs of allegiance.

**Elites in exile: militancy, sociability and networks**

Despite the initial impression of national segregation, these international rituals testified to a genuine but circumscribed and symbolical internationalism. These contacts were made possible above all by the charismatic appeal of the movement’s most eminent figures, so that the exiles’ sociabilities must be understood through those of the most high-profile militants – ‘the shadow circle of leaders’ bound by ‘ties of personal friendship or shared experience’, in the words of George Woodcock. The links among the anarchist elite were instrumental in making the movement more international in its functioning and outlook, and also illustrate the efficiency of these small networks. The development and early dissemination of pro-union ideas in the early 1890s were a significant outcome this elite militancy.

Few international militants held more prestige than Louise Michel, the ‘black virgin’, a ‘fervent internationalist’, ‘symbol of the Commune and the revolution forever reborn’ who was at the centre of several international networks. Her life was in striking conformity with her internationalist principles: a true Anglophile, she stayed in Britain out of personal choice until her death in 1905, due to a preference for British liberalism and its greater freedoms. An icon of revolution itself, she was the most famous of the French exiles, and the only one to be greeted with one of the great rituals of exile, a mass demonstration welcoming her on the train platform upon her return to France. After refusing to openly criticise her close friend Henri

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Rochefort for his ultra-nationalist positions during the Dreyfus affair, she went through a temporary disgrace, especially in France, but intermittently regained her iconic status. In London, she lived with Charlotte Vauvelle and her brother Achille on Fitzroy Square before moving to East Dulwich. She was in contact with many militants, both well-known and anonymous, who often worshipped her. Juliet Soskice, cousin of The Torch’s editors Olive, Helen and Arthur Rossetti, describes her first encounter with Michel in Hyde Park, when distributing tracts with her cousins: ‘I said please was it quite true that she had been in prison? I thought that as she was a lady there might be some mistake. She said it was quite true, and what had little girls to do with things like that?’

Michel contributed to most of London’s anarchist publications; her writings were sometimes translated by British poetess Louise Bevington and published in Freedom. Her renown went beyond anarchist circles and her works were translated into English for readers who were not necessarily anarchists. However, she was often sneered at by fellow socialists: ‘She has gone mad with the misery of the world… That misery to her blots out all light, all grace, all beauty out of life’, Annie Besant observed in 1883. ‘Talking of Louise Michel, [Stepniak] said she was a fine character, an ideal woman, but crazy, all wrong.’ Her sentimental and non-theoretical brand of anarchism may well have appeared as an aberration for revolutionaries focused on strategic and ideological aspects. Nonetheless, her prestige granted her a unique rallying power and her presence in the capital greatly contributed to the national and international cohesion of the comrades, all the more as the need for international fraternity and cooperation was one of her choice topics when speaking in public:

70 Louise Michel Archive, IISG, correspondence, letter from Louise Bevington to Louise Michel dated 17 November 1894.
71 National Reformer, 21 January 1883.
I hereby ask you if you can come sunday [sic] 9 November at 12.30 at the club from where the procession, headed by a red flag, will leave for Liverpool [sic] station because the comrades would be happy if you could say a word at the graveyard, you could speak a little about the union of peoples or the international, a comrade asked her on the occasion of a German comrade’s funeral. Her double role as an internationalist propagandist is apparent: she brought companions closer and preached the good word of international unity.

Her internationalism materialised in the International Anarchist School for the refugees’ children which she opened in 1890 on Fitzroy Square. The initiative came from Coulon, who was also the School’s secretary. Ahead of the opening, a thousand leaflets were sent to Paris’s Bourse du Travail and in December 1890, Freedom ran an ad announcing that the school was open to children of all nationalities, even if the French were predominant. Just before the opening, Père peinard called on all those interested in the education of youth to take part in a fundraising lottery. The teaching was based on Bakunin’s educational principles, with an emphasis on scientific and rational methods, personal dignity and individual independence, as well as clear references to anarchism: a visitor recalled a history lesson illustrated by images of the hung Chicago martyrs and the Communards being shot. The influence of the libertarian educationalist Paul Robin could be felt through the notion of integral education, both physical and intellectual. Above all, the school aimed to ‘develop among children the principles of humanity and justice essential in the nineteenth century.’ French, English, German, Music, Drawing, Sewing and Etching were taught. Technical teaching was included, as well as adult classes, especially English lessons for ‘foreigners arriving in London’. Michel taught piano.

The school, a reflection of her longstanding interest in education as a former school teacher,

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73 Louise Michel Archive, IISG, correspondence, letter from Capt to Louise Michel, 7 November 1890.
75 Le Père peinard, 30 November 1890, II, 89, ‘Communications. Londres’.
77 Thomas, Louise Michel, p. 36; Le Gaulois, 27 December 1890.
announced a long tradition of libertarian pedagogy; it testifies to the many forms of propaganda in exile and the importance of anarchist cultural activities. Its strong internationalist intent was reflected in its directing committee, which included William Morris, Malatesta and Kropotkin; Charles Clauss was the Committee’s secretary and Delebecque its treasurer. Among the teachers were Victorine Rouchy-Brocher, pioneering educationalist Miss Rachel McMillan, Agnes Henry, Mrs Dryhurst, a Professor Belgrave and Coulon. French comrades Bernard, Capt and Nebout sat on the ‘Control commission’.

This innovative project came to a sad end in 1892, when explosives and bomb-making material were found in the school’s basement, having most likely been placed there by Coulon, who lived on the premises.78 Like most anarchist ventures, the school also received its fair share of stereotype-laden sneers: ‘The school was, of course, a failure… Louise and two or three others attempted to teach simultaneously several different subjects. Ordinary notions of school discipline received scant attention. The fundamental anarchist principle of individual liberty for all and everyone here was carried out in its fullness. The teachers did try to teach, but the boys and girls could not possibly learn or even hear anything’.79 Another witness gives a different description, however, underlining the decrepit condition of the premises (‘a couple of dingy rooms approached by a dirty staircase, in a squalid yards’), but eluding anti-anarchist stereotypes by saying that the children wore dirty clothes but were ‘very intelligent-looking’.80

Lastly, in a community faced with constant financial difficulties, whose militant work required significant funds, Michel helped collect money, through paid conferences and publications, or by using her non-anarchist and better-off connections (such as Rochefort and the notorious Duchess of Uzès). Her legendary generosity was also often called upon by those

78 Quail, *The Slow-Burning Fuse*, chapter 6, pp. 103–43.
79 Hart, *Confessions of an anarchist*, pp. 120–1.
who had just arrived, some of whom were complete strangers\textsuperscript{81}; her unflagging willingness to help those who came to her, to the point of giving what little money she had to live on, shows the remarkable consistency between her ideas and her way of life.

Pouget’s London year is highly enigmatic. The historiographic legend is that the Père peinard’s well-known editor formulated his highly influential pro-trade union ideas in the wake of his stay in London, based partly on the example of British trade unionism and discussions with Italian comrades promoting organisation. As early as 1894, in a landmark issue of the paper’s London series, and after his return to France in 1895, Pouget was one of the leading advocates of an anarchist infiltration of French trade unions. His time in London is therefore taken to have initiated what later became the CGT’s dominant ideology and influenced workers’ movements in many countries (see chapter 6). In fact, the first pro-union ideas had been formulated in Italian circles and in the wake of the London dock strike before Pouget fled for London, which makes any notion of a revelation or sudden change inaccurate, although the impact of the British example must be acknowledged.

Pouget left France on 21 February 1894, before the Procès des Trente, in which he was indicted.\textsuperscript{82} He settled down in Islington, at 23, King Edward Street, in a modest room, but seems to have faced lasting housing problems: ‘Pouget cannot find a place to stay and is sick of London’, an informer wrote quite a few months after his arrival.\textsuperscript{83} He was eagerly awaited by the police: ‘I have written concerning your request. You know how difficult this is’, one of them wrote intriguingly in a report annotated by the Préfecture addressee as referring to Pouget.\textsuperscript{84} There is no doubt that agents were under special instructions to glean as much information as possible regarding him. Being extremely wary of informers and police surveillance, Pouget had his post sent to the Torch office, on Arlington Road in Camden

\textsuperscript{81} Descaves Collection, Louise Michel Archive, IISG, letter dated 2 July 1903; letter to Cova dated 3 August 1901; Gustave Brocher Papers, IISG, letter to Malatesta dated 21 May 1896.

\textsuperscript{82} Delesalle, Emile Pouget Ad Memoriam.

\textsuperscript{83} APP BA 1509, report by Satin dated 30 November 1894.

\textsuperscript{84} APP BA 1509, report by Z.6 dated 17 January 1894.
Town, and then later to a new Islington address, using the alias Blacksmile. He asked his correspondents to sign their letters with a number rather than with their names and used the alias Émile Boiteaux to remain incognito.  

His networks were different from those of the average Soho anarchist. According to police reports, he lived in London with ‘his wife and Hamon; Djéni live[d] in the same house… [he] mainly frequent[ed] Djeni, Hamon, Duprat, and also Lapie, Malatesta and Malato’. Malatesta also lived in Islington, 112 High Street; Pouget was therefore described as belonging to a hypothetical ‘Groupe Islington’ by spies. Outside anarchist circles, Pouget was in touch with the neo-impressionist Lucien Pissarro and his wife Esther, who lived near Epping in Surrey. Pouget also associated with exiled writers like Darien, other distinguished militants and anarchist sympathisers. He sometimes attended the Autonomie Club and was in contact with lesser-known French anarchists. His international contacts are another distinguishing trait: he was close to the Torch group, many of whom were early converts to trade unionism.

He was very terse regarding his life in London, except for a few and mainly negative comments in his paper: ‘We are in London… a not very funny city where bars are as rare as a white robin. No way to sprawl on a wall seat and chew the fat with mates’. He remained focused on France during his time in London and devoted himself to press activities, having collected funds from comrades in Liege, Hastings, Brighton, Brooklyn, and Paterson to launch a new paper.

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85 Nettlau, Frankreich Persönen, Max Nettlau Papers, IISG, item 356; Augustin Hamon Papers, IISG, correspondence, letter to Augustin Hamon (no date).  
86 APP BA 1511, inventory dated 27 December 1894, ‘Anarchistes résidant à Londres’.  
87 Augustin Hamon Papers, IISG, letter from Pissarro to Hamon dated 4 December 1894.  
88 Augustin Hamon Papers, IISG letter from Pouget to Hamon dated 15 August 1894.  
90 Max Nettlau Papers, IISG, ‘Frankreich Personen’, Émile Pouget file; Le Père peinard, November 1894, I, 4, ‘Souscriptions’.  

He returned to France in February 1895. Knowing that the Wicked Laws would still be enforced and unsure of the extension of the February 1895 amnesty, he chose to risk jail rather than stay in London: ‘If I don’t get an amnesty, I will do my time, and I’ll be damned if I don’t see it through’.91 After his acquittal, he quickly threw himself into new journalistic projects. From London, he had already sought the comrades’ financial support for a bimonthly publication entitled *Le Droit à l’aisance*.92 Upon his return, he initiated a vigorous pro-union propaganda in his paper *La Sociale* (renamed *Père peinard* in October 1896) and *Le Journal du peuple*, a collective project led by Sébastien Faure.

Out of all of London’s anarchist exiles, none was more influential than the revolutionary doyen Peter Kropotkin. The Russian Prince’s international aura was even greater than Louise Michel’s, and their styles were radically different too: his social circle was more elitist and he made a point of staying clear of the Soho anarchists, except when he spoke at large events. His quiet character, pleasant and soft-spoken manners and talent as a geographer earned him respect far beyond anarchist groups. In many respects, Kropotkin was a late incarnation of the figure of the romantic exile previously embodied by Alexander Herzen, Victor Hugo, Lajos Kossuth and, to some extent, Karl Marx – a thinker living away from the humdrum and squabbles of the proscription, ‘the writer whose stature grew in exile’.93 Visions of Kropotkin in his various retreats feature in the memoirs of the many visitors who came to see him: ‘Let us just picture him again, walking along Brighton Rock, a convalescent, standing high, shoulders square, a stick in his hand, thinking about the article which he was about to start, thinking of the Russia of his childhood, thinking of a new social order’.94

91 Augustin Hamon Papers, IISG, correspondence, letter from Pouget to Hamon, 4 February 1894.
93 Aprile, ‘Du singulier au pluriel’, p. 175.
From the moment he settled in Britain in 1886, the ‘anarchist prince’ was a sought-after orator. He spoke every year at the anniversaries of the Commune and Chicago and on May Day, as well as on many different occasions, in London, the provinces and, less frequently, abroad. From around 1895, his health problems led him gradually away from London and his spoken propaganda became less regular. His written output was very prolific; it was in Britain that he wrote some of his most influential essays, notably expounding his theory of mutual aid. He also contributed assiduously to *Freedom* and *Le Révolté, La Révolte* and *Les Temps nouveaux* and intermittently acted as an editor for both publications. He was a mediator between diverse circles in London. Probably more than his status as the leading anarchist-communist thinker, it is the Russophillia prevalent in socialist, liberal and intellectual circles which explains his strong integration. Sympathy for the victims of Tsarist repression grew especially strong from the 1890s onwards; the reformer Robert Spence Watson, the president of the National Liberal Federation of Great Britain, founded the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, of which several MPs were members. Edward Pease from the Fabian Society was its secretary and Russians of all political allegiances were active in it, Kropotkin among them. The organisation published the anti-Tsarist paper, *Free Russia*. However, the defence of persecuted revolutionaries was also quite divisive, due to a rift between those tolerant of nihilism and its detractors. In the same years, the very influential Russian exile Olga Novikov campaigned against the British support movement and the Society, even putting pressure on Gladstone to incite the members of his government to withdraw from the Society.

Kropotkin’s main connection was with the capital’s Russian exiles and Russophile circles. He was close to the revolutionaries Sergei Stepniak and Warlaam Tcherkesoff.

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95 For a detailed presentation of Kropotkin’s writings, see Avakumovicz and Woodcock, *The Anarchist Prince*.


Stepniak, a writer, translator and activist, was not an anarchist: he was initially a nihilist who had evolved towards the right wing of the socialist movement and conciliatory positions, opposing revolutionary violence, stressing instead the moderate character of pro-Russian associations, and working for a rapprochement between Socialists and Liberals against the Russian regime.\(^98\) Warlaam Tcherkesoff was a communist anarchist activist and propagandist; a Georgian by origin and a member of the nobility like Kropotkin, he fled to Britain in the mid-1870s, having already spent some time in Russian jails. He quickly left for Switzerland, where he met Élisée Reclus and Kropotkin, and took part in the launch of the *Révolté* in 1879. He spent time in Paris and made his way back to London after being expelled in 1880, and became the spokesperson for Georgian nationalists. He briefly returned to Georgia in 1905, but left for London when the revolution gave way to repression. In Britain, he was very active in international anarchist circles. He was married to the sister-in-law of the Dutch anarchist Christian Cornelissen and was a regular contributor to *Freedom* as well as a close friend of Kropotkin and Malatesta. The itineraries of Stepniak, Tcherkesoff and Kropotkin highlight the importance of a broad Franco-Russo-British connection, based on intellectual and ideological affinities (not necessarily anarchist), built in exile (especially in London), reinforced by friendship and occasionally family bonds.

Kropotkin was pivotal in bringing together many of these networks and making an important connection between anarchist and non-anarchist circles. Within the anarchist world, he was one of the few comrades who had links with the strong but largely separate Jewish anarchist movement, although this was mainly through an elitist collaboration with Rudolf Rocker and Saul Yanovsky. It is most likely through his intervention that the French exiles Hamon or Pouget came to contribute to *The Torch*. He had a crucial role for the French anarchists, both in France and in London, notably due to his role in both *Freedom* and *La Révolte*. From the moment Kropotkin settled in Britain, in 1886, a systematic collaboration was put in place with Grave’s successive papers. Grave and Kropotkin maintained a very

regular correspondence from 1885 until at least the First World War and also met directly from time to time, when one of them crossed the Channel. Kropotkin was very active in *La Révolte*’s propaganda in France, publishing articles (sometimes in series) and transcripts of his London conferences. He kept Grave informed of the progress of anarchism in Britain and the country’s general politics, on topics as diverse as social legislation, the Home Rule debates or the progress of ideas on eugenics. Kropotkin was very much a political mentor for Grave, advising on a wide range of questions, from the importance of learning English to key strategic issues such as the evolution towards syndicalism, the need for a new International and, crucially, the war in 1914. Financial support between these papers travelled both ways, depending on everyone’s situation.

This Franco-British network was the most important axis for the diffusion of anarchist communism in both countries. It also helped the exiles travel between London and Paris: Kropotkin told Grave about the London circles, recommended some militants to him, and both made new contacts through each another. Even after the early 1890s, when Kropotkin assumed a background role in editing *Freedom*, he still ensured that the paper’s editors reprinted articles translated from *La Révolte*. Both papers had a correspondent across the Channel: Malato was in charge of *Freedom*’s French section and the exile Lucien Guérineau wrote a column on British life in *Les Temps nouveaux* throughout 1895.

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99 Grave Correspondence, Institut Français d’Histoire Sociale (IFHS), Paris; letter from 1893 (not dated), letter dated 1st August 1912, letter dated 15 February 1912.

100 IFHS, Grave correspondence, letter dated 3 September 1894; letter dated 3 July 1902; latter dated July 1914.

101 IFHS, Grave correspondence, letter dated 22 June 1904, letter dated 8 February 1908.

102 See the letters from Kropotkin to Alfred Marsh, Alfred Marsh Papers, IISG, 26 April 1895; 22 February 1905; 20 July 1905.
Kropotkin enjoyed a remarkable degree of recognition across London’s socialist circles, and belonged to different political, scientific and literary networks. His acquaintances included left-leaning artists and writers William Morris, WB Yeats, Oscar Wilde, William Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, the painter G.F. Watts, Felix Moscheles, as well as Walter Crane. He was part of a broad progressive front which included figures like the Liberal MP Cunninghame Graham and Bernard Shaw, James Keir Hardie and Philip Snowden. He was even lauded by the SDF’s Hyndman, who was very hostile to anarchist ideas and criticised Kropotkin and the whole movement for sacrificing everything to the absolute right of minorities, but nonetheless translated into English Kropotkin’s *Appeal to the Young*, which he regarded as ‘the best propagandist pamphlet that was ever penned’.

Lastly, Kropotkin was active in scientific and academic British circles. From 1893 to 1895 he was involved in the Royal Geographical Society and wrote in the *Geographical Journal*. Through the intermission of the Society’s secretary, Sir John Keltie, Kropotkin also published in *Nature*. He was close to three high-profile contemporary social scientists and academics: the Scottish urbanist and reformer Patrick Geddes (also connected with anarchism through Paul Reclus), the progressive economist James Mavor and the theology professor William Robertson Smith. Through these connections, he was able to help several French comrades integrate intellectual circles, for instance by advising Hamon on how to get his sociological writings reviewed in Britain or by trying – to no avail – to help Louise Michel through an introduction to the Lecturing Agency.

Kropotkin’s stature gave anarchism a degree of respectability and favoured international collaborations, even though there was very little he could do to reverse the increasingly negative public perception of the movement as a result of the early 1890s’

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103 Avakumovicz and Woodcock, *The Anarchist Prince*, pp. 222–3. The presentation of Kropotkin’s connections is largely based on this source.

104 Hyndman, *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 268.

105 Augustin Hamon Papers, IISG, letter from Kropotkin to Hamon, 20 July 1893.
terrorism. On an individual level, next to the wretched poverty and isolation which most anarchist exiles were faced with, and despite his own material hardships, he provides an example of exile becoming a factor of professional integration and increased recognition. He illustrates the connections of elite anarchist networks with artistic, literary, scientific and political circles. He played a key role in qualifying the stereotypical firebrand image of anarchism and replacing the movement in a progressive and humanist tradition instead.

The famous Italian agitator Malatesta was another key figure of London’s anarchist proscription, who had a structuring role within the exiled colonies in Britain, and ‘filled the roles of exilic intellectual revolutionary, tramping artisan and global labour organiser’. He ought to be counted as an influential London anarchist from the point of view of the French refugees, since like many Italians he spoke fluent French and knew many French companions; his militant wanderings also briefly took him to France in the late 1870s, but he eventually settled in London for almost thirty years in total, in 1881–82, 1889–97, 1900–13 and 1914–17, during which he worked as an electrician and a mechanic and had his own workshop in Islington. He was another pillar of the exile circles and, like Michel and Kropotkin, he was a cult figure of international socialism, whose aura reached beyond his homeland, Italy, and strictly anarchist circles. In London, he was close to the Italian colony, the international anarchist intelligentsia (Michel, Malato, Pouget, Kropotkine, Tcherkesoff, Rocker, Alexandre

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108 Rocker, The East End Years, p. 70.

Schapiro) and British socialists. He attended the Democratic Club, a radical literary club near Fleet Street which was a meeting point for liberal collectivists, radical journalists, feminists and leaders of New Unionism.\textsuperscript{110} He also belonged to eclectic socialist circles such as the Kropotkins’ or the Pankhursts’ house in the 1890s, where socialists, Fabians, suffragettes, Freethinkers and radicals mingled and where Stepniak, Morris, Michel and the anarchist John Morrison Davidson, were regular speakers.

Due to his activist conceptions and audience among the comrades, he was suspected of being involved in several terrorist scandals: he was arrested in 1912 for allegedly taking part in the infamous Sydney Street Siege, triggering an international mobilisation which led to his release.\textsuperscript{111} However, crucially, he was one of the very first exponents of the evolution towards organisation and the anarchist infiltration of trade unions. In the early 1890s, he tried to organise the Italian catering employees in London, encouraging them to set up a trade union. After 1898, he was a regular at Tom Mann’s pub, The Enterprise, which was one of the laboratories of the pro-union turn and of metropolitan socialism in general.

\textbf{Towards syndicalism}

The formulation of pro-union ideas in anarchist circles was a key development of the exile years, as summarised by an informer in April 1894: ‘In London, the distinction between anarchists of the bomb and anarchists of the idea is increasingly marked’.\textsuperscript{112} After several years of debates and tentative approaches, this clear stance was taken in quick succession by Italian, French and British groups, and was rooted in their respective national contexts.

In line with the orientations sketched out in the late 1880s, international anarchist gatherings saw calls to infiltrate trade unions as early as 1892. During the Chicago anniversary, Charles Mowbray, who had been a trade unionist for several years, stated that

\textsuperscript{110} Levy, ‘Malatesta in London’, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{111} See chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{112} APP BA 1509, report by Leon dated 13 April 1894.
‘anarchists ought to enter the trade unions to show the workers their true aims. He himself had in a few weeks made a perfect revolution in his own trade society, the Amalgamated Society of Tailors’. A few weeks later, during a meeting at the Autonomie Club, Kropotkin insisted that the revolution would only be successful if anarchists advertised their ideas to workers through trade unions: ‘The chief point to be achieved now, is to make Anarchist ideas permeate the great labor [sic] movement which is so rapidly growing in Europe and America… without any concession to the present authoritarian or narrow tendencies of the movement’. Mowbray was already trying to establish connections between anarchists and East End workers, encouraging the latter to form unions; his underlying idea was of course that trade unions should become revolutionary in the long term: ‘Ultimately the Sick and Burial Fund must die out, and the society will be a fighting trade union’.

*Freedom* took up this watchword around the same time. Unions were praised for enabling ‘some workers at least’ to defend themselves and for being based on the libertarian principle of free association. But they were also denounced for being rife with ‘arbitrary authority, place hunting, red tapism, wire-pulling, conservatism and exclusiveness’. Despite a few caveats, the paper concluded very favourably: ‘Anarchists might hope to do what existing trade unions, with their tendency to develop an aristocratic exclusiveness, will never accomplish – i.e. bring a large part of the disunited masses outside into conscious association, in voluntary groups. The newer unions, like the dockers, talk about trying to do this’. *The Torch* rallied these proto-syndicalist positions at the end of 1893, having reported on national and foreign strikes since 1891. The debate was opened in June 1893 in an article by Fauset McDonald, ‘Organization of anarchists’:

> Trade Unions in their present indefinite organization are so weak and dangerous to individuals… But that Trade Unions show of late very strong symptoms of definite ideals is

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114 *Freedom*, December 1892, VI, 72, ‘Commemoration of the Chicago martyrs’, p. 83.


evident from their conception of a general strike: if they were only to make this their central idea; or, better still, that of Revolution; how quickly organization would go on around it!117

The discussion continued in the following months:

Much thought has been given of late among Anarchists to the question of how best to organise their forces with a view to the Revolution and the best means of propagating their ideas among the workers so as to obtain that end. These questions usually come down to the question of whether Anarchists should or should not join trade unions.118

Whilst answers to this question were often ambiguous, Merlino thought that anarchists actually had no choice:

Now – you argue – ‘when we have these revolutionary situations created for us, then is the moment for the Anarchist to come forward…’ No, dear comrades, then it will be too late… in this case those who have created the movement will control it… Why, our comrades are asking themselves how they can take part in the miners’ strike, and they find out that, with the best intentions, they cannot get a hearing without the permission of some Union officials!119

Leading Italian anarchists, in particular Merlino and Malatesta, had been engaged in pro-union activism and their presence in London stimulated the international reflection on the topic. This questioning was rooted in British developments: like Kropotkin, Malatesta had been very impressed by the 1889 Dock strike, from which he derived a conception of the revolutionary strike as an opportunity to attack the state and expropriate the bourgeoisie, which the anarchists ought to participate in.120 As early as 1889, he developed the concept of association, announcing his strategic interest in trade unions: ‘Malatesta envisaged the establishment of an anarchist party that comprised all members who embraced a common program. This organisation had to be an anarchist one, therefore without authority and with

119 The Torch, August 1893, III, 8, ‘Correspondence’, p. 4.
complete freedom of action both for individuals and groups’.

At the end of 1894, *The Torch* publicised its reorientation through a new front-page statement: ‘We know that the Revolution must be accomplished by the workers themselves, and consequently we believe in anarchists entering workmen’s organisations… The labour movement will interest us as much as the revolutionary movement, for the triumph of the latter depends on the former’. This new strategic direction had a French connection: the same issue included a long report on the 1894 Nantes trade union congress, where the general strike had been adopted, despite the opposition of the Marxist-inspired Guesdists; Nantes had therefore put an end to the project of a German-style subordination of unions to a large working-class party. This suggested that ‘the people [were] ready to follow the Anarchists if these latter are practical and will work in the Trades-Unions, with the people, for the people.’

This international propaganda was soon relayed in the French exile papers, starting with Malato’s *Tocsin*:

> Individual action and collective action should not be mutually exclusive but answer to each other and follow each other… Just like you, we know how slow-paced, narrow-minded and fussy trade unions are. However, they are the centre of the economic forces which will turn the old world upside down. Enter them, not so much to dissolve them but to transform them from top to bottom, and raise an army of insurgents.

Malato proposed an original synthesis between the anarchists’ emphasis on individual action and the collective dimension of trade unions: ‘Imagine, answering Vaillant’s bomb or Caserio’s dagger, a good mining strike, led by someone like Ravachol? This would be the beginning of the social revolution’. Pouget was the man who synthesised and refined these ideas and adapted them to the French context. While, for him, ‘there is nothing like violent revolution to further the

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121 Dipaola, Italian Anarchists in London, p. 166.


workers’ rights against the bourgeoisie’, unions presented substantial advantages, not least the fact that there were legal, in a highly repressive context: ‘The big cheeses would be well annoyed if the anarchos’, who they think they have gagged, used this opportunity to infiltrate unions on the sly and spread their ideas without a noise or a boast’. Beyond the immediate situation, the key stake for Pouget was to renew contact with the workers, break out of isolation without reneging on the anarchists’ antiparliamentarianism. Most interestingly, Pouget saw British unions as examples of direct action strictly in the economic field: ‘In London, since last year, shops have closed on Thursday afternoons. To get this, the employees have dealt with the bosses, not the State, and this is why they have succeeded’.

This was a very distant prelude to the key syndicalist principle of trade union independence from the state – later formalised in the 1906 Amiens Charter: the British example presented an alternative to the German model championed by the Guesdists in France, through the emphasis on purely economic action without any parliamentary or other state mediation. There may well have been another British influence in Pouget’s radically new emphasis on the trade unions’ role in defending the workers’ immediate interests and promoting better conditions for them – this aspect, which featured prominently in British unions, had previously been criticised by anarchists as a reformist palliative.

Several direct sources noted the influence of British trade unionism over Pouget: ‘This very empirical militant had been struck by the results obtained by British trade unionists. While in London, he maintained close relations with them, and kept them up after he returned to France’. Hamon noted that ‘anyone who studies the genesis of French Syndicalism will discover a British factor in this social phenomenon as well. One of the founders of Syndicalism was Émile Pouget, who was directly subjected to English influences during a

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125 Le Père peinard, October 1894, I, 3, p. 12.

126 Maitron, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste, p. 256.
long residence in London’. In the weeks following the publication of this now-famous issue of the *Peinard*, the informer Eurêka wrote to Paris that ‘the anarchist groups are trying to form relations with the trade unions in order to carry out effective propaganda’. After strategic debates, the time of groundwork had begun.

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‘It was from London that the sums of money which funded the latest anarchist outrages were sent. It is in London that the most militant comrades live, those at the head of the movement. It is from London, for example, that part of the money from burglaries is sent, in order to support those comrades risking their lives in attacks… what is certain is that support for the comrades comes from London, where the strength of the anarchist party is now.’¹ Very early on, the London anarchist milieu and the French and Italian proscriptions in particular were regarded as the nodal point of the international anarchist conspiracy. In the words of Malato, parodying the rants of the British conservative press,

Four hundred desperadoes, robbers, counterfeiters and killers, whom their crimes have marginalised from any society… have fled continental polices and landed upon our shores.

As soon as they arrive, being as ungrateful as they are unjust and unpatriotic, they start by plotting a large, horrific conspiracy (adjectives always sound good) against their hosts…

These wretched men have decided to penetrate into the houses of all the wealthy people in London and the Kingdom with various excuses, in order to chloroform them… Etc., etc., etc.²

It was a commonly-held belief, in Britain and beyond, that during the critical years 1890-1894 the French exiles were actively conspiring against their host country and other targets from their London headquarters. By the early 1890s, the stereotype of the French ‘dynamiter’ or ‘dynamitard’ – a French term tellingly imported into English – was deeply entrenched. Throughout the 1890s, spies’ reports and newspapers abounded with rumoured conspiracies of terrorist attacks in Britain or on the Continent, sometimes very inventive or chillingly prophetic. This obsession with terrorism betrayed a profound misunderstanding of the political views of most anarchists, the functioning of the movement and the resources actually available

¹ APP BA 1509, Report by Z. 2 dated 25 April 1894.

to them. It also reflected how unfathomable this new type of terrorism was for its contemporaries.\(^3\) The French and British police forces and the popular press played a pivotal role, both directly and indirectly, in fanning those fears and shaping a negative, non-political understanding of anarchism. Across the Western world, anarchists provided a significant impulse to the development of modern police forces, as newly-established democracies sought to gather information about the threats they faced and to suppress them; however, anarchist attacks ‘gave the police a degree of justification and legitimation for their actions’.\(^4\) This complex web of actual threats, imagination and propaganda is all the more difficult to disentangle as the exile years were marked by several attempted terrorist attacks, so that discourses on terrorism cannot be dismissed altogether. These turned the refugees and the British tolerance towards them into a pressing political and diplomatic problem. This chapter sets out what is known about the alleged terrorist activities of the London French, mapping out how the anarchist myth was created and the conditions in which it operated.

**Terrorist attacks and their consequences**

The French colony found itself at the centre of two bomb scandals with long-lasting consequences for the movement and the reception of the exiles. The first was the Walsall case: in 1891, three men met at the Walsall anarchist club.\(^5\) One of them, Frederic Charles (aka Fred Charles, aka Fred Slaughter), a member of the Norwich branch of the Socialist League, had come to look for work. The second one was Auguste Coulon, a French member of the League and a contributor to the *Commonweal* who was notorious for his much-publicised interest in

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5 This account is largely based on John Quail, *The Slow-Burning Fuse*, chapter 6, pp. 103–43.
dynamite, and was already suspected of planting bombs in the basement of Louise Michel’s International School. The third was the Breton engineer Victor Cails, who had sought refuge in Britain after scuffles with the police at the 1891 May Day demonstration. At the Walsall club, they met Joseph Deakin, a local anarchist who was also the club’s secretary. Cails, Charles and Deakin found work in a local foundry and Coulon, who had been instrumental in bringing them together, suggested that they start making bombs. In December 1891, Jean Battola, an Italian shoemaker who had previously travelled through France, introduced himself to the men and enquired about their bomb-making activities. But Battola was, unknowingly, tailed by Inspector William Melville and the chief of the Walsall police. In January 1892, Deakin travelled to London, carrying a parcel. There, he was arrested, but the parcel turned out not to contain any bombs. The following day, Charles and Cails were both arrested, and so was Deakin shortly afterwards. In prison, Deakin confessed to planning to target Russia with a bomb. The group’s court case began at the Stafford assizes in March 1892. Charles, Cails and Battola received a 10-year prison sentence, while Deakin had his sentence reduced to five years for giving information to the police. Coulon, surprisingly, was cleared, which fuelled the existing suspicions that he was a provocateur.

The affair had a considerable resonance in circles with libertarian sympathies. Edward Carpenter, who knew some of the suspects from the Walsall club, was one of the most dedicated champions of their cause, collecting money in Birmingham for a defence fund, campaigning through Freedom and appointing a friend as solicitor for the court case.6 David Nicoll, who led a similar campaign on behalf of the Commonweal group and the Autonomie Club, was to pay a heavy tribute for his unrelenting denunciation of the police manipulation behind the case. He constantly referred to the puzzling fact that Coulon was not prosecuted, despite his long-standing and outspoken interest in explosives and solid evidence that he had been in the pay of Melville. Moreover, Nicoll took the lead in protesting against what was widely perceived as an indictment of anarchism itself (the Walsall trial coincided with

Ravachol’s exploits across the Channel). He led a virulent campaign of demonstrations, meetings and accusatory articles in the Commonweal, especially in the 9 April 1892 issue, which asked whether the Home Secretary, policemen and judge involved in the case were ‘fit to live’. This earned him a sentence of 18 months’ hard labour.

The Walsall scandal had a very detrimental impact on the fortunes of British anarchism, further tarnishing its reputation, at a time when the global campaign of propaganda by the deed peaked, with heavy consequences for the refugees too. It also became a minor liberal cause célèbre. As late as 1897, Carpenter’s pressure group still circulated petitions for the release of the three men. Robert Cunninghame Graham, a Liberal MP with socialist affinities, raised questions in Parliament regarding the treatment of prisoners awaiting trial. He attacked the use of provocateurs in the Walsall case, criticised the detention conditions of anarchist suspects, and pointed to breaches to their right to defend themselves because letters were withheld from them.7 There were two aftershocks concerning the burning issues of terrorism and surveillance. In November 1894, a bomb exploded near the Mayfair house of Judge Hawkins, who had presided over the case (as well as some Fenian legal cases), causing minor material damage.8 And in April 1895, Special Branch Detective Patrick McIntyre, who had been in charge of some of the arrests for the case, published his memoirs in Reynolds’ Newspaper, a journal which had been consistently supportive of the comrades indicted. McIntyre owned up to the use of Coulon as a provocateur by Melville in the Walsall case – although he did so indirectly, and just pointed to the fact that Coulon was an informer and was dealt with very complacently in the Walsall proceedings.9 His contribution elicited a disclaimer from Coulon and a letter of approval from the anarchist Ted Leggatt. McIntyre also claimed that mouchards in the pay of

continental police forces represented up to a third of the Autonomie Club’s patrons, so that ‘the wisest of the foreign refugees’ in London ‘never went near the ‘Autonomie’’.

A second scandal, involving an actual explosion this time, drew attention to the exiles again and led to a further questioning of the liberal approach to ‘the anarchist question’. On 16 February 1894, the French refugee Martial Bourdin was killed in Greenwich Park by a bomb which he was carrying. The idea that the device was intended to explode on British soil, in the Observatory, was raised but soon deemed unlikely, as Russia appeared as a more probable target. Even spies noted that ‘Bourdin was not regarded here as a serious man, and it is certain that he was alone’.\(^\text{10}\) Nonetheless, predictably, the explosion greatly fuelled anti-anarchist sentiment in public opinion. A clue to the attention which it attracted is its fictionalisation in Joseph Conrad’s novel *The Secret Agent*. The conspiracy theories and confusions so typical of continental discourses on anarchism gained currency in British conservative circles. As with the Walsall events, *The Times* was the main forum of those who were alarmed by the spread of continental-style anarchist terrorism in Britain; after the Greenwich explosion, the paper started lobbying against the anarchist asylum, emphasising the country’s difficult diplomatic position as a result of its unconditional tolerance of anarchists: ‘The Débats continues to speak its mind strongly. It suggests that whenever the explosion mania extends to London [Asquith] will discover something better than the international police relations which already exist and for preserving the life and property of the electors’.\(^\text{11}\)

The government’s decision to ban any demonstration on the occasion of Bourdin’s funeral was greeted as ‘a prudent if somewhat tardy concession’.\(^\text{12}\) For *The Times*, there was no doubt that Bourdin’s bomb had been meant for the destruction of the Greenwich Observatory, a planned attack which should be interpreted with reference to Anglo-French rivalries: ‘The fact that the reputation of the Greenwich Observatory is worldwide, and that Frenchmen have rather

\(^{10}\) APP BA 1509, report by Z.6 dated 19 February 1894.


an objection to its pre-eminence, may have been influential in the mind of a Frenchman who was clearly, by his brother’s testimony, fairly educated’. The paper recurrently pleaded for asylum laws to be changed, by allowing expulsions and extraditions: ‘Our anarchist population is not much of it home-grown. It is mostly of foreign importation, and we may quite fairly insist that the countries which have raised it keep the noxious swarm to themselves’.

London was also suspected of providing a hiding place to dynamiters on the run; there are indeed enduring questions about the role of the London anarchists in the organisation of attacks in France. It was rumoured, probably untruthfully, that Ravachol briefly crossed the Channel. But at least one high-profile anarchist terrorist spent time in London: Émile Henry, who lived in London for several weeks between November 1892 and February 1893, staying with Armand Matha after planting a bomb at Paris’s Café Terminus.

The anarchists and terrorism

Turning his back on alleged plots, Malato recounts an anecdote which testifies to the paranoia of those years: in London, aghast with boredom, he spent a lot of time making banana wine. One day, a French journalist visiting the city to investigate anarchist groups appeared at his house and, seeing the banana wine bottles, immediately took them for sulphuric acid. Ironically referring to the Autonomie Club as ‘the den of the social revolution’, Malato offered an unromantic view of it: ‘Now that the tragic period has passed…I must declare that the only powder prepared in this dreaded place was vanishing powder’. In fact, it was only ‘a decoy: there was a lot of shouting, but no serious decision was ever made there’. And indeed, the gap between word and action typical of the anarchists’ defiant style must be pointed out. The ‘heroic years’ were marked by a verbal escalation only rarely acted on, a tendency to bravado


16 Malato, *Les Joyeusetés de l’exil*, p. 44.

typical of exile and the anarchist ethos in general, as even a detractor of the anarchists was willing to acknowledge: ‘Conceited beyond belief, the average anarchist delights in impressing the ‘outsider’ with his supposed bloodthirstiness and daring’. Moreover, the terrorist rhetoric remained in use even among the most respectable and influential exiles, long after their views on the topic had changed and their positions regarding anarchist terrorists become more nuanced. Even if it was above all a stance of defiance, possibly an outlet in the forced inactivity of exile, this verbal exaggeration gave credence to the idea that the colony fully approved of propaganda by the deed. Pro-bomb declarations were also part of every provocateur’s act, as a spy remarked: ‘Agents from the Continent have a bad habit of always talking about explosives, which makes people suspicious’.

In fact, the exiles were highly divided on the issue of terrorism. Many of them were aware of the precarious nature of the asylum granted to them and sought to preserve it, as informers repeatedly emphasised: ‘They know … that at the first opportunity they will be taken to court, and keep very quiet’. The exile papers wrote very little about specific acts of propaganda by the deed. The anarchist intelligentsia was not wholeheartedly supportive of the attacks, nor had they been prior to exile. At first, they tended to sympathise with the perpetrators, although this was less true of British anarchists. *The Torch* examined both sides of the terrorism argument, as illustrated by their discussion of Ravachol:

One can only feel repelled and horrified at explosions which may bring death on innocent people … nevertheless if society is horrified at the crimes of a Ravachol it has only itself to blame … Ravachol is a signal instance of a man whom our present society has driven to be a murderer and a dynamitard who under other conditions might have proved a useful member of the community.

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19 APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 6 June 1893.

20 APP BA 1508, report by Z6 dated 22 November 1893.

In August 1893, on the first anniversary of Ravachol’s execution, Mollet wrote a tribute article which portrayed him as ‘a martyr of misery’ whose deeds expressed his revolt against the government and private property, even at the cost of ‘horrendous methods’. A few months later, Vaillant, Henry and Ravachol were described as ‘martyrs’, and the paper reprinted a declaration by Henry entitled ‘Propaganda by the deed’. Until 1895, even after The Torch had set itself firmly on an pro-union course, it featured regular articles on ‘anarchist martyrs’ on a regular basis, such as Henry’s declarations on propaganda by the deed, a depiction of Caserio as ‘the brave, fearless, indomitable hero he was’ and a reprint of Mollet’s article on Ravachol in May 1895. Freedom also restated its profound horror after each act of propaganda by the deed but constantly stressed the status of the terrorists as victims: ‘Homicidal outrages have from time immemorial been the reply of goaded and desperate classes ... Such acts are the violent recoil from violence, whether aggressive or repressive’. The British anarchist intelligentsia was therefore far from unanimous when it came to anarchist attacks, and even highly critical in some instances. There were also expressions of unambiguous hostility in James Tochatti’s anarchist communist paper Liberty (1894-96): ‘We believe that bombastic talk and glorifying the deeds of men driven to desperation by circumstances can only serve to retard the progress of Anarchist ideas by alienating the sympathies of the mass of the people’. However, such criticisms were juxtaposed with eclectic views, such as G. Lawrence’s ‘Why I advocate physical force’, published in January 1894.

Rumours

The terrorist scandals of the early 1890s reinforced the widespread belief that London was the ideological and organisational headquarters of the anarchist International. ‘It is a fact


23 The Torch, 18 January 1895, n. 8, ‘1894, a retrospect’; 18 May 1895, n. 12, ‘Ravachol’ (no page).


that many of the outrages which have taken place on the Continent were arranged beforehand here in London, within the four walls of the Club Autonomie’, the repentant anarchist WC Hart wrote in 1906, echoing countless statements which depicted London as the centre of the anarchist International.\textsuperscript{26} The conspiracy motive was based on two main themes. The first was the existence of a large-scale secret organisation, which distributed funds and gave orders towards terrorist attacks. The myth of a revolutionary anarchist ‘central committee’ based in London, which gained momentum after the 1881 conference, peaked in the late 1880s and early 1890s. As early as 1882, following the violent strikes in France’s Montceau-Les-Mines, an agent declared:

Dejoux dealt with the instructions to be sent to St Etienne, Lyon, Montceau-les-Mines and the distribution of the money from London’s Internationals, represented by Kropotkin, who had sent very detailed information... This was the starting point of what happened in Montceau-les-Mines, and you will see similar events every week, despite prosecutions and sentences.\textsuperscript{27}

Another claimed that ‘whether it succeeds or not, the fact of the conspiracy is beyond doubt, and the international anarchists in refuge in London expect to hear, any minute, that ‘the universe is free from its worst tyrants’”.\textsuperscript{28} The numerous terms used to describe this organisation were occasionally very inventive: in 1894, a spy reported plans to set up an ‘anarchist Bund’ with delegates in every major European city, directed from London.\textsuperscript{29} Others spoke of ‘action troops to be organised in order to intervene brutally at the first occasion’. Unsurprisingly, the best-known comrades were taken to be at the head of the ‘London Committee’ sending out its instructions across the world: Brocher, Michel, Kropotkin,

\textsuperscript{26} Hart, \textit{Confessions of an Anarchist}, p.41.

\textsuperscript{27} APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 27 July 1882.

\textsuperscript{28} APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 16 September 1884.

\textsuperscript{29} APP BA 1509, unsigned report dated 19 June 1894.
Alleged organisations were often referred to through the metaphor of a sect, which conveys the ideas of esotericism and irrationality connected with anarchism for many contemporaries; the comrades were ‘apostles’ or ‘devotees’ of their ‘cult’; London was ‘an anarchist Mecca’ where comrades were proud to ‘go on pilgrimage’.

Amidst all the conspirators, French anarchists were regarded as the most ardent practitioners of propaganda by the deed. The Italians, whilst not considered to be as violent as the French, were at the centre of several bomb scandals: in April 1894, the Italians Francis Polti and Giuseppe Fornara were arrested and indicted for manufacturing a bomb, allegedly meant for the London Stock Exchange. Fornara, who pleaded guilty and claimed that he wanted ‘to kill the capitalists’, received a sentence of 20 years’ penal servitude, while Polti received 10 years.

The stereotypical ‘French dynamiter’, doubling up as a continental provocateur, features in Hart’s memoirs of his anarchist days; the book describes the infiltration of an agent among the London anarchists, who talks them into making bombs in order to destroy a large London institution. When the comrades own up to their ignorance and inexperience in the field, he then replies, with a characteristic French accent, ‘zat ve vill soon rectify’.

Similarly, the series of articles on the capital’s anarchist circles published in 1894 by the Evening News described French exiles as ‘the most ‘active’, both in the ordinary sense of the term and in the special meaning they give to it’. The term ‘dynamitard’ was imported into English; the Evening News also suggested ‘bombistes’ and ‘anti-bombistes’, an illustration of the association between France and propaganda by the deed – itself an extreme manifestation of the implicit link between France and violent revolutions. The stereotype of the French bomb thrower was

AN F7 12504, unsigned letter from London dated 26 January 1893.

Le Matin, 9 May 1891, ‘Cité anarchiste. Les révolutionnaires réfugiés à Londres’.


Hart, Confessions of an Anarchist, p. 23.


not confined to scare-mongering in the popular press and low-brow publications. In 1894, *The Strand* ran a short story entitled *An Anarchist*, translated from French. It recounted the downfall of Jacques Houdaille, a loving husband and father, married to a kind seamstress named Marianne. After an argument with his employer (who, naturally, was a kind philanthropist), Houdaille turned to alcohol, striking and anarchist militancy, until his death in an explosion which he had accidentally provoked – a redeeming expiatory end.\(^{36}\) The insistence on the anarchists’ inherently vicious inclinations is a reminder that criminality – of which anarchism partook – was analysed in nationalist and even racialist terms. One factor is the relative tolerance which they enjoyed in Britain was the belief that the native population was immune to the diseases of socialism and terrorism:

> We have abundance of Anarchists of our own, but not many of the genuine Continental type…the difference is that the Continental Anarchist really means what he says, and will do the mischief which our home-raised brood is quite satisfied with talking about … Fortunately an English crowd is not formed of the highly inflammable stuff which lends itself to Anarchist designs.\(^{37}\)

The other recurring theme connected with the conspiracy motive was its projected assassinations and mass attacks. Such allegations ranged from complete vagueness (‘Le Breton and Edouard are rumoured to be in the West of France, preparing something\(^{38}\)') to great precision (‘I am currently making bombs with Corti, Sicard and Mattaini\(^{39}\)’). Agents frequently named the exact target of the planned attack, whether it was a person or a place:

> The Prince is Wales is at the moment the object of a very active surveillance on the part of revolutionaries of all tendencies.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) APP BA 1509, report by Z. 2 dated 23 December 1893.

\(^{39}\) APP BA 1509, report by A 41 dated 8 November 1894.

\(^{40}\) APP BA 435 report by 27 dated 4 March 1885.
It would be good to keep a close watch on the Archive building, as well as on the surroundings of the Élysée Palace. It is through the sewage system that the anarchists are hoping to reach their target.\textsuperscript{41}

The [terrorist] epidemic unleashed in the south of France is giving great delights to those people. They will endeavour to exploit the fears it spreads by taking the Hôtel de Ville and the Préfecture de Police by storm.\textsuperscript{42}

Still the Opera and no other theatres, because this is where the Jewry, the upper classes and the aristocracy go.\textsuperscript{43}

Few had any doubts that the attacks of the heroic period and the assassination of President Carnot in Lyon by the Italian anarchist Santo Caserio in 1894 had been engineered by the London groups. The evidence for such claims was often flimsy: after Carnot was stabbed, one informer pointed out that ‘Malatesta who, in this city, is the oracle of the refugees, is quite reluctant to use bombs; he prefers daggers’.\textsuperscript{44} The fact that these threats were usually linked to current events and changed at a frantic pace gave them added reality and a panic-inducing dizziness. The event prompting such talk of intense activism could be the idea of a revolutionary situation calling for anarchist intervention, often in the aftermath of a previous attack: ‘Kitz was saying that the time has finally come for Ireland to strike at the head of those who tyrannise it… The way in which the Phoenix Park drama happened may suggest that another attack is imminent’.\textsuperscript{45} Following Auguste Vaillant's December 1893 bomb in the French Assembly, ‘Satin’ reported from London that ‘since Saturday, the comrades living here

\textsuperscript{41}APP BA 1508, report by Satin dated 12 December 1893.

\textsuperscript{42}APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 14 July 1884.

\textsuperscript{43}APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 13 February 1894.

\textsuperscript{44}APP BA 1509, report by Leon dated 26 June 1894.

\textsuperscript{45}APP BA 435, report by 27 dated 4 March 1885.
have been overexcited; from every quarter all you can hear are the words ‘Revenge!’, ‘Death to the bourgeois!’ New attacks are to be feared.46 Every high-profile event triggered fears that the publicity-hungry anarchists would strike: ‘The dynamite party is alleged to be preparing an attack, or even a series of attacks, for the week of the Jubilee’.47 And of course, any development affecting the anarchist movement was seen as resulting in some ‘gesture’ in retaliation. After Vaillant’s arrest, Jarvis announced that ‘the anarchists in refuge here talk about nothing but vengeance and tell one another that we shall soon see something funny’.48

These messages have at least two striking characteristics. First, the very frequent use of hypothesis. This is hardly surprising, given how information was obtained. However, considering the vagueness of some reports, such convoluted phrasing certainly raises questions as to their truthfulness:

Bomb-making is said to be going apace. An unrivalled activity is rumoured to be going on in the French quarters of the English capital. Helped by scientific progress, the anarchists are said to be assured of being able to bring to France, in a very slim volume, explosive devices whose use has allegedly been programmed.49

The obsession with the use of chemistry and ‘modern science’ was another distinctive feature. Anarchist attacks indeed relied on recent inventions, starting with Alfred Nobel’s dynamite, which dated back to 1867 but whose manufacture ceased to be a monopoly after 1881, resulting in its proliferation.50 However, this recurring theme also shows that the terrorist imagination was intricately bound with scientific progress, and anarchism was perceived to be one of the symptoms of a potentially dangerous modernity.51 Plans to organise chemistry classes at the

46 APP BA 1508, report by Satin dated 12 December 1893.
47 Le Gaulois, 17 June 1887.
48 APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 6 February 1894.
49 Gil Blas, 26 March 1894, ‘La propagande à Londres’.
51 Salomé, L’Ouragan homicide, pp. 29–30.
Stephen Mews Club are mentioned as early as 1884. It was later claimed that these lessons were held at the Autonomie Club and that the comrades attended lectures given in various London institutions to learn how to make explosives. When it came to explosives too, there were constant rumours of secret developments and hints at potential terrorist activity:

It is said that the explosive devices which Emil [sic] Henry used in order to make the Terminus bomb had been entrusted to him by the London anarchists.

At the international pharmacy on Old Compton Street, one of the (German) helpers is affiliated to a socialist club and it is very easy for the comrades to get hold of chemical substances such as sulphuric, cyanic acids, without any questions asked.

Bergue… is a militant anarchist who knows about handling chemicals.

Yesterday, Corti went to Lapie’s bookshop and asked for a chemistry book about explosives. He did not find any but took notes from a French – English dictionary about the way in which some products whose French names he knew are spelt in English.

As the above examples suggest, rumours travelled through many different channels. The most alarmist declarations were found primarily in the reports written by French spies, who had a financial stake in yielding results. It also appears that these reports were leaked to the press on a regular basis and often quoted verbatim. This of course suggests a degree of manipulation or at least orchestration of ‘the anarchist peril’ by the French police. The leaks were so frequent

52 APP BA 435, report by Etoile dated 6 August 1884.
54 APP BA 1509, report by Satin dated 27 February 1894.
55 APP BA 1509, unsigned report dated 2 June 1894.
56 APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 2 January 1895.
57 APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 7 June 1893
that an agent warned against their dangers: ‘The information I am providing must not be vented by newspapers because we are the only ones in the know and this could arouse suspicions’. Discourses on anarchists in the general press were twofold, as scare-mongering was offset by the dominant celebration of law and order and stability.

The head of the London’s intelligence service and the lieutenant of the Metropolitan Police are absolutely convinced that a most serious anarchist conspiracy is being plotted in London... I can assure you that the Home Secretary has given very severe orders for surveillance to be unrelenting and for all precautions to be taken.59

Paris depicted the surveillance of the British police in very laudatory terms:

It is in the shade that the conspiracy is being plotted... whether they are leaving their houses or entering them, going to eat or to sleep, strolling around or visiting one another – the agent protecting order is always there, tracking them down and sniffing like a shepherd’s dog sticking to its irrevocable assignment.60

The press frequently sent informers and investigators to London in order to investigate into the French quarter in London, especially after each new attack. However, playing tricks on these journalists was one of the comrades’ preferred pastimes: ‘Several journalists have come here to interview the anarchists. Gil Blas’s Prisson has been strongly tricked’.61 It was therefore common for undercover agents to dismiss the information published in the press: after a few journalists visited the Autonomie Club, Jarvis pointed out that their articles were ‘wrong on everything’.62 In October 1901, following the assassination of President McKinley, the agent Bornibus commented on an article from Le Matin which reported enthusiastic comments allegedly gleaned from the comrades in one of the London clubs: ‘This all comes from the

58 APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 17 October 1893.
59 L’Eclair, 13 December 1893.
60 Paris, 13 December 1893.
61 APP BA 1508, report by Y.3 dated 1 December 1893.
62 APP BA 1508, report by Jarvis dated 11 December 1893.
imagination of a reporter suffering from writer’s block’. He reiterated his objection a few weeks later: ‘French newspapers have announced that the London anarchists celebrated the bravery of McKinley’s assassin by dancing in the clubs until 4 in the morning. This claim is completely false.’ It is essential to replace the anarchist panic in the context of the rise of the popular press and new journalism in the mid-century – a term associated with the growth of cheap newspapers addressed to a large working-class readership and showcasing crime, scandal, disaster, and sports, along with bolder and more lurid headlines and subheads. Anarchism provided a golden opportunity for this young industry, offering sensationalism and shock headlines galore, so that both French and British newspapers quickly capitalised on the headline-grabbing ‘black peril’. The study of anarchist mores and circles also grew into a genre in its own right, where the stock figure of the French bomber and the London backdrop featured prominently. The masterpieces of this genre were Flor O’Squarr’s *Les Coulisses de l’anarchie* (1892), Felix Dubois’s *Le Péril anarchiste* (1894, translated into English that same year), and WC Hart’s *Confessions of an Anarchist* (1906).

**Anarchism in public opinion**

The strength and lasting hold of the terrorist conspiracy myth, despite the predominant reluctance towards dynamiters within the anarchist movement and the comrades’ actual political activities, also stem from its resonance. To what extent did the British population yield to anti-anarchist frenzy? Haia Shpayer-Makov has stressed that stereotypes involving anarchists pervaded all of the British press to some extent – the popular and more high-brow conservative press, but also, to a lesser extent, liberal publications. The figure of the revolutionary terrorist was a *topos* in popular literature but also appeared in writings addressed to a more discerning

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63 APP BA 1510, report by Bornibus dated 4 October 1901.

64 APP BA 1510, report by Bornibus dated 6 November 1901.


audience. This emerging moral panic fed an apocalyptic imagination, and vice versa. The historian Bernard Porter was therefore inclined to emphasise Britain’s relative stoicism: ‘Anarchist Outrages anywhere were mere drops in an ocean of murder, suicide, infanticide, epidemic, accident and other ‘natural’ horrors, which Britons suffered almost as a matter of course in the 1890s’. As in France, the anarchist terrorist threat was connected with the positive idea of expiatory and purifying violence; however, it was also linked with the theme of national decline and expressed collective anxieties through the morbid fascinations of the tabloid press. Similarly, Shpayer-Makov points out that there existed in Britain a tradition of using stereotypes ‘as a means of externalising underlying tensions and anxieties’; at the time of the anarchists, these were anxieties over ‘the appearance of ever-widening cracks in the façade of Victorian optimism and complacency’. Anarchists, just like revolutionaries, poor people and foreigners (especially Irish) were commonly associated with animals, represented as deviant, monstrous and non-human. Such hyperbolic discourses, Shpayer-Makov argues, were a symptom of a more widespread crisis, and conveyed fears over national decline, in economic, diplomatic, and even moral terms. The author of a series of articles on anarchism in the Evening News came to the conclusion that unless revolutionary tendencies were crushed by military intervention, ‘the pendulum of civilisation may swing far beyond the line of progress into a series of half mad and mutually destructive extravagances.

In France, the dread of a London-led conspiracy was a continuation of the terror caused by the French attacks, and can be seen as a moral scare typical of this fin de siècle obsessed

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with decadence, violence and evil confederacies. This became all the more pervasive in a context of intense Franco-British rivalries: many commentators, especially in the conservative press, thought that the asylum extended to the French anarchists allowed them to plot against France. British fears in the face of the ‘black peril’ developed more slowly and were altogether less dramatic. This cultural and intellectual climate, which had different national modalities, largely accounts for the myths surrounding the anarchist colonies in Britain, and it is fair to say that the anarchist movement acted as a catalyst.

**Surveillance**

The presence – or rather the omnipresence – of a large number of French spies and informers among the exiles and especially in Soho was well-known. The surveillance of the anarchists was primarily carried out by the police of the countries from which they originated. This was a relatively new development in France: until the comprehensive reorganisation of intelligence services under the Third Republic after 1880, surveillance pertaining to national security matters abroad (which was overwhelmingly covert) had been the remit of diplomatic staff. Thereafter, the Republicans reoriented the existing political police towards the surveillance of the regime’s enemies, notably the anarchists. Consequently, the French Préfecture de Police was well-represented in the British capital: the reports sent to Paris were signed by several different men: A. 40, A.41, Z.2, Z.6, Jackson, Jarvis, Bornibus, Lowbray, Monte Carlo, although the same agents were likely to use different aliases over time. For the year 1894 only, four different styles of handwriting appear in the reports sent to Paris, with an average of three or four regular agents at a time from the end of 1892 to the end of 1894.

However, it remains impossible to provide an exhaustive and reliable list of agents operating in London, as the bureaucratic system implemented by the Préfecture ensured the

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71 Kalifa, L’Encre et le sang, p. 250; Rioux, Chronique d’une fin de Siècle, pp. 21–5.

anonymity of the reports’ authors and surveillance archives have been repeatedly destroyed, sometimes by Préfecture officials themselves. Little is known about how these agents were recruited, and they were not permanently employed by French authorities. Most of the existing information regarding the thorny issue of recruitment comes from accidents which occurred during the London years. One is the ‘Rabe scandal’ of 1893, after the name of Victor Rabe, who was approached to work for the secret police and pretended to agree, so that he found himself in a position to obtain details on police operations for the companions. Expelled from France ‘as a matter of form’ by the French, Rabe returned a few days later and had an interview with Inspector Fédée, after which he left for London. It was arranged that he should write to Fédée, ‘giving all the information he could collect concerning the objects and movements of foreign anarchists resident in London’, sending these to ‘X. Poste Restante, Tribunal de Commerce Paris’. He provided 3 addresses: 30 Fitzroy Street (Delebecque’s house), the Autonomie Club and London’s general post office. The list of specific questions asked by the police pointed to the answers which they were seeking, and it is notable that the suspicion of ‘action’ was constant; such instructions partly explain the somewhat paranoid tone of many spies’ reports. Rabe was asked to send a map or a sketch of the Autonomie Club. He was also asked to provide details about someone who was suspected of plotting ‘something’, and about a number of persons allegedly connected with the French terrorist attacks. He was told to keep an eye on the companions’ wives, and entrusted with ‘providing information on each INTELLIGENT anarchist attending the Autonomie Club; their aspirations; their means of action; their dealings; their movements to go to France; what they do there’. Rabe received 230 francs, that is to say £9 (about £500 today) in total for these services.

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74 Le Tocsin, 7 January 1893, I, 2, ‘La police prise à son piège’.
Two spies were ‘brûlés’ (i.e. exposed) whilst in London. The first was Delannoy in June 1893, who ‘with unbelievable clumsiness, showed up at the Autonomie Club to ask for information concerning Meunier’, offering money in exchange. Two fellow mouchards reported that Delannoy’s life was now in danger and he was to be executed, but in the end, he was just subjected to a joint attack by Capt. Bidault and an Englishwoman named Ida, which saw him being showered with flour at Charing Cross station.\(^75\) The second case was more complex. It is better documented, and seems to have had a greater impact on the colony. Eugène Cotin, also known as Cuvilier and Cottance, arrived in London in August 1894 and was exposed at the very end of 1894. He had managed to gain access to some rather secretive activities among the exiles. These included the fabrication of bombs (if Cottance is to be believed) and the reclusive group around Pouget, since Cotin lodged with Sicart, a former editor of the *Père peinard*, and dined regularly with Duprat, another journalist. With generous funding from the French police, he managed to set up a business in Lapie’s shop, which provided a good location for information-gathering. Later that month, he claimed to be ‘making bombs with Corti, Sicart and Mattaini. We hope to travel to Paris in a fortnight. We will be carrying three bombs: one for the War Ministry, one for Monsieur Casimir-Périer [the French President], and the use of the third one will be decided once we are there’.\(^76\) But by the end of November, when he did travel to France under a false pretence, the ‘luggage’ with which the London companions had entrusted him was far less compromising. It included various letters, most of them apolitical, some of them rather poignant family correspondences dealing with day-to-day issues, and especially the search for work.\(^77\) Duprat had asked him to visit his son in law to ask why he had not been in touch and give him clothes, a cake, a chef’s hat among other things. Several tasks assigned to him pertained to the diffusion of *Père peinard*; in particular,

\(^75\) APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 2 June 1893 and 6 June 1893; report by Monte Carlo dated 2 June 1893; *L’Intransigeant*, 13 June 1893.

\(^76\) APP BA 1509, report by A.41 dated 8 November 1894.

he was to visit a certain Ibelo in the Latin Quarter and ask him to help in the search for subscribers. Of course, letters were not despatched and were brought directly to the Préfecture by Delannoy.

It was not long before he was exposed. His place among the anarchists had probably never been as secure as he claimed. Before Cottance was found out, another informer who had been told to work with him wrote back: ‘Concerning C… we have kept away from this individual who is compromising and completely uncovered.’ Another agent commented retrospectively that ‘this young man probably didn’t know much; he was treated as a child. He insisted too much to be given information’. It was indeed through a beginner’s mistake that Cottance was found out:

I saw Corti, who said that an agent has been playing a dumb game among us. This agent has received a letter with 50 francs in it. Since he cannot speak English, he had to have his letter read to him, in which he was asked for some information… He received this letter last Saturday and everyone has been saying that the 50 francs are from Fedée. Lapie and Malato took him aside and threatened him so that he owned up to everything. He ran away from Lapie’s and must have left for Paris yesterday evening.

It was claimed by some non-anarchist papers in France that Cotin/ Cottance was then judged by a revolutionary tribunal, a common practice with spies amongst exiles. Malatesta was said to have presided over the proceedings, with Pouget, Lapie, Delebecque, Duprat and Sicard. According to one article, Cotin had only narrowly avoided a death sentence on the counts that he was a mouchard in the pay of the police and had caused other comrades to be arrested. In the

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79 APP BA 1509, report dated 18 November 1894.
80 APP BA 1509, report by Lapeyre dated 25 December 1894.
81 APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 24 December 1894.
82 La Patrie, date illeg., cutting held in file APP BA 1509.
end, he was sent back to France via Victoria Station. It is likely that his actual ‘sentence’ was simply a signed declaration, which appeared with a photograph in the London *Père peinard* under the title ‘Judas!’.

An unusually loquacious Pouget later commented that the press, ‘instead of telling the story like it is, have extended it with monumental blunders’.

Even without such fiascos, French informers and spies had a sorry reputation among the anarchists and across police services. Malato recalled them in unflattering terms:

> Far shoddier in style and language than their counterparts at Scotland Yard, they did not operate directly for the London police, but rather for the worthy Houllier [who was in charge of anarchist surveillance at the Paris Préfecture].

Even the employees of the *Préfecture de police* had a low opinion of surveillance in Britain, which they saw as an obstacle for efficient cooperation with Scotland Yard: ‘We persist in wanting to channel the dregs of society towards England. They just send to London here and there an agent who doesn’t speak English and uses the trip as an opportunity for making merry’. And yet, informers were the cogs of a complex system and the sophisticated surveillance implemented by French authorities must be stressed. Agents executed orders, gave intelligence on notorious individuals, their whereabouts, movements, connections, publications, and the colony’s general atmosphere. They also volunteered a significant amount of surveillance advice for Britain and France:

> M. Houllier has been here for a few days; people know what he is up to and he can be sure that he will not obtain the information he has come to look for. He would even be wise to avoid wandering into certain places where his presence is spied on and the anarchists are planning to do him harm.

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83 APP BA 1509, report by Lowbray occasionnel dated 27 December 1894.


86 APP BA 1509, internal memorandum from the Paris Préfecture dated 26 February 1894.

87 APP BA 1508, report by Monte Carlo dated 9 June 1893.
[You should] immediately place the rue Sartine under surveillance… Do not arrest the individual with a cane that you will see there.88

They helped protect the cover of other informers:

On the same train as Pouget’s wife there was a suspicious individual… The anarchists have been pointing him out to one another; if he is an agent, tell him to be cautious.89

They played a key role in a number of arrests:

I have been watching over Pouget’s house in order to obtain information on Galau and Leveillé. I am convinced that they are in London and must avoid being seen.90

They could also be quite shrewd and keep their cover for years if they were well-integrated among the exiles.

In the future, I will write under the alias Monte Carlo. Indeed, someone must have opened one of your letters addressed to my personal home and made a copy of it. When I realised this, to create a diversion, I pretended that it was an anonymous letter like those addressed to several London anarchists…containing a recruitment offer. It worked really well.91

However, not all agents were equally reliable, and the reports they produced must be analysed and cross-checked before being interpreted. One recurring difficulty stems from the inconsistencies between their reports. Along with the insistence on intense anarchist activism, one finds a running theme that nothing at all is happening in refugee circles; against the obsession with conspiracies there is also an emphasis on dispersion and isolation. As early as 1885, when the terrorist fixation was building up, one informer remarked that ‘if France’s

88 APP BA 1508, report by Monte Carlo dated 9 June 1893.
89 APP BA 1509 report by Z.6 dated 8 March 1894.
90 APP BA 1509, report by Bourgeois, 22 January 1895.
91 APP BA 1508, report by Monte Carlo dated 5 December 1893.
anarchists are anything like those living in London, the upper classes can sleep in peace… Anyway, the anarchists’ new tactic is said to be based on individual action… But it is likely that on this subject too, there will only be talk’.\textsuperscript{92} Reports contained many such descriptions of inactivity:

The anarchic party here is currently neither fearsome nor feared.\textsuperscript{93}

From here and there, nothing to fear.\textsuperscript{94}

All of them, let me repeat it, are very quiet, apart from a few hotheads. Some of them even regret embracing anarchy in the first place, and would prefer to be in France rather than living miserably in England.\textsuperscript{95}

No clue makes it possible to connect the London anarchists with the explosion of rue Montceau. They are too divided to carry out any plot right now, and they are constantly arguing. Moreover, the English police keep a close watch on those who could make bombs. Those who could do so cannot afford it.\textsuperscript{96}

There is no permanent Revolutionary Committee, this is false and simply cannot be, since the companions are used to acting in isolation due to personal hatreds. Dynamite action can only be carried out by an isolated individual, whom the other comrades do not know, and who does not attend anarchist circles and therefore escapes surveillance.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{92} APP BA 435, report by 27 dated 5 January 1885.
\textsuperscript{93} APP BA 1509, report by Z.6 dated 27 May 1893.
\textsuperscript{94} APP BA 1509, report by Z.6 dated 15 December 1893.
\textsuperscript{95} APP BA 1509, report by Satin dated 4 October 1894.
\textsuperscript{96} APP BA 1509, report by Lapeyre dated 15 January 1895.
\textsuperscript{97} APP BA 1508, report by Z.6 dated 19 April 1893.
And of course, another problem was the agents’ lack of political understanding. This was obvious when they discussed politics beyond anarchism:

[The Fabians] who preach plunder, war on the rich and the inexorable levelling of all classes. All of them, including women, are anarchists.98

Some of the English and German anarchists and a few Frenchmen have joined the Social League [sic] whose president in England is Hyndman.99

Errors were also made when it came to anarchist politics. A report kept at the Préfecture de Police contains marginal annotations from its recipient, with the mentions ‘erreur’ and ‘grosse erreur’ in two different places.100 Evidently, spies’ reports were not always taken at face value; they were closely analysed and inventoried, and it was well-known that the quality of the information provided by the agents was ‘often remarkable’, but nonetheless ‘variable’.101

An original British model? Official discourses and surveillance practices

There was a long-standing opposition to political policing in Britain, but in the early 1880s, a changing political and social ethos manifested itself, largely due to the impact of the Fenian bombing campaign of 1883–85, the threat of anarchism, Johann Most’s trial and the impulse of the Home Secretary Sir William Harcourt.102 After the 1867 Fenian attacks in

98 APP BA 1508, unsigned report dated 3 May 1892.
99 APP BA 1509, unsigned report dated 18 June 1894.
100 APP BA 1509, report by Leon dated 1 March 1894.
London’s Clerkenwell, which claimed 12 lives, there were explosions at Scotland Yard in 1884, and other bombs under London Bridge, in the Tower of London and the House of Commons. The Metropolitan Police Special Branch was set up in 1883 within the Criminal Investigation Department; its original remit, the surveillance of potential Irish terrorists, was soon extended to the Anarchists. While the practice of this political policing is relatively well-known, it was and largely remains an extremely sensitive issue. In practice, this means that some archival material remains inaccessible and the extent of policing, much debated.

It is therefore largely on the basis of French police archives, exiles’ testimonies and on histories of the British police services that an assessment can be made. This last source remains often moderate: ‘There does not seem to have been any use of agents provocateurs; and all the while the government remained very sensitive about the term ‘political police’”, according to Clive Emsley. Similarly, Bernard Porter has emphasised the relative insouciance of both British authorities and public opinion in the face of the anarchist peril so dreaded across the Channel. However, this appears erroneous in the light of recent research by Lindsay Clutterbuck highlighting the very comprehensive nature of political surveillance in the UK, long before the transformations induced by Fenian and anarchist terrorist threats. Contrary to the liberal myth, ‘the concept of political policing…was therefore in existence long before the catalyst of the Fenian attacks on the mainland led to the establishment of a specialised section of the Metropolitan Police Criminal Investigation Department to deal with it on a more systematic basis’.

Police surveillance became more systematic after the influx of continental revolutionaries following the 1848 Continental revolutions and the 1871 Paris Commune, but there remained a strong reluctance to acknowledge it; the Home Secretary later referred to this covert practice as ‘an observation not sanctioned by express provision of the law, but by usage only…The police have always been compelled to keep a number of suspects under more or less sustained observation, and by the general acquiescence in it of the community’.

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104 TNA, HO 412/68, letter from the Home Secretary to the Foreign Secretary dated 10 January 1902.
After 1880, the onslaught of Fenian violence brought on ‘a dramatic change’ in the methods used by British authorities: a systematic surveillance of suspects was put in place, along with permanent border control, mufti police presence during political meetings and discreet searches in the post sent to prisoners linked with the circles under surveillance.\footnote{Clutterbuck, ‘An Accident of History’} In the 1880s, Inspector William Melville, who was entrusted with the surveillance of the anarchists, was a well-known figure for the companions. A man of Irish origins who spoke perfect French and went on to have a fine career in the British secret services, he was one of the very first agents of the Special Branch and was promoted to its direction in 1893.\footnote{Andrew Cook, \textit{The King’s Detective M: MI5’s First Spymaster} (London: Tempus Publishing, 2006).} He soon became the comrades’ nemesis, presiding over both overt and covert surveillance of international anarchist circles:

While he lived he was probably the best hated and most feared enemy of militant anarchists in the world, and it was his energy and astuteness in fighting them that earned him the epithet among the brotherhood ‘Vile Melville’…. Melville, as inspector, and later as superintendent, of the Special Branch, harried these clubs with all the resources at his command. A special study was made of them, and nothing that happened within their walls was permitted to pass unreported.\footnote{George Dilnot, \textit{Great Detectives and Their Methods} (Guildford: Billing and Sons, 1927), pp. 174–5.}

In addition to closely watching the clubs, Melville resorted to numerous methods of surveillance and control. The use of informers and provocateurs was common. Besides, there also existed a complex chain of occasional informers through whom the British and foreign police services collected their information, which is impossible to reconstitute.\footnote{Aprile, ‘L’espion, frère de l’exilé’; Brunet, \textit{La Police de l’ombre}, pp. 34–5.} The Frenchmen Coulon and Dufournel were in the pay of the Special Branch.

This surveillance provided comprehensive information on foreign and native anarchists. Interestingly, the map of British surveillance does not quite overlap with that of the French
Préfecture de Police; it is less extensive and systematic, and focuses on a different set of individuals. One puzzling element is the almost complete absence of information on the most famous exiles in British archives, such as Michel, Kropotkin, Malato and Pouget, who are barely mentioned in the archives of the Special Branch or the correspondence of the Foreign Office. This can suggest that these individuals were primarily watched by the various national police forces represented in London; alternatively, this may be because the British police chose to focus on more immediately threatening individuals, such as Bordes or Brothier. McIntyre indeed noted that ‘Louise Michel… was not considered by our detectives to be a particularly dangerous woman… she had no special ill-feeling towards our Government’.

Lastly, this archival silence may simply be the consequence of the destruction or unavailability of the relevant sources, as hints from other archives indicate that Pouget attracted more than his fair share of attention.

And indeed, various voices testified to the overbearing surveillance exerted by the Special Branch under the aegis of Melville. The French groups’ publications were intercepted and their authors were kept under a close watch. The documents obtained in this way were not always confiscated: the first exile number of Père peinard was intercepted, along with pamphlets by Bakunin and Malatesta. Having ascertained that Pouget’s paper was not illegal, as ‘it hardly directly countenance[d] assassination’, and made a note of its editorial details, Asquith suggested that the copy travel on to its addressee. Similar interceptions contained Hamon’s work on the psychology of professional servicemen, his Hommes et Théories de l’Anarchie, and the radical placard L’Anonymat aux Plumitifs de l’Anarchie, which were sent to the South Kensington Museum for conservation purposes. Combining discreet spying and manipulation with direct interventions, Melville oversaw house raids in order to gather


110 APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 16 March 1894.

111 APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 16 March 1894.

112 TNA HO 144/258/A55684, n.d.
evidence against the comrades. In 1885, the Stephen’s Mews Club was raided by the police. In July 1892, following the attack on the Café Very in Paris, Delebecque’s lodging house was inspected. The year 1894 saw a peak in police raids: in February, the Autonomie Club was raided, followed in March by the shops of the watchmaker Rousseau and the barber Franco and, in April, following the attack in Paris’s restaurant Foyot, the houses of Delebecque (for the second time) and Ricken.\footnote{APP BA 1509, report by Jarvis dated 19 March 1894; APP BA 1509, report by Z.6 dated 10 April 1894.} A fervent admirer of Melville also gave a vivid portrait of him in action, passing off as an agent of the London hygiene services in order to track down Meunier, an anarchist on the run hiding in a French house in Soho.\footnote{Dilnot, \textit{Great Detectives and their methods}, p. 176.} Scotland Yard was informed of the developments of provincial anarchism, although there was no permanent informer outside London. Moreover, British detectives were stationed in the ports of Northern France (Boulogne, Dieppe, Le Havre and Cherbourg) to watch passengers who boarded for Britain. These detectives initially dealt with Fenians only, but they gradually started following almost exclusively anarchists and criminals\footnote{Archives du Quai d’Orsay, Intérieur 1908-1929, Series C, box 5, file 1. Report dated 31 July 1912, ‘Les polices étrangères en France’.} This surveillance was also heightened in times of crisis. Far from the bonhomie implied by official surveillance discourses, Melville was not averse to intricate ploys, for instance paying passers by to stage false declarations of hostility during anarchist events: ‘On Sunday, at the Trafalgar square meeting, Malatesta got two black eyes and Agresti had his left cheek cut. This was done by M. Melville’s agents’.\footnote{APP BA 1508, report by Jarvis dated 12 December 1893.}

This surveillance raises some problems of interpretation. First of all, the refugees’ own accounts ought not to be taken at face value, as they were notoriously prone to entertain ‘wild rumours and fantasies’ concerning the police surveillance exerted over them, mirroring the conspiratorial obsessions which they crystallised themselves.\footnote{Berlière, ‘A Republican Political Police?’, p. 27.} However, while it may have
been overstated, it is clear that very extensive surveillance was at work amidst the refugees, in glaring contradiction with liberal principles and official discourses. Bernard Porter sees this as Britain’s concession to its foreign counterparts, ‘other ways of placating continental opinion without betraying their liberal principles…people were not going to allow ‘little’ outrages to shake them out of their liberalism’.\footnote{Porter, \textit{Plots and Paranoia}, pp. 102–8.} Clearly, British counter-revolutionary and counter-terrorist methods were evolving, along with the discourses about them. Occasional breaches to the liberal consensus in the name of greater collective security seemed increasingly tolerable. In the words of Metropolitan Police Detective John Sweeney, ‘the public will feel and know that the eternal vigilance of society is the price that England pays for the practical immunity England enjoys from the bombs and daggers of the anarchist peril’.\footnote{Sweeney, \textit{At Scotland Yard}, p. 370.} The dread of revolutionary agitation and, in the pre-war decade, of continental spies, led to a revision of national traditions in terms of surveillance\footnote{Paul Begg and Keith Skinner, \textit{The Scotland Yard Files}, (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1991), p. 164.}; by then, the ‘British way’ in the field of political policing referred not so much to the relative laxness of controls over foreigners, as to the discretion shrouding the subject.

The comrades did not cope passively with the presence of agents among them. Apart from the permanent suspicion and countless denunciations which informed the exiles’ interactions with one another, the comrades occasionally tricked the police too. Victor Richard and Gustave Brocher organised a counter-surveillance of Melville by members of the Autonomie Club, a tactic in which anarchists were especially proficient.\footnote{Clutterbuck, ‘An Accident of History’, p. 251.} A note from the Préfecture on ‘Anarchy in London’ typically contained an entire section dedicated to the theme of ‘anarchist tails’, whose mission it was to follow the newly-arrived French in the city and
expose them if they headed for New Scotland Yard. Even a rather disloyal comrade like Parmeggiani was reported for pointing Melville out to the Soho comrades so the latter could recognise him. And of course, giving false information to the French police was a fairly common pastime. The case of Rabe, explained above, also constitutes an instance of an anarchist infiltrating the police. Whenever spying or policing was clearly under way, there would be taunts from the comrades; for instance, when Fedée and Houllier visited a house in Fleet Street entirely inhabited by French anarchists to look for two companions on the run, they were told ‘with an ironical tone… we expected your visit; we were told that you had arrived in London. How regrettable for you that just as you were embarking for Calais, comrades Francis and Meunier were leaving the house’.  

**Attempts at police coordination**

British authorities had regular contacts with their continental counterparts, both at grassroots and decisional levels, and circulated information to them regarding the identity and activities of the comrades hiding in Britain, as evidenced by the archives of the Special Branch and diplomatic correspondence. However, all of these exchanges were subject to complex dealings and negotiations. Agents regularly alluded to these contacts and to occasional tensions:

Grandidier has been under arrest for several days. We had reported Grandidier to Mr Melville’s agents.

The local police are officially in charge of anarchist surveillance; based on a conversation with an English informer, we could cooperate with them in exchange for a reward.

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123 A Marceau from the Autonomie Club is also described as specialising in ‘tailing English police agents’ (APP BA 1509, report dated 27 February 1894).  
124 *Le Petit Parisien*, 30 June 1892. Cutting held in file APP BA 1508.  
125 APP BA 1509 report by Jarvis dated 29 December 1894.
The French police gave us very poor information about the man [Francois] and the portrait they supplied was at least ten years old.\textsuperscript{127}

Negotiations were especially complex between police and diplomatic authorities. A note from Scotland Yard dated May 1893 highlights the many factors behind the decision to collaborate with foreign secret services or not. After the German police requested information on three individuals as part of an enquiry on the Autonomie Club, Scotland Yard pointed out that the decision rested with the Home Secretary, but formulated a number of caveats:

An objectionable and even dangerous precedent would be set…HM’s government do not think that it would be in accordance with their practice, or with international usage, to provide information – at the instance either of the prosecution or of the accused – which may be used as evidence at the trial of the case.\textsuperscript{128}

It is hard to discriminate between deciding to withhold information based on the principles of justice and non-involvement and, on the other hand, simply refusing to cooperate and take part in systematic information-sharing.

Individual agreements between Britain and some of the countries carrying out expulsions supposedly made it possible to track down dangerous individuals, but in practice, information sharing remained limited and patchy, and this became a recurring cause for complaint for British authorities. Britain and France entered such an agreement in 1888 but even after then, it was rare for the British police to be informed of the imminent arrival of anarchists from France. Frictions were especially frequent with Belgium, from where many exiled anarchists arrived. Belgian legislation indeed stipulated that those targeted by expulsion orders could be taken to the border of their choice; as a result of the increasing restrictions against anarchists in French-

\textsuperscript{126} APP BA 1508, report by Black dated 26 July 1892.

\textsuperscript{127} McIntyre, Reynolds’s Newspaper, 21 April 1895, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{128} TNA HO45/9739/A54881, letter dated 26 May 1893.
speaking countries, these comrades frequently asked to be placed on a Britain-bound ship. The fact that Belgian authorities were very slow in mentioning these expulsions to their British colleagues was frequently bemoaned. In 1901, things came to a head over the case of Jaffei, a violent anarchist sent to Britain without a warning\textsuperscript{129}; British authorities criticised the Belgian police for only giving them monthly reports, whereas telegraphs would make for more efficient controls. A 1902 memo observed that difficulties persisted with several European countries: ‘The Special Branch receiving but little assistance from the continental police. It is true that periodically they receive from France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Greece, Switzerland, and Holland, reports from either the police or the Ministry of Justice but expulsions are made weeks before the reports arrive’\textsuperscript{130}

The special measures implemented during the period of anarchist attacks were upheld after the threat receded. Police reports to France concerning the exiles grew rarer after 1895–6, still came in regularly until the end of 1900. From 1898, there were discussions to formally appoint a 	extit{commissaire} entrusted with anarchist surveillance at the French embassy in London. His name was Moerdès and he had been sent to London in order to watch over the anarchists with two deputies, in agreement with Scotland Yard. This project points to the seriousness with which ‘the black peril’ was taken, because it was regarded as a threat to the safety of the state. Moreover, it highlights the problems in owning up to such practices, both in France and in Britain, where there was great reluctance towards the idea of political policing.\textsuperscript{131} The idea of an official French presence had a number of advantages from a British perspective – not least in confirming the idea that surveillance was mainly carried out by continental police forces – but also caused tensions due to the ambiguous status of the anarchists as political refugees. The

\textsuperscript{129} TNA HO 144/668/X84164, letters dated 10 October 1901 and 12 October 1901.

\textsuperscript{130} TNA FO 412/68, memorandum n.2.

\textsuperscript{131} Quai d’Orsay, file ‘Anarchistes, 1890-1906. Affaires diverses, police des étrangers, anarchistes’. Letter from Paul Cambon dated 10 January 1900.
French ambassador Paul Cambon eventually abandoned the project precisely because of these complications:

Were it to be established that these agents are entrusted with a political service, should they appear as auxiliaries of the Embassy and be suspected of being here in order to watch over the refugees indicted or sentenced for purely political activities, their situation would become intolerable and the English police would refuse any involvement with them. These days, the English cannot conceive of the necessity of even having a political police, they regard it as a remnant of barbarity, as an institution for countries afflicted with an absolutist political regime, or prey to revolutionary disorder.

Of course, this English reluctance towards political policing was by then largely rhetorical. Cambon sought to bypass this obstacle by ‘sending new instructions to his agents, but their actions must remain secret and it is important that the embassy should not be involved in them’. As the historian Sébastien Laurent points out, ‘the ambassador… pretended that he did not know about the existence of a British political police for over 20 years… Special policemen thus remained in the country in an unofficial mission, with the agreement of Scotland Yard, but without that of their own embassy’. Quite clearly, transnationalising police operations was proving rather problematic, both in terms of actual organisation and with respect to the discourses and politics surrounding this thorny issue.

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133 Quai d’Orsay, file ‘Les polices étrangères en France’, 31 July 1912.

5. The Road to the Aliens Act: the Anarchists Become a Political and Diplomatic Stake

In spite of their limited numbers and unproven participation in terrorist plots, Britain’s international anarchist groups came to play a significant role in the redefinition of the country’s immigration and asylum policy. The early 1890s witnessed the emergence of a broad ‘restrictionist’ party advocating stricter policing and limitations on immigration and asylum, based on fears of economic and racial decline which would follow the uncontrolled immigration of radical foreigners. The terrorist scandals involving foreign anarchists, the threat posed by anarchism in general and, crucially, mass immigration from Eastern Europe, formed the core of the restrictionists’ arguments. The risk of becoming ‘the dumping ground’ of the rest of the world was stressed, at a time of faltering imperial power. International tensions over the presence of foreign spies in Britain, notably from France and Italy, fuelled the exasperation articulated by those who called for a revision of Britain’s open-door policy, which had prevailed since 1826. This is how a handful of French anarchists became instrumental in redefining the country’s century-old Liberal policy.

The turning point came in 1905, with the passing of the Aliens’ Act, which restricted entry into the country for the first time in decades. The Act had very little impact initially but was later reinforced, following yet another anarchist-related scandal – the 1911 Sidney Street siege, an attempted robbery resulting in the death of a policeman and the spectacular siege of an anarchist club. These events distantly involving Latvian Left Social Revolutionaries stigmatised all anarchist groups for good. After 1914, the figure of the German spy replaced that of the anarchist as the chief public enemy, but in the meantime, the impact of the anarchist threat – both real and imagined – had been decisive.

The Liberal legacy
In the early 1880s, as most Western countries closed their borders to anarchists, Britain developed a unique model of control, which can be defined as ‘circumscribed tolerance’. It soon remained the only country which still allowed anarchists into its territory or tolerated them even once foreign powers had deported them without authorisation. A draconian anti-socialist law was passed in Germany in 1878 after two assassination attempts against Kaiser Wilhelm I.\(^1\)

In the early 1880s, European countries passed laws against the use of explosives (Germany in 1884, Austria in 1885, Belgium in May 1886, and Switzerland in April 1894); Britain had actually taken the lead in doing so, in 1883. However, it resisted instituting further changes to control anarchism. Europe’s other traditional asylums, Belgium and Switzerland, both changed their laws in the late 1880s to protect themselves against the anarchist peril.\(^2\)

In the early to mid-1890s, Italy, Spain, Germany and Denmark implemented very repressive legislation to crush their own anarchist movements – and, in some cases, socialist groupings in general. France followed suit with the Wicked Laws of 1892–94. In the United States, attempts to pass laws preventing the immigration of anarchists and nihilists started in 1888, eventually bearing fruit in 1903 with a law explicitly refusing entry into the North American territory to anarchists, which was extended in 1907.\(^3\) In this increasingly repressive context, British authorities found themselves under pressure to re-examine their positions and adopt more comprehensive laws.

However, Britain’s asylum policy was bound by strong constraints linked to its national traditions of tolerance, which dated back, as far as French refugees were concerned, to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Huguenots. This tradition had been revived with the upheavals which followed the French Revolution and had become fully integrated into nineteenth-century liberalism. Apart for a brief spell in 1848, no law restricted immigration or travel into the Britain after the repeal of the 1793 Aliens Act in 1826. After 1823, no expulsion took place, nor was entry into the country was refused. After 1848, Great-Britain became the

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\(^1\) Carlson, *Anarchism in Germany*, chapter 1.


destination of choice for the exiles of all the continental revolutions. In 1871 came the exiled Communards, followed later in the decade by German socialists, and eventually anarchists from across Europe. This asylum tradition came to be seen in the second half of the century as a national specificity, to which great collective pride was attached. In practical terms, liberalism in the fields of asylum and immigration manifested itself through the absence of controls over entry into the territory. No government had the power to deport or expel, and no law made it possible to follow immigrants after their arrival on British soil. Foreigners were required to show a passport upon arrival and ship captains had to provide border control officers with the list of all foreigners on board, along with their physical description. However, this had very little impact since the requirement was only enforced in London, Hull and one or two other ports.

This exceptional tolerance is explained by several factors. One was the small size of the colonies formed as a result of these forced migrations, and therefore a lack of serious competition for employment for local populations. In some cases, these refugees brought some outstanding skills, like the Huguenots and to some extent the Communards; Rosemary Ashton notes, however, that continental exiles seemed less easy to integrate from about 1850 onwards, due to their large numbers and perceived lack of skills. The nineteenth-century exiles were also careful not to jeopardise their asylum status and tended to keep a low profile during their stay in Britain. In addition to these pragmatic aspects, the defence of the right of asylum had a strong ideological dimension, and was a corollary of the liberal ideology which was at its apex under Queen Victoria. Asylum and immigration were perceived as facets of the Victorian dogma of free trade: unfettered economic competition was not seen negatively, and it was widely believed that attempts to stifle it through artificial restrictions would have detrimental

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consequences. Freedom from political oppression was regarded as one of the key liberties of freeborn Englishmen, along with freedoms of expression, of the press and of religion. The protection of foreign exiles was therefore a celebration of English freedoms against continental despotism and was invested with considerable patriotic pride. Implicitly – especially after 1848 – it was also a commentary on the superiority of Britain’s institutions and its political system, which made it possible to harbour continental exiles and defuse internal and external revolutionary threats through successive extensions of the political franchise, when elsewhere these toppled continental governments. This assumption fuelled the feeling of exceptionalism linked to the presence of foreign exiles: ‘They were walking proof, every one of them, of Britain’s superiority and consequent resilience. The wilder they were, the more trouble they caused, the more risible they appeared – the more they underlined that superiority, and Britain’s magnanimity in putting up with them’.  

This set of principles, which forms the core of the liberal asylum tradition, was established in the 1850s, when Britain came to harbour especially large contingents of exiles displaced by the 1848 continental uprisings. The country’s tolerance of foreign refugees was already becoming an exception, since Belgium and Switzerland had carried out expulsions in 1848. The continuing unstable political situation on the Continent brought further fears of revolutions, possibly instigated from Britain by exiles, and so the country faced diplomatic pressure for the first time. However, Lord Palmerston’s cabinet fell in 1858 after an attempt to extradite Simon Bernard, the accomplice of a failed attack on France’s Napoleon III by the Italian revolutionary Felice Orsini. Palmerston was blamed for almost surrendering to diplomatic pressure exerted by France, so that the ‘Orsini scandal’ came to illustrate the political risks in contravening liberal principles. The idea of British resistance in the face of foreign coercion attempts remained popular in the last years of the nineteenth century, when the anarchists brought the question back to the fore.

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Although they refused to adopt specific legislation to deal with anarchism, British authorities could rely on existing laws to contain the movement. Laws against incitation to murder were used to sentence Most in 1881 and Nicoll in 1892. The 1883 law on explosives was the basis for the Walsall convictions. It was also used against Fritz Brall, a German woodcutter who was a regular at the Autonomie Club, who was indicted – but eventually acquitted – in July 1894 for holding instructions for the fabrication of explosives, a photo of the French terrorist Auguste Vaillant and anarchist papers in various languages. This approach, combining liberal discourse and the use of older laws not specifically designed to fight anarchism, constitutes an original British model. It contrasts with the practice of most other Western countries, where a much more direct and comprehensive repressive strategy prevailed and new laws were adopted.

The Johann Most Case: the situation in 1881

The liberal tradition underwent significant changes in 1881, with the sentencing of the German revolutionary socialist Johann Most. On 18 March 1881, Most published in his paper Freiheit an article celebrating the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by Russian Populists, and calling for similar actions to be carried out on the Continent. This earned him a sentence of 16 months’ hard labour, on the charge of incitation to murder. The reaction to Most’s sentence was twofold: while acts of political violence were widely disapproved of, he attracted considerable public support. This was not because of his ideas, but for fear that the trial might be an attack on freedom of the press and opinion, as well as a complacent gesture towards the demands of foreign ‘despots’. A rumour that Bismarck himself had asked for Most’s arrest went around London; the Rose Street Social Democratic Club even offered a £300 reward for the letter

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8 Sweeney, At Scotland Yard, pp. 265–75.
signed by the German Chancellor, and the Home Secretary William Harcourt had to deny all of this in the Commons.9

According to Bernard Porter, the decision to try Most must be understood in the context of the diplomatic bargaining over anarchists and Fenians at the time. Britain had been the target of attacks from the American branch of the Irish republican movement since 1870, and a new onslaught started just as Most’s case began. In addition to countless bomb alerts, there were threats against Queen Victoria’s life in 1872 and 1882. The residence of London’s Lord Mayor was attacked in March 1881. Faced with this situation, the Government hoped to use Most as leverage to ask for convictions or extraditions from foreign authorities – and especially the United States. Most’s conviction also demonstrated the efficiency of British methods regarding the repression of terrorism, and briefly put to rest foreign demands for greater cooperation between international police forces, or even for a permanent system of collective control.

The Freiheit prosecution and its outcome called into question several liberal dogmas. The principle of non-interference into the activities of refugees on British soil was openly breached for the first time since the days of Simon Bernard. This intervention was also followed up by another Freiheit case, as Frederick Schwelm and William Mertens, who took over as the editors of Freiheit, were soon arrested for fêting the Fenians. Most’s trial also resulted in a reinforcement of police surveillance over the refugees, through occasional but often complicated collaborations with continental police forces.

The anarchists as a political and diplomatic stake

After the consolidation of foreign anarchist colonies in London and the terrorist campaign of the early 1890s, diplomatic arguments for the revision of existing legislation gained currency

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in public opinion and were heard in Parliament after 1892. In the Commons, they were supported by the Conservative party, which was in opposition from 1892 to 1895. Diplomatic issues loomed large: some Members of Parliament expressed the fear that Britain would become isolated in international politics because of its protection of anarchists and, at the same time, accused continental powers of getting rid of dangerous individuals by allowing them to flee to Britain or deporting them here themselves.

The Walsall plots marked a real turning-point in the movement’s perception; in its wake, several voices were heard demanding a less lenient and more interventionist stance towards the refugees. ‘We only have too good reason to expect that no small contingent will arrive among us by-and-by, and will claim a hospitality which we cannot refuse, but which we shall most unwillingly allow,’ the Times regretted on 25 April 1892. Parliament saw several heated debates on the increasingly polemical issues of asylum and immigration, with peaks after each new terrorist attack. Fears were especially intense following the December 1893 explosion in the French Chamber of Deputies, when the Wicked Laws were adopted and during the waves of mass expulsions of 1893–94.

On 12 April 1892, the Conservative Charles Darling, MP for Deptford, asked for the Commonweal to be prosecuted for its violent verbal attacks on Justice Hawkins, the judge in the Walsall case; however, in the absence of the Attorney General, Balfour managed to avoid the question. Nicoll, however, ended up being prosecuted for seditious libel and sentenced to 18 months’ hard labour in May 1892. Several MPs demanded heightened vigilance against the anarchists. In November 1893, Darling, supported by 40 other MPs, pointed out the dangers in allowing anarchists to hold public meetings, especially in view of foreign terrorist attacks. Describing the Freedom group as ‘a conspiracy’, he attacked the Government’s laxness, depicting the recent celebration of the Chicago anniversary in alarming terms:

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11 *Hansard*, HC Deb 12 April 1892 vol 3 cc1251-2, ‘The conviction of anarchists at Stafford Assizes’.
They were men of the same class and engaged in the same objects as the men who the other day blew up the audience in the theatre of Barcelona. They were men of the same class, having the same objects as those who were convicted at Walsall for taking part in plots to commit dynamite outrages… Was this what was called allowing the use of the Square to those who were responsible for the maintenance of order – granting it to people who met to commemorate criminals and others who devoted their lives to disorder?12

An anarchist gathering for which Henry Samuels had requested permission was banned in November 1893 because its attendees ‘applaud and justify the wholesale massacre of innocent persons as a legitimate method for the attainment of their ends’.13

Despite occasional concessions, the Government refused the all-out repressive policy prevalent everywhere in Europe, upholding the liberal policy of tolerance, which relied on the notion of political liberalism as ‘a safety valve’ to defuse revolutionary tensions, and downplaying the threat posed by continental anarchist refugees. The Liberal Home Secretary Henry Asquith, questioned in the Commons about the anarchists, answered in tranquil terms:

I regard these vapourings of very foolish and very ignorant people as having, at any rate, this advantage – that to use a vulgar expression, they ‘let off the steam’ and act as a kind of safety-valve to feelings and opinions which are only dangerous so long as they are held in suppression and not properly looked after.14

He went on to describe the anarchists as ‘a small handful of insignificant people, speaking and acting in the presence of the police’ and clearly expressed his refusal to exert ‘any censorship over the objects for which meetings are hold [sic]’. Similarly, the trade unionist and SDF member John Burns opposed any motion ‘fettering the right of public meeting and freedom of discussion’; for him, the anarchists were only ‘a few precocious youths and young men’.

Typically, in those years, protests against anarchist refugees remained marginal, and even in the months following the Greenwich explosion, Lord Salisbury was the main spokesperson in Parliament for those who demanded a firmer stance against the anarchists. It was the perceived threat of immigration which provided a more favourable context for anti-asylum arguments to be heard – and *vice versa*.

The ‘Alien Question’: asylum, immigration and socialism

The anarchists were only a secondary issue amidst the broader ‘alien question’, since contemporary public opinion was primarily concerned with the increased presence of immigrants from Easter Europe, especially in the East End of London. These concerns were symptomatic of a shift in public perception, which meant that race was now perceived as the chief determinant for crime, rather than poverty, as previously; Jewish immigrants had the misfortune of carrying both stigmas. In the 1880s, a restrictionist movement put forward several White Papers calling for measures limiting immigration into Britain, and especially the influx of impoverished Jewish populations from Eastern Europe which had started in the late 1870s. The 1905 Aliens Act was passed primarily to control this migration, but the question of the anarchist threat was repeatedly raised in the debates leading to the Act, for over a decade.

Tens of thousands of Eastern European Jewish immigrants from Russia, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania had arrived in Britain since the late 1870s, fleeing legalised discrimination and persecution in their homelands. After 1881, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II led to a wave of pogroms and new legal restrictions on these populations. Many of them headed for Britain in the hope of travelling on to the United States but in fact, their journey often ended there and they settled in the areas of Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Stepney, along Commercial Street and, south of the Thames, in Lambeth and Brixton. Leeds and Manchester

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were the main destinations outside London. It was not long before hostility towards these populations mounted, and MPs, journalists and police authorities used this ‘alien’ question (a byword for the ‘Jewish’ question) to press for stricter immigration rules. Economic arguments were put forward: immigrants who were employed in the least qualified jobs, especially in the textile industry’s sweating system were accused of driving down salaries by accepting a very low pay, which in turn had a detrimental effect on the British workers’ pay. The pressure on housing caused by the influx of poor migrants, leading to rent increases at a time of ongoing slum clearance and housing shortages, was another cause of hostility, and overcrowding also raised sanitary concerns. There was also a belief in a specific Jewish criminality, which evolved into conspiracy theories centring on an imaginary ‘International Jewry’.  

In 1888, rumours alleged that the crimes of Jack the Ripper were in fact perpetrated by ‘Jacob the Ripper’. Anti-foreigner propaganda kicked off in London’s East End in 1886, when Arnold White, a xenophobic ‘social reformer’ and the chief extra-parliamentary restrictionist lobbyist, set up, in association with the Count of Dunraven, a Society for the Suppression of the Immigration of Destitute Aliens. It remained in existence until 1892; its main task was the diffusion of restrictionist views in the press and population. White sent regular contributions to *The Times* on the subject. In 1888, a Select Committee of the House of Commons examined the question, but concluded that there was no need for formal restrictions. The following year, a Commission on the sweating system ruled that the evils attributed to immigration were largely exaggerated. No legislation was contemplated. It was Lord Salisbury, in the aftermath of the 1894 assassination of French president Carnot by the Italian anarchist Caserio, who presented the first White Paper for a revision of existing asylum and immigration laws. Anarchism thus provided the driving motive for a revision, ‘a convenient opportunity… the depression was lifting, the abuses of sweating were no worse than before, and immigration was declining, so

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that only the anarchist menace offered a plausible excuse for urgent legislation’. Gainer argues that the alien question, a popular theme with the working classes, was used by the Conservatives in order to destabilise the Liberals who were in difficulty, which explains why the discussion of the Bill was quickly interrupted by Rosebery’s government. Immigration also crystallised inter-party divisions, because it touched on the fundamental opposition between the Conservatives’ protectionism and the Liberals’ defence of free trade.

The restrictionists’ propaganda intensified after the Bill was abandoned. New support rallied to anti-immigration views too, from those sections of the population who felt most threatened by the economic impact of immigrants. A resolution of the Trades Union Congress approved the idea of an Immigration Bill in 1892, and again in 1894 and 1895. Salisbury presented a new White Paper in 1898 – unsuccessfully again. In 1901, a working-class activist group often described as proto-fascist, the British Brothers League, organised mass demonstrations in the East End, Leeds and Manchester. Castigating soaring rents, overcrowding and population removal as a result of housing shortages, with a violently xenophobic tone, the League called for a parliamentary committee to consider an immigration law. The exacerbated jingoism of the Boer War years reinforced this trend. Rampant popular anti-Semitism transpired in a series of propagandist publications and in the widespread myth of a Jewish support for the Boers in the Transvaal. In 1903, the Immigration Reform Association took over in spreading these themes among the population.

These concerns over immigration testify to the repulsion generated by the East End and its inhabitants, at least amongst part of the population. This area itself was a symbol of the urban civilisation and social reconfiguration brought on by the second Industrial Revolution. After 1880, it was represented as the symbol of the damages caused by the advent of the industrial age. Walter Besant’s *How the Poor Live* and George Sims’s *The Bitter Cry of Outcast*

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19 Gainer, *The Alien Invasion*, p. 175.

London (1882–83), followed by Charles Booth’s Life and Labour of the People in London (1892–97), shed light on the appalling living and working conditions prevalent in the capital’s slums and, in the following years, journalists, novelists, reformers, educators, philanthropists and even tourists flocked to visit these areas:

It became customary to talk of the East End as somewhere heathen, outcast, and totally neglected by religious leaders and social reformers…In relative terms such a view was true, but there was also a certain amount of rather empty rhetoric involved, rhetoric which was used to arouse public interest in various causes.21

The East End became the incarnation of the various social ills with which Britain seemed to be battling. The horror associated with the East End comes through in the portraits drawn by the restrictionists: ‘All the moral evils that follow poverty, overcrowding, physical depression, the fierce temptation to the overtried and helpless of vice, drink, and idleness, are there with a breadth and a depth that make good men despair and bad men grow cynical’.22 The detractors of mass immigration – who included a number of socialists – brandished the image of a decadent and inherently corrupt community, threatening their host country with ethnic, moral and religious decay, another assault on a reeling economic and social system. Anti-Semitic discourses highlight an increasingly pressing obsession with national decline which revolved around the notion of identity loss and decline: ‘As they come, so they remain – aliens, children of another race, amongst us, yet not of us. And the East End produces no type of man or woman so unfit, un-English, and morally and personally so alien, as the pauper immigrant when he becomes a settler in the regions of Hatton Garden, Soho and the East End’.23


The fear of seeing British workers contaminated by socialist and revolutionary ideas was another one of the restrictionists’ main arguments. The social unrest ignited in this part of London in the mid- and late 1880s, with the Bryant and May matchmakers’ and the Dockers’ strikes, turned the area into a symbol of the appalling working-class plight. Many contemporary depictions were underpinned by the Victorian equation of material and moral deprivation, the stigmatisation of poverty and the notion of laborious classes as dangerous classes. The risk that these populations might succumb to socialism was voiced unambiguously by Howard Vincent (the former head of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at Scotland Yard and a famous detractor of anarchists), Salisbury and other commentators. The argument was all the more powerful as East End Jewish populations formed unions at an early date, and had a thriving anarchist movement too:

They come simply to swell the swollen tide of immigration into the towns, to reduce the rate of wages there, and therefore to strengthen that spirit of discontent and disorder on which the agitators live and batten, and which in time may pollute the ancient constitutional liberalism of England with the visionary violence of Continental Socialism…Mr. Burns, Mr. Tillett and Mr. Mann could raise a Judenhetze tomorrow if they liked to do it.24

The socialist revival confirmed the feeling of an imminent threat to social stability, and the presence of numerous socialist exiles in Britain provided another argument to the critics of liberal policies.

The conflation of socialism with anarchism and therefore violence was almost permanent, suggesting that public fears of anarchism were deliberately fanned for ulterior motives by a conservative section of the population. Barbara Arnett Melchiori sees references to the anarchism by middle-class Victorian writers as a hyperbolic description of the increasingly militant working class:

The real fear of the middle-class writers was…a fear of what was felt to be an inevitable and impending class struggle…What the novelist was tending to do was to take the popular

fear of explosions, with their threat to life and property, and to canalise this fear so as to build up resistance to the whole socialist movement.\textsuperscript{25}

Without fully adhering to this argument which, to some extent, is also conspiratorial, there is no doubt that the confusion between ‘dynamite and democracy’\textsuperscript{26}, between socialist activists and bomb-throwers, social protest and anarchism, was omnipresent. Socialists and anarchists were all perceived as enemies of society, conspirators seeking to inflict harm upon the institutions of family, government and society as a whole, as exemplified by literary works featuring anarchists (Melchiori cites George Gissing, Walter Besant and Henry James as examples\textsuperscript{27}). The confusion between anarchism and socialism was very common across Europe, where both movements rose to prominence at the same time, remained linked until 1896 and triggered similar fears in public opinion. France, Spain or the United States were notorious cases in which governments used the anarchist threat as an excuse to repress all of the socialist movement\textsuperscript{28}; Britain certainly toyed with the idea too, all the more as the protests of the years 1886–89 left a lasting trauma in public minds. Thus, after the Greenwich attacks, the national and international press was quick to point to far greater troubles: ‘If such trouble-makers are not arrested, it is to be feared that there will be a repetition of the plunder of shops which took place in the West End a few years ago’.\textsuperscript{29} The reference to the mass demonstrations of 1887 evidences the confusion between different kinds of militancy. These various pressures – economic, popular, diplomatic, cultural – cumulatively weakened the asylum dogma. Distinctions were increasingly drawn between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ immigrants, and between the immigrants of the past and those of the present:

\textsuperscript{25} Melchiori, \textit{Terrorism in the late-Victorian Novel}, pp. 6–9.

\textsuperscript{26} Melchiori, \textit{Terrorism in the late-Victorian Novel}, p. 190.

\textsuperscript{27} Melchiori, \textit{Terrorism in the late-Victorian Novel}, chapter 7, ‘Dynamite and Democracy’.

\textsuperscript{28} Avrich, \textit{The Haymarket Tragedy}, p. 429.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Paris}, 17 February 1894. Cutting held in file APP BA 1509.
Everything has changed since the days of Kossuth, Mazzini, and Garibaldi. It is no longer a case of liberty against despotism. It is no longer a question of giving a harbour of safety to those who, in the vicissitudes of politics, have failed to carry their own ideals into effect. You are now dealing with men for whom any such excuse is impossible, and would be almost disgraceful. You are dealing with men who commit crimes.  

**Parliamentary debates**

In this climate of fear and self-doubt, the anarchists provided additional arguments to those pressing for a revision of immigration and asylum laws. Hence another type of restrictionist argument, deriving from fears of becoming ‘the dunghill’ of the world, which was put forward by Howard Vincent. He defended the idea in the Commons in April 1892, and pressed for anti-anarchist legislation:

> As the frontiers of Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Belgium are closed to them by the administrative laws of these nations, and also to a great extent, the ports of the US…the UK is practically the only refuge for the rejected of Europe.

However, Salisbury was alone in making an explicit connection between restrictionist arguments and the anarchists, between immigration and asylum. On 17 July 1894, he presented a two-part White Paper to the Lords:

> The first part deals with a question which has been a great deal discussed of recent years – namely, the dealing with destitute aliens who are proposing to land upon our shores… But

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recent events have brought before our minds another class of aliens for which this country has for a long time unfortunately been the last resort.\textsuperscript{32}

He called for a resurrection of the 1848 legislation on dangerous foreigners, based on various arguments. First, taking up the depiction of London as the capital of the international anarchist conspiracy, he claimed that recent attacks had been plotted in Britain:

Now England is to a large extent the headquarters, the base, from which the Anarchist operations are conducted, the laboratory in which all their contrivances are perfected.

The worst part of it is that these enterprises, so far as we can judge, are to a great extent prepared and organised on this soil.\textsuperscript{33}

British exceptionalism in the field of asylum, traditionally a source of great national pride, now became a source of problems: ‘We alone, I believe, among the nations of Europe do not give to our Government the power of removing aliens from our shores. Every other Government possesses it.’ The very notion of anarchist asylum was called into question, as anarchism was no longer recognised as a political doctrine:

The course of events has caused an entire change in the idea of asylum. Those who reach our island now are not the men to whom we offered asylum in old times. You may agree with such men as Garibaldi or Kossuth or any other supporter of insurrectionary movements or not, but it is an insult to them to mention their names in the same breath as the men who raise our horror to-day. It is the mere clinging to a tradition, of which the bare pretence survives, to say that because we have always granted the right of asylum to


\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Hansard}, HL Deb 17 July 1894 vol 27 cc117-56.
patriots and rebels, however mistaken they may have been, therefore we should continue to
grant the right of asylum to those who live in a perpetual conspiracy of assassination.

But above all, Salisbury’s argument was diplomatic:

It is impossible, while events of this kind succeed each other, that our allies and other
nations upon the Continent should not look with indignation, if not with a stronger feeling,
upon a country where enterprises of this kind can be and are safely organised… I feel that
not for our own convenience only or mainly, but as part of our duty to the commonwealth
of nations to which we belong, as part of our duty to that common civilisation which is
attacked altogether wherever it is attacked at all, we owe it to them that we should not be
behind them in the precautions we take against the organisation of these atrocious crimes,
that we should adopt the measures of safety which have commended themselves to all other
nations.

The Liberal Foreign Secretary the Earl of Rosebery replied cautiously, pointing to the sterility
of purely ideological debates based on the increasingly problematic notion of tradition:

I myself have always thought that we are hampered too much by traditional watchwords
about Great Britain being the asylum open to all nations and by arguments drawn from the
immigration into this country after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and so forth.

However, he refuted the notion that the anarchists posed a serious threat and firmly denied that
the attacks against France had been plotted in Britain. Salisbury’s position, while testifying to
the emergence of a continental-style discourse on the anarchists, remained a minority, and the
Liberals’ ascendancy in Parliament enabled them to sustain the mid-Victorian asylum tradition
for another few years.

It was probably as a sign of goodwill that several extraditions of French anarchists were
agreed to by British judicial authorities in the 1890s. This landmark change represented both a
diplomatic compromise and a preventive measure against potential attacks by exiles; it also
meant that the anarchists would no longer be considered as political refugees. The most high-profile case, at the end of 1892, was that of Jean-Pierre François, better known as François, whose extradition was requested by French authorities in connection with Paris’s Café Very explosion in April 1892. But this could only be achieved if the political nature of François’s suspected crime was denied, since otherwise he would still be considered as a political refugee entitled to asylum. Indeed, by virtue of the French Extradition Treaty, political offenders could not be extradited. The preparation for François’s impending court case mobilised the comrades, who feared that it would set a precedent for other future extraditions; François himself quickly managed to alienate most of his fellow exiles and attracted little sympathy, but his fate held high stakes.34 In October 1892, the news that the extradition had been granted by Bow Street Magistrates Court caused great concern in anarchist circles. François had allegedly confessed that he knew where the dynamite used for the Paris explosion had been hidden. A strong mobilisation in London’s international anarchist circles followed; a Committee for the Defence of the Right of Asylum was formed to raise money and appeal against the extradition order. Active members included The Torch’s young Rossettis, Kropotkin, Michel and Agnes Henry.35 The mobilisation succeeded in opening a debate on the defence of the right of asylum; even a reticent witness like the Russian revolutionary Felix Volkhovsky, with little time for anarchists, eventually rallied to François’s defence:

He said that the question for him was one of extradition. Let F. be hanged by all means in France if he committed a crime there, that was the affair of the French government, but we ought to fight extradition, it was immorality between governments. He talked of Anarchists as criminal fools and the moment one of them committed a crime, Kropotkin said ‘Oh, but he is not an Anarchist’.36

34 APP BA 1508, report by Z.2 dated 24 October 1892.
In a pamphlet issued by the defence Committee, Agnes Henry put the question in historical perspective, presenting extradition as a radical new departure.37 She pointed out that anarchism ought to be regarded as a political belief, contrary to those who saw it as a meaningless act of violence, and the defence of indicted anarchists was essential to the defence of political asylum itself:

No one would venture to maintain that the offence had nothing to do with a rebellion against the political institutions of France. It was not committed for personal profit, not even to revenge a personal friend, because François did not know Ravachol. It was an expression of hatred, deeply seated in the heart of the great mass of the Parisians, since the time of Napoleon III, against anyone aiding the police, which has still the reputation of holding the worst traditions of a dark period in the history of France.38

The case raised the question of the status of anarchists as political refugees, especially since François’s defence was based on the Extradition Treaty and the claim that his had been a political offence. The rejection of his appeal on 1 December 1892 meant that anarchist outrages would not be considered as political crimes warranting asylum: ‘The suggestion that the crime with which he is charged could be treated as ‘political’ was scouted by the magistrate…and was practically withdrawn by his own counsel.’39 Ironically, however, François was acquitted following his trial back in France.

Another suspect in the Café Véry explosion, Théodule Meunier, who was also suspected of involvement in the attack on Paris’s Caserne de Lobau in March 1892, was eventually arrested by Melville on a platform at Victoria Station as he was apparently preparing to flee to Antwerp at the beginning of April 1894. ‘He said to him in French, ‘Meunier, I arrest

38 Agnes Henry, Pamphlet dated 25 November 1892, held in TNA, HO 144/485/X37842A.
you”, the *Daily Graphic* reported.\(^{40}\) His extradition was decided following a court case in which several French comrades testified.\(^{41}\) Comrades organised a protest at the lack of solid evidence against Meunier, and the fact that ‘at the present moment the very suspicion being connected with Anarchists is sufficient ground for a man’s imprisonment in France.’ It is probably due to this issue of principles that Meunier’s defence fund was supported by non-anarchists such as William Morris and Walter Crane.\(^{42}\) The verdict carried the same meaning as in François’s case: anarchist attacks were not a political crime. The notion of political offence was therefore redefined by the Court’s decision:

> To constitute the conditions under which a political offence may be committed, there must be two parties in a state, one seeking to impose its government on the other … The anarchists seeking not a new form of government, but general destruction… the intent necessary to create a political offence – its direction primarily against a government – does not exist; the anarchist outrages being primarily directed against the citizens as such.\(^{43}\)

There were divergent analyses regarding the place of the anarchists in international diplomacy: some, like Vincent, sought laws to protect Britain against careless extraditions from foreign countries, while others wanted measures to be taken as a sign of goodwill towards foreign countries. This was Salisbury’s position, which was also commonly found in the conservative press. Their point was at least partly valid; a section of the French press, for example, was becoming increasingly critical of Britain’s ambiguous positions. This was not quite new, as Porter has stressed: ‘On several occasions in the nineteenth century European governments demanded the return of their exiled dissidents, clearly under the illusion that Britain could comply. When she did not, they sometimes suspected that it was because Britain


\(^{41}\) TNA, HO 144/485/X37842B, ‘Witnesses at Bow Street Police Court’.

\(^{42}\) *Liberty*, June 1894, I, 6, ‘The Meunier extradition treaty’, p. 44.

\(^{43}\) *Law Times*, 16 June 1894, ‘Political Offences’.
wanted them there, plotting against Britain’s enemies subversively’. After the Greenwich explosion, the French nationalist press was incensed by Asquith’s refusal to pass anti-anarchist measures, as he called instead for a system of concerted information exchange between national police forces and restated Britain’s opposition to any expulsion. The daily *L’Éclair* attacked Asquith and Gladstone, insisting that the British population was irritated with Asquith’s determination to let the anarchists organise freely; Asquith, the paper claimed, was the only person to ignore what everyone else knew – ‘that London is the centre of all anarchist conspiracies. That it is from London, always, that the watchword comes; that it is from London, often, that the criminal comes’. Two days later, the patriotic *Gaulois* confidently claimed that ‘John Bull, practical as ever, has passed an unspoken convention with the anarchists: ‘Don’t blow up my house, and you can live in London pretty much in peace, all the more as you will be causing trouble to my neighbours, which I always enjoy’.* *Le Matin* sniggered: ‘England’s Government is showing very little eagerness in carrying out its duty, and London may well remain for a long time still the haunt of anarchic conspirators’. The *Écho de Paris* came to a similar conclusion:

Being an anarchist refuge, without suffering from their destructive faculties, now this is a rare agreement of these two conditions. Taking men whom the social hierarchy, everywhere, used to send into a rage and turning them into public-tranquillity sheep under a very hierarchical government; defusing their power of propaganda, or at least leaving it strength for export only, this is a good fortune which does not solely boil down to mores. This has something to do with politics, and the English are very good at it.

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44 Porter, ‘The Asylum of the Peoples’, p. 44.
47 *Le Matin*, 20 February 1894, ‘L’anarchisme international’.
But while such criticisms appeared more frequently in the conservative press throughout 1894, there were also discordant views: *La Cocarde*’s contribution to the post-Greenwich press onslaught on the British government praised the Cabinet’s ‘cold blood’ in the face of the ‘anarchist conspiracy’ allegedly unravelled by the London police.49

It is hard to measure the impact of Britain’s growing diplomatic isolation in those years, in a context of intense colonial rivalries with France until the 1904 Entente Cordiale, and assess whether it may have seemed relevant for the authorities to use the anarchists as a trading currency or even a source of information. However, the compromises relating to extraditions, surveillance and bilateral agreements certainly show that the period of Britain’s splendid isolation was coming to an end. In answer to the Conservatives’ arguments, Liberals refuted the idea of any opposition between the different countries confronted with the issue of controlling anarchism. Grilled by Salisbury on the risks of diplomatic conflicts caused by the control of anarchism, the Earl of Rosebery set out in reply a more cooperative vision:

> I do not consider the responsibility lies with Great Britain alone. I regret the presence of such persons on our shores; I regret that some of their crimes should possibly be concerted here; but I cannot think that the country to which they are sent and which unwittingly receives them is to be considered as more responsible than the country which wishes to expel them.50

This was also Asquith’s position throughout the attacks of the early 1890s; Liberals defended this more collective conception, advocating systematic exchange of information as opposed to permanent legislation. However, they stumbled upon difficulties in doing so – not least the highly problematic sharing of international information about expulsions, a subject on which little cooperation seemed achievable. Above all, while attempts at international coordination after 1898 indicated a desire for the surveillance of anarchists to be dealt with collectively, it soon emerged that the countries engaged in it took vastly different approaches to the practice.


Contemporary historians have replaced the ‘anarchist question’ in the broader context of the pre-World War One spy fever:

For the Foreign Office these exiles were a source of information and a recruiting ground for potentially valuable agents; it therefore adopted a tolerant attitude towards the refugees. On the other hand, the Home Office, the police and the Special Branch viewed these groups as potentially subversive and a threat to the state. As a result a working hostility developed between the Foreign Office on the one hand and the police and special branch on the other, with the former holding much information which it did not pass on to the latter.\textsuperscript{51}

Until at least the signing of the Entente Cordiale in 1904, Britain was constantly gripped by rumours of imminent invasions by foreign powers, which testified to a profound sense of national self-doubt, nourished by fears of decline and weakness, disorder and decadence. This had a strong impact in the rethinking of immigration and asylum traditions.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Via Britannica: redefining the British surveillance system}

Although there were still occasional acts of propaganda by the deed, the anarchist threat had largely waned by the very end of the nineteenth century. It was then, however, that Britain revised its asylum and immigration policy. This represented a concession to continental countries and a profound change in British practices and, above all, in discourses on surveillance. It was also the local manifestation of a global trend towards border closure and controlled circulation.

Since the control of international anarchist networks had emerged as an international issue, in the 1880s, the countries faced with it protected themselves by limiting the immigration of suspicious individuals, placing them under intense police surveillance or simply expelling them. However, the international legislation for the surveillance of anarchists remained very


\textsuperscript{52} Stafford, ‘Spies and Gentlemen’, pp. 489–509.
unspecific and empirical until the end of the century, and international surveillance rested to a large extent on bilateral agreements.

In September 1898, following the assassination of the Empress Elizabeth of Austria by the Italian anarchist Lucheni, the Italian government convened an international conference in Rome, in order to establish between the European powers ‘in the interest of Social defence, a practical and permanent agreement aimed to successfully fight anarchist Associations and their adepts’. The British government, now led by the Conservatives, accepted the invitation but clearly stated its reluctance towards any formal binding agreement:

The law of this country has on recent occasions been found adequate for the repression and punishment of public incitements to criminal attempts abroad … And its provisions against the preparation or possession of explosives for nefarious purposes are of a very stringent character.

The acceptance letter reiterated the government’s official policy on these matters, as well as:

the principles traditionally accepted here with regard to the individual freedom of all persons, whether natives or foreigners, whatever opinions they may hold, so long as no substantial evidence of crime or criminal intentions can be produced against them. H.M.’s Government do not anticipate that Parliament would be disposed to sanction any legislation involving a material departure from these principles, and they feel it their duty to make a reservation on this point at the outset, in order to avoid all cause of subsequent disappointment or misconception.

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The same determination to preserve the existing approach and the country’s independence characterised British positions throughout the conference, which was held in Rome between 24 November and 21 December 1898. Britain was represented by its ambassador in Italy, Lord Currie, the former Home Office Under-Secretary Godfrey Lushington, as well as Howard Vincent. The conference aimed ‘to suggest the best means of repressing anarchist work and propaganda, having due regard to the autonomy of each State’. The reference to national ‘autonomy’ may well have been a concession to the British delegation, since the measures under discussion were rather stringent and interventionist. The agenda started with the possible implementation of penal sanctions against those involved in the fabrication or preparation of explosive devices, joining anarchist ‘conspiracies’ or groups planning an ‘anarchist act’, inciting to anarchist acts or propagating anarchist ideas in the army. It advocated systematic punishment for any involvement in anarchist propaganda, as well as a complete ban on anarchist publications, including minutes of anarchist trials in the general press, which had repeatedly served as choice platforms for the comrades to publicise their ideas. In addition to these measures, which formalised existing practices, the allocation of new powers to judges was considered, such as house arrest or topping up any sentence with a travel interdiction without notifying administrative authorities. The Conference’s administrative Committee put forward the most innovative proposals: creating a central authority in each country devoted to the surveillance of anarchists, liaising with each country’s authorities and making the use of ‘portrait parlé’ more systematic for the international surveillance of suspicious individuals. An ‘extradition sub-committee’ suggested that all anarchist acts be regarded as punishable by extradition. The British delegation itself only called for a sub-committee discussing ‘the details of police intercommunication’, which it chaired – an agenda which testifies to its relative moderation and isolation in a context of law strengthening.

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Noticeably, the political transition from the Liberals to the Conservatives had not changed the country’s openly stated preference for information sharing over formal diplomatic and policing arrangements. Vincent also arranged closed meetings alongside the Rome conference, resulting in individual police cooperation agreements.58

The final report was approved by 20 out of the 21 countries represented in Rome. Britain was the only country to abstain on most of the clauses which, except for minor amendments, were adopted unanimously. The British delegation, while restating its determination ‘to prevent the perpetration of violent crimes against the heads of foreign states’ and conceding that ‘it is a duty for nations to protect one another against any criminal attempt’, reiterated its refusal to enter any formal commitment59: ‘We consider that arrangements in this respect must be left to the discretion of each government’. It insisted that existing British laws allowed for the extradition of murderers and the extradition of François had proved that the anarchists were not granted immunity as political exiles.60 A few concessions were made by extending the law on explosives, and the government also agreed to study the best ways to control the diffusion of anarchist writings inciting violence.61

Despite all the dispositions adopted in Rome, the conference’s outcome was regarded as disappointing, since the signatories of the Protocol subsequently did very little to implement these measures.62 Howard Vincent had expressed his doubts over a diplomatic approach to controlling anarchism, preferring international police conferences instead: ‘Their very mystery inspires criminal conspirators with fear, and the exchange of views and mutual confidence

engendered are conducive to successful activity and co-operation’. The subsequent correspondence between British services was telling of the refusal to alter British methods: ‘Expulsion as it is understood on the continent is impossible in this country …. All we can do is to deal with men who do criminal acts under the ordinary criminal jurisdiction’. From the British perspective, the main progress achieved with the Rome conference was the joint agreement to avoid deporting anarchists to London.

In 1902, the assassination of United States president McKinley by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz prompted the Russian and American governments to call for new international controls. But again, the British government refused any further cooperation, especially regarding expulsions, the surveillance of entry points into the country and systematic exchanges of information among the national police forces. One of the reasons for the adamant emphasis on British independence was revealed on this occasion, when internal correspondence reflected that a systematic exchange of information risked exposing Scotland Yard’s informers and jeopardising their entire work. In spite of this British refusal, a confidential protocol was signed in Saint Petersburg in March 1904 by representatives from Germany, Austro-Hungaria, Denmark, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Sweden and Norway, Turkey and Bulgaria. The United States did not take part in the conference and France refused to enter the final Protocol due to ‘some inconveniences from a political point of view’. The Protocol bound its signatories to create a central bureau in each country, in order to collect information on anarchists and their activities and communicate closely with the other international bureaux.

This initiative is commonly described as the forerunner of Interpol: even if few decisive measures were taken by the states involved, in the long run, the Rome and Saint Petersburg

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64 TNA FO 412/68, letter from the Home Office (HO) to the Foreign Office (FO), 10 January 1902.

65 TNA FO 412/68, letter from HO to FO dated 15 May 1902.


67 TNA FO 881/9281X, letter from Count Bernstoff to the Marquess of Lansdowne, 28 April 1904.
conferences led to a reinforcement of direct communication between national police forces. Britain’s refusal to enter a formal agreement, calling instead for greater police cooperation, was the expression of a general preference for a non-political solution to the problems posed by the policing of anarchism. Once again, the British Government showed willingness to cooperate, but only within the existing legal framework, that is to say without powers to expel and without appointing a formal authority with a national remit. But, as the Foreign Secretary Lansdowne specified, this was not really a problem; most of the anarchist refugees lived in and around London and were therefore subject to the observation of the Metropolitan Police.

However, one important point featured prominently in internal memos, without being publicised internationally. This was the fact that Britain relied heavily on private informants: ‘H.M.’s Government gave all these objections save those which depend on the source of information in England being largely the private informer’. This silence may have had primarily pragmatic motivations, chiefly avoiding the risk of exposing them, after the lessons of the Rubino case were learnt. The informer Gennaro Rubino, who infiltrated the Italian anarchists whilst in the pay of the Italian secret service, was exposed in London in May 1902. He later tried to assassinate King Leopold of Belgium, as a redeeming proof of his anarchist leanings. There were, moreover, well-known disagreements between the British authorities and the Italian Police, whose surveillance work in London was seen as veering a little too close to political espionage. So there were precedents which may explain why the British authorities found it preferable not to expose themselves to what they perceived as foreign incompetence. Equally, however, this decision may have been prompted by the strategy to preserve the ambiguities surrounding British surveillance tactics.

The Aliens Act and its aftermath

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68 Deflem, Policing World Society, pp. 72–4

69 TNA FO 881/9281X, letter from Lansdowne to Count Beckendorff, 17 June 1904.

70 TNA HO144/757/118516, Memorandum from 1904.

71 Quai d’Orsay Archive, ‘Les polices étrangères en France’.

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One year after the Saint Petersburg Protocol, the passing of the Aliens Act was a watershed in British asylum and immigration policy. The restrictionists’ propaganda and the Conservatives’ efforts eventually prevailed over the Liberal status quo ante, and Britain, rather ironically, became ‘the first European state to establish a modern system of immigration control at the point of entry’.72 The Act, which came into force on 1 January 1906, was the result of a renewed parliamentary and pamphlet campaign started in 1901, in which the issue of crime featured prominently. The main dispositions of the new law allowed entry on British soil to be refused to ‘undesirables’ – that is to say ‘the insane, the diseased, the criminal, the putative public charge’73 – and the Home Office could now expel such individuals. Political refugees were exempt from this legislation, but it affected the treatment of anarchists, as the refugee status was redefined. It now included only those seeking to ‘avoid prosecution or punishment on religious or political grounds or prosecution for an offence of a political character, or to avoid prosecution involving danger to life or limb on account of religious or political belief’.74 The definition was carefully worded so as not to include deserters and it was specified that any individual would be considered undesirable if previously sentenced abroad for a non-political crime liable to extradition – a restriction probably targeting anarchists.

The Act’s immediate impact was minimal, as universal inspection was ruled out and the checks which were carried out could be avoided: more than a quarter of those arriving in Britain were still not inspected upon arrival in 1906 (the figure rose to just under 40 % in the following years) and only third-class passengers were controlled at all.75 It also suffered from a fundamental flaw: the extreme difficulty in identifying criminals upon arrival.76 However, the symbolism of the Aliens Act is unquestionable: it was an important manifestation of the faltering of Victorian liberalism and it signalled the turning point when the British political

74 *Hansard*, HC Deb 17 July 1905 vol 149 cc903-57, ‘Aliens Bill’.
class discovered the political gains of xenophobic watchwords. It put an end to almost a century of ‘open-door policy’ and paved the way for a legal reinforcement of immigration control in the following years and after the First World War. This evolution, which was not specific to Britain, highlights a new conception of the state and the nation, which was incompatible with liberal views and policies:

The ‘protectionism’ which was put in place at the time marked the beginning of massive state interventionism in economic affairs, but also in social problems, and the end of the ‘laisser faire’ so dear to free-exchange theorists. This is the inaugural moment for the transition for the liberal state of the early nineteenth century to the welfare state or, even better, to the social state… In addition, this period saw a new conception of national identity, based on a more coercive and invasive state multiplying measures of regulation, control, restriction and expulsion of foreign populations.

After the end of the heroic period, and despite the relative calm of the London anarchist groups after 1896, the myth of the anarchist conspiracy based in London by some central committee reappeared from time to time. In January 1909, the ‘Tottenham outrages’ revived the association between anarchism, immigration and crime, and played an important role in fanning public anti-Semitism; two persons were killed and another 21 injured by two Latvian immigrants escaping after a wages snatch from a rubber factory in Tottenham. The following year, in 1910-11, another alleged ‘anarchist outrage’ led to a stricter enforcement of the Aliens Act. During the night of 16 December 1910, a group of Latvian Social Revolutionaries who had rented out two rooms in the Exchange Building, in a small cul-de-sac behind Houndsditch, dug up a passage to the adjacent jeweller’s shop, in order to plunder its safe. The neighbours, alerted by the noise, called the police, who came to the scene, only to be fired at by the

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burglars, resulting in the death of three officers and serious wounds for the others. The burglars ran away, dragging along their severely wounded leader George Gardstein. These ‘Houndsditch murders’ caused a profound trauma to the London population – to the point of being seen as one of the worst events in English police history.\textsuperscript{79} Five men and three women were suspected of taking part in the Exchange Building operation. The investigation to hunt down the Houndsditch runaways progressed quickly, taking the police to the East End’s anarchist clubs (or clubs referred to as anarchist, even when they attracted a wider clientele), in particular the Jubilee Street Club set up in 1906. The repression of the 1905 Russian uprising had indeed driven many revolutionaries and social-democrats to London. On 2 January, the police and military forces circled a building on Sidney Street, believed to be harbouring two of the wanted men. Thus began the Sidney Street siege, which lasted for eight hours and ended with the death of one of the gunmen. It was also an important step in the career of the then Home Secretary, a young Winston Churchill. The Houndsditch murders trial came to a strange resolution: after the culpability for the events was deemed to have rested with two men, Gardstein and Fritz Vaars, all the other suspects were released.

These highly-publicised events reinforced anti-anarchist hostility in Britain: public opinion was especially shocked by the use of firearms, and an explicit link with anarchist refugees was made when a pair of glasses belonging to Malatesta was found in the Exchange Building: Gardstein had indeed worked for a few months in the workshop of the Italian activist.\textsuperscript{80} This was of course a tenuous link, and the case can be seen as a late instance of anarchist stereotyping in the press and public opinion, whereby the companions would be pinpointed as ‘probable culprits when suspects were lacking, especially when gangs were


involved’. The dread of the terrorist and criminal anarchist conspiracy was reinforced by the Houndsditch events, as well as the xenophobic themes attached to discourses on the East End. The conservative press blamed the whole affair on the Liberal government and the limitations of the 1905 Aliens Act, which had been fiercely criticised by Churchill and several Liberals. Churchill – allegedly acting on a suggestion from George V – presented to Parliament an Aliens (Prevention of Crime) Bill aimed at making it harder for foreign immigrants to come to Britain, providing for their expulsion if necessary. The Bill was introduced on 18 April 1911 and its second reading met with especially strong opposition from Radicals and the Independent Labour Party. Four months had gone by since the events at Houndsditch had taken place; the public furore had almost died down and so the Bill was withdrawn.

Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the defence of foreigners in Parliament was now a minority concern, upheld by a small number of Labour MPs. This evolution was enshrined a few years later, with the Aliens Restriction Bill passed on 5 August 1914, debated and voted for in one single day without the minimal opposition, which forced all foreigners to register with the police and granted the Home Office the right to expel or deport anyone without appeal. The law marked the beginning of a new era, while anti-anarchist sentiment receded in the face of a far more fearsome enemy: ‘foreign anarchists brandishing pistols had given way to German spies filching secrets’. Western as well as Eastern European anarchists had nonetheless acted as important catalysts in the revision of liberal principles, before the war dealt them a final blow.

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82 Gainer, *The Alien Invasion*, p. 207.
6. The Pre-war Years: Cross-Channel Networks, Syndicalism and the Demise of Internationalism.

‘Père peinard has now left Islington for Montmartre, and the French anarchists here are but a few… The Anarchist movement has never been more than a very sickly plant in this country, and to-day it is almost moribund’¹, a tabloid noted in 1897. It is true that the international anarchist movement in London was by then minimal in terms of numbers and activity, following the departure of the French comrades after the heady years of propaganda by the deed. But this was not so much a lull as a change in forms of action. The years leading to the First World War were a period of intense international militancy for many anarcho-communists, marked by a double shift – from direct contact to network-based activity, and from anarchism to syndicalism. The importance of the exile years must be understood in this broader historical and geographical context: the direct legacy of the 1880s and 1890s lasted at least until the First World War, notably through the activism of individuals operating within informal networks, at a time when ideological internationalism was an important driving force. These networks partly made up for the enduring failure to set up formal international organisations, a running theme from the 1881 London congress through to the 1913 London revolutionary syndicalist congress. They also testify to the gradual replacement of the ‘heroic’ generation with a syndicalist young guard for whom Franco-British entanglements remained strategically very important. Examining Franco-British syndicalist militancy provides insights into the transnational dissemination of ideas through these personal networks largely created through exile. They show that syndicalism was developed transnationally, with a constant interplay of cross-influences, where the supposedly conservative principles of British trade unionism were reinterpreted in a revolutionary perspective.

¹ Daily News, 12 August 1897.
Organisational conundrums

The failure to set up a permanent international anarchist organisation, an Anarchist International, was a constant theme of the years 1881-1913. The idea that working-class internationalism ought to materialise into a formal organisation was a legacy of the First International, as well as the consequence of a highly repressive context: ‘UNION MAKES US STRONG. Well then, let’s unite!’ Le Révolté exclaimed in 1881. And yet, this organisational drive was paradoxical and highly problematic considering the anti-authoritarian and anti-centralisation tenets of anarchism.

No sooner had the idea of an anarchist International been floated, during the preparation of the 1881 London congress, that tensions appeared within the international anarchist movement, revealing widespread unease over the betrayal of anti-centralising and anti-organisational principles. Calls for ‘the revolutionary reconstitution of the IWMA’ were juxtaposed with much vaguer phrasings: ‘the congress’s sole purpose will be to find a way to group all the forces of the Revolution and found union on a larger basis’. Predictably, the 1881 London Congress did not result in the setting up of a lasting structure providing a framework for international propaganda. After lengthy debates, most comrades agreed on the idea of international coordination. The most contentious suggestions were the proposed creation of a central fund, the exact terms of the proposed ‘solidarity pact’, and possible links with parliamentary socialists. An ‘International’ was set up, but these disagreements were not overcome and no founding text led to a consensus. A three-member Information Bureau based at the Rose Street International Club was eventually put into place, and different language sections were set up over the following months. However, the ideal of coordination, deprived of financial backing and moral legitimacy, remained a dead letter in practice.

2 Le Révolté, 14 May 1881, III, 6, ‘Congrès international de Londres’, p. 2.
4 IISG, Gustave Brocher Papers, ‘Congrès de Londres’.
These questionings were the outcome of the classic libertarian organisational dilemma: could there be such a thing as a group based on the rejection of traditional political and militant organisations? All of the anarchists’ national and international coordination attempts would stumble from then on upon this inherent contradiction. The rise of syndicalism in the early 1900s provided an answer to the question of militant organisation, albeit by toning down its libertarian contents. The 1881 congress was the first symptom of a lasting pathology of international anarchism: the failure to unite into an International. But while Internationals were regarded as the best structure by the companions, informal militant networks proved far more congenial to anarchist militancy, especially because they did not seem to carry the threat of authoritarianism. However, they were only occasionally conceived as such by contemporary actors, and have only been studied in this light retrospectively, by political scientists and historians.

There were other major attempts to set up a formal anarchist organisation in 1899 and 1907, which were equally unsuccessful. In 1899, Pouget, Fernand Pelloutier and the Dutch companion Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis launched the idea of an International Revolutionary Workers’ Congress, to take place in Paris in September 1900. A key item in the preliminary agenda was the question of organisation. However, the event was banned by the police, and the issue of organisation was not raised again until 1907, during the International anarchist congress held in Amsterdam. Debates over organisation were no less vexed, repeating the pattern of the 1881 congress: pre-congress arguments over organisation versus autonomy, in the pages of the pre-congress liaison publication, Le Bulletin de l’Internationale libertaire, followed by the setting up, during the congress, of an extremely vague ‘anarchist International’ which met with a lukewarm reception and died out within a year of its creation. It was supported by a Bulletin de l’Internationale anarchiste, published in French in London by Schapiro. The paper was an efficient way of spreading information about the national movements. While clearly anarchist, it documented the progress of syndicalism too; in Britain,

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it focused primarily on promoting anarchist national organisation and collaboration with East End Jewish anarchists – Schapiro himself was a Russian Jewish anarchist and syndicalist. However, the International’s and the Bulletin’s actual weakness was exposed when repeated calls by Malatesta, Rocker, Schapiro and Turner for the preparation of the International’s 1909 congress fail to elicit a reply.\(^6\)

The final pre-war attempt at an anarchist International was especially ill-fated, since its founding congress was cancelled following the declaration of war. The London Anarchist Congress had been planned to take place between 28 August and 5 September 1914. As with previous congresses, a liaison publication, the *Bulletin du congrès anarchiste international*, put the participants in touch in the months leading up to the gathering. It was published in London by Schapiro, the organising committee’s secretary. The three themes which were to be focused on were antimilitarism, syndicalism and organisation.\(^7\) When the Bulletin’s first issue appeared, several countries had already written in support of the initiative, including France, England, Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States. In the following weeks, there were further proposals for contributions, and the presence of several delegates from the United States was announced, raising great hopes for the conference’s success.\(^8\) Kropotkin and Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis were also expected. Once more, the main objective was the creation of an International: ‘Studying all organisation attempts, trying to find a common basis for anarchist organisation and coordinating all forms of local organisation towards an international agreement between anarchists’.\(^9\) Was this yet another try at a project which, like previous endeavours, was unlikely to succeed? Were there hints that anarchist organisation was progressing in a number of countries, suggesting that such an International could have functioning? In the debacle of August 1914, these questions quickly sank into oblivion.


\(^7\) *Bulletin du congrès anarchiste international*, I, 1, May 1914

\(^8\) *Bulletin du congrès anarchiste international*, I, 2, July 1914.

\(^9\) *Bulletin du congrès anarchiste international*, I, 2, July 1914.
Importing British trade unionism into France

By contrast, the diffusion of syndicalism through personal networks created through exilic contacts exemplifies the benefits of informal organisation for libertarians. The reflection initiated in the late 1880s on trade union infiltration became central to anarchist communist propaganda after 1895. French comrades set about imprinting anarchist views on France’s nascent trade union movement’s goals and methods. The anarchists’ permeation of trade unions took place started with the Nantes Congress in 1894. It was complete by 1902, when the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), which grouped trade unions on an occupational basis merged with the Fédération des Bourses du Travail, which had become another hotbed for early, ‘proto’-syndicalist ideas. The Bourses grouped occupational organisations from the same region or city and were coordinated at the national level by the Fédération des Bourses du Travail founded in 1892. This two-tier structure – vertical integration with the CGT, horizontal with the Fédération – characterised the French model. Although the Bourses were structures of social regulation, anarchists, led by the Fédération’s first secretary Fernand Pelloutier, saw them as embodying the anarchist ideal of social organisation, and their decentralised organisation as a concrete transposition of libertarian principles.

British labour conflicts provided both a counter example and a model in elaborating proto-syndicalist ideology, especially during the years 1895–1900; the British reference was momentarily obliterated after this. The most striking manifestations of this influence were Pouget’s interpretation of the British model, Les Temps nouveaux’s pro-union propaganda and discussions of British unionism in Fernand Pelloutier’s publications. Building up on his London publications, Pouget campaigned vigorously for trade union permeation, reporting on labour conflicts across the Channel and using the practices and achievements of British unions as an

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argument and a model. The British reference was connected with three main themes: the
dangers of state mediation in labour conflicts, sabotage and the urgent need for working-class
organisation. The first theme, direct action against ‘the superstition of the welfare state’, made
its appearance in the second issue of Pouget’s post-exile venture La Sociale in 1895, which
commented extensively on the failed strike of the Leicester and Northampton shoemakers.
Pouget blamed the ending of the strike on the trade union leaders’ decision to negotiate with
employers, with the state mediating. The British example was taken up again in the new series
of the Père peinard, which replaced La Sociale in 1897. Writing about the English
metalworkers’ high-profile strike, Pouget wrote:

As I already said, folks: let’s look at what the English are doing! They are proving to us
experimentally that you only need guts to hold your own against employers. Whereas in
France, the socialists are wasting their forces trying to stupidly climb up the greasy pole,
the English, who are a lot more practical, do not give a damn about the State and are
marching on against the capitalists. And they’re all the better for it! When will the French
prols be ballsy enough to follow their example?

What made the strikers more powerful is that they gave the boot to all politicos, and
counted on themselves only, not on the State, it is a rich lesson in initiative that the English
are giving us. If only we could make the most of it!

This unequivocal statement of the ideal of trade union independence, which was to be
formalised in France with the 1906 Amiens Charter, suggests that the origins of the famed
CGT’s manifesto went further back and borrowed from British practices.

11 La Sociale, 19 May 1895, I, 2, ‘La sociale en Angleterre’, p. 3.
Britain also provided a model for sabotage and, more generally, direct action methods. The 1897 Toulouse congress of the CGT officially adopted sabotage. Pouget had been the main champion for the tactic in the previous months, writing extensively on the example set by British workers:

I already explained about this business which the English often resort to and which is pretty damn good for them. The motto is: A BAD JOB FOR A BAD PAY! In England, when a boss wants to bring down wages, his prols will take a look at the situation: if the strike doesn’t seem practical, with a sure victory at the end, – here comes the sabotage.¹⁴

Pouget’s famous brochure Sabotage, published the same year, developed similar ideas and nodded to British influences too:

Neither must it be believed that sabotage is a product with a Parisian trade mark. It is, indeed, if anything, a theory of English importation and it has been practiced across the Channel for a long time under the name of ‘Go Cannie’ – a Scotch expression which means literally ‘Go slow’.¹⁵

Moreover, Pouget saw British unions as a model of strength and efficient organisation, which brought ‘real improvements concerning the reduction of working hours and wage increases’.¹⁶

They provided the example of a syndicalism free of state interference, supported by powerful and aggressively militant trade unions, with a view to both daily battles to secure immediate improvements and the revolutionary general strike.

Les Temps nouveaux, launched on 4 May 1895, was the continuation of La Révolte under the aegis of Jean Grave, still in close collaboration with Kropotkin in London. Many high-profile comrades contributed to the paper, such as the syndicalist Paul Delesalle, who was in


charge of the ‘Mouvement social’ section, where he devoted several articles to libertarian action in trade unions. The paper was rooted in the anarchist tradition, but paid considerable (if cautious) interest to trade union infiltration. Close attention was given to labour conflicts across the Channel, and Britain gradually emerged as an example of direct action. In early 1897, André Girard described the railway workers strike in the North East of England as ‘an irrefutable answer to those who pretend that in the event of a general strike, the working class, which does not own the capital… would not have the strength to fight the bourgeois class’.\footnote{Les Temps nouveaux, 13 March 1897, II, 46, ‘Angleterre’, p. 3.} Reports on the conflict afforded opportunities for internationalist exhortations: ‘Tom Mann extended a warm call to French workers, who are notoriously lukewarm in supporting their English comrades… We are French here, French from France, and this is enough: we ignore the rest of the universe… Well done, the English’\footnote{Les Temps nouveaux, 18 December 1897, III, 34, ‘Angleterre’, p. 3.}

Other important figures in the newly-created CGT also pondered the example of British trade unions. In 1897, Fernand Pelloutier and his brother Maurice launched \textit{L’Ouvrier des deux mondes}, an economics review which soon became the official organ of the Fédération des Bourses. Fernand Pelloutier was not without contradictions when discussing British unions. He objected to their reformism, wealth, elitism and political moderation:

Their numerous members, the importance of their funds, their clever organisation only serve to give them a mixture of pride and conservation spirit similar to that inspiring the tens of thousands of men fooling themselves into thinking that they are free, in the demonstrations of in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park which are enough to protect them from any gesture of spontaneity.\footnote{Fernand Pelloutier, \textit{Histoire des Bourses du Travail} (Paris: Publications Gramma, 1971 (1902)), pp. 258–9.}
And yet, these unions appeared profoundly libertarian, as shown by comments on the metalworkers’ strike for the eight hours:

Not a strike could be named, which better reveals the strength of the proletariat and the possibility it has to disenfranchise itself – not a single one which, to this point, has shown its administrative intelligence and science of self-government, which are clues to the libertarian society in preparation; not a single one, above all, where workers have least taken the risk of being duped by the solidarity between exploiters and political leaders.  

The British movement became exemplary for direct action and revolutionary practice:

Think for yourself, gather your strengths quietly and, when the day has come, act – but act with your own forces and without any other guide than your own reason. Here is the key to the maturity reached by the English people. Karl Marx, who rightly predicted the ineluctability and nature of the coming revolution, seems to have got things wrong when he claimed that it would be done by the ‘Gallic Rooster’. The Gallic rooster is far too light-headed for such a momentous task; this time, it might well lose out to the British leopard.

Other issues included feature articles on English trade unionism, notably a reprint of the liberal economist Paul de Rousiers’s reference work on the topic, articles on chain-making workers, a historical survey of the right of association in England, vocational training, and accounts of decisive Trades Union Congress sessions, along with frequent mentions of Britain in the foreign news section.  

One highlight was George Sorel’s unflattering review of Beatrice and Sidney Webb’s *History of Trade Unionism*, which called the Fabian Society a group of ‘seven

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hundred bourgeois’ and the tenet of municipal socialism ‘an ideal worthy of a pen-pusher’. Sorel, rather unperceptively, saw the rising tide of parliamentary socialism across the Channel as a temporary phenomenon. All these commentaries, either critical or approving, made Britain the most prominent foreign country in this decidedly international publication.

**The British crisis**

Across the Channel, a smaller proto-syndicalist movement was developing among anarchists too. Some British comrades, such as John Turner, Sam Mainwaring, Ted Leggatt and Jack Tanner had turned to syndicalism in the late 1880s, long before the post-1900 ‘official’ theorisation and diffusion of syndicalism. In May 1895, when Freedom reappeared after a four-month interruption, the new editorial committee expressed their wish to bring it ‘into closer touch with the labour movement and to devote a large part of our space to a full and first-hand account of the more advanced sections of that movement’. The paper started promoting strategies close to those of the French syndicalists – trade unionism, strikes and daily protest as a ‘revolutionary practice’ –, and the necessity of political independence was repeatedly stressed. Despite frequent references to the CGT, this was also seen as a return to the ideas of New Unionism, ‘picking up the revolutionary traditions of the older unions, purged of their sectional and economic mistakes…putting into practice the new ideas they have assimilated’. And indeed, Freedom’s contributors castigated the limitations of New Unionism over and over again, in particular the unions’ extreme corporatism. The notion that British syndicalism was both the product of foreign influences – primarily French and North-American – and the manifestation of an indigenous protest tradition would become a familiar theme a decade later.

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The socioeconomic context largely explains the interest in these ideas. The 1890s were marked by the rise of modern labour management; work conditions changed dramatically up to 1914, with increased concentration in both old and new industries, heightened controls and worker supervision. After 1889–90, employers tightened their grip on work processes, undermining workers’ attempts to control employment or skill levels. With the emergence of foremen, workshops and factories became more bureaucratic; instances of workers’ insubordination were sanctioned with dismissals without notice, existing negotiation schemes were terminated and extra hours imposed on workers. At the institutional level, this employers’ counter-attack culminated with the 1901 Taff Vale judgment, which made unions financially liable for the losses incurred by employers during strikes. Employers were especially uncompromising in the sectors most exposed to international competition, a trend reinforced by the setting up of large employers’ federations. It was several years before these changes led to increased industrial unrest and a shift in political allegiances towards the newly-formed Labour Representation Committee, which aimed for an independent parliamentary representation of the working class. The economic depression and Jingo of the late nineteenth century fever were equally detrimental to radical propaganda; consequently, it was only a decade later, with the return of economic growth, the 1906 election of the Lib-Lab ‘progressive alliance’, as well as Tom Mann’s tireless propaganda that more advanced ideas entered the TUC. Nonetheless, the slow permeation of syndicalist ideas was under way. The levelling down of industrial skills through mechanisation created new working-class solidarities, born of shared experiences of deskilling, loss of control over work processes and intensified workplace

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For the low- or unskilled workforce, the modern factory provided the basis of organisation and resistance, as more stable and regular employment led to increased unionisation, often within general trade unions operating in a wider geographical area. Another decisive factor in the development of syndicalism was the trade unions’ increasingly bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation. New leaders, hoping to consolidate their staggering 1886-89 progression, often entered agreements with employers, triggering calls for more democratic unions. Anarchists opposing these changes stressed the need for democratic trade union management within a federalist structure, cross-industrial solidarity and amalgamation, the general strike and workers’ control. The growing integration of trade union delegates into conciliation schemes gave rise to the theme of the corrupt union leader, which also became central to syndicalism.

The relations between unions, workers and the state were also redefined. The state oscillated between legal restrictions on unions and a more subtle integration strategy. This strategy was implemented by the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1896, increased attributions for the Board of Trade after 1906 and the 1906 Trade Disputes Act, which reversed the Taff Vale judgment. The resulting impression was mixed: official union recognition coexisted with the impression of a falsely neutral state, which promoted employers’ interests through strategies of

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social control with the backing of union leaders. This was propitious to the setting up of a political force standing exclusively for trade unions: a meeting agreed to establish a ‘Labour Group’ in Parliament in February 1900, and it came to power in 1906, in the context of the Progressive Alliance with the Liberal Party. But the slow pace of the reforms implemented by the Alliance spurred anti-parliamentary sentiment, creating a very favourable terrain for syndicalist ideas. Tillett’s famous 1907 pamphlet, *Is the Parliamentary Labour Party a Failure?* stigmatised the lack of attention paid to unemployment, in favour of trivial matters such as temperance; it also criticised the careerism of newly-elected Labour politicians and attacked the dilution of Labour’s initial goals. The rise of parliamentary socialism was therefore an important factor in the development of syndicalism, which was one of several manifestations of widespread discontent. Similarly, in France, the unification of the different parliamentary socialist groupings into a single socialist party, the SFIO, in 1905, was a key factor in the adoption of the 1906 Amiens Charter and the radicalisation of the CGT’s apolitical stance.

**Proto-Syndicalism in Britain**

The development of syndicalist ideas in both France and Britain also owed much to the links formed between the French anarchists and Tom Mann in the aftermath of the 1896 London Congress, during which Mann and James Keir Hardie openly supported the anarchists expelled from the Second International. In 1897, Mann opened The Enterprise, a pub in London’s Long Acre which was ‘a rendezvous for those who were in difficulties in finding a gathering place’. Its diverse patrons included Malatesta, Michel and the American anarchist Harry Kelly. Pro-union propaganda was also conducted, very much on the margins, in the remaining proscription circles, chiefly in the International Workingmen’s Group set up in


October 1900. It harboured different revolutionary socialist tendencies and brought together about a hundred members from Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and France, such as Tcherkesoff, Malatesta, Michel, and the Spanish free-thinker militant and theorist Fernando Tarrida del Marmol. It held conferences on social issues, Darwinism, patriotism and internationalism, and offered entertainments and educational activities, such as concerts, family soirees and language classes. Its political stance was resolutely proto-syndicalist: it supported the CGT, rejected political interference and adopted the IWMA’s motto, ‘the workers’ emancipation is the task of the workers themselves’.

In 1902, French member Henri Cuisinier launched *La Grève générale (Il Sciopero Generale)*, a Franco-Italian monthly. Silvo Corio, an Italian militant who had come to Britain in 1900 and was Silvia Pankhurst’s partner, supervised the Italian publication and Malatesta, Tarrida and Gennaro Pietraroja were also involved. The paper charted the progress of the general strike in France and called for the setting up of general strike committees in other countries. It promoted electoral boycotts and antimilitarist propaganda, and informed readers of continental developments in a very pedagogical way. It advertised and resold foreign anarchist papers. While it was not as influential internationally as it purported to be, it was a manifestation of the ongoing political activity of London’s international proscription even after its heyday, with a clear diffusion of proto-syndicalist propaganda among exiles.

A similar paper in English was launched in October, *The General Strike*, edited by Tarrida and Sam Mainwaring, a long-term pro-union anarchist and a member of the *Amalgamated Society of Engineers*. The paper’s team had close links with The International Libertarian Group of Correspondence, a recent initiative by British, Spanish, German, French, Italian and Scandinavian militants based in Britain. The Group attacked parliamentary legislation and stood for the general strike, direct action and libertarian internationalism. It

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37 *The General Strike*, October 1903.
emulated the Catalan syndicalist publication *La Huelga General* and wrote about corruption, the overwhelming reformism of trade unions and, above all, the general strike.

There were other connections between French and British proto-syndicalist circles outside the exile groups. After 1896, Tom Mann focused on setting up international sailors’ unions in order to retaliate against the creation of employers’ federations. Glassworkers and miners were already organised internationally. These organisations sought above all to secure a better control of the labour market against the importation of blacklegs during strikes. These links were also meant to prepare the ground for international strikes and, ultimately, the general strike. Mann, who led one of the country’s two Dockers’ Unions, was in an ideal position to organise this industry. The new International Federation of Ship, Dock and River Workers (renamed the International Transport Workers Federation in 1898) campaigned for ‘sailors’ homes’, recruitment offices modelled on the Bourses du travail, more humane work conditions on board and an international harmonisation of wages and working hours. Its congress was held in London from 24 to 26 February 1897, with delegates from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. The French proto-syndicalist press greeted Mann’s endeavours enthusiastically; Pelloutier’s *Ouvrier des deux mondes* featured a two-page presentation on the Federation – its context, goals and potential – as part of a broader investigation into the industry workers fight against deteriorating work conditions. The belief that syndicalism was by definition international continued to progress in the following years, with the growing awareness of the globalisation of the labour market, the connections between different branches of industry and the setting up of the employers’ international federations. Syndicalism entered a new phase: international solidarity was no longer an idealistic watchword, a mere extension of the national level, and became a cornerstone of militant strategy and organisation.

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Mann paid a rather theatrical visit to Paris in May 1897. He was due to give a talk at the Bourse du Travail on the organisation of dockers in Britain, a first step towards the creation of a similar federation in France, which could then affiliate with the International Federation. However, following his prompt expulsion by the French government, his talk had to be read by Eugène Guérard during a private meeting. Nonetheless, this French tour strengthened his links with French unions: he attended several meetings in Paris, spoke in a café and met Antoinette Sorgue, a journalist who soon joined him as a syndicalist propagandist in Britain.\textsuperscript{40} With the help of local Bourses representatives, he then visited the large ports where the progress of organisation was especially slow, Bordeaux, Le Havre, Nantes and Saint-Nazaire. The French syndicalists took the lead in devising similar international or Franco-British federation projects. Kropotkin advocated the formation of international trade union federations in Les Temps nouveaux early in 1898 and around the same time, he went to the United States with John Turner to publicise these ideas.\textsuperscript{41}

Links between French and British trade unions were strengthened after 1900. The CGT adopted a resolution stressing the indispensability of trade union internationalism in 1900. An international trade union congress was held in Paris in September, ironically attended by just a handful of non-French delegates (Chambers, from the International Transport Federation, was the only British delegate). The creation of an International Labour Secretariat was suggested, to collect and distribute information on the international labour movement, and perhaps also offer translation and information services. Organised federally, it would respect each movement’s autonomy.\textsuperscript{42} This laid the foundations for the future International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC) created in 1901. However, viewing the congress as a failure, the

\textsuperscript{40} Mann, Tom Mann’s Memoirs, p. 142 ; Yann Béliard, ‘Outlandish ‘isms’ in the city : how Madame Sorgue contaminated Hull with the virus of direct action’, Recherches Anglaises et Nord-Américaines 3 (2003), pp.113–25.


CGT turned to more informal rapprochement strategies. It contacted British trade unions and organised a visit of British workers to France in December 1900. The following year, a French delegation took part in the trade unions’ anti-war demonstration in London, ‘in a shared feeling of brotherhood’. The visit started with a large meeting in Shoreditch, where CGT delegates Louis Niel and Pouget attacked capitalism as a cause of war, exhorting militants to organise the economic International against the capitalist International. There were fringe meetings; about 30 militants visited the *Groupe ouvrier de langue internationale* on Tottenham Court Road. Georges Yvetot, who became the Bourses’ secretary the following year, gave a talk on syndicalism. The Freedom Group organised a large meeting a few days later. The delegation took part in the demonstration organised by trade unions against the growing diplomatic tensions and rumours of war between France and Britain. Antimilitarism was a key theme, with calls for military strikes. The visit was regarded as a great success, and even as the ‘embryo’ of a new International, in Pouget’s words.

The anarchist press repeatedly called for international solidarity. In May-June 1901, a union of Parisian bronze workers addressed British colleagues in *Freedom*:

> We, workers in bronze, join our voices to those of all French workers, mutually proclaiming our ardent love for the oppressed of the entire world… We also hope that this declaration will be followed by similar ones in all countries, so that the ruling classes may clearly understand that the sophisms masked under the veil of patriotism have lost their power.

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What was truly novel was that this internationalist rhetoric was accompanied by concrete endeavours, in particular financial support during strikes, a practice dating back to the heyday of the First International which came back in force in this period.

**A British syndicalism**

The period between 1900 and the First World War was the golden age of the first syndicalist wave. The CGT reached its apex; the 1906 Amiens Charter, which made the political independence of French syndicalists official, was the symbol of a trade union organisation which commanded a near-global prestige.46 But this triumph was short-lived, and the period saw France and Britain successively becoming models of trade union innovation, with numerous cross-influences between them.

Syndicalism progressed in Britain at a quicker pace from 1906-1907. The chronology of its diffusion remains disputed: according to Bob Holton, it began in 1902, when dissident SDF members rejecting the party’s growing reformism and careerism, advocating industrial unionism after the American De Leonist model but also parliamentary socialism. They set up the Socialist Labour Party (SLP).47 A new organisation was launched in January 1906, The British Advocates of Industrial Unionists, from which a group named the Revolutionary Industrialists soon split, opposing the Advocates’ parliamentarianism. According to Holton, this marked the real start of syndicalist propaganda – propaganda inspired by the CGT’s ideas, with a more independent stance towards parliamentary politics. Noticeably, though, Holton ignores the previous decade’s work in *Freedom* and proto-syndicalist anarchist circles. In fact, while French-inspired syndicalist propaganda started in the 1890s, it was reinforced after 1907, and it was then too that these ideas met with a more receptive audience.

French ideas were disseminated through two sources: the proto-syndicalist anarchist paper *The Voice of Labour*, launched in 1907 by Freedom Group members John Turner, Alfred

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Marsh and Thomas Keell and free agents like Guy Aldred, with the support of the French libertarian correspondent Aristide Pratelle (aka Albert Préau), an important cross-Channel syndicalist intermediary. The title nodded to the CGT’s own La Voix du peuple and its overt objective was to encourage the creation of a syndicalist movement in Britain, advocating direct action, the general strike and antimilitarism. The immediate context for the launch was the proclamation of the Amiens Charter and the first year in power of the Labour Party, with its ‘almost incredible political cowardice’—here again, the dual impact of foreign and national developments is noticeable. Calls to emulate French conceptions featured everywhere in the paper: ‘The English workers might learn something about the propaganda and organisation of the French workpeople. Perhaps, if this were done, even here and there among this slow-witted crowd of ‘respectable’ working men might be fired with an idea or two,’ Turner mused. The paper reprinted an English translation of Pouget’s The Bases of Trade Unionism (Les Bases du syndicat). Syndicalism was also described as the direct legacy of a British revolutionary tradition in trade unionism, epitomised by Robert Owen’s Grand National Consolidated Trades Union and the early days of New Unionism: ‘Above all there must be a revival of that militant policy of direct action which in the early nineties did so much to inspire the poorest workers in the country with the serious determination of fighting the exploiters at the point where they secure their plunder.’ A few weeks later, Turner called for a ‘newer trade unionism’, a play on words which highlights the continuity which for many contemporaries linked New Unionism and the pre-war syndicalist outburst, both of which were seen as fights for a more militant, less segregated and elitist trade unionism. The Voice of Labour only had seven issues, but it was an important pool of syndicalist militants and fostered a number of new initiatives, such as Guy Aldred’s Industrial Union of Direct Actionists (IUDA). It was an important forum


50 Émile Pouget The Basis of Trade Unionism (London, Voice of Labour pamphlet, 1908).


for the diffusion of French-inspired syndicalism, at a time when this propaganda was still discreet.

Tom Mann return from Australia in 1910. He had left in 1901 as a supporter of parliamentary action and leading trade unionist, but eventually gave trade union militancy precedence over political action after the failure of Australia’s 1908 Broken Hill Strike, which in his view illustrated the flaws of arbitration. After his return to Britain in May 1910, he undertook an intense syndicalist propaganda, strongly inspired by the American and French models. He had already founded the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) with Guy Bowman, a journalist, translator and member of the Social Democratic Party, who spoke fluent French and translated into English the seminal work of French antimilitarism, Gustave Hervé’s *Leur Patrie (My Country Right or Wrong)*. In 1910, both men travelled to France to meet with CGT officials; Mann spoke at several meetings and met writers connected with France’s main syndicalist publications, *Le Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste* and *La Vie ouvrière* – two lasting networks which proved instrumental to the cross-Channel and wider international dissemination of syndicalism. Back in Britain, Mann and Bowman set up the ISEL’s paper, *The Industrial Syndicalist*, whose programmatic first issue attacked parliamentarianism, contemporary trade unionism and the TUC’s narrowness. It also stressed the importance of ‘boring from within’ existing trade unions, as opposed to the strategy of the United States’ Industrial Workers of the World, which consisted in founding an alternative, syndicalist trade union federation.53 The CGT was repeatedly presented as an example of successful industrial unionism, having ‘eliminated the antagonisms and sectional craft interests’.54 Mann also praised its ‘revolutionary instinct’, pro-general strike, anti-patriotic and anti-militarist stance, in addition to its twofold goal of securing concrete improvements and working for the revolution. He called on readers to emulate all these aspects: ‘On the average, the French policy is one that will suit us best; for whilst the temperament of the French is

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undoubtedly different from that of the British, their interests are exactly as ours, and their enemy is also as ours – the capitalist system.’ In the following issues, France was again presented as an example of cross-industrial solidarity (including in a 5-page article in October 1910):

The chief difference between British and French workmen is this: the French have instinctively and rationally a keener appreciation of class solidarity.55

Nothing approaching this has been experienced since 1871. It is, indeed, a magnificent lesson in working class solidarity that the French comrades are teaching… The world over, the workers will profit by this splendid example56

However, Mann did not reject political action altogether. This was an important difference with French syndicalists who in those years did not tolerate any form of parliamentary action, as their British counterparts in the ISEL did:

Does this mean that we should become anti-political? Certainly not. Let the politicians do as much as they can, and the chances are that, once there is an economic fighting force in the country, ready to back them up by political action, they will actually be able to do what now would be hopeless for them to do. 57

Now Parliamentary action is at all times useful, in proportion as it makes for economic emancipation of the workers. But Socialists and Labour men can only do effective work there in proportion to the intelligence and economic organisation of the rank and file.58


This contrast resulted in part from the anarchist origin of French syndicalism, with its adamant rejection of parliamentary politics. It was reinforced by the notion that British workers should play to their own key strength, that is to say their established trade union movement: ‘We must combine with our native ability for organisation, something of the fine revolutionary spirit of our French comrades’. 59

In addition to pro-French writings, there were translations of French works, and especially Émile Pataud and Pouget’s Comment nous ferons la révolution, which appeared under the title Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth. How we shall bring about the Revolution, in a translation by Frederic Charles – of the Walsall affair fame, released in 1899 – and his wife Charlotte. The translation was prefaced by Mann, who stressed unambiguously that ‘the remarkable change that has taken place in recent years in the revolutionary movement has received its chief inspiration and stimulus from France’. 60 The ISEL organised conferences all over the country, where French references featured prominently. 61 These were widely attended: the November 1910 Manchester conference brought together 200 trade union delegates representing some 60,000 members. Mann’s work was supported by Madame Sorgue, an ardent propagandist for Franco-British worker solidarity. In 1910 she attended meetings of London transport workers initiated by the dockers’ federation, where she called for ‘a combined action by French and English transport workers against the employers’ federation’. 62 She was in Hull


60 Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget, Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth. How we shall bring about the Revolution (Oxford: Oxonian Press, 1913 (1911), transl. by Frederic and Charlotte Charles), p. V.

61 Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste, 3 July 1910, n. 147; 24 July 1910, n. 150, ‘Préparez-vous à l’action’.

in 1911, tirelessly promoting direct action and international solidarity, just before the sailors’ strikes broke out. The *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste* reported on her activities quite closely.

Mann and the ISEL’s interest in French syndicalism flagged after 1912. References to French syndicalism were far less frequent in the League’s 1912 new publication, *The Syndicalist*, and were more restrained: ‘[The general strike] has not had a very brilliant success in France but it has undeniably caught on here’.\(^{63}\) Agitation was starting to spread in Britain; trade union membership was rising steeply, and large spontaneous strikes in the transport, railway, dock and coal industries drew international attention to Britain. By contrast, the CGT seemed to be steeped in a complex crisis, so that the dynamics of influence were soon reversed. The years 1906-10 had been a time of great ideological inventiveness, during which French syndicalism played an important role in shaping maturing syndicalist conceptions in Britain, which in turn became one of the ferments of the ‘Great Labour Unrest’. However, this French influence was by no means exclusive; it was one of several inspirations for a rich and often contradictory movement, which borrowed from diverse foreign models, was not driven by ideology and, above all, remained bound by its own national constraints, starting with its old and firmly established reformist trade unionism.\(^{64}\) It is therefore more relevant to see the CGT as an important theme of discussion and analysis for British syndicalists, rather than a ‘model’ accepted unquestioningly. And indeed, when many called for a mere transposition of French methods across the Channel, sceptical voices could be heard too, such as Max Nettlau’s:

> It is not only useless but illogical to expect to introduce French and American syndicalist methods in England… In France the labour movement was neglected for politics and the syndicalists had and still have to make the greatest possible noise, to bluff in every way, to make themselves heard… The English unions, old and firmly established, have no need to be

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\(^{63}\) *The Syndicalist*, January 1912, I, 1, ‘Enter syndicalism’

\(^{64}\) On the interplay between British trade unionism and foreign influences in this period, see Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The New Unionism in Perspective’, *Worlds of Labour*, p. 154.
noisy… All the workers of any [illeg.] are organised in England and have far more real power than the French syndicalists have. 65

Clearly, by 1910, after several years of slow permeation, French ideas had become familiar enough for this influence itself to be often commented on, in positive or negative terms. Discussing syndicalism as a French doctrine, often in racialist terms emphasising its Latin origins, became a passage obligé in much of the general press too: ‘Syndicalism is something specially Franco-Italian, or perhaps more exactly French, and…could not have developed in any other land’. 66 France, as the motherland of syndicalism, was scrutinised for this reason – that is, until the tide turned after 1910, and British trade union and militant practices became a source of possible reinvigoration for the CGT in crisis.

The CGT and the British reference, from an anecdote to an example

The CGT’s strategy of direct action and political independence reached its apex in October 1906, with the adoption of the Amiens Charter, which famously stated that ‘the CGT brings together, outside any political affiliations, all the workers who are conscious of the work to be carried out for the disappearance of wage-earners and employers’. However, the organisation was already faced with a series of problems. It was ridden with ideological divisions, due to the conflicting influences of reformists, parliamentarians, and anarchists; it was precisely against such influences that the Charter’s apolitical pledge was proclaimed. There were also justified doubts as to the substance and relevance of syndicalist discourse given the increasingly integrated practice of the CGT. Moreover, for all its belligerent rhetoric, the organisation lacked actual strength and power, due to its persistently low numbers. In 1906, it only had 200,000 members out of a national workforce of about 6 millions; it was therefore one of the weakest European federations in terms of numbers. Despite its revolutionary stance, its mobilising power was also questionable, as evidenced by the relative failure of the much-

65 IISG, Freedom Archives, Correspondence, letter from Nettlau to Keell dated 22 March 1910.
anticipated May Day 1906 strike. From 1906 onwards, the organisation was weakened further by the government’s repressive strategy, and especially the repeated arrests of its leaders. A corruption scandal involving Victor Griffuelhes led to the election of the reformist Louis Niel as a replacement at the head of the organisation in 1909, but Niel’s leadership was so unsuccessful that he was replaced by Léon Jouhaux after three months. At the international level, the revolutionaries’ position was made more precarious by the CGT’s affiliation to the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Federations founded in 1901, where it was the only revolutionary organisation. The initial aspiration to revolutionise the Secretariat from within by imposing discussions on the general strike, antimilitarism and the eight-hour day was repeatedly countered by the powerful German federation led by Karl Legien, and quickly proved unachievable.67 This international isolation was compounded by the CGT’s subsequent refusal to formally take part in setting up a syndicalist International to rival the Secretariat.

In this atmosphere of growing scepticism towards syndicalism, the now mature British movement appeared as a source of possible renewal – or, as Jean-Louis Auduc wrote, ‘the English movement realised in practice the dreams of French syndicalism, just when the latter found it increasingly difficult to theorise and try to implement them’.68 French militants had been following the fortunes of syndicalism across the Channel for several years. Mann’s advances featured regularly in the French syndicalist press; after his departure for Australia, *Le Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste* and *La Vie ouvrière* charted his evolution from parliamentary socialism to direct-action syndicalism. There was a significant change in the way Britain was discussed after 1911, when the first large strikes of the pre-war unrest broke out. From August onwards, when the transport workers strike broke out, followed by sympathy strikes, Britain ceased to be regarded as a mere student of French methods, and its own democratic and revolutionary traditions were emphasised:


It is the revolutionary past and the truly democratic social life of the English people, this national character which distinguishes this people…which explains this phenomenon. In a nutshell, this is the realisation of all our revolutionary doctrines. 69

England has woken up – it is the old combative spirit of Chartism and the early trade union movement which is being reborn and all the ruling class’s attempts at paralysing the action of workers’ organisations…will meet in this democratic people with a fierce resistance. 70

From then on, not a week passed without an article examining Britain and its strikes. French commentators were nonetheless fairly critical of the movement, dissecting its strategic dilemmas, the lack of solidarity between the large industrial federations71 and the enduring parliamentarianism of many sectors.

La Vie ouvrière, a syndicalist publication with a marked international outlook launched in 1909, was an important link between France’s syndicalists and the English-speaking world. It described Britain as a source of possible inspiration for the crisis-ridden CGT. Its second issue included an article by Mann who, from Australia, took sides for a more militant syndicalism. He contributed to the paper more regularly after this.72 There were also articles about Britain by Alfred Rosmer, under the pen name Griot. 73 He reported in great detail on the ISEL’s


70 Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste, 17 December 1911, n. 221, ‘Le mouvement ouvrier anglais et le droit à la grève’.

71 Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste, 9 June 1912, n. 246, ‘Quelques observations à propos de la grève générale des transports à Londres’.


Manchester conference in January 1911. Over the following months, Britain became both an example and a counter-example for the journal’s anti-reformist argument: it scrutinised the implications of Lloyd George’s arbitration and conciliation project in the railway industry, paving the way for greater state intervention in labour conflicts. This coincided with similar developments in France, where the socialist Alexandre Millerand, at the helm of the Ministère du Travail, sought to enforce similar approaches. After 1912, Britain was discussed almost explicitly as a ‘model’ to replicate.

From pre-war internationalism to the Sacred Union

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76 Auduc, ‘Le Mouvement syndical anglais à travers la presse syndicaliste française’, p. 55.
The promotion of anti-war activism was another key objective of cross-Channel syndicalist networks. The pre-war movement was deeply internationalist, through its antimilitarist militancy as well as the belief that the revolution could not but be international. The fact that the French CGT joined the war effort so quickly in 1914 thus reinforced the idea of an overall failure of pre-war syndicalism. It remains that, despite the failure of these endeavours in 1914, antimilitarist and pacifist militancy was another area where significant Franco-British and international propaganda was carried out, drawing significantly on the connections formed during the 1890s.

Antimilitarism became a central syndicalist theme in the first decade of the twentieth century. The *Ligue antimilitariste* was founded in 1902 by high-profile militants, including Émile Janvion, Albert Libertad and Georges Paraf-Javal. It campaigned for the suppression of armies. After the international Amsterdam congress of June 1904, it became the French branch of the International Antimilitarist Association (AIA), an organisation with a central committee and regional sub-committees. Members were to be recruited from all socialist trade unions and workers’ organisations, but antimilitarist anarchists and syndicalists formed the movement’s core. The Association developed quickly in France, although financial hardship, uncertainty as to its aims and identity and, above all, repression were obstacles to its success. Anarchists remained the most vociferous antimilitarist activists of the pre-war period, their projects characterised by a hard-line position. In 1911, the congress of the Anarchist-Communist Federation resolved that, in the event of a war, its Parisian groups would prevent troops from leaving the capital by organising a series of explosions on railway lines. In September 1912, the Federation’s new secretary, Louis Lecoin, was sentenced for advocating the assassination of

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officers by their soldiers.² At the same time, Henry Combes published the paper *Le Mouvement anarchiste* (1912-1913), which called for the sabotage of mobilisation, soldiers’ strikes, desertion, arm destruction, igniting powder magazines, and attacks on railway lines and locomotives. In 1913, the anarchists put in circulation a ‘red booklet’ listing ‘useful gestures’ in the event of a war, such as sabotage and assassinations, complete with instructions to fabricate explosives.³ The most advanced syndicalists took up some of these anarchist themes, in particular the incitation to desertion. They promoted it through the notorious initiative of the *sou du soldat* (soldier’s penny), whereby 5 francs were to be given out to those called up for military service, through the Bourses. This *sou*, initially a way of keeping up links with servicemen through financial support, was soon reinterpreted as a practical step to encourage deserters. Georges Yvetot was the instigator of one of the key antimilitarist campaigns of the CGT’s advanced wing: the 1902 launch of the *Manuel du soldat*, which defined the main themes of antimilitarist propaganda. The work was quite a sensation, with 20,000 copies reckoned to have been distributed to soldiers in 1904, and 16 editions by 1908.⁴

The idea of the international general strike in the event of a war was endorsed in anarchist circles and the AIA, based on the recommendations of the First International’s 1868 Brussels congress.⁵ The project was mentioned with increased frequency in the run up to the war, so that the syndicalist strategies of the general strike and sabotage were reinterpreted from labour protest to an antipatriotic perspective. This antimilitarism was largely derived from the French context, where the role of the army in repressing labour conflicts and the resentment over compulsory military service gave it great relevance. However, despite this national background, antimilitarism took on an antipatriotic and international dimension over the course

of the decade. The transposition of French antimilitarist conceptions across the Channel was problematic, since Britain had no obligatory military conscription, unlike France, where this was a central antimilitarist grievance. Nonetheless, there were early efforts to publicise French antimilitarist conceptions within the broader diffusion of French syndicalism. Guy Bowman translated Gustave Hervé’s *Leur Patrie* and Hervé went on a speaking tour in Britain in October 1912, discussing ‘War against War’ in Shoreditch and then in Manchester, in the presence of Rosmer and Jouhaux. The title of his talk referred to a famous CGT pamphlet aimed at propagating antimilitarism among foreign movements. This antimilitarist propaganda met with greater echo in Britain when the mass strikes of 1911-14 led to a growing involvement of the army in labour conflicts. Antimilitarist agitation in Britain peaked with the publication of an anonymous letter entitled *Don’t Shoot* in *The Syndicalist* in January 1912. It was addressed to soldiers and elaborated on a classic antimilitarist theme: soldiers, who belong to the same social class as strikers, should stand in solidarity with them and refuse to shoot at them during strikes. The publication led to Mann and Bowman’s arrest, who were sentenced to 6 months of forced labour by virtue of a 1797 law on mutiny.

After 1912, the war seemed unavoidable and antimilitarism became almost exclusively focused on anti-war action, with a more international perspective. Several socialist groupings resolved to sabotage a possible mobilisation order, including the French Socialist Party. Jouhaux, the CGT’s secretary, attended the 1913 Trades Union Congress, where he gave an address extolling direct action in its many forms and called for working-class solidarity in the face of the impending war. However, there was widespread scepticism as to the chances of success of mass protest against mobilisation. Moreover, the tense relations between the CGT

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and foreign trade union federations – notably the German one, where the idea of a general strike in the event of a war seemed ludicrous – jeopardised any hope of cooperation. It seemed very unlikely that foreign movements would follow the CGT in the event of a war. Attempts at international agreements thus proved pointless, despite joint resolutions in various international congresses and declarations of unity and solidarity. In view of the weak ties between the different antimilitarist and syndicalist movements, Amédée Dunois’s 1905 assessment appears remarkably apt:

Proletarian internationalism is just a big ghost which is almost identical to that of governments and capitalists. It is an internationalism which glorifies peace and human warmth in the contagious heat of banquets and congresses but which would not shrink from war, should it come about. A verbal internationalism which in practical terms amounts to staunch nationalism.¹²

In the specific Franco-British case, there was a clear contrast between good intentions on the one hand and a lack of national and international organisation. The longed-for connection between worker organisations and antimilitarist agitation did not happen. Several syndicalist federations announced that the CGT should lead the general strike against the war but the Confédération, realising its powerlessness, was unable to answer the call. The anarchists, who were the most decided advocates of anti-war sabotage, were too few and uncoordinated to undertake any action. As a result, despite strong internationalist sentiments, pre-war antimilitarism remained, paradoxically, a national affair above all.

**The failed Syndicalist International**

The repeated endeavours to set up a formal international organisation to coordinate syndicalist movements were another facet of the failure of pre-war internationalism. Early in 1913, the project of a London-based syndicalist congress was launched by Guy Bowman, for


whom the lack of international organisation hindered solidarity and the movement’s progress. This International was seen as the revolutionary counterpart of the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres. Bowman’s project stumbled upon difficulties at an early stage. Time was too tight to prepare the Congress while abiding by the movement’s libertarian traditions, which required the agenda to be discussed and set by the participants. The CGT criticised the separatism inherent in the project in *La Vie ouvrière*, stressing that ‘boring from within’ reformist organisations rather than setting up new ones altogether was the path to follow. The danger for the CGT was that the congress would exacerbate the internal conflict between revolutionaries and reformists and ultimately lead to the break-up of the *Confédération*. Debates on this issue continued until the very eve of the Congress, and the CGT’s eventual defection marginalised Bowman’s initiative. Hostilities were especially fierce between Cornelissen, the editor of the *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste* and Pierre Monatte of the *Vie ouvrière*.\(^{14}\)

The first International Syndicalist Congress was scheduled to take place in London, from 27 September to 2 October 1913. It had the backing of syndicalist organisations across Europe, and of the United States’ Industrial Workers of the World, who wanted closer links between direct-actionist and revolutionary organisations. But a sense of perplexity was soon felt, as the preparations progressed very slowly. One month before the Congress, Bowman claimed to have only received one suggestion for the agenda, from a Cuban union.\(^{15}\) At the same time, it was announced that Mann, who had left for Pittsburgh for two months, would not attend; it seems that he had a strategic disagreement with Bowman and was forced to embark on a speaking tour due to financial difficulties.\(^{16}\) In his absence, Bowman’s organisational work left much to desire. The agenda was only released a week before the start, and the congress was as chaotic

\(^{13}\) *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste*, 16 February 1913.


\(^{15}\) *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste*, 10 August 1913.

\(^{16}\) Thorpe, *The Workers themselves*, p. 62.
and conflict-ridden as its preparation. Unlike most of the federations in attendance, the CGT had no official delegate, but a few union delegates were there, as was Rosmer, representing *La Vie ouvrière*. The anarchist and syndicalist veterans Cornelissen and Schapiro attended as translators, as did Tcherkesoff. There were a total of 33 delegates, representing 11 countries, 60 workers’ organisations and about 250,000 members.\(^{17}\)

Arguments plagued the gathering. The Dutch threatened to leave on the very first day, as did the Spanish delegation the following day. The Italian Rossoni did leave, while Bowman accused Cornelissen of giving erroneous translations in order to manipulate the Congress’s outcomes.\(^{18}\) Once more, debates crystallised around the topic of international organisation. The champions of minimal organisation, in particular the Unione Sindacale Italiana’s Alceste De Ambris, from Italy, opposed the creation of a Syndicalist International to rival the ISNTUC, favouring instead closer links between national movements. In the end, it was decided to set up an Information and Correspondence Bureau based in Amsterdam, to which the different organisations would affiliate. It was put in place at the beginning of 1914 and Cornelissen then handed the editorship of *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste* over to them. A final declaration proclaimed internationalist principles but discussions had been so hampered by debates over the Bureau and personal conflicts that no other joint resolution had been taken. Planned resolutions on antimilitarism and the use of foreign blacklegs had to be dropped.

The Congress rehearsed the libertarian dilemma: reconciling the autonomy of individuals and small groups with the perceived necessity of organisation. By contrast, the very efficient work of liaison carried out by the syndicalist press and certain individuals suggests that, at this stage, informal links were more efficient vehicles for the international circulation of ideas and strategies. Nonetheless, the Congress represented an important step in showcasing and

\(^{17}\) Thorpe, *The Workers themselves*, p. 69.

attempting to formalise the practical and ideological internationalism of the syndicalist movement.

**The War**

In August 1914, turning their back on the international general strike feared by public authorities, the French working class rallied the war effort. When the Germans crossed the Luxemburg border on 2 August, the leaders of French labour organisations, aghast after the assassination of the pacifist socialist leader Jean Jaurès two days before, obeyed the mobilisation order. On 3 August, after Germany declared war on France, Léon Jouhaux joined the *Comité de secours national*. Symbolising the u-turn of the confederal majority and the arguments supporting it, on 8 August, *La Bataille syndicaliste* exhorted its readers to ‘go without bitterness, go without regrets, worker comrades, called to the borders to defend the French land... It is truly for the revolution that you will be fighting’. The anarchists found themselves isolated and powerless, and most of those who were called to arms complied. A minority of syndicalists refused to surrender and continued to oppose the war. The team of the *Vie ouvrière*, around Rosmer, Monatte and Alphonse Merrheim, became the rallying point for these syndicalists who remained pacifists, but the journal ceased to appear. For both syndicalists and anarchists, the war resulted in profound material disorganisation, but above all, in acute ideological disputes which left a lasting imprint on the movement after 1918.

In France and Britain, the anarchists were closely watched by the authorities who feared that they would seek to activate their sabotage plans. In France, surveillance took the form of the *Carnet B*, a list of individuals who should be arrested when the war broke out, as they had expressed an intention to sabotage the war effort; as it turned out, the workers’ quickly-won support made the *Carnet* unnecessary. Across the Channel, several high-profile comrades were put in detention, especially foreigners connected with East End Jewish anarchism, like Schapiro, Rocker and Aldred. Foreign anarchist clubs were raided by the police and closed.

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19 *La Bataille syndicaliste*, 8 August 1914.

20 Rocker, *The East End Years*, p. 121.
down. In 1917, many Eastern European anarchists left for Russia, where the revolution had just started; Kropotkin was among them. In both countries, a political truce marked the beginning of the war and revolutionary activism was close to non-existent until the end of the conflict. In France, comrades ended their subversive activities or went into exile once again. A majority among these exiles from the Great War were prominent antimilitarists; this was the case of Henry Combes and Édouard Boudot, the joint secretaries of the *Fédération Communiste Anarchiste*, one of the main French anarchist groupings at the time. The draft-dodging journalist Manuel Degalvès also left for London. Julien Content, a former contributor to the *Libertaire*, spent a couple of years across the Channel before returning to France and throwing himself into antimilitarist propaganda. Older networks were revived: Hamon, no longer an anarchist, used his Fabian connections to secure a lectureship at the LSE. This time, Grave crossed the Channel with his wife Mabel Holland, who was a British citizen, to stay with her sister. In London, Grave devoted himself to antimilitarist militancy and joined the Union for Democratic Control, an association founded by socialists and liberals to fight the all-encompassing militarisation of British society, compulsory military service and war censorship. His attempt to launch a similar initiative in France, however, proved fruitless.  

Most of the French individualist anarchists stuck to their antiwar positions, and the dividing line between individualists and anarchists shifted in the aftermath of the war, being now placed between the supporters and the opponents of the *Union Sacrée*. Franco-British circles were especially affected by these divisions, with opposite positions crystallising around Kropotkin and Malatesta. Many comrades were shocked by Kropotkin’s striking support for the war effort, almost as soon as the conflict broke out. As early as September, Kropotkin urged a reluctant Grave to give up on pacifism:

> In what illusionary world do you live, that you can talk of peace? ... Quick, quick, design and melt 50 cm-cannons... Arm up! Make a superhuman effort – and this is the only way France

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will reconquer the right and the strength to inspire Europe’s peoples with her civilisation and ideas of freedom, of communism, of fraternity.²²

In October, *Freedom* published a ‘Letter to Steffen’ where Kropotkin explained his reasons for backing the fight against Germany, notably the fact that the latter was an obstacle to the progress of anarchism, and that pacifism was pointless in the present state of affairs. A vigorous debate ensued between the supporters of the war and its detractors, which divided the paper’s editorial staff, as Tcherkesoff (who sided with Kropotkin and Grave) tried to oust Keell, an advocate of international working-class solidarity in the face of war propaganda.²³ The opponents of the war were the first to formalise their position, in March 1915, with the ‘International Anarchist Manifesto on the War’, written in London and signed by about 40 militants, including Malatesta and several prominent London anarchists such as Keell, Yanovsky, Schapiro and Combes. In the United States, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Harry Kelly (an American militant who had been active in Britain, in the *Freedom* group, during the 1890s), were among the signatories, along with Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis in the Netherlands. The Manifesto reasserted pre-war anarchist positions, rejecting the distinction between offensive and defensive wars and repeating that ‘there is but one war of liberation: that which in all countries is waged by the oppressed against the oppressors, by the exploited against the exploiters’.²⁴ The March 1916 publication of the *Manifeste des Seize* in *La Bataille Syndicaliste* enshrined the split: 15 militants replied to the Manifesto by stating their reasons for supporting the war.²⁵ Its signatories were equally distinguished: Kropotkin, Grave, Cornelissen, Malato, Tcherkesoff, Paul Reclus, as well as Belgian, Algerian and Japanese anarchists. In April 1916, the reply of the London anarchist group in *Freedom* brought tensions to a climax.

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²² IFHS, Grave Archive, letter from Kropotkin to Grave dated 2 September 1914.

²³ IISG, Max Nettlau Papers, Correspondence, letter from Keell to Nettlau dated 4 November 1911.

²⁴ IISG, Max Nettlau Papers. ‘L’Internationale Anarchiste et la Guerre’.

Such divisions among the anarchists were in fact hardly surprising. There were a number of theoretical justifications for those who reneged on antimilitarism after the war broke out, and their seemingly contradictory positions were not inconsistent. From 1905 onwards, Kropotkin had been very forthright in declaring his attachment to France, which he saw as the land of the revolution. This was paired with a profound hostility to German social democracy, which he regarded as the revolution’s supreme enemy.26 Several comrades – notably Bakunin, Kropotkin and Reclus – also distinguished between the motherland and the state, and did not disapprove of the former, calling for its defence against the enemy.27 The ideological difference exposed by the war also stemmed from a generational gap, between the champions of the *Union Sacrée* and the younger opponents of the war. Moreover, the recent historiography of the syndicalist movement has dented the myth of unanimous support for the war by stressing the complexity of individual choices and the importance of a large variety of factors: one’s region of origin, place of residence, gender, institutional affiliation to labour organisations…28 One particularly determining factor to account for the decision to rally – or not – was the degree of national integration of the labour movement. In the case of France, the war highlighted an ongoing process of integration, and reconciled the CGT’s integrated practice with their official discourse, thereby putting an end to the utopia of the proletarians’ absolute separation within the nation.29 However, in this respect, France was an exception since most federations, in

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warring as well as neutral countries (Germany, Italy; Netherlands, Sweden, Spain) continued to oppose the dominant nationalist discourse.\(^{30}\) The war thus highlighted the ongoing integration of the working-classes beneath defiant discourses on both sides of the Channel, but most strikingly in France.

It would take years before the movement recovered from the organisational and ideological chaos triggered by the war. The letters exchanged between Grave and Malato over the next few years testified to the sombre mood of the times. Malato was back in London with his nephew, who was trying to enlist in the army; he himself had been turned down for being too old.\(^{31}\) He made a very critical assessment of the pre-war movement, made ‘powerless, ridiculous or obnoxious’ by its mystical and criminal tendencies; he criticised the anarchists’ absolute faith in ‘the masses’ as well as the dangerous belief that ‘bourgeois are better revolutionaries’. Evidently, for the ‘heroic’ generation, the time of critical self-analysis had begun. *Les Temps nouveaux*, deeply divided by the schism over the war, saw its publication interrupted, but reappeared after May 1916 in the form of irregular bulletins written by Reclus, Kropotkin, Tcherkesoff and Grave. But despite his efforts, Grave had to face the facts: ‘Death, poverty, defections will, of course, have made our ranks thinner’.\(^{32}\) And indeed, while the paper reappeared regularly after July 1919, it never regained its pre-war influence over French or international anarchism. Kropotkin died in 1921. The anarchist movement found itself marginalised in the aftermath of the war, as a result of its internal divisions, the rise of mass socialist parties and the ideological challenge posed by the 1917 Russian Revolution. There were virtually no contacts between French and British militants. ‘We have no influence whatsoever on public opinions today, and a new and younger generation must replace us before we can make ourselves heard again’, a dejected Keell wrote to Nettlau in 1923.\(^{33}\)

\(^{30}\) Thorpe, ‘The European Syndicalists and the War’.

\(^{31}\) IFHS, Grave Archive, letter from Malato to Grave dated 7 March 1918.

\(^{32}\) *Les Temps nouveaux*, I, 5, April 1917.

\(^{33}\) IISG, Max Nettlau Papers, correspondence, letter from Keell to Nettlau dated 3 December 1923.
Conclusion

‘The importance of the binominal’ in anarchism has been stressed by historians.¹ Carl Levy used the phrase to characterise Errico Malatesta’s oscillation between local patriotism and cosmopolitanism, but it also applies to the French exiles who were his contemporaries in London, and this was in fact just one of the many dual traits of their groups. Other examples include the tension between communitarian isolation and internationalisation in the French comrades’ social organisation and political mores, between individualism and organisationalism in their political outlook, between blind terrorist violence and more gradualist and educationalist militant endeavours, and also, more prosaically, between camaraderie and conflict. The sociology of exile groups was also marked by a contrast between the elites and the proletarian exiles. Even the responses to the refugees were torn between hostility and sympathy. No doubt, part of the current interest in political and social histories of anarchism stems from their complex and occasionally paradoxical character. The highly colourful London groups were no exception, especially as their exile took place in a climactic period, in which they crystallised many social and cultural changes, if not crises.

There is also the vexed question of their historical significance and contemporary relevance, which has been something of Holy Grail for historians in recent years. The history of pre-WW1 Franco-British anarchist and syndicalist networks was resurrected for the most part as a result of the wave of terrorist attacks which started with 9/11. The 7 July attacks on London, which triggered many public debates on the asylum offered in Britain to foreigners suspected of terrorist involvements, had almost uncanny echoes – at least superficially – with the era of propaganda by the deed and its effects on asylum and immigration policies. The most insightful and possibly final conclusions on this topic have been drawn by Richard Jensen, who pointed out that anarchist-inspired attacks declined when repression was eased, the working classes became better integrated into the broader nation and formed labour

organisations where their grievances could be articulated in a non-violent way.\(^2\) Integration and institutionalisation, through trade union organisation and parliamentary socialism and communism, offered a way out of terrorism and defused the anarchist threat. All-out repression, the path taken by most Western nations faced with the ‘black peril’, proved counter-productive and made matters worse. The same conclusion was reached by Jean-Marc Berlière, who remarked that ‘by subjecting anarchists to special laws, humiliating surveillance, arrests and endless surveillance, subversion was nourished rather than fought’.\(^3\) In the case of the Franco-British connection, the role of integration in defusing revolutionary threats is clearly illustrated by the divisions revealed when the First World War broke out, which highlighted an ongoing process of national integration beneath the rhetoric of revolt and separateness.

Historical analyses centring on a tradition of alterglobalization protest may be a more fruitful line of investigation. The argument has been made elsewhere, that the early anarchist and syndicalist movement promoted ideals and invented, theorised or formalised direct-action strategies which are of great relevance to today’s social movements.\(^4\) It can also be argued that today’s alterglobalization activists continue ‘a nineteenth-century trajectory’ of ‘globalization from below’.\(^5\) Just like today, the period 1880–1914 was a time of dual globalization. In the context of the present study, globalization led by the economic and political elites consisted in the globalization of capital, for instance through the expansion of


international labour markets evident in the use of foreign blacklegs, the creation of employers’ federations, as well as greater, if often problematic, cooperation between the different governments and police agencies in order to suppress radical agitation. The anarchists’ transnational endeavours, between France and Britain and in many other areas across the globe, were manifestations of a reactive working-class globalization which was very much prompted by resistance to the elite globalization. The period saw the development of several counter-hegemonic globalization strategies, such as the formation of international unions and propaganda in favour of the general strike, both of which yielded mixed results.

Anarchist and syndicalist antimilitarism is one example of a transnational movement designed to promote an alternative, progressive and libertarian agenda; other instances (not studied here) are the early twentieth-century libertarian pedagogical ventures and protest campaigns against political repression in Spain. A similar interpretation of anarchist internationalism and transnational militancy has recently been proposed by Kirwin Shaffer, in a case study on the Panama Canal and isthmus. In this anarchist hub, Shaffer shows, between 1914 and 1925, anarchists developed ‘an imagined Pan-Americanism’ which was consciously propounded as an alternative to the United States government’s and North-American industrialists’ own attempts to promote hemispheric organisation and pan-American sentiment as a cover-up for ongoing imperialist activities in the area. The function of anarchist and syndicalist transnationalism as a response to a hegemonic globalization is quite clear, and sketches out a red thread between nineteenth-century international socialism and contemporary calls for a fairer globalization.

Leaving historical echoes and comparisons aside, the main conclusions elicited by the story of the French anarchist exiles and Franco-British anarchist and syndicalist transfers are also, quite simply, of an academic nature.

As with any transnational study, the complex interplay between different scales of analysis is a major aspect to probe. The national level is often the poor relative of transnational approaches. And yet, transnational approaches are also one way of pursuing a more effective comparativism; in the present case, charting cultural and militant transfers between France and Britain leads to qualify the traditional dichotomy between revolutionary France and reformist Britain. Underlining Britain’s imperviousness to France’s revolutionary watchwords had almost become a cliché by the end of the nineteenth century; even police agents relished in pointing out that ‘these theories… are not met with any echo among the English’. However, even a cursory look at Edwardian Britain proves these claims to be erroneous, considering the fears engendered by the pre-war labour unrest as well as the recurring observation that Britain had succumbed to continental, and especially French, influences. The present case study testifies to a period when these distinctions were quite porous, in actual facts and, to some extent, in public perception, and when it was quite normal for French radicals to follow with great interest developments across the Channel. The notion that Britain was the heartland of capitalism and the country where the proletarians were faced with the worst living and work conditions went hand in hand with the belief that the country’s socioeconomic advance made it the herald of all political struggles to come: ‘England always was, par excellence, the country of all experiments of every kind in the industrial, commercial and social spheres. This is where began and took place for the first time the great battles through which continental workers went less than half a century later’. The established opposition between evolution and revolution was an over-simplification of the way political ideas were conceived in this section of the labour movement, where an interplay of exchange, ideological borrowing and reinterpretations prevailed.

7 *Le Matin*, 19 March 1895, ‘Schisme anarchiste’. Cutting held in APP BA 1509.

Indeed, despite its brief duration and small geographical span, the story of the French exiles in London evidences the importance of processes of transfers, borrowing and adaptation in the understanding of anarchism and syndicalism. These were often accompanied by nods to foreign influences, for instance in newspaper titles and other name changes – from ‘syndicalisme révolutionnaire’ to ‘syndicalism’, famously. Another key feature is the role of mediators, who were central in creating and maintaining these networks, often without articulating a conscious strategy in doing so, since internationalist efforts focused on the setting up of formal organisations.

The key concept, a contentious one, is therefore that of networks. In the Franco-British case, anarchist networks were small (although they sometimes stretched very far), fluctuating, and they never really conceived as such, or theorised as an efficient mode of political organisation. These networks relied heavily on the press and personal correspondence, in addition to personal contact through exile. In this perspective, they can be inscribed in the long tradition of the République des Lettres and informal, often epistolary, exchanges amidst European politicians. However, given the complexity, changing nature and global reach of the personal links within and outside the anarchist movement, the term network has imposed itself for the description of these milieus, even though metaphorical rather than quantitative uses largely prevail.

These personal connections occasionally evolved into overlapping networks and branched out of anarchism. This is exemplified by the sociability of the most high profile militants, such as Kropotkin or Michel, but also of less famous ones, like Malato, Hamon, or Grave, all of whom were able at some point to mobilise some non-anarchist acquaintances in support of the cause. This aspect became especially important in the decade preceding the War, when many prominent anarchists and libertarians of different nationalities, based in various countries, developed a shared interest in libertarian pedagogy: the free schools and pedagogical ideas pioneered by Francisco Ferrer in Spain and Paul Robin in France and Switzerland provided models for companions worldwide to set up their own schools, at a time when many communist anarchists as a whole, having turned their backs on the terrorist
strategies of the 1880s and 1890s, were developing a more evolutionary and educationalist outlook. These initiatives placed the anarchists again within a broad progressive and socialist front, from which they had been evicted at the time of propaganda by the deed.

In this respect, it could be argued that, on the eve of the war, the anarchists and syndicalists had re-established their place within European socialism and societies – as confirmed in France by the overwhelming support for the Union Sacrée in 1914. Come 1918, they would be faced with new challenges, from the competition of Russian bolshevism to the rise of more state-controlled politics. However, such narratives of success and retreat – the established pattern of explanation for anarchism⁹ – do not do justice to the wealth of long-lasting ideas and strategies evolved during this heroic age of anarchism. Nor do they offer a fair assessment of the significant and multifaceted legacy of the colourful London exile circles and the global anarchist diaspora.

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