

The Red Flag & the Black

Emile Capouya

2006

FE staff note: Mike Ochs, a reader from Pennsylvania, sent us an obituary from *The Nation* for one of its former editors (1970–1976) Emile Capouya—saying “I thought of your efforts when I read it.” Remembering Capouya’s radical prose, Ted Solotaroff writes, “My favorite essay was ‘The Red Flag and the Black,’ a beautiful exposition of anarchism... For all his dialectical agility and nuance, his black flag flew two simple principles that he had learned with his hands: People long to do better than they do, and they are naturally creative and cooperative. The categorical imperative of his politics was to act always in the spirit of the society we wish to bring about.”

Impressed by Mike’s letter, we tracked down ‘The Red Flag and the Black’ in the anthology *Contemporary Anarchism*—a book published in 1979, although this essay is about a decade older than that—and decided to share an excerpt, printed below.

The Red Flag & the Black (excerpt)

by Emile Capouya

For anarchists, an enlarged opportunity to direct one’s fate cannot in the nature of the case be received as a gift from above, from leaders, from the vanguard party, from the holy proletariat itself. Neither can it be delegated and exercised on the individual’s behalf in some theory like that of “virtual representation,” or by representation of any kind.

At this stage in the evolution of society, the political problem is at bottom the problem of self-awareness, a winning free of the cramped imperatives of the traditional ideologies of Left and Right.

Only a mature self-consciousness that understands and approves its own vital instincts and desires can advance the immediate project of the race, which must be to free mankind from the tyranny of a blind technology. The majority of men are a living sacrifice to the machine, and they may soon be a dead one. Neither capitalism nor socialism has any serious objection to our martyrdom by technology. That is what the young radicals have discovered, and what they mean, when they erupt from the university with the black flag in their hands.

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