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James Guillaume, *[On the Abolition of the State]*⁵³

All kinds of fantasies have been dreamed up on this score. It has been claimed that *anarchists* or *Bakuninists* – that is usually what we are called – want to eliminate any social bond between people, any collective action; that they want not only to destroy political institutions like the army, judiciary, police, clergy, etc., but even what are called ‘public services’. How could anyone seriously impute such absurdities to us?

When we speak of ‘abolishing the state’, we mean abolition of that authoritarian organization which, instead of being the natural form of society, is an artificial institution created for the sole purpose of ensuring the supremacy of one class over the rest of the people; abolition of the state is for us abolition of government by a class.

Do not the German Socialists pursue exactly the same goal? Do they not want to abolish what they call the *Klassenstaat*, the state based on classes? Yes. Well, as you see, with regard to what is negated, we do not differ as some claim but are in agreement: the Germans want to abolish the *Klassenstaat*, we want to abolish the state. We say the state *tout court* because, as we define it, every state is the organization through which one class rules over the others, every state is a *Klassenstaat*. So, in speaking of the abolition of *the state*, we are necessarily speaking of the abolition of a *Klassenstaat*.

It remains to examine the positive side of the question, and here begin the differences – serious differences this time, no longer just a quarrel over words.

⁵³ This text is an excerpt from the synopsis of a speech given on 27 October 1876 at the ‘autonomist’ IWMA Berne Congress. James Guillaume [1844–1916], a typographer, teacher and author of an IWMA history, was one of the main leaders of the Jura Federation. Delegate to all IWMA Congresses, he was expelled in 1872. Afterwards, he was the main organizer of the ‘autonomist’ IWMA and participated in all its Congresses. This intervention was published in B1876 and its complete version is also found in PI, IV: 466–7.

When the Germans speak of society as it will be reorganized, they imagine it in the form of a *Volksstaat*, a 'people's state'. And we say to them:

If you establish a new state, a new government, you will by the same token have created a new privileged class, a class of rulers who will dominate the masses, as the bourgeoisie does today the proletariat, and your socialist statesmen will be armed with a power even greater than that which bourgeois governments hold; for they will have control over all the social capital, and the working people, sovereign in name, will in reality be at their mercy. The *Volksstaat* of which you dream will then be a *Klassenstaat*, just like the bourgeois state; and that is why we want none of it.

The conception of the future that we collectivists (that is, anti-authoritarian communists) oppose to the idea of the *Volksstaat* is a free federation of free industrial and agricultural associations, with no artificial frontiers and no government.