

## Revolutionary Rhetoric and Labour Unrest: Liège in 1886 and Seville in 1901\*

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**SUMMARY:** This article explores the similarities and differences of the discourse used by the main figures from the labour unrest of Liège in 1886 and Seville in 1901 to articulate their experiences and protests. The comparison, focused on the analysis of the interpretative frameworks, that is, on the “construction of arguments”, highlights the role of the discourse as one of the cultural ingredients which encouraged and shaped both instances of collective action.

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### INTRODUCTION

Alerted by numerous cases of labour unrest in Europe, the observers of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century contemplated social reality as a matter of concern. “The future is full of threats”, declared *La Meuse* in mid-February 1886, in view of the possibility that an “army of wretched” from London could follow the example of the Paris Commune, “an army feared because of its number, because of the hatred which urges it on and because of the interests that it represents”, stressed G. Núñez in relation to the internationalization of the labour disputes.<sup>1</sup> The worsening of social antagonism was undoubtedly of concern, although so were its new proportions, its generalization, its likeness. In 1885, *La Société Nouvelle* stressed that:

[...] until recently, social discontent [...], only affected one sector of activity and only certain countries. These distinctions have now disappeared; the world of labour of all peoples is affected. We are facing a crisis which will trigger a

\* An initial version of this text was presented at the History Seminar of the Fundación Ortega y Gasset in 2006. From among those who participated, I would like to highlight in particular the criticism and advice of Javier Moreno Luzón, Santos Juliá, José Álvarez Junco, José Babiano, and Mercedes Cabrera Calvo-Sotelo. This article likewise owes much to the comments made by José Luis Gutiérrez Molina and by anonymous referees and the Editorial Committee of the *International Review of Social History*. I am most grateful to all of them.

1. *La Meuse* (20–21 February 1886), p. 5 [hereafter *LM*]; *El Liberal* (16 May 1901), p. 1 [hereafter *EL*].

proletarian avalanche, the international guild of poverty rising up against the cosmopolitanism of capital.<sup>2</sup>

The “evil”, in the words of the President of the Catholic Circle of Liège published on the eve of the 18 March 1886 uprising, was taking place “in all places and to the same degree”. What was occurring – he added – constituted a phenomenon of a “universal nature”.<sup>3</sup>

In the Europe of transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century labour protest did not, however, adopt the homogeneity that many contemporaries thought they could see. This unity in the labour reaction existed in part, but only in part. This is revealed by the cases studied here, which had their epicentres in Liège and Seville. Promoted by anarchist groups, harshly repressed, and with huge repercussions on their respective surroundings (it is significant that they originated in cities which were particular foci of men, of labour organization, and of the circulation of ideas), both protests have essential similarities, but also particularities, constituting different types of what Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow and Charles Tilly call “transgressive contention”.<sup>4</sup>

The Belgian case is set in the context of an increase in labour unrest experienced by the industrialized Europe of the 1880s. In this sphere the social effects of the 1873 international economic crisis became more pronounced, and the workers’ organizations began to re-establish themselves in the face of the repression exercised by different states following the events of the 1871 Paris Commune. The incidents which took place in Belgium in 1886 were not therefore an isolated event. On the contrary, they came during a wave of mobilizations that had been developing since the beginning of that same year in various European countries, regardless of the events of 1 May in the United States. Apart from the January uprisings in Madrid demanding work, there was also the international echo of the miners’ strike in the French town of Decazeville, in which the engineer J. Watrin died on 26 January 1886, and the demonstrations in February of the same year in London which, promoted by the “Social Democratic Federation” against low wages and unemployment, likewise led to acts of violence. Furthermore, the events of 1886 fell within a period in which two tactics were being debated in international anarchism (set out by P. Kropotkin a few weeks before the underground congress of London in July 1881): that of illegality, revolutionary violence, and secret organization as opposed to legality, public organization, and union action.<sup>5</sup>

2. *La Société Nouvelle*, 16 (15 February–15 March 1886), p. 346.

3. *La Gazette de Liège* (17–18 April 1886), p. 1 [hereafter *LGL*].

4. D. McAdam, S. Tarrow, and C. Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 8–10.

5. Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Archiv Nettlau, *Rond AIT*, s.f. 11; cited by C. Lida, “Los discursos de la clandestinidad en el anarquismo del siglo XIX”, *Historia Social*, 17 (1993), pp. 63–74, 63.

The Belgian disturbances began with a demonstration held in Liège on 18 March 1886, in commemoration of the Paris Commune. The initial march by 900 people (according to police sources), participants who came from the towns of Verviers, Seraing, Tilleur, Jemeppe, and Flemalle-Grande,<sup>6</sup> triggered disturbances and a strike which, on the following days, spread around different parts of the industrial belt of the Sambre-Meuse. Apart from an indeterminate number of injuries and arrests, the deaths of over 30 workers demonstrate the violence with which the forces of order acted to put down the dispute. Despite all the warnings and premonitions, the dispute exceeded the forecasts both of organizers and government, at the same time making the “phantom” of the Commune emerge in public opinion.<sup>7</sup> One event shows the importance of this uprising: the protest, in addition to contributing to the reorganization of the political map in Belgium, obliged the state to pass labour legislation, thus following the line begun in Germany by Bismarck.

The Sevillian case is set in a different context and marked by two complementary circumstances. First, the development in international anarchy of the debate on revolutionary syndicalism and on general strikes, coinciding with the period of the spread of the effects of the second Industrial Revolution, the disillusion of workers in the face of reformist strategies, and the radicalization of the attitude of workers.<sup>8</sup> And second, the promotion in Spain, between 1900 and 1902, of various disturbances (La Coruña, Gijón, and Barcelona) following the legalization of associations in 1899. This legalization did indeed allow the Spanish anarchist media to return to trade-union action (after five years – from 1893 to 1897 – of terrorist actions) and to recover the idea of the general strike as a revolutionary instrument in the face of the exhaustion of previous tactics.

The first of the two 1901 strikes in Seville – held by the metalworkers<sup>9</sup> between April and July to demand a wage increase and a reduction in

6. See Archives de la Ville de Liège, Bureau de police, Ordre public, 19 March 1886. The press, however, talked about “thousands” of participants. See also *LM* (19 March 1886), p. 1.

7. “We have been under the scourge of a red terror which recalls the explosions of the Commune”; *LM* (5 April 1886), p. 1.

8. M. van der Linden and W. Thorpe, “Auge y decadencia del sindicalismo revolucionario”, *Historia Social*, 12 (1992), pp. 3–29, 11. On the debate on revolutionary syndicalism, see W. Thorpe, “Une famille agitée. Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire en Europe”, *Mil neuf cent*, 24 (2006), pp. 123–152; A. Bar, *La CNT en los años rojos* (Madrid, 1981), pp. 100ff.; P. Gabriel, “Sindicalismo y huelga. Sindicalismo revolucionario francés e italiano. Su introducción en España”, *Ayer*, 4 (1991), pp. 15–45, 33ff.; Á. Duarte, “Entre el mito y la realidad. Barcelona, 1902”, *Ayer*, 4 (1991), pp. 147–168, 148–150.

9. The term “metalworkers” includes workers from the old and new industries. Indeed, both coexisted in Seville in 1901. On the one hand, it refers to the workers from small artisanal foundries, distributed in the city centre and devoted to manufacturing agricultural implements and machines, artistic ironwork, and household items. The survival of this artisanal tradition can be seen by the fact that in 1918 Seville still referred to itself as “mother of the artistic iron

working hours – was carried out with moderate action and respecting the legality in force. It was, however, an unsuccessful strategy, as the protest ended with the declaration of a state of emergency, with numerous arrests, and with the deaths of eight workers. The failure which this represented for working-class aspirations did, however, lead to a period of reflection within the local workers' organizations on the means of collective action. This reflection led to a following dispute in 1901, a new conflict, different from the immediately previous one, of a markedly "offensive" nature: the October inter-trade general strike. This was the first strike of this scope in Seville and an immediate precedent for the one, with similar characteristics, which took place in February 1902 in Barcelona.

The lock-out from the pottery factory of La Cartuja, on 6 October 1901, was the trigger for this general stoppage in solidarity with the potters affected. After bringing the city to a standstill on 14 and 15 October, this disturbance hastened a new declaration of a state of emergency and repression of the labour unions as a whole. All in all, the importance of this movement comes from its contribution to the international debate which was taking place in those years on revolutionary syndicalism expressed in the 1906 Amiens Congress. This contribution, together with the translations which began to reach Spain through Anselmo Lorenzo and Josep Prat, would result in the long term in the creation of organizations such as Solidaridad Obrera in 1907 and in the configuration of the anarcho-syndicalism of the CNT.<sup>10</sup>

The aim of this article is to analyse the similarities and differences of the discourse with which the leading figures of both episodes of labour unrest articulated their experiences and undertook the protest. The examination therefore focuses here on the conceptual or interpretative frameworks of these social actors (especially the anonymous anarchist members and workers). This examination emphasizes what M.N. Zald stresses in view of its importance in understanding the disturbance: "the cultural construction of repertoires of contention".<sup>11</sup> In accordance with this, the focus proposed

industry"; see *EL* (8 November 1918), p. 1. This term, moreover, refers to workers employed in larger foundries, such as the "Real Fundición de Bronces y Cañones" (which in 1901 had 291 workers and which from 1898 began to adapt to new military demands, abandoning the casting of bronze to concentrate on the preparation of steel parts) or in new industries which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, introduced mass-produced or automatic production processes, far from the virtuosity traditionally attributed to Sevillian metalworkers: the "Balbontín y Orta" ship repair yard, the Cobián rolling mill, or the Ollero y Rull screw factory.

10. In relation to the debate on whether revolutionary syndicalism in Spain was the result of French doctrinal influences or of the importance that the general strike already had at the end of the nineteenth century in the Spanish anarchist media, see Gabriel, "Sindicalismo y huelga", pp. 33–41, 44f; Bar, *La CNT*, pp. 100ff.

11. M.N. Zald, "Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing", in D. McAdam, J. McCarthy, and M.N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 261–274, 261.

refers to an essential premise: the episodes of labour unrest were not the automatic result of economic factors. Rather, the circulation of discourses which succeeded in interpreting the workers' experiences and encouraging collective action also intervened in these disputes. In other words, it is considered here that labour movement and discourse cannot be understood separately, as a discourse was created within this movement which, in turn, shaped and inspired the mobilization.

The consideration of the protest in part as the result of a discursive construction is not new. First, it is linked to E.P. Thompson's proposal to study the "common experiences" of the workers in greater depth, avoiding the interpretative priority of economic over ideological factors. Furthermore, as M. Pérez Ledesma recalls, the extensive biography and the intense controversies concerning the role of language in collective action and identity are well-known.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, if the extreme postulates of the "linguistic turn" have led people to consider the nonexistence of a social reality outside or prior to language,<sup>13</sup> authors such as W.H. Sewell focus on the consideration of the discourse as an element articulating ideological traditions which must be treated on the same level as the other (economic and political) aspects which intervened in the workers' experience.<sup>14</sup>

Controversies aside, there appears to be consensus on one aspect. If, following E.P. Thompson, we understand that people "act" because "they feel themselves to belong to classes", and that the latter are not unchanging categories or events exclusively from economic history, but rather "social and cultural formations", it is important to take into consideration the analysis of one of the cultural ingredients that encouraged this "action", namely the discourse by means of which the leading figures from the episodes of unrest understood, felt, and communicated that it was necessary to mobilize.<sup>15</sup> This text is in accordance with this approach. On the following pages discourse is considered not as a simple means of

12. Cf. E.P. Thompson, "Folklore, Anthropology and Social History", *Indian Historical Review*, 3 (1978), pp. 247–266, and "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76–136. Also see M. Pérez Ledesma, "La formación de la clase obrera: una creación cultural", in R. Cruz and M. Pérez Ledesma (eds), *Cultura y movilización en la España contemporánea* (Madrid, 1997), pp. 201–233, 201ff.

13. See G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 7ff. See also J.W. Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 31 (1987), pp. 1–13, and responses to her article by B.D. Palmer, C. Stansell, and A. Rabinbach in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 31 (1987) pp. 14–23, 24–29, and 30–36 respectively; J.W. Scott "A Reply to Criticism", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 32 (1987), pp. 39–45.

14. W.H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 10f.

15. See E.P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English", in *idem, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978), pp. 245–301, 261f., 295f. In this respect, I again refer to the approach of Pérez Ledesma, "La formación de la clase obrera", pp. 201ff.

expression, or as the sole or determinant factor of collective action, but rather as an element by means of which experience is interpreted and articulated at the same time as inspiring and shaping action. The discourse is thus conceived here as an element making up what W.H. Sewell calls an “ideological system” with “independent causal power”, a system which, in interrelation with the (economic and political) systems with which it coincides in time, has a value in explaining historical processes.<sup>16</sup>

#### SIMILARITIES OF THE DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORKS

A series of factors was necessary for the workers' groups from around Liège and Seville to mobilize in 1886 and 1901 respectively. The first and most essential was discontent about the deterioration and toughening of living and working conditions. In both cases this discontent was related to the effects of the 1873 international economic crisis and of the second Industrial Revolution.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the area around Liège had experienced an economic cycle of expansion which took Belgium to second place on the European industrial table.<sup>17</sup> Although welfare was fragile, in this period the nominal wages and standard of living of workers went up, to such an extent that the years 1869–1873 would be recalled in the collective memory as years of abundance.<sup>18</sup> The dreams of progressing welfare evaporated, however, with the 1873 crisis and the subsequent reorganization of production by which the state and employers reacted to the economic decline. The consequences were dramatic for the working

16. W.H. Sewell, “How Classes are Made: Critical Reflections on E.P. Thompson’s Theory of Working-Class Formation”, in H.J. Kaye and K. McClelland (eds), *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (London [etc.], 1990), pp. 50–77, 75–77.

17. S. Pollard, *Peaceful Conquest: The Industrialization of Europe 1760–1970* (Oxford, 1981), p. 118; J. Dhont and M. Bruwier, “La revolución industrial en los Países Bajos, 1700–1914”, in C. Cipolla (ed.), *Historia económica de Europa. El nacimiento de las sociedades industriales* (Barcelona, 1982), IV (1), pp. 340–379, 341ff.; G. Hansotte, “Pays de fer et de houille”, in H. Hasquin (ed.), *La Wallonie, le pays et les hommes* (Brussels, 1975), I, pp. 269–294; H. Hasquin, “Déjà puissance industrielle (1740–1830)”, in *ibid.*, pp. 313–349; P. Lebrun, “L’industrialisation en Belgique au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Première approche et premiers résultats”, in P. Léon *et al.* (eds), *L’industrialisation en Europe au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1972), pp. 141–188; P. Lebrun, “La Revolución Industrial belga: un análisis en términos de estructura genética”, in D.S. Landes *et al.*, *La revolución industrial* (Barcelona, 1988), pp. 63–106, 101; B.S. Chlepner, *Cent ans d’histoire sociale en Belgique* (Brussels, 1972), pp. 47f.; B.R. Mitchell, “Apéndice estadístico, 1700–1914”, in Cipolla, *Historia económica de Europa*, IV (2), pp. 388–469.

18. R. Leboutte, “A propos de la condition ouvrière en Wallonie”, in M. Bruwier *et al.*, 1886. *La Wallonie née de la grève?* (Brussels, 1990), pp. 7–23, 19. This is also the opinion of B.S. Chlepner, although the latter considers that the improvement in the situation of the working class occurred from 1870–1873; Chlepner, *Cent ans d’histoire sociale*, p. 49; A. Julin, *Recherches sur les salaires des ouvriers des charbonnages belges (1810–1889)* (Liège, 1889), pp. 1–61; *Œuvres Sociales. Société Anonyme John Cockerill* (Liège, 1910), pp. 8f.

population. In addition to applying a protectionist policy, the processes of mechanization and concentration of labour and capital (above all in mining and metallurgy) resulted in a decrease in real wages, in the multiplication of dismissals, and in the loss of labour expectations of upward social mobility. These effects became more acute in the 1880s, in particular during the winter prior to the 1886 protests.<sup>19</sup>

The area around Seville likewise participated in the industrializing euphoria which characterized some parts of the continent during the central decades of the nineteenth century. This is demonstrated by the development during these years of the crafts and enclave industry. This was a phenomenon linked to the growth in its traditional commercial vocation (which had acted as an axis for the accumulation of capital) and to a decentralized financial structure which fostered investment.<sup>20</sup> This considerable industrial impetus was, however, hindered by the policy with which the Spanish state tried to deal with the 1873 economic decline, that is to say by the so-called “economic nationalism”, a combination of protectionism and regional redistribution of production. This did not cause the disappearance of Sevillian industry, but did prevent it from consolidating itself as an economic driving force. On the one hand, the high tariffs imposed on raw materials curbed local initiatives in favour of metallurgical activities. Moreover, the regional specialization of production led to the financing of agro-commercial activities being stimulated to the detriment of manufacturing in the capital of Andalusia, unlike other centres in Catalonia or the Basque Country.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the effects of this economic policy were already fully visible in Seville. The lack of incentives to industrial investment had configured an undercapitalized, disseminated, and precarious productive fabric. Alongside tens of medium- and large-sized facilities, the majority of production units consisted of small workshops focused on greatly diversified demand. Cases such as the Real Fábrica de Tabacos (where significant transformations were observed in the incorporation of technology and the concentration of labour) were exceptions which should not disguise either the predominance of the crafts industries

19. Leboutte, “A propos de la condition ouvrière”, pp. 18–21.

20. From 1845, the port activity of Seville was in second position nationally. These were likewise years in which the potteries of La Cartuja (1841) and of Rodríguez y Cía (1859) were created; years in which the proximity of the blast furnace of El Pedroso (praised by Le Play in 1833) stimulated the development of the foundry San Antonio Bonaplata in 1840 and the metallurgical workshops of Portilla Hnos. y White in 1857, together with a prosperous weapons (Fundición de Bronces y Cañones) and machinery (Aspe, Duarte and La Catalana) industry. The number of industrial patents applied for in the second third of the nineteenth century, above the Spanish average, is an indication of the dynamism shown by Sevillian employers; C. Arenas, *Sevilla y el Estado. Una perspectiva local de la formación del capitalismo en España (1892–1923)* (Seville, 1995), p. 51.

or the trend toward business dispersion.<sup>21</sup> The precariousness of labour, the increase in irregularity of employment, and the progressive reduction in real wages were – in particular in the years 1898–1900 and 1903–1905 – the dominant traits in this economic scenario, traits aggravated by the abundance of immigrants (41,000 between 1870 and 1900) that the city was receiving.<sup>22</sup>

Both around Liège and Seville, these developments caused discontent, resentment, and fear for the future. These feelings were shared by workers from different professional categories, although they were especially experienced by artisans. It was, indeed, the artisans who spread to other sectors their discontent and fear of a reduction in wages, or of a loss of their “knowledge” and control over their work. Essentially, it was a reaction motivated by their growing difficulty in improving their labour situation and climbing socially, that is to say caused by the observation that their condition as workers was becoming a permanent reality in their life projects.<sup>23</sup> This reaction and its importance for the increase in social tension from the 1880s onwards was especially visible in the Belgian case, where industry was quickly assimilating technological changes and where there were powerful employers determined to control production. The same should, however, be indicated in relation to the capital of Andalusia which, despite being identified with less marked processes of concentration and mechanization and having artisans particularly present in the culture of work and in the regional productive model, was immersed in a dynamics of loss of capital and activity as a result of “economic nationalism”.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 183, C. Arenas, “Sevilla en el primer tercio del siglo XX, ¿una industrialización imposible?”, in *idem* (ed.), *Industria y clases trabajadoras en la Sevilla del siglo XX* (Seville, 1995), pp. 19–35, 21; J. Nadal, “Industrialización y desindustrialización del sureste español, 1817–1913”, in A. Parejo and A. Sánchez Picón (eds), *Economía andaluza e historia industrial* (Motril, 1999), pp. 65–137, 86ff.; M. Martín Rodríguez, “Andalucía: luces y sombras de una industrialización interrumpida”, in J. Nadal and A. Carreras (eds), *Pautas regionales de la industrialización española (siglos XIX y XX)* (Barcelona, 1990), pp. 342–376, 348ff.; A. Florencio Puntas, “Iniciativas empresariales sevillanas en el sector industrial: 1860–1880”, in Parejo and Sánchez Picón, *Economía andaluza*, pp. 337–348, 337–345; E. Baena and C. Arenas, “La mecanización del primer centro fabril de Sevilla: la Fábrica de Tabacos. 1887–1925”, in *Actas del II Congreso de Historia de Andalucía*, 2 vols (Córdoba, 1996), II, pp. 311–320; L. Gálvez, “La tardía modernización de la industria del tabaco en Andalucía”, in Parejo and Sánchez Picón, *Economía andaluza*, pp. 349–360.

22. Arenas, *Sevilla y el Estado*, pp. 255–258, and *idem*, *La Sevilla inerme* (Écija, 1992), p. 45.

23. There is generalized agreement which considers that the workers’ movement arose in the craft workshop and not in the factory; see Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, p. 1. In this respect, in the emergence of the working class and of class action, M. Pérez Ledesma considers the growing difficulty that the artisans observed to improve their labour situation to be significant, that is the perception that the working-class condition was a permanent and not a temporary reality. In the Spanish case, the artisans began to communicate this perception to other professional sectors in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. See Pérez Ledesma, “La formación de la clase obrera”, pp. 204f., 213–220, 233. See also how the artisans joined the militant Belgian anarchists in J. Moulart, *Le mouvement anarchiste en Belgique, 1870–1914* (Brussels, 1996), p. 41.



In both places, faced with a lack of life expectations, and with the difficulties of upward social and labour mobility, artisans proceeded to circulate their complaints and concerns to other working sectors with which they shared instability and wage reduction. These sectors became progressively aware of their subjection to the ups and downs of employment and wages. Having said this, the existence of the discontent was not, however, sufficient for the workers' groups to mobilize. It was also necessary to convince various categories of workers that the only way to improve their situation was to act jointly (that is to say that the common traits were more significant than the particularities of each sector), that this action was justified, and that it was worthy and legitimate. In this respect, the discursive organization of the perception of discontent was a key element. In order to understand why the workers from around Liège and Seville reacted, and why they reacted as they did, it is important – from the theoretical approach raised here – to begin to understand the structure and the nature of the shared discursive frameworks which promoted their joint action.

A revealing fact should be highlighted immediately. After the first route followed by the demonstration of 18 March in Liège, the leader E. Wagener pronounced words which the authorities considered to be a provocation of the uprising, the starting point for the disturbances which spread around the Wallonia region. Various media coincided in pointing out an especially significant fragment of that speech: "Working citizens, you have just passed through the city's richest streets. What did you see? Bread, meat, wealth, and clothing. And who obtained that? You? Your wives and children are dying of hunger and you have nothing to eat. You are fainthearted."<sup>24</sup> Following this intervention, the demonstration continued with the singing of *La Marseillaise*, shouts against capital and ownership, and the breaking of a food shop's windows which triggered the riot. Beyond their significance in encouraging mobilization, these words by Wagener summarized the essential and profound contradiction which the main figures of the labour unrest of Liège and Seville perceived, independently of their geographic or socio-professional status differences. This contradiction was at the centre of the basis for the protest and consisted of opposing two aspects considered by the workers as constituting their identity: their condition as victims of the social organization and their condition as axes of the social order, being executors of useful work for the community.<sup>25</sup>

24. Archives de la Ville de Liège, Bureau de police (19 March 1886).

25. An initial approach to the study of this contradiction can be found in C. Velasco Mesa, *Los nombres de la cuestión social. Discurso y agitaciones obreras: Lieja y Sevilla en el tránsito de los siglos XIX y XX* (Seville, 2003), pp. 461ff., and *idem*, "The rationalisation underlying the discourse of protest", in G. Álvarez, *International Conference on Political Strategies* (Seville, 2009), pp. 163–176. This approach is corrected, expanded and reworked here in accordance with a new historical interpretation.

Their elementary perception of being victims was expressed by a triple register which called on the material precariousness, the marginalization experienced in the different liberal systems, and the abuses suffered in the production centres. The workers defined themselves as “dying of hunger”, or “brothers in misery”. They described social unrest as “the struggle of the hungry generated by society”. In short, they condemned a badly accepted reality: the difficulties of food – of survival in general – with meagre wages.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, they identified themselves as the “despised ones” in the sphere of social (“the worker is not entitled to anything, not to work, or to welfare”) and political (where “the worker is no one”) organization,<sup>27</sup> but also in the production system, where they defined themselves as “abused” by bosses and by foremen. Indeed, the subjection of the workers to labour conditions which represented their physical deterioration and their loss of control over the market and the organization of work was repeatedly highlighted as an integral part of their permanent sacrifices. In this respect, the emphasis with which in 1901 the Sevillian metalworkers and potters denounced abuses of authority and aggression against labour is eloquent.<sup>28</sup> This was also indicated by the definitions that the weavers of Verviers offered in 1885 of the workshops and factories: “industrial prisons” or “barrack-prisons” where the workers suffered from “daily monstrosities” and received “all kinds of physical and moral torture”.<sup>29</sup>

The identification of workers as victims of the social order, due to their omission from the distribution of wealth, to their displacement from control of work, and to social and political marginalization, is undoubtedly at the

26. The citations in *La Guerre Sociale* (1–14 January 1886), p. 3 [hereafter *GS*]. *Ni Dieu, ni Maître* (18 July–1 August 1885), pp. 2f. [hereafter *ND*]. In this respect, the workers’ testimonies before the “Commission d’Enquête” created in 1886 are revealing in the Belgian case. Cf. *Commission du travail instituée par l’Arrêté Royal du 15 avril 1886* (Brussels, 1887), I, pp. 252–261, II, pp. 5–7, 145 [hereafter *CT*]. Likewise, O. Watez, *De la condition des ouvrier et des moyens de remédier leur situation* (Liège, 1886), pp. 32f. On workers’ budgets, cf. J. Puissant, “Un lent et difficile processus de démocratisation”, in H. Hasquin (dir.), *La Wallonie. Le pays et les hommes* (Brussels, 1976), II, pp. 159–189, 163. For the Sevillian case, see Un herrero, *El Noticiero Obrero* (5 April 1901), p. 1 [hereafter *ENO*]; A. Vasseur, *El Baluarte* (30 March 1900), pp. 1f. [hereafter *EB*].

27. The citations in *GS* (8–15 March 1886), pp. 1f.; *LM* (26 March 1886), p. 2. This conviction was not exclusively of those who mobilized in 1886 in a context of census suffrage. The Sevillian workers of 1901 insisted on condemning the fact that, despite the establishment in 1890 of universal male suffrage in Spain, tyranny by local political bosses and manipulation of the vote distorted democracy, that is they were factors of exclusion. Cf. *ENO* (2 April 1901), p. 1; *ENO* (18 March 1901), p. 1.

28. See Un herrero, *ENO* (5 April 1901), p. 1; Un cerrajero, *ENO* (16 April 1901), p. 2; *ENO* (7 April 1901), p. 1; *ENO* (18 May 1901), p. 1; *EL* (19 October 1901), p. 2; *EL* (11 October 1901), p. 1.

29. *GS* (6–20 December 1885), p. 3; *ND* (18 July–1 August 1885), p. 1, and (6–20 June 1885), p. 3. Other workers’ testimonies on the excessive duration of working hours, unhealthiness, deficient ventilation, physical abuse, loss of control over work, or wrongful dismissal, in *CT*, I, pp. 135, 312 and II, pp. 48f., 77, 111f., 386, 388.

root of the shared perception of injustice. This perception is even more important on being compared with the second of the major aspects which workers recognized as constituting their identity: their condition as creators of the wealth of the community. Starting from a conception of work as “universal law which produces life”, the workers – “the arms”, the “children of work” – were, consequently, the “creators of the capital of the industrialists”, the “wet nurses of humanity”.<sup>30</sup> And if work was the summit of creativity, the principle which organized humanity, the worker consequently had to be the axis for the development of society. This was the reasoning behind the explorations that the workers made of the defects of society.

The words of E. Wagener in the speech on 18 March 1886 were not an isolated occurrence. Victims of the social order and the “wet nurses of humanity”: these were the conflicting, contradictory terms that enlightened militants and anonymous workers highlighted – with variants – in their exaltations of collective action. A long time before they were declaimed in the street or they appeared in the document which announced the 18 March demonstration, these expressions – this contradiction – formed a fundamental part of the language and the propaganda used by the anarchists from around Liège. From January 1886 they insisted that “we, the workers, who have created the social wealth which deteriorates in the shops while we die of hunger and are in rags, we do not expect anything from this class which exploits and oppresses us”.<sup>31</sup> The Sevillian metalworkers expressed themselves with similar words during the months of their strike.<sup>32</sup>

The repetition in space and time of this double and contradictory identification reveals its importance on two fundamental levels. On the one hand, this discursive framework acted as a factor of cohesion, helping the workers – despite their salary or professional heterogeneity – to feel themselves as belonging to a group, a class excluded from the social order. On the other hand, this framework constituted an essential factor for action in so far as it revealed a contradiction, an injustice. In other words, the leading figures of the 1886 and 1901 unrest mobilized in accordance with the awareness of this paradox between their location and their role in society, in accordance with the injustice inherent in one fact: their work did not lead to rights in society.

It should, however, be indicated that this interpretative framework did not arise from nothing, and neither was it a new development attributable exclusively to the effects of industrial development. In fact, this elementary

30. *ENO* (11 June 1901), p. 1. *EB* (19 June 1899), pp. 1f.; *LM* (1 May 1891), p. 1; *L'Express* (18 January 1893), p. 1; *ENO* (17 June 1901), p. 2; *EB* (14 July 1903), p. 2.

31. *GS* (1–14 July 1886), p. 3.

32. “[The workers] are the poor who make rich, the slaves of the ruling tyranny, the martyrs of the bourgeois exploitation, those who are despised, [...] and yet, they are the great men, the giants of work, the exploiters of progress, the only ones who produce, those who create [...]; the true saviours of this country”; *ENO* (13 April 1901), pp. 1f.; *ENO* (4 April 1901), p. 1.

line of argument with which the protest was articulated, established, and encouraged, was the result of a complex reworking of concepts and terms characteristic of two pre-existing discourses. These two discourses were transformed about 1830, as W.H. Sewell rightly stressed in relation to his studies on French workers.<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, there is the traditional discourse of solidarity with the trade and the community, which is universalized to include all workers and gives rise to collectivist demands. On the other hand, there is the radical republican discourse of individual rights, which is compatible with the universalization of traditional solidarity with the trade and the community. A new revolutionary rhetoric was created where these two traditions converged, and the renewed emphasis that it received in those who participated in the 1886 and 1901 unrest is important in its survival.

In accordance with the convergence of these pre-existent discourses, the workers' groups of Liège and Seville reworked the principle of the legitimacy of political participation, circulated by liberal revolutionaries since the end of the eighteenth century in the face of the Old Regime model. In this respect, if the liberal model determined ownership (considered as the result of work and not of belonging to a class) as a requirement for political rights, the new workers' discursive framework directly placed work (not ownership) as the element from which rights which should be recognized by society arose. Furthermore, the exaltation – in particular in the case of Seville – of the right of individuals to join together for collective aims should likewise be interpreted in accordance with the adaptation of these pre-existent discourses. This was the exaltation of “the union against exploitation” in benefit of the “big family” which constituted all the “workers of the universe”, in the words of the president of the “Association of Metalworkers” of Seville, and praise for the “brotherhood” of “all the workers without distinguishing guilds” as an anonymous Sevillian builder pointed out.<sup>34</sup> It was, moreover, a discourse which found fertile ground in the experiences of this group of Sevillian workers, taking into account that with the change of century – as already indicated – new industrial and social relations appeared which contributed to homogenizing the condition of the workers and to confirming the sterility of “partial strikes”.

Parallel to these developments, the language spoken by the leading figures of the 1886 and 1901 unrest included concepts and terms used by liberal revolutionaries to oppose the Old Regime a century earlier. These concepts and terms, appropriately adapted, were used by workers' groups to argue, provide ideological and moral coverage, and, in short, to encourage mobilization against liberalism and its promoters. The workers' discourse thus attributed traits to the bourgeoisie that the latter had previously

33. See Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, pp. 233–242, and “How Classes are Made”, pp. 73–75.

34. The citations in *ENO* (3 June 1901), p. 2. Un Albañil, *ENO* (4 August 1901), p. 2.



Figure 1. "L'esclavage ouvrier", pamphlet written by Alfred Defuisseaux. Collection CARHOP.

stressed in the aristocracy, that is to say, it applied to the bourgeoisie–workers opposition the binomials “idle–productive”, “egoism–generosity”, “exploiters–exploited”, or “tyrants–slaves”. For *La Justicia Humana*, “capital is the feudal castle of the modern bourgeoisie”; the bosses are “parasites”, “idle blood

drinkers”, “exploiters of the workers’ sufferings”; in short, they are “today’s new lords of capitalist feudalism” according to words pronounced at an anarchist rally at Verviers in 1885. On the other hand, the workers were the “serfs”, the “modern-day slaves” who had to free themselves legitimately from a bourgeoisie which was merely a new aristocracy.<sup>35</sup> The legitimacy of the emancipation of the workers which concludes this reasoning was, moreover, reinforced by the component of sacrifice inherent in the perception of the worker as a victim (the holder of purity and moral superiority), but also by the rhetoric of the “people” (a concept mythologized as a source of political virtues since the French Revolution): if it was the workers who carried out the useful work for society, they should also constitute the “sovereign people”.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of a complex adaptation of different ideological discourses and traditions, the workers’ revolutionary language revealed visible paradoxes which the leading figures hastened to clarify. Those who rose up in 1886 and 1901 felt that they belonged to the French revolutionary tradition (stating that “we will continue its work”), but they also criticized it for only having introduced a new order of “bourgeois egoism at the expense of the proletariat”; a “new power in which the middle class has become the successor of the tyranny of the nobility and of the clergy”.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, they wanted to achieve “the genuine representation of true equality, liberty and fraternity”, in the words of G. Fernández, and “not – as indicated in *Ni Dieu, ni Maître* – the individualist, egotistical, brutal, and always mean and fictitious liberty proclaimed by the schools of bourgeois liberalism”.<sup>38</sup>

35. The citations in *La Justicia Humana* (18 April 1886), p. 4; *ND* (6–20 June 1885), p. 4; *GS* (1–14 January 1886), pp. 2f.; *ND* (18 July–1 August 1885), pp. 1f.; *La Razón Obrera* (25 January 1902), p. 1. *ND* was explicit: “the slave became the serf and the serf a wage earner”; action was therefore encouraged with expressions such as “go forth, slaves a thousand times more wretched than the old slaves, wake up and throw off your yoke”; *ND* (15 August–1 September 1885), pp. 2f. See also *GS* (1–14 January 1886), pp. 2f.; *ND* (27 September–11 October 1885), p. 3. The case of A. Defuisseaux shows the importance granted by the authorities to this discourse and, in particular, to the identification of the worker with the slave. He was condemned to six months imprisonment for writing the famous and widely circulated *Catéchisme du Peuple*: a text which, in view of its terms (including “slave”), was considered as encouraging the 18 March rebellion; J. Puissant, *L'évolution du mouvement socialiste dans le Borinage* (Brussels, 1982), p. 212; Velasco Mesa, *Los nombres de la cuestión social*, pp. 81–83.

36. Cf. Un repartidor de prensa, *ENO* (2 June 1901), p. 1; *ENO* (28 June 1901), p. 2; *ND* (4–18 July 1885), p. 3; *LM* (26 March 1886), p. 2; *LGL* (15 June 1886), p. 2. On the mythologization of the “people” as one of the axes of the protest and working-class culture, see J. Álvarez Junco, “Cultura popular y protesta política”, in J. Maurice (ed.), *Pueblo, movimiento obrero y cultura en la España contemporánea* (Paris, 1990), pp. 157–168.

37. The citations in *ND* (8–23 November 1885), p. 1; J. Fernández, *ENO* (5 September 1901), p. 3; *La Justicia Humana* (18 April 1886), p. 4.

38. Cf. G. Fernández, *El Proletario* (1 May 1902), pp. 5f.; *ND* (1–15 August 1885), pp. 1f.

Two observations should, however, be made. Those who participated in the Liège and Seville conflicts shared a conclusive discourse in one aspect: neither material precariousness, the degradation of working conditions, nor political marginalization were natural phenomena, but rather the result of violence and usurpation. By adapting terms and concepts from the pre-existent revolutionary rhetoric and reinterpreting the enlightened concept of emancipation, the need took on a political dimension, was explained in the political sphere,<sup>39</sup> was translated, in short, into a language which recognized the moral right of workers to demand social benefits and which consequently legitimized the mobilization.

Those who participated in these episodes of unrest were thus encouraged by these elementary arguments which started from discourses which were transformed, adapted to their experiences and to the new circumstances in which the dissidence was developed. The elementary similarities of the discourse used in both places should not, however, disguise its variants, the different readings that this structure allowed, the contrast between the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of the groups of workers in both contexts. These readings and actions were connected to specific economic and political situations, but also to specific ideological traditions. Some months after E. Wagener pronounced the words which preceded the 18 March uprising, an order could still be read which *La Liberté* addressed to “you, [the workers] who produce everything and who only have what is left to you by those who do not produce anything and have everything”. The order was “to wrest violently from our bosses what they have robbed from us”.<sup>40</sup> This was not, as explained below, either the discourse or the action which characterized the Sevillian workers in 1901.

#### DIFFERENT PROTESTS, DIFFERENT DISCOURSES

Despite the similarities presented by the structure of arguments of the protest, the different nature of the 1886 and 1901 episodes of worker unrest appears to indicate that their participants were living in different worlds. The 1886 mobilizations were semi-spontaneous, of short duration, and badly organized. Rather than being attempts to pressurize employers to negotiate efficiently or obtain concessions, they appeared to consist of expressions of working-class discontent and of solidarity, demonstrations of indignation, intimidation, and strength of the rank and file, defensive, forceful, incisive movements with no precise direction.<sup>41</sup>

39. See H. Arendt, “The Social Question”, in P. Baehr, *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York, 2000), pp. 247–277 (originally published in H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 1963), pp. 59–114).

40. *La Liberté* (23 October 1886), p. 1 [hereafter *LL*].

41. The contemporaries did not hesitate to classify them as “jacqueries”. See *LGL* (17–18 April 1886), p. 1. An analysis of similarities in this respect in D. Pector and E. Fourier, 1886.

Without a clear programme to support them, these mobilizations reproduced some common traits. The machines and pits were abandoned. Groups were formed which travelled along the roads around Liège, which marched from factory to factory or from town to town, with drums, chants, and revolutionary emblems seeking support to continue the strike or finding other workers to join them. In any case, the agreement to act was made in situ, by oral communication, by the workers themselves. Destiny was decided in the street.<sup>42</sup> As the movement spread to other towns of Wallonia, the point was reached where the factories and houses of employers were burned, such as those of E. Baudoux. This occurred until the police or the army intervened and dispersed the participants.

The account of the events made by the anarchist press months later was clear: “the organizers could not foresee that a revolutionary act would be carried out on that day”. It is indeed indicated that the demonstration would have remained peaceful if the traders of Liège, “alarmed by their newspapers”, had not closed their shops “before the eyes of the hungry”. This gesture was interpreted as a humiliation, “the last straw”, which sparked off the violence independently of the fact that “the exploitation of the workers and the governmental oppression had been embittering spirits since a long time before 18 March”. A similar approach was adopted by the anarchist media to explain how the movement spread to other parts of Wallonia: “in a few days, thanks to police ill-treatment, thanks to General Vandersmissen and to a summary repression, other workers followed the example of the Liège basin”. Accordingly, the anarchist press stressed one fact: “our brothers from Liège began without organization and we would certainly have triumphed if our thieves [the socialists] had not advocated calmness”.<sup>43</sup>

The 1901 actions in Seville were, on the contrary, less expressive and better organized. Coordinated by the FOS (the Workers’ Federation of Seville which, at the time, had almost 6,000 members), the metalworkers who went on strike in April had a specific programme of demands and acted, convinced that their efforts implied economic pressure on the employers to oblige them to accept certain concessions. After resisting for almost three months, the civil governor’s decision to close the headquarters of the Association of

*La révolte des damnés de la terre* (Brussels, 1986), pp. 4ff; J. Frank, “Une jacquerie industrielle vue comme action para-politique: l’insurrection belge de 1886”, *Revue de l’Institut de Sociologie* (Brussels, 1975), pp. 163–193.

42. *La Meuse* highlights how in the towns of Herstal, Ans, Jemeppe, Montegnée, Glain, Saint Nicolas, and Grâce-Berleur, groups of workers (mainly miners) met in small groups (of between ten and fifty members with a red flag and the sound of bells or rockets) which marched along roads, entered inns or gathered near factories in search of supporters of the strike. cf. *LM* (24 March 1886), p. 1; (26 March 1886), p. 1 and 2.

43. The citations in *LL* (20 March 1887), p. 1; (08 January 1887), p. 1.



Metalworkers on 30 June increased the tension of the conflict and, in the end, hastened the 8 July disturbances, the declaration of the state of emergency and the repression. Likewise, the October inter-trade general strike (also coordinated by the FOS) was initially called out of solidarity with the Sociedad de Cartujanos, which had been rejected by the employers as the representative of the workers in their demand for the reinstatement of some of their number dismissed from the La Cartuja factory.

Several factors contribute to explaining the contrast in the morphology of both types of mobilization. On the one hand, while those of 1886 came during a particularly critical phase as regards reductions of real wages and irregularity of employment,<sup>44</sup> those of 1901 took place in a brief period of recovery of real wages,<sup>45</sup> a circumstance which could strengthen the workers' capacity for resistance and negotiation. A factor which could be included in the so-called "structure of political opportunity" should, moreover, be indicated. In this respect, the 1886 unrest began with a function commemorating an insurrectionary occurrence (the Paris Commune), when those who promoted the workers' organization (the socialists) had just joined together in 1885 under the POB and were not yet sufficiently established among the workers of the region. On the other hand, as already indicated, the Sevillian workers mobilized, taking advantage of the legalization of association membership in 1899 (which helped the Sevillian anarchists to return to workers' organization after an interval underground which had lasted since the dissolution of the FTRE in 1888), in a context, furthermore, of an international debate on the need to redefine the instruments of collective action.

Beyond these factors, though, if – as previously highlighted – the protests which originated in Liège and in Seville were linked to the workers' adaptation of pre-existent ideological discourses and traditions, it is reasonable to deduce that the specific adaptations of these (corporate and radical) discourses and traditions also intervened in their contrasts. A more precise understanding of the different repertoires of collective action therefore makes it necessary to consider the specific interpretative frameworks circulated by anarchists from both places. This should be done with one premise: for the leading figures of the 1886 and 1901 uprisings to react as they did, the economic and political factors had to come together with an ingredient of an ideological and cultural nature consisting of the circulation and acceptance of discourses through which the groups of workers felt and understood that it was necessary and legitimate to act.

44. Leboutte, "A propos de la condition ouvrière", pp. 18–21.

45. This was the situation in 1901–1902, between the two major phases of reductions, that of 1898–1900 and that of 1903–1905; Arenas, *Sevilla y el Estado*, pp. 255–258, and *idem*, *La Sevilla inerme* (Écija, 1992), p. 45.

In this respect, a preliminary observation can be established. Contrasting with the situation observed in Liège, Seville was characterized by a notable presence of the craft culture of work, accentuated by the industrial spread experienced by the city since the end of the nineteenth century. This characteristic of the Sevillian case contributed to the greater discipline of its mobilizations, the morphology of which referred to the action of the skilled urban trades, although this action was transformed by revolutionary ideas circulated at the turn of the century. It contributed insofar as this craft culture of work favoured the workers' understanding and acceptance, not only of the organizational forms of the skilled urban trades, but also of corporate-type values and of association and fraternity messages. It was with these values and messages that the workers succeeded in articulating their identity and collective action. In these years, moreover, with international syndicalism in a process of conceptual redefinition, together with the defenders of older tactics, discourses arose among the Sevillian workers which heralded a typically Spanish phenomenon: anarcho-syndicalism. Around Liège in 1886, on the other hand, a tradition originating from the socio-professional heterogeneity<sup>46</sup> arising from the city's industrial model, led to the insurrectionary radical discourse which predominated before exclusion from the right to vote constituted the central concept which bonded the workers' identity and organized the protest.

### *The rhetoric of the "violent revolution"*

The assessment that the anarchist weekly *La Liberté* made of the March 1886 events stressed one fact:

[...] the disturbance was localized precisely in the points where the workers' organization had not taken place, because there the workers had understood well that they should only rely on themselves. Charleroi and its surrounding area, Liège and its surrounding area rose up, while in the Borinage, in Ghent and at other points the workers relied on the security of their organization.<sup>47</sup>

Two essential observations should be drawn from this interpretation. First, that organization is not needed for mobilization, and that organization is even harmful for this purpose. And second, that this conviction was sufficiently deeply rooted among the workers' groups of Liège and its surrounding area for them to decide to proceed accordingly.

Both observations are linked to a process which began to be developed in the previous decade. Indeed, when at The Hague Congress of 1872 the Belgian delegates of the International rejected the idea of a revolution by

46. Moulart, *Le mouvement anarchiste*, p. 334.

47. *LL* (8 January 1887), p. 1.

political means, Liège experienced – to the detriment of “reformist socialism” – the predominance of anarchism. This anarchism, despite the attempt in 1880–1881 to join forces with “revolutionary socialists” in the Union Révolutionnaire, did not succeed in organizing a movement beyond the local limits, the group breaking up due to lack of organization and to divisions concerning the role of politics.<sup>48</sup> In short, it considered union action to be subsidiary and focused its efforts not on workers’ organization, but on propaganda in favour of terrorist actions which would prevent any worker deviation toward the political or reformist channel. This propaganda was in favour of what *Ni Dieu ni Maître* defined as “violent revolution”.<sup>49</sup>

These premises pervaded the “Cercles ouvriers” which appeared from the end of the 1870s at the main points of anarchist influence in Belgium: Brussels, Verviers, and Liège. Certain groups stood out in the latter, such as “Les Va-Nus-Pieds” and “Les XV”, established in 1881 and 1884, respectively, by a group of militants including E. Warnotte and E. Wagener. These groups were organized informally (without articles of association, membership conditions, or fees, which has traditionally made it difficult to study their organization). They were groups established for purely doctrinal or ideological reasons, of a marked “anti-bourgeois labour nature”, and consequently without the presence – unlike in the Spanish or French cases – of members of the petite bourgeoisie or of important figures in the intellectual sphere. In short, the groups had little influence from corporate traditions and very few activists. The relevant data are fragmentary, imprecise, and inconsistent. In contrast to estimates of the anarchist press, which in 1886 spoke of approximately 600 sympathizers in Jemeppe-Tilleur, the police and political authorities indicated that in the Liège basin that year there were a dozen active anarchists with an audience of approximately 40 people, mostly from the mining sector.<sup>50</sup>

At that time, in particular when the reformism of the POB entered the arena in 1885, the abandonment of union action and the deployment of rhetoric in favour of “violent revolution” were clear in those anarchist media. This was expressed by *La Liberté*: “since a long time before 18 March [...] some, the most convinced, had understood that the psychological moment or

48. On these aspects see Moulaert, *Le mouvement anarchiste*, pp. 25, 338ff.

49. *ND* (15 August–1 September 1885), pp. 1f.

50. See *ND* (28 February–7 March 1886), p. 1; (28 March 1886), p. 1; *LM* (23 March 1886); R. Van Santbergen, *Une Bourrasque sociale. Liège 1886* (Liège, 1969), pp. 27, 31; C. Strikwerda, *A House Divided* (Boston, MA, 1998), pp. 94ff. During successive years it does not appear that these figures increased significantly. In 1887 the police commissioner of Liège spoke of thirty-five anarchists belonging to the groups “Les Humaitaires” and “Les XV”. In 1892, a total of twenty-five were recorded in the city of Liège, forty-eight in the basin, and sixty-four in the province; cf. Moulaert, *Le mouvement anarchiste*, pp. 25, 66, 327ff.

the supreme hour was about to arrive [...] and they sought, through incessant study, the fastest routes to make the hungry understand the cause of their suffering”.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, an intense propaganda campaign was launched, not “through action” but “through words”. The activity of the Liège anarchists formed part of this campaign. Supported by their comrades from Verviers, they began to organize weekly rallies from the beginning of 1886 in the *Café des Quatre Nations*. These meetings were called *contradictaires*, and accepted the presence and debate of socialist members. They read and discussed ideas, shared and circulated concepts, terms, a discourse, in short, in favour of an immediate revolution, of an insurrectionary action entrusted to the instinct of the masses, and the boldness of determined men. It was undoubtedly a commitment to one of the two tactical discourses raised by P. Kropotkin in 1881: the discourse in favour of illegality, revolutionary violence, and secret organization versus that of legality, public organization, and union action.<sup>52</sup>

This discursive framework was organized through various registers which started from a conviction: that it was impossible for employers and workers to come to an understanding and harmony. This was expressed laconically by *Ni Dieu, ni Maître*: “you don’t discuss with bosses, you eliminate them”.<sup>53</sup> This opinion was at the origin of the rejection by the “Cercle Anarchiste l’Étincelle” of Verviers of the activity of the 1886 “Commission d’Enquête”. Persuaded that the members of this Commission were not going to “return to society the goods that they hold unjustly and invite their companions in parasitism to do the same [...], only one route is left open for the workers: to oppose their strength”.<sup>54</sup> In fact, the main demands being set out before this Commission – identified with “peaceful means” – were considered by the anarchist speakers as “huge lies”, or at best as palliatives which should be rejected.<sup>55</sup>

The proposals of reformists were, in this respect, subject to an intense campaign of rejection starting from 1885, not a random date if we consider that this is when the POB was established around the emblem of universal suffrage. For the anarchists the invocations made in *contradictaires* rallies, by militants such as Picraux, Plumhans, and Blanvalet, to organization, union, association, regulation of the duration of work, cooperatives, and universal suffrage were only “a hypocritical procedure to shy away from the Revolution”.<sup>56</sup> As for universal suffrage, “the greatest mythologization of the century which cannot improve at all the

51. *LL* (8 January 1887), p. 1.

52. Cl. Lida, “Los discursos de la clandestinidad”, p. 63.

53. *ND* (4–18 July 1885), p. 2.

54. *LL* (13 November 1886), p. 2.

55. *ND* (15 August–1 September 1885), pp. 3f.; *CT*, II, pp. 138ff.

56. *ND* (16–20 September 1885), p. 1.

condition of the workers”,<sup>57</sup> it was sufficient to observe the French case to conclude – in the opinion of an anonymous worker – that in Belgium, “the country of capitalist exploitation par excellence”, the workers would not escape from a similar electoral corruption.<sup>58</sup> However, in addition to the systematic rejection of the state made by Cardinael and Wagener in Liège, Dodémont, Wysman in Verviers, “whether working-class or bourgeois”,<sup>59</sup> the inefficiency of cooperation and of “peaceful strikes” was likewise stressed.

Cooperation was not the solution because “it is completely impracticable”, given the difficulties of workers in meeting their urgent needs of subsistence, and because “it makes men reactionary and conservative”, that is, because it generates “a working-class aristocracy formed by some more skilful individuals”, that is to say “a new class of privileged people which will provoke divisions among workers”.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, strikes – “as understood by the POB” – were not considered to be a means of emancipation either. It was not a question – as *La Guerre Sociale* pointed out a few days before 18 March 1886 – of demanding work or bread, but of “destroying and killing in order to establish a new society”. In the words of *La Liberté*, “while the strike is peaceful, while it does not kill the Watrin of the moment, while it does not entail the taking of this factory or of that pit, which are owned by everyone, the strike will only serve to make the workers more wretched”.<sup>61</sup> A general strike was only therefore accepted if it provoked “revolutionary unrest among the workers”, that is to say, “if it represented immediate Revolution”, for which “it must be violent or, otherwise, it should not be carried out”.<sup>62</sup>

The “peaceful strikes”, “the trade-union congresses, the cooperation societies, the electoral committees, the societies of freethinkers, the popular bakers, and other intended means of emancipation” being rejected as inefficient and as having the consent of the bourgeoisie, the message was clear: a “violent revolution” was necessary in the words of Wysman in a rally organized by *l’Étincelle Révolutionnaire* of Verviers in January 1886. It was necessary to “be armed with memory and with anger”, and “to strike out without pity”.<sup>63</sup> “Violence”, said *Ni Dieu, ni Maître*, “is not only legitimate but also decisive; it is the only alternative which will put

57. *Ibid.*; *ND* (1–15 September 1885), p. 1.

58. *LL* (25 December 1886), pp. 1f.

59. *GS* (15–28 January 1886), p. 3.

60. Cf. *LL* (23 October 1886), p. 1; (29 May 1887), pp. 2f.; *ND* (8–23 November 1885), p. 2; (8–23 November 1885), p. 2; (15 August–1 September 1885), pp. 2f.; (8–23 November 1885), pp. 3f.

61. See, respectively, *GS* (8–15 March 1886), pp. 1f.; *LL* (19 February 1887), p. 1.

62. See, respectively, *ND* (6–20 June 1885), pp. 1f.; *LL* (3 April 1887), pp. 2f.; (19 February 1887), p. 1.

63. *GS* (15–28 January 1886), p. 3; *LL* (1 May 1887), p. 2.

an end to the ills of the worker".<sup>64</sup> It was specified that it was not a question of gratuitous violence, that what was desired was that "the emancipation of the proletariat could be carried out without scenes of carnage".<sup>65</sup> It was, however, accepted that this violence was inevitable, that it followed the line marked by the radical revolutionaries of 1793, whom it was necessary to emulate "if we want to rid ourselves of the well-dressed wastrels who rob us".<sup>66</sup> It was, in short, a question of violence justified as the only means to "resist" and "put an end to the violence", to "the liberticidal attacks of our enemies".<sup>67</sup> The fact that "two hundred thousand workers a year die from firedamp, from imprudence, rapacity, the egoism of the employers" was adduced. These arguments were set out in order then to add a slogan: "Kill [the employers] if you do not want them to kill you".<sup>68</sup> The motto "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" was certainly behind these invocations of violence,<sup>69</sup> that is to say, revenge (in particular for the 1871 repression of the Commune), in which, "if we do not exclude the women and children [of employers], we will just be imitating their example" declared *L'Étincelle* and *L'Arène révolutionnaire* in 1885.<sup>70</sup>

Beyond the harsh and revanchist tone of this discourse which encouraged people to "destroy all the oppressors", or which wanted "blood to flow fast along the city's sewers", a significant aspect is the emphasis of these anarchist media on the need for workers' emancipation through "the grouping together of those convinced due to affinity of character and of temperament, instead of bringing together a large number of individuals". The individual action of "determined men" was thus imposed, men "who replaced inertia with audacity", and who applied "the means obtained from chemistry", men, in short, "with initiative to attract the masses to the path of demands".<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, Wysman declared in a rally in Seraing that he was in favour of the spontaneity of the revolution: "a revolution is not organized but rather breaks out without it being expected".<sup>72</sup> Likewise, in January 1886 *La Guerre Sociale* was convinced that "the revolution will be mature when you [the workers] want, [...] when you have understood that you will only make yourselves heard through violence".<sup>73</sup>

64. *ND* (18 July–1 August 1885), p. 1.

65. *ND* (4–18 July 1885), pp. 1f.

66. *Ibid.*

67. See, respectively, *GS* (21 December 1885–04 January 1886), p. 1; *ND* (6–20 June 1885), pp. 1, 4.

68. *LL* (22 January 1887), p. 1.

69. *LL* (3 April 1887), p. 1.

70. See *ND* (23 May–6 June 1885), p. 3.

71. The citations in *ND* (4–18 July 1885), p. 1; *GS* (21 December 1885–4 January 1886), p. 1; *LL* (8 January 1887), p. 1; *ND* (6–20 June 1885), pp. 1f., 4.

72. *LL* (1 May 1887), p. 3.

73. *GS* (15–28 January 1886), p. 1.

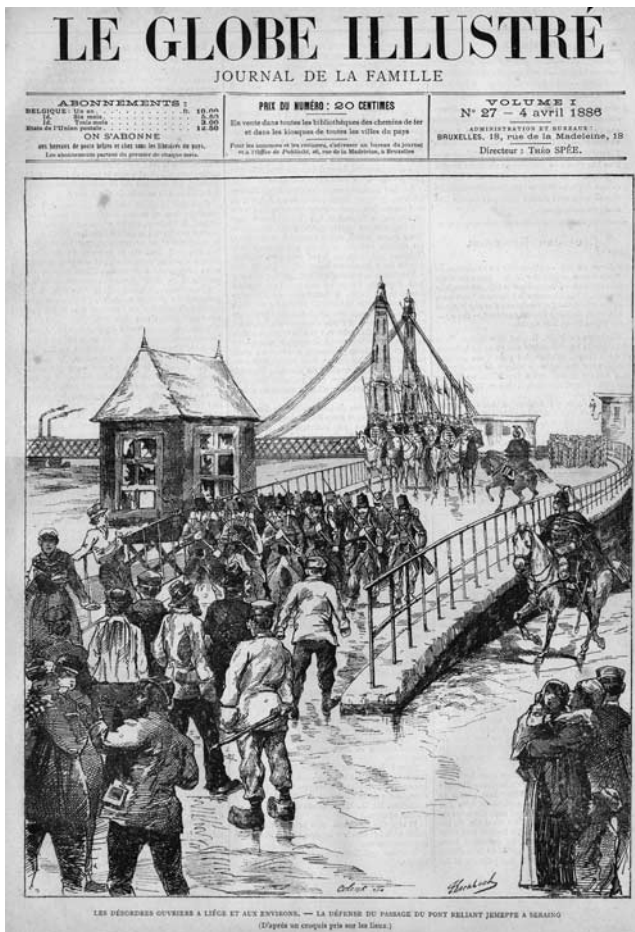


Figure 2. Protesters facing the police in Liège on 18 March 1886. *Le Globe Illustré*, Nr 27, 4 April 1886. Collection CARHOP.

Although the events of 18 March 1886 were not an expression of “propaganda through actions”, although the organizers themselves were overcome by events and justice quickly intervened against them, it is reasonable to suppose that this “propaganda through words” had effects on the development of the events. It was not just a question of workers like Lechamps proclaiming, in a rally prior to the disturbances, the use of dynamite against the owners.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the social revolution about

74. *LM* (19 March 1886), p. 1.

which those anarchist militants or sympathizers were talking, and which was their alternative to the electoralist path of social democracy, did not accept union organization or the organization of the workers at all. With a POB not yet consolidated among the group of local workers, and with anarchist groups which were reluctant to offer conceptual references in relation to association membership, the main figures of the 1886 events did not have the means to organize their protests, despite the fact that the 18 March demonstration had a certain preparation within the campaign of propaganda undertaken since January of the same year.<sup>75</sup> It was precisely toward that line, toward the organization of the movement, that the POB would direct its efforts thereafter. In addition to the tacit desire to channel the impulses of the workers towards its ranks, the socialists, from then on, sought the cohesion and organization of the workers, stressing one of the central elements of their identity: political marginalization.<sup>76</sup>

### *The rhetoric of the “scientific revolution”*

Today the proletariat casts aside the political rebellions and rallies as inefficient and with dreadful results. It does not want to succumb to suicidal outbursts. The Social Revolution only places its hope in the grouping together of all the oppressed in the ideals of equality and justice. The general strike is the new tactic that the proletarians have adopted.<sup>77</sup>

These were the words with which A. Salas determined the thought and the feeling which pulsed in the workers of Seville a few days before the October inter-trade general strike was declared. The text was published on 16 September 1901, that is to say in the same month in which the Lyon

75. G. Deneckere, “The Transforming Impact of Collective Action: Belgium, 1886”, *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), pp. 345–367. On a larger, nationwide, scale, it should, however, be explained that the appearance of the POB and its very rapid rise starting from 1886 contributed to concealing – as J. Puissant maintains – the organization that existed in the Belgian workers’ movement; J. Puissant, “L’historiographie du mouvement ouvrier”, *Revue de l’Université de Bruxelles*, 1–2 (1981), pp. 175–192, 180; P. Rion, “1886 et les historiens de métier”, in Bruwier, 1886. *La Wallonie née de la grève?*, pp. 185–196, 185.

76. Applying the approach of J. Kocka for the German case, it would be necessary to consider, as a fundamental factor in the adoption by the Belgian workers’ movement of attitudes which transcended each trade, the impact of an authoritarian state which excluded the workers from any participation in the political system. This explicit discrimination, which for the workers represented exclusion from the right to vote, made universal suffrage the main emblem, in the face of labour diversity, to interpret common experiences and organize the protest. Cf. J. Kocka, “Los artesanos, los trabajadores y el Estado: hacia una historia social de los comienzos del movimiento obrero alemán”, *Historia Social*, 12 (1992), pp. 101–118, 112–116; *idem*, “Problems of Working-Class Formation in Germany: The Early Years, 1800–1875”, in I. Katznelson and A. Zolberg (eds), *Working-Class Formation. Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 279–351.

77. ENO (16 September 1901), p. 1.



Congress of the CGT likewise identified the social revolution with the general strike, considered there as the only hope for the workers in the face of the failure of reformist panaceas.<sup>78</sup>

Two observations can be made from these words. First, that the essential route to achieving the social revolution was not the rally but rather the union, that is to say the organization of the workers. Other militants insisted on this in rallies and the Sevillian press, such as Diego Martínez Barrio (future president of the Second Spanish Republic), Alejandro Guichot, and Adolfo Vasseur, who repeatedly added another slogan to the need for organization: “before oil, before the incendiary torch, before the pickaxe, before the devastating mattock, education, education, and education”.<sup>79</sup> And second, that the workers shared this conviction, and accordingly had adopted the general strike, a tactic therefore understood as an alternative to violent action or to armed insurrection, as a modern instrument of pressure which should be carried out in a “scientific”, that is responsible and organized, manner.<sup>80</sup>

The discourse and type of action adopted by the Sevillian anarchists in 1901 thus marked a substantial difference from their counterparts in Liège in 1886. In fact, this difference was already visible when, following the 1881 underground congress in London, the Sevillian anarchist media adopted the discourse in favour of legality, public organization, union, and educational action, in short an approach to the workers with the aim of equipping them with theoretical and discursive instruments for organized action and for social transformation from their associations. The bases of the interpretative framework deployed in 1901 do, indeed, refer to a culture of associations conceived since the last third of the nineteenth century in Spain, as revealed by the blossoming of association membership which can be observed in Seville in 1882, when the associations were legalized following the repression of the 1873 cantonal uprising.

This boost for associations coincided with the holding in Seville of the Second Congress of the FTRE, Federación de Trabajadores Regional de España (Spanish Regional Federation of Workers), where the Centro Obrero of Seville, with almost 6,000 members, was the one that brought together the biggest number of workers. Association membership in Seville became from then on a plural platform for discussion and resistance

78. Gabriel, “Sindicalismo y huelga”, p. 20.

79. *ENO* (23 August 1901), p. 1. By Diego Martínez Barrio see *ENO* (19 May 1901), p. 1. By Alejandro Guichot see *ENO* (27 March 1901), p. 1; (17 March 1901), p. 1; A. Guichot, *De dónde venimos. Quiénes somos. Adónde vamos. Qué debemos hacer* (Seville, 1898). By Adolfo Vasseur, see *ENO* (16 September 1901), p. 1.

80. Cf. *ENO* (11 August 1901), p. 2; for the different acceptances of the general strike, see Bar, *La CNT*, pp. 89f.

of libertarians, federalist republicans, and workers of other tendencies, with or without known affiliation. At its heart was not only the promotion of educational centres for workers or solidarity with prisoners and exiles, but also concepts and terms were shared which would mark the path of the discourse and action of local workers: a rejection of parliamentarianism and of exploitation, the aspiration to emancipation and equality, the exaltation of education, association, and the productiveness of work. In 1888, following the events of the “Black Hand”, the FTRE broke up and anarchist organizations were obliged to go underground again, although this did not prevent this ideology from continuing to be circulated and rethought until it reappeared publicly and with renewed strength at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the return of the Sevillian anarchists to action within the workers’ associations. The objective was to provide these associations with a revolutionary orientation which simultaneously would remove them from republican and socialist influence.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, not only was the FOS created but also *El Noticiero Obrero* was founded and a discourse of emancipation was deployed without which the 1901 protests cannot be adequately understood. This discourse succeeded in interpreting the workers’ experiences starting from the essential principles of association and education.

The articulation of the discourse which characterized the main figures from the 1901 mobilizations was carried out starting from the conviction that neither unrest, nor violence led to anything by themselves. *El Noticiero Obrero* stressed:

The same has always happened – the workers become despairing; they become agitated; they understand that they need to respond with force to the attacks on their rights and it does not go any further, tiredness ensuing. [...] The need to break out of this routine procedure, to open up new horizons, is thus imposed.<sup>82</sup>

This was the argument and conclusion to which militants such as C. Moro incorporated the explicit refusal to “write in blood the sacred triumph of reason”, or the desire – in the words of F. Calderón – for the “evolution of

81. After the dissolution of the FTRE in 1888 and the appearance of terrorism in the panorama of anarchist actions (including the attack on Martínez Campos in 1893 and that on Cánovas in 1897), the 1899 Associations Act effectively opened up a new stage in Spanish anarchism in which the adoption of revolutionary syndicalism began. Cf. A. López Estudillo, “Federalismo y obrerismo en Sevilla (1881–1883)”, in *Actas del II Congreso*, II, pp. 431–440, 437–439; J. Maurice, *El anarquismo andaluz. Campesinos y sindicalistas, 1868–1936* (Barcelona, 1990), pp. 218f.; J. Díaz Del Moral, *Historia de las agitaciones campesinas andaluzas* (Madrid, 1967), pp. 212ff.; A. Calero, *Movimientos sociales en Andalucía (1820–1936)* (Madrid, 1977), pp. 27–30; J. Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español (1868–1910)* (Madrid, 1991), p. 547; J. Casanova, “La cara oscura del anarquismo”, in S. Juliá (ed.), *Violencia política en la España del siglo XX* (Madrid, 2000), pp. 67–104, 73–77.

82. *ENO* (16 April 1901), p. 2.

society to take place without any upheaval".<sup>83</sup> In the words of A. Vasseur, far from proceeding to a "social liquidation", "men with gaunt looks should not look like an unconscious beast, but rather, aware of their mission, they should be capable of making a selection of what should disappear and what should be kept or transformed".<sup>84</sup>

Having said this, for action – the revolution – to be effective, it should be carried out at the heart of the association, strengthening the general unions. For this, "unity", "solidarity", and "association" were first considered to be fundamental. "Our weapon is union", proclaimed an anonymous potter;<sup>85</sup> that is, the union and solidarity of "all" the workers, without distinguishing trades or professional sectors, as a builder pointed out;<sup>86</sup> union to prevent the sterility inherent in any individual demand, as "if just one person asks or pleads for it, they are thrown into the street like an unwanted object from a home".<sup>87</sup> Union and solidarity were understood as "supreme moral obligations", in the words of the printer A. Pino, or as an anonymous coachman stressed, using expressions which referred to corporate codes, to labour experiences in a context of the deep-seatedness of the craft culture of work: "we turn to unity and fraternally embracing we swear to defend our ideal of emancipation, fulfilling all the requirements set by our regulations, including what for me is the most beautiful, that of practising the principle of solidarity".<sup>88</sup>

Not everything, however, was limited to unity. The fundamental role of education was, moreover, stressed for the strengthening of the workers' associations and, more broadly, for the development of the social revolution. The words of Diego Martínez Barrio reveal the importance granted to this factor:

[...] while workers are not educated, while they do not understand the simple reason which exists to request the equality demanded as the natural right of men, we will not advance at all, not at all, in our aims, even though it is stated ex cathedra that the revolution will be the great leveller.<sup>89</sup>

The title of another article by the same person – "The Revolution is Reached through Education" – is conclusive in this respect, as is the

83. *ENO* (15 April 1901), p. 1; (30 July 1901), p. 3.

84. *ENO* (23 August 1901), p. 1.

85. *ENO* (6 August 1901), p. 2.

86. "Comrades, let us unite, let us join together to defend ourselves from the capitalist yoke. Let us defend work, yes, but let us not spurn any comrade, wherever they are, as we are all entitled to eat"; *ENO* (4 August 1901), p. 2.

87. *ENO* (13 April 1901), pp. 1f.

88. The citations in A. del Pino, *ENO* (15 April 1901), p. 3; Un cochero, *ENO* (11 June 1901), pp. 1f. See likewise Un Albañil, *ENO* (4 August 1901), p. 2; J. Partida, *ENO* (13 April 1901), pp. 1f.

89. *ENO* (18 July 1901), p. 1.

opinion of a shoemaker, M. Ruiz: “there is no struggle possible if we do not educate ourselves”.<sup>90</sup>

Education was indeed interpreted as “the true agent of the revolution”,<sup>91</sup> for three essential reasons. First, it was the channel for the workers to be aware of their rights and, consequently, to be able to confront their infringement. This was expressed by D. Covadonga in maintaining that “the ill arises from our scarce education”, and also by an anonymous carpenter: “due to the lack of education, the workers cannot defend their interests with dignity and occupy the place that Nature has assigned for them”.<sup>92</sup> Second, it was a means to proceed “rationally” and to avoid impulsive, ill-prepared and in the end sterile actions. In other words, education was the adequate means to develop “convictions”, which would prevent the “withdrawal” or the “scepticism” of the workers in the face of possible setbacks.<sup>93</sup> And third, it was essential for the complete and autonomous development of the individual, regardless of the dictates of any “messiah” or “political group”.<sup>94</sup>

Accordingly, various anonymous workers insisted that the “new channels” of collective action required “the workers, alone, without the help of anyone, to establish primary schools, whose manual and scientific works place them in conditions of true emancipation; to manage on their own”, and they advised “the workers’ associations to devote part of their fees to create truly secular schools so that our children receive a complete education”.<sup>95</sup> Behind the tacit or explicit apolitical nature of this discourse lay the workers’ experiences of marginalization and disappointment with the route of parliamentary action. In a context in which tyranny by local political bosses and the manipulation of the vote distorted the male universal suffrage established in Spain since 1890, a baker was clear in this respect: “the regeneration of class, which in not too distant times we expected from above, we now know can only come from below”.<sup>96</sup>

On assimilating these rationalist principles, these discursive references concerning association and education, the workers who mobilized in 1901 in Seville – unlike those who did so on 18 March 1886 in Liège – acted with premeditation, understanding the strike as a means of pressure to achieve specific demands and initially, during the metalworkers’ strike, following the

90. *ENO* (19 May 1901), p. 1; *ENO* (19 August 1901), p. 1.

91. *ENO* (22 April 1901), p. 1.

92. *EL* (14 October 1901), p. 2; (16 September 1901), pp. 1f.

93. *ENO* (9 August 1901), p. 2.

94. *ENO* (18 March 1901), p. 1.

95. See *ENO* (16 April 1901), p. 2; (13 August 1901), pp. 2f.; (5 April 1901), p. 1; (18 March 1901), p. 1; (16 April 1901), p. 2.

96. *ENO* (2 April 1901), p. 1. The debates of the contemporaries on the paradoxical coexistence of a law of universal suffrage and of a doctrinaire monarchy, in A. Calero, “Los precursores de la monarquía democrática”, in J.L. García Delgado (ed.), *La España de la Restauración* (Madrid, 1985), pp. 21–54, 32–44.

line of moderation. In this first case it was necessary to wait for two factors to occur (the refusal of the employers to negotiate with the Association of Metalworkers and the closing, by order of the civil governor, of its headquarters) for the disturbances of 8 July to be hastened. Almost three months of the strike had passed in which the workers' demand for recognition of their association – in the face of a management obstinately rejecting it as representative of the workers – even took preference over labour demands.<sup>97</sup> The reaction of the metalworkers during these disturbances referred to a deeply rooted conviction and feeling; indeed, the closing of their headquarters represented an infringement of their right of association, one of the fundamental rights on which their version of the social organization was established.

The October inter-trade general strike was, in part, a result of the radicalization of the workers' attitude and discourse in view of the failure and the repression of the metalworkers' strike, and in general in view of the failure of the partial strikes. The principles of association and education were not, however, abandoned during this radicalization. In this respect, the months which separated the two conflicts were, from an intellectual point of view, months of frenetic activity during which a debate developed on the tactics and aims of the social revolution which reproduced, with additional nuances, the controversies demonstrated by collectivists and communists since the 1882 Congress of the FTRE in Seville. The controversy, rather than being considered as an irreconcilable division between collectivists defending legality and the "scientific organization", starting from the general unions and communists inclined to use illegal tactics,<sup>98</sup> consisted of the self-critical exploration of a group concerned by organization but which, faced with the repression and the sterility of conventional forms of struggle, renewed the associative procedures to carry out the social revolution.

In a context, moreover, marked by the Montjuich (Barcelona) and La Coruña trials, and by the international debate on revolutionary syndicalism, more and more voices began to be heard which, without ceasing to call for the strengthening of the associations, defended the application of new "immediate and energetic" measures.<sup>99</sup> The revolutionary general strike, falling within a broader process of "scientific revolution" which included education, began to be considered as a real possibility. This was

97. "The Sevillian workers can yield in matters of pesetas and in more or less working hours, but will never be able to do so when the social group to which they belong is not known and the authority that it exerts over them is scorned"; *ENO* (19 April 1901), p. 1.

98. See M. Rubio, *La Tribuna Libre* (23 December 1891–8 January 1892), pp. 1f.; R. Núñez Florencio, *El terrorismo anarquista (1888–1909)* (Madrid, 1983), pp. 105f.; A. Robles Egea, "Terrorismo y crisis de la organización obrera a fines del siglo XIX", *Estudios de Historia Social*, 22–23 (1982), pp. 201–238, 210f.

99. On the Montjuich and La Coruña trials, see *ENO* (11 August 1901), p. 2; *La Razón Obrera* (6 October 1901), p. 4; F. Olaya Morales, *Historia del movimiento obrero español (siglo XIX)* (Madrid, 1994), p. 830; F. Urales, *El Castillo Maldito* (Toulouse, 1992), pp. 14–72.

the major new conceptual and discursive development of the period which, added to the basis of workers' association-related and pedagogical references, responded to the indolence and the repression that the workers perceived from the authorities in relation to the social problem.

Proposed as an alternative to individual violent action or armed insurrection, the revolutionary general strike discussed by the Sevillian workers reconciled the generic aspirations of the anarchist social project with specific demands close to the material experiences of the workers. This was in accordance with the advice of one of the noteworthy militants, Diego Martínez Barrio, already formulated one month before the events: "to fire with enthusiasm the masses of peasants and artisans" it is necessary to prevent "the motive from being too abstract".<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, the conflict was declared, in principle, as a reply to the lock-out of the La Cartuja pottery (a decision by the employers in the face of the attempt by the Asociación de Cartujanos to represent the workers in relation to the reinstatement of dismissed workers), that is to say, in solidarity with the potters and as a means of pressure on the owners of the factory. The demands went even further, though: the strikers demanded freedom for the workers detained in Barcelona, La Coruña, and Seville for "not accepting subordination to the tyranny of local political bosses, justice or politics"; the construction of a society in which the workers become "free producers of a humanitarian society"; "to civilize uncultured peoples through scientific teaching"; "the replacement of war with peace, of weapons with reason and law".<sup>101</sup> In short, it was a question of the social revolution, of achieving a society based on "justice", "reason", and "progress". These objectives were presented surrounded by universal generosity and fraternity, far from any slogan of "social liquidation".

From this perspective, the allusion to the fact that the guilt of exploitation should not be personalized in the employers, "mere instruments of the capitalist regime", are not surprising.<sup>102</sup> In fact, the Sevillian workers of 1901 interpreted the conflict not so much as an intense confrontation between classes but rather as an attempt to achieve a social organization in which manual or intellectual work would obtain the legitimate recognition arising from its utility and where fraternal association would replace competition between men. In other words, there was not so much an awareness of a class as the more universal awareness of an *enlightened humanity*. Therein, collective action was not revenge against the exploiters but rather the path to overcome exploitation and create a fairer society.<sup>103</sup>

100. *ENO* (4 September 1901), pp. 1f.

101. *Ibid.* See also *El Proletario* (1 April 1902), p. 2.

102. *ENO* (9 August 1901), p. 2.

103. See *ENO* (15 August 1901), p. 1.

All in all, starting from conceptual and discursive references which referred to association and to education, the Sevillian workers decided to mobilize beyond their professional differences and to announce the October strike. The radicalization of this protest and, at the extreme, the use of violence were not in this case consequences of the ideology of the workers, but rather of the toughening of the conflicting parties, that is to say, they constituted a response to the repressive tactics of the local powers. This general strike responded, among other reasons, to the latter. It was the reaction, not only in the face of what the workers considered to be an infringement both of the right to be represented as an association and of the right to work (two of the fundamental principles on which their version of social organization was built), but also in the face of the immobilist and intransigent posture which the elites of power had been showing in the face of the resolution of the “social question”.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The discontent of the groups of workers of Liège and Seville, when faced with the deterioration of their living and working conditions, the difficulties of individual emancipation, and political discrimination, was one of the central factors in explaining their respective protests. However, in order for these groups to mobilize, a discourse was necessary which would coherently interpret the workers' experiences in favour of collective action. That is to say, in addition to the discontent, it was necessary to convince different categories of workers that the means to improve their situation was to act collectively and for this action to be legitimate. The discursive frameworks prepared in this respect are, therefore, keys to understanding why the workers of Liège and Seville reacted, and why they reacted as they did.

Not only economic and political factors but also ingredients of a cultural nature intervened both in the unity and in the diversity of their reactions: a discourse whose fundamental structure was common. In both cases this discourse appealed to an essential contradiction between two aspects which the workers considered as constituting their identity: the condition of victims of the social order and the condition of axes of society as executors of useful work for the community. In accordance with this contradiction, the material precariousness, the degradation of working conditions, and the political marginalization experienced by the main figures of the 1886 and 1901 unrest, were defined as the result of violence and usurpation. On stressing this contradiction, in short, emphasis was simultaneously placed on the moral right of the workers to action.

It should be specified that this fundamental line of argument was not a new development, and was not exclusively an effect of industrial development either, but rather revealed the persistence of the conceptual

transformations that W.H. Sewell already noticed as happening around 1830. In fact, behind the common discourse with which the protest was articulated, legitimized, and encouraged, can be found the combination and reworking of concepts and terms characteristic of two pre-existent discourses: that of the corporate tradition of solidarity in the trade (which was universalized to include all workers) and that of the radical republican tradition of individual rights (which was reconciled with the universalization of solidarity). The rhetoric which exalted solidarity, which transferred to the bourgeoisie the description as “privileged-egotistical” and which promoted the right of the workers to collective action was located at the confluence of both discourses.

Beyond these essential similarities in the discursive frameworks which articulated the protest, however, the contrast in the morphology of the Liège and Seville unrest was the result of the interrelation of different factors. Together with the economic particularities and the so-called “political opportunity structure”, it is again worth mentioning those factors of an ideological or cultural nature. Two complementary elements which contributed decisively to shaping the protests are assigned to the latter: the degree of influence of the respective (corporate and radical) traditions, and the specificities of the discourses circulated in both locations by the members of the workers’ movement.

In the Sevillian context, characterized by a notable presence of the craft culture of work, the workers’ assimilation of the corporate values and of the rhetoric of supportive association, fraternity, and education circulated by the anarchist militants from the end of the nineteenth century, contributed to articulate in 1901 a workers’ association-related and pedagogical protest (proposals which, in fact, Spanish anarchism never abandoned). This was the case both when the strategy of moderation was backed – during the metalworkers’ strike – and when, faced with the failure of the old tactics, more conclusive discourses began to be considered. These discourses, which fell within the international debate on revolutionary syndicalism, led to the October general strike and, in the long term, to the configuration of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain. The rhetoric circulated by the anarchists from around Liège, and which gave rise to the 1886 mobilizations, was different. In this rhetoric, union action was considered to be subsidiary, the workers’ organization was marginalized, and efforts were focused on propaganda in favour of individual revolutionary violence. In this rhetoric, in short, the corporate tradition was far from predominating, and the insurrectionary radical legacy was the determinant.