

¿ANARCHOS?

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For the better part of the twentieth century Freemasonry, or at least the Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction, has waged war — in print — on communism. Yet if one looks at the earliest history of communism, Freemasons were there.

Before there was communism there was anarchism, socialism and mutualism. And there hangs a tale. Anarchism has had a bad rap, mainly through the actions of violent activists with little or no association with the anarchist movement. But true anarchism is about building, not destroying, or at least it was in the mind of its spiritual father Proudhon.

Anarchism was about a perfect freedom of inclination; it was about freedom of thought; freedom from oppression; and it did not preclude an active, committed democracy. But politics is not the topic, only the background to this article.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) was a Freemason, initiated into a lodge under the Grand Orient of France in Paris in 1847. Now, remember, the Grand Orient was as regular and recognized as any masonic body until 1877 when it took the next logical step in our masonic pursuit of freedom of conscience and removed the requirement for a belief in Deity. But that's a topic for another article.

There is no question that the Freemasons of France were particularly political. The nineteenth century was the age of European revolutions, and the lodges, whether they wanted to be or not, were part of that political struggle. Masonic teachings promoted freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of association. If radical revolutionary republicans promoted those same freedoms,

and the lodges existed under a constant threat of closure by the government of the day, it is not surprising that many Freemasons were sympathetic to radical ideas. Radical ideas such as anarchism and socialism.

Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), whose life was dedicated to promoting anarchism, was initiated into Il Progreso Sociale in Florence sometime in 1864. Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1891), a politically prominent advocate of trade unionism and radical republicanism was a member of the Loge des Philadelphes, as well as a member of the regular High Cross Lodge No 754 EC. Louis Blanc (1811–1882), the republican socialist who coined the expression “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs,” was initiated into the regular lodge, Les Sectateurs de Ménès, but was also very active in the irregular Order of Memphis.

Two events stand out in the history of radical politics: the First International of the International Workingmen's Association, and the Paris Commune of 1871.

Freemasons, both regular and irregular, played a large role in the early days of the First International (1864–1876). Members of the London-based irregular Loge des Philadelphes organized the meeting of 28 September 1864 at which the General

Council of the First International was elected. While it is true that continental lodges were unwittingly

used as recruiting grounds and were not as a rule actively political, the point is that promoters of radical political



The plumline in the emblem of the Spanish Regional Association of the International Workingmen's Association (shown on this page) has not been proven to demonstrate a link to Freemasonry.

movements viewed Freemasons as sympathetic to their particular politics.

When the radicals and anarchists of Paris held free elections and established the Paris Commune in March 1871, the Freemasons of Paris counselled reconciliation with the new regime in Versailles. When provisional president Adolphe Thiers made it clear that he would prefer to bombard Paris to rubble rather than allow the Paris Commune to continue, 10,000 Freemasons from some fifty Paris lodges paraded, in regalia and with banners flying, to the barricades. Approaching the Versailles forces under a flag of truce, a delegation again attempted a reconciliation but was rebuffed. Within a month the Paris Commune was crushed.



The First International (1864–1876), also called the International Workingmen’s Association, held high hopes for the Paris Commune but

many of its members saw its failure as an indication that compromise was not possible. Demoralized, Bakunin’s anarchists lost control of the First International to Karl Marx’s communists and the rest is history. Communists, with their focus on class struggle and their new-found atheism, identified Freemasonry with bourgeois sensibilities and had little more to do with it.

Socialists on the other hand, as they made inroads in the burgeoning trade union movement, continued to be attracted to the professed equality of Freemasonry. Samuel Gompers (1850–1924), long-serving president of the American Federation of Labor was only one of many unionists to actively involve themselves in Freemasonry, having been initiated in Dawson Lodge No. 16 in 1904.

The Noble Order of Knights of Labor of America was founded in 1869 by Uriah S. Stevens (1821–1882), a member of Kensington Lodge No. 211 in Philadelphia.

A. Phillip Randolph (1889–1979), founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925 and John Jordan Upchurch (1820–1887), founder of the Ancient Order of United Workmen in 1868, were also Freemasons.

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Closer to home, Tommy Douglas (1904–1995), founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and premier of Saskatchewan (1944–1961) was initiated into Wayburn Lodge No. 20 in 1935. In our own neighbourhood, Ernie Winch (1879–1957), a self-defined “socialist of the third way” affiliated with Park Lodge No. 63 in 1911. More recently, Dr. Salvador Allende (1908–1973), democratically elected Marxist president of Chile, was an active Freemason, having served as Master of Lodge Hiram No. 65, Santiago, in 1946, 1950–1951, and again in 1953.

While Freemasonry in western society has increasingly become identified with flag-waving patriotism and conservative ideologies, our history tells a different story. Freemasons, of whatever political stripe, have a history of embracing a muscular, robust democracy. When Freemasonry’s core beliefs of equality and freedom are considered radical, Freemasons will be radical. When those beliefs are accepted as the status quo, Freemasons will support the status quo. But we should never forget that we support the status quo not because it is the status quo but because it supports our fundamental teachings.

