

Joseph Déjacque

The Anarchist Almost No One Knows

John Clark

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Joseph Déjacque was a major 19th-century communist anarchist political theorist and visionary utopian writer, born in Besançon, France on December 27, 1821. To celebrate the bicentennial year of his birth, two New Orleans-based groups, are convening a Déjacque Bicentennial Conference on December 10 and 11.

Déjacque was a strange, compelling, challenging, and strikingly creative thinker, and his work has strong literary, poetic, and visionary dimensions. It remains provocative today for anyone interested in free thought, radical creativity, and social and ontological exploration.

From 1856 to 1858, Déjacque lived in New Orleans where he wrote his greatest work, *The Humanisphere*. Of it, he writes: "This book is not a literary work, it is an infernal work, the cry of a rebellious slave. This is a book of rage; it is a book of love!"

Déjacque begins this extraordinary work with what he calls the Geological Question. Noting that many have studied the external and internal structures of the Earth, he asks, "who has occupied themselves with its psychological organism?" Déjacque volunteers to do this.

He goes on to describe a world in motion, striving toward the emergence of a planetary utopia of desire: "The human, like the universe, is one and not double: not body or soul...but animated and passionnal substance, susceptible of thousands and thousands of metamorphoses and constrained by its animation and its passionality, by its attractions, to a perpetual upward movement."

Déjacque sees the social goal of this passionnal movement as a cooperative community that is free from all forms of domination, and which realizes a condition of Harmonic Anarchy. Moreover, he envisions a world in which many such communal Humanispheres will join together into networks of Continental Humanispheres, and, ultimately, into a Universal Humanisphere.

It was also while he was in New Orleans that Déjacque wrote his famous text, "On the Human Being, Male and Female," which took the form of an open letter to the French political philosopher, economist, and activist, P.J. Proudhon. In this work, Déjacque introduced the term libertaire or libertarian into political discourse.

Déjacque claimed that Proudhon, the first person to declare himself an anarchist in the 1840s, was not a true libertarian or partisan of liberty, most flagrantly because of his arrogant and authoritarian defense of patriarchal domination. But he also criticized Proudhon for not following the anarchistic logic to its consistent conclusion of libertarian communism:

"Go beyond the abolition of contract to the abolition not only of the sword and of capital, but also of property and of authority in all its forms. Then, you will have arrived at the anarchist community; that is to say, the social state where each one is free to produce or consume according to his will or his fancy without controlling, or being controlled by any other person whatever; where the balance of production and consumption is established naturally, no longer by the restrictive laws and arbitrary force of others, but in the free exercise of industry prompted by the needs and desires of each individual."

So, the term libertarian was, indeed, invented by a communist anarchist as a critique of those who give lip-service to liberty, but fail to reject all forms of domination, including its patriarchal and propertarian forms. For this and many other reasons, Déjacque deserves much greater attention than he has received, and much greater recognition of his significance in the history of anarchism and utopianism.

The Bicentennial Conference will explore Déjacque's life, work, and historical significance. It will include not only presentations on diverse aspects of Déjacque's thought, including its social, political, ethical, aesthetic, and ontological dimensions, but also an assessment of his place in the history of anarchism, utopianism, surrealism, and other radical theories and movements.

The Déjacque Bicentennial Conference is sponsored by La Terre Institute for Community and Ecology (New Orleans and Bayou La Terre, Miss.) and Yes We Cannibal (Baton Rouge), with the support of the Anarchist Political Ecology Group and the Dialectical Social Ecology Group from New Orleans.

Send inquiries about the conference program and for the zoom link to surregionalist@bellsouth.net.

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The Library of Unconventional Lives

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