International workshop "From the Commune to Communalism? The Paris Commune and its Meaning for Democratic Theory and Practice." (19-20 May 2022)

Sophie Bloemen (Commons Network)

Title: T.B.A.
Abstract: T.B.A.

Martin Breaugh (York University)

Title : A Democracy Without Titles? 1871 Against the Politics of the Few
Abstract : In this paper, I will argue that the Paris Commune of 1871 is a form of democracy that eschews the "titles to govern" that offer salience and legitimacy to the few who monopolize public office. To do so, I will first explain what is meant by "titles to govern" and how such titles are operationalized in the political institutions of modernity. I will then sketch out the type of politics enacted during the Paris Commune with a view to demonstrating how it rests upon the participation of "anybody and everybody" (Rancière) rather than the entitled few. By way of conclusion, I want to briefly relate this politics without titles to the hatred of democracy as it manifested itself during the Bloody Week, when the entitled Few liquidate the actors (and the bystanders) of 1871.

Discussion questions:
- The idea of a democracy without titles rests upon the postulate of a political capacity of the Many. How does this premise affect the way by which education is aticulated in a radical democratic political community?
- If we consider that Paris Commune is not a model to be reproduced but a "fecund germ" (Castoriadis) that can help us think differently about our political situation, what political practices should be better understood today and what political practices are best left to the "ash heap of history"?

Quentin Deluermoz (Université Paris Cité)

Title: The astonishing persistence of the Commune.
Abstract : The presentation will briefly review the state of historical discussions on the type of democratic experience that was the Paris Commune of 1871, and will then show how the Commune was immediately a "global" event. These two aspects provide elements for understanding why, after 1871, the "Commune" was constantly revived and reinvented during the 19th and 21st centuries. This long-term perspective will finally allow us to question the astonishing persistence of this "living past", and and to better understand what its recent resurgence in several parts of the world tells us about our current mutation of the relationship to power.

Carolyn Eichner (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)

Title: Many Paths to Justice, Many Types of Justice to be Pursued: The Commune as Multidimensional Map to Egalitarianism.

Abstract: The Commune looked both to the past and to the future. Deeply attached to France's revolutionary legacy, Communards referenced and linked to their revolutionary foremothers and fathers. Yet the Commune also broke new ground. History influences the future, but it does not and con not repeat itself. The Commune emerged from socialist and feminist movements and ideas that developed in the long wake of the French Revolution. Communards seized their insurrectionary moment to initiate a range of progressive and radically democratic programs, which many of the insurgents had been intimately involved in developing in previous years, and they did so while immersed in civil war. This alone would provide inspiration to later activists. The brutal realities of the demise of this radical experiment added an epic and near-mythic element to the event, making clear the immense threat it posed to existing power hierarchies. Not merely the ideas behind the Commune, but also their practices and implementations, provided a template for substantial change, a map to egalitarianism that suggested multiple routes to differing possible ends. The legacy of the revolution delimits neither the paths to justice, nor the types of justice that could be pursued. Cut down just as it had germinated, grown, and hinted at flowering, the Commune suffered a bitter end. But it did not fail. It persists as a guide to multiple radically democratic goals.

Discussion questions:

- In what ways did Communarde women's challenges to the existing gender order provide templates for future feminist ideas and actions?
- Can we consider the Commune a precursor to later anti-imperial struggles? Can we find roots of anticolonialisms within the Commune?

Matthias Flatscher (University of Vienna)

Title: Revolutionary Clubs. Reflections on Political Mobilization in the Run-Up to the Paris Commune.
Abstract: T.B.A.

Christina Flesher Fominaya (Aarhus University)

Title: Commons thinking and practice in the 15-M movement and Spanish municipalism
Abstract: In this short talk I will first discuss how the experience of life in common in Madrid's Acampada Sol was essential to the thinking and practice of "real democracy." I will then address some of the key ways in which the idea of the commons came to occupy an important component of the discourse in parts of the movement, and later influenced the ideational frameworks that shaped the policies, discourse and political aspirations of Spanish municipalism in the "Ayuntamientos del cambio" (Municipalities of change).

Joost Jongerden (Wageningen University & Research)

Title: The Commune Beyond the Commune: Abdullah Öcalan, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and democratic confederalism

Abstract: Just 71 days short, the Paris Commune of March 18 to May 28, 1871, has become a key reference in the development of radical political thought through the 19th and 20th centuries. The Commune emerged as a symbol of political struggle against capitalist dispossession and centralizing state bureaucracy, yet carrying different meanings for different traditions. For Proudhonists, the Commune became synonymous with decentralization; for Blanquists, it was insurrectional political action; for Marxists, it symbolized the historical role to be played by the working class and an embryonic form of the dictatorship of the proletariat; while for Leninists, it urged the need for democratic centralization. In their different "appropriations" of the Commune, all agreed on one thing—the Commune stood for the destruction of a state power that cemented the rule of the bourgeoisie—but disagreed on another—its political implications.

On the one hand the Proudhonists, as well as the followers of Kropotkin and Bakunin—let us group them together as the "anarchists"—believed that the political legacy of the Commune implied a free geographical association or federation of self-organized communities; the Marxists and Leninists, on the other hand, thought it symbolized the possibility of the power of self-management of the proletariat while securing the centralized political control over the economy. The question of radical horizontality or centralizing verticality—or, that is, the question of the political and the state—resulted in a parting of minds and ways within the radical socialists of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the 21st century, this question of the political and the state has become a key issue again in the thoughts and actions of the Zapatista, Chavista, the FARC—and also the network of movements and parties that emerged from the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK). In this contribution, the thoughts of Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, are discussed in relation to this question of the political and the state. Öcalan's work contains multiple references to the Paris Commune and how it had fed hope, how after the state's merciless repression of the Commune, *The International* became divided between reformism and radical statism. It is against this background of the question of the political and the state and a re-evaluation of radical thought that Öcalan developed his proposals for democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism. Thus, it is in the context of the living legacy of the Commune in revolutionary political thought that Öcalan's political proposals are here discussed, focusing on their working practices and symbology in Kurdistan.

Femke Kaulingfreks (Inholland University of Applied Sciences)

Title: The Revolution Will be Live: Towards a Pedagogy of Radical Imaginaries beyond the Paris Commune.

Abstract: Young people in superdiverse, Western European cities grow up in challenging times. Income inequality, flexibilization of the labor market, segregation and a lack of equal opportunities in education, a large scale housing crisis, systemic racism and climate change all indicate the need to look for new, collective political solutions to structural crises threatening their future. However, 21st century youngsters have been raised in a neoliberal political culture promoting individualistic social and political attitudes. Many have internalized the mantra of citizens' 'own responsibility and resourcefulness'. Additionally, growing distrust in institutional politics seem to substantiate a 'youth disengagement paradigm'. In my presentation I will explore the potential for a contemporary, critical social pedagogy which might enable us to raise present-day youth in another, more communal spirit. How can young people's 'capacity to aspire' be stimulated in precarious times and how can they be offered leeway to 're/create' the world? What role can radical democratic imaginaries play in such a critical pedagogy and how can young people be supported to express their own political imagination beyond adult, conformist expectations? I will build my analysis in reference to the movie 'Les Misérables' (2019) and explore the resonance of a political imaginary of the Paris Commune in contemporary youthful struggles to overcome social injustices and exclusion.

Ruth Kinna (Loughborough University)

Title: Anarchists and the Commune: Memoralisation and Constitutionalisation.

Abstract: This paper discusses the status the Commune in nineteenth-century anarchist writing argues that it was promoted in two guises. On the one hand, it was memorialised as a symbol of heroic struggle, contextualised by its violent repression. On the other, the Communards' practical organising efforts inspired later theorisations of anarchy.

The disintegration of the First International and the reunification of Germany encouraged anarchists to link these ideas and present the Commune as a valiant, if doomed attempt to enact the idea of workers' self-emancipation against the state and Marxist social democracy (Landauer, 1911; de Cleyre, 1912). Peter Kropotkin (1902) and Rudolf Rocker (1947) both looked to Proudhon, who had exercised a powerful influence on the Cantonalist revolution of 1868, to articulate plans for communal anarchy.

Yet anarchists neither regarded the Commune 'anarchist' nor embraced it uncritically (Malatesta, 1900). Even its most enthusiastic champions preferred to represent it as an essentially modern expression of an anarchistic spirit rather than an experiment in anarchism or even socialism (Bakunin 1871; Kropotkin 1880). The argument of this paper is that the Commune inspired anarchists precisely because it was not a specifically anarchist event. It was a popular rebellion against the imposition of centralised authority and external government. As an experiment in self-government that demonstrated the potential for anarchy, it bolstered a critique of sovereign power, contract, citizenship, and representation.

Discussion Questions:
- In what ways can the memory of defeat be used constructively?
- What are the barriers to communalism?

Sonja Lavaert (Free University Brussels)

Title: Horizontality of a Spatial Event: The Commune from the Perspective of the Multitude.
Abstract: This contribution will focus on the anti-hierarchical gestures and the horizontal effect of the Commune which, rather than bringing down a political regime, aimed at a transformation of everyday life. The Commune did not want to just take over power within the institutions of state and political representation but rejected the state as an institution separated from civil society. Its revolution did not concern the means of production but the means of life itself, the conceptions of time and place, the human condition, and civil society. To grab its meaning, it is therefore necessary to focus on its actors/subjects: whose Commune, and who are the Communards? Not the working class but the multitude, not the producer but the citizens, not an ordered, identity-based one unity but an internally differentiated assembly, crowd, or swarm (as Rimbaud says). Their revolution is a struggle against the verticality of the linearly conceived history structured around high points, the crescendo line of progress and the rise and fall of star protagonists. The multitude as acting subject corresponds to a rejection of hierarchy and a horizontally structured spatial event: even more than striving for the appropriation of time and history, the revolution of everyday life aims at an appropriation of place. Hence the focus on the perspective associated with the social space of multitude. Everyday life is the field of both subjective biographies and artistic testimonies on the one hand and of objective discursive structures on the other.
Central to these reflections are the texts on the Commune by Karl Marx (1871), Henri Lefebvre (1962; 1965), the Internationale Situationiste (1963), Bertold Brecht (1949) and Kristin Ross (1988; 2015). Testimonies: Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray (1876), Louise Michel (1898), and Arthur Rimbaud (1871).

Discussion questions:
- Whose Commune? Who are the Communards? Wherein consists their perspective?
- What are the consequences of the priority of life over power in the political form of the Commune and in political theory that takes an example of the Commune-experience?
- How is the spatiality and horizontality of the movement of the Commune related to hierarchy and the view on human nature? What about the perspective therein? How can this be related back to the multitude?
- How can we imagine political institutions of the multitude/the Commune that endure?

Artemy Magun (European University at St. Petersburg)

Title: The institutional design of communal democracy: problems and inventions.
Abstract: T.B.A.

Sixtine van Outryve d'Ydewalle (UCL Louvain)

Title: Rethinking representation as delegation in the framework of communalist direct democracy.

Abstract: The political theory of communalism as formulated by Murray Bookchin asks anew two correlated questions: that of the main political unit for a people to govern itself, and that of how public power should be exercised. It answers by advocating for the commune to be the main political unit, in order to realize direct democracy. Indeed, communalism sees the municipality as the locus where communities would collectively manage their own affairs through popular assemblies. To decide on issues going beyond the scope of the municipality, these self-governed municipalities would organize in confederations, where each assembly would send delegates with imperative and recallable mandates to administer the policies formulated by them. As such, to enable decision-making across assemblies these delegates endorse a task of representation, in the generic definition of Pitkin of "making present that which is absent", since they make present the will of the absent popular assembly at the confederal level through the imperative mandate. However, this conception of representation is radically different than the one of representative government.

This paper intends to capture how decision-making could happen across assemblies and to rethink what representation would mean in a communalist framework. To this end, I first develop the main concepts of the theory of direct democracy proposed by communalism, that I call *communalist direct democracy*: the continuous assembly of the people to exercise all public power (political and economic), and the delegation, or direct representation, of such power when it can no longer be assembled. Second, I propose solutions to ease the tension between delegation through imperative mandates and decision-making across assemblies.

Discussion questions:
- Starting from the principle that the economy is municipalized, and therefore also confederalized, and that economic decisions are taken at the confederal level based on each popular assembly's will, how to avoid economic domination among communes in the confederation?
- As the process of decision-making across assemblies (deliberating at the local level, giving an imperative mandate to the delegate, revising this mandate according to the discussions at the confederal level) takes time, how to handle urgent decision-making in that framework?

Paul Raekstad & Enzo Rossi (University of Amsterdam)

Title: Political Naturalism: Legitimacy Without Sovereignty

Abstract: This paper provides a vindicatory genealogy of coercive non-state political structures—of legitimacy without sovereignty—and a debunking genealogy of the statism implicit in most contemporary theories of legitimacy. We draw on empirical evidence from anthropology and archaeology to provide a modern version of political naturalism: the Aristotelian idea that there are forms of political organisation that are natural for human

beings, in the sense that no less coercive option is available. Our contention is that the natural political condition is one structured by coercively enforced norms, but not of the vertical kind found in states. Rather, it's a form of horizontal coercion: members collectively self-enforce norms and decisions, with no distinct central authority and thus no sovereignty. The classic real-life example of this form of political organisation would be a type of hunter-gatherer band. We also discuss applications of this model of legitimate coercion to modern settings, with a particular focus on prefigurative politics in municipal settings.