

Charismatic Leadership and Networks in Anarchism: The Cases of Pietro Gori and Jean Grave

An Introductory Note

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The terms “Marxist” and “Marxism” have a problematic history. Their use raised questions as early as the 1870s, when Bakunin coined the terms in his polemic against the supposedly vanity-driven “leader” Karl Marx. By labelling Marx’s supporters “Marxists”, the Russian anarchist created the impression that they were slavishly subjecting themselves to Marx, a painful suggestion that the egalitarian early communists, already mistrustful of the personification of movements, felt even more keenly. Their mistrust illustrated the scepticism engendered by an emphasis on leaders and leadership, even in the early years of the labour movement.

In the historiography of social movements, too, opposition to the idea of researching the role of the individual was both long evident and deep-seated. There was an understandable desire not to succumb to the “great man” theory of history, the course of which was to be explained instead in terms of the relationships and conflicts between social forces. Furthermore, for many years academic theory accepted the ideology of the major traditional mass organizations of the European left. The only leadership to be tolerated was one that within the social struggle still endeavoured to defend bureaucratic forms of organization, so that the sort of centralized leadership examined in that context largely reproduced the development of the organizations themselves. The leadership was as it were the personification of a not especially fertile starting point for it to consider its own specific role and development.

Even when formal centralized mass organizations gave way to more decentralized networks, the degree of interest shown in leadership was scarcely any greater. Charisma and populism were phenomena believed to originate in the irrationality of mainly right-wing radical movements that were out to deceive; *Fremdkörper*, which, left-wing movements believed, manifested themselves only in the non-Western variants of authoritarian movements operated by the petty middle class and peasants who were attracted to socialism. Charismatic leadership especially, with its promise of redemption, remained suspect; it was an obstacle to self-liberation.

In more libertarian circles, that suspicion became a particular hindrance to historians' theorizing leadership in general and charismatic leadership in particular. It is only over the past fifteen years that progress has been made in the study of charismatic leadership within the labour movement,¹ primarily by substantiating Max Weber's theory of charismatic leadership by drawing on specific historical examples.²

It is gratifying to see that the present issue of the *International Review of Social History* is perpetuating this still frail tradition with studies on the leadership of two renowned anarchist figures from the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century: the Italian Pietro Gori (1865–1911) and the Frenchman Jean Grave (1854–1939).

Emanuela Minuto, a political scientist at the University of Pisa and a specialist in Italian anarchism, quite rightly emphasizes that charisma is not an objective ahistorical quality of the person concerned. Rather, it is an out-of-the-ordinary quality attributed to him by his followers, making it appear to them that he was “sent by God” or endowed with something “supernatural or superhuman”. The qualities of a natural leader are, in fact, founded in the interaction between leaders and followers,³ and it is fascinating to see how Minuto operationalizes such an ambiguous concept by emphasizing Gori's emotional style of communication. Indeed, during an episode of major political and social upheaval in Italy in 1897–1898, Gori created a sense of self-awareness and involvement among a following passionately keen to find a way out of the crisis. His style of communication was actually at its most effective in emergent movements lacking any great deal of central organization. Similar observations have been made elsewhere, too, applied to the cases of Ferdinand Lassalle in Germany, the Dutchman Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, Jean Jaurès in France, and the British socialist James Keir Hardy, among others. Like Gori, they, too, had the religious charisma of the saviour and prophet. They also sought the theatre of the street, in protests and demonstrations, in debates, at funerals, during judicial hearings; situations where no appeal could be made to inherited prestige and where, through their Christian metaphor and symbolism, they could forge a link with popular tradition.

1. See, for example, Carl Levy, “Charisma and Social Movements: Errico Malatesta and Italian Anarchism”, *Modern Italy*, 3:2 (1998), pp. 205–217. Henk te Velde, “Charismatic Leadership, c.1870–1914: A Comparative European Perspective”, in Richard Toye and Julie Gottlieb (eds), *Making Reputations: Power, Persuasion and the Individual in Modern British Politics* (London and New York, 2005), pp. 42–55. Jan Willem Stutje (ed.), *Charismatic Leadership and Social Movements: The Revolutionary Power of Ordinary Men and Women* (New York and Oxford, 2012).

2. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Grundriss der Verstehende Soziologie*, 4th edn, 2 vols (Tübingen, 1956). Max Weber, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*, Selected papers, edited and with an introduction by S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago, IL, 1968).

3. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 140.

Whereas Gori became famous as the charismatic leader of an organized social anarchist movement through his powerful emotional style of communication, the French anarchist Jean Grave owed his influence to his role as newspaper publisher and editor, especially of *Les Temps Nouveaux* (1895–1922), successor by turns to *Le Révolté* (1879–1885) and *La Révolte* (1887–1894). Unlike Gori, who the repression in Italy often forced into exile – in London, for example (1895), or the US (1895–1896) and Argentina (1898–1901) – the Frenchman seldom left his editorial offices in Rue de Mouffetard in Paris’s Latin Quarter. While in his involvement in the labour struggle and campaigning for civil rights Gori personally sought contact with ordinary, often illiterate people, and managed to win their hearts and minds (*andare al popolo*), the more retiring Grave used the printed word to disseminate the anarchist message, and, until World War I, the former shoemaker was an influential figure in the international socialist movement, and in the 1890s an ideologue of anarchosyndicalism.

In “Jean Grave and French Anarchism: A Relational Approach (1870s–1914)”, the social historian Constance Bantman, author of a number of academic studies of anarchism, including *The French Anarchists in London 1880–1914* (2013), offers the first in-depth analysis of the countless networks and circles (local, national, global) Grave influenced through his publications. In her research into this network, Bantman has aimed with her autobiographical study of Grave to clarify the nature of anarchist activism, within the broad French anarcho-communist tradition, in the interaction between personal and political life, and ultimately in the person of Grave himself. For the first time, the historiographical paradox, by which the figure of Grave himself, who rarely left his birthplace, was ascribed importance largely within the context of France, is unravelled, while many studies of international anarchism recognize the influence of his publications, with *Les Temps Nouveaux* being regarded as one of the most significant international anarchist periodicals of its time. In her methodological exposé, Bantman also points out that a network approach that considers informal connections can make a major contribution to the conceptualization of anarchism as a social movement.