

# THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF LUCY PARSONS: SOCIALISM, CLASS STRUGGLE AND ORGANISATION<sup>[1]</sup>

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## Abstract

Lucy Parsons (1851-1942) was a socialist-anarchist activist and revolutionary trade unionist whose activities took place from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century in the United States. A non-white woman and participant in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), she stood out as a leader of the North American labour movement, particularly after the death of her husband in the context of the 1886 Chicago General Strike. Her writings covered several themes: (1) the defence of the class struggle as a tool for transforming society, opposing the interests of workers and employers; (2) criticism of reformism and electoralism, represented by moderate trade unionism and Marxist social democracy; (3) the importance of organisation among anarchists and the problems of disorganisation; (4) the integration of gender and race debates into class debates, noting that the liberation of women and people of colour could only occur in collaboration with men and white working-class people.

Keywords: Anarchism. Socialism. Communism. Syndicalism.

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Lucy Eldine González Parsons (1851-1942) was a socialist, anarchist and trade unionist who, from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, became a reference point for the revolutionary movement American. As a racialised woman<sup>[2]</sup> from the working class, she called for trade unionism as a strategy for organising and mobilising the proletariat, affirmed the importance of sex education for young people and, anticipating the Black Panthers by around 75 years, advocated that the black population arm themselves and react through violence against racism and the government. However, despite her enormous historical relevance in popular struggles, Parsons was constantly ignored by the left-wing movements that erupted in the 1960s

and 1970s, and "when she was included in academic writing, she was generally not allowed to speak for herself" (McKean, 2006, online). In other words, even when Lucy Parsons was mentioned, this was usually accompanied by an erasure of her political positions<sup>[3]</sup>.

The reasons that could have led to this boycott are the most varied: its revolutionary perspective, which would be at odds with the line of most gender and race research in academia, often linked to US progressive liberalism; its explicit link to anarchism, which would make it uninteresting to certain wings of the radical left associated with Marxism; and, finally, its insistence on the centrality of the class struggle and the need for organisation, which would prove inconvenient for certain parts of anarchism hegemonic in the United States (Flood, 2005; McKean, 2006). This article therefore aims to help us understand Lucy Parsons' thinking by briefly explaining important aspects of her political conceptions.

The roots of Parsons' ideas can be traced back to 1868, when anarchism emerged within the International Workers' Association (IWA) from the theory and practice of the Alliance's members, who included Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), James Guillaume (1844-1916), Eliséé Reclus (1830-1905) and Errico Malatesta (1853-1932). Over the following years, anarchist doctrine - or libertarian socialism, as it also became known - quickly spread to the most diverse countries and the most diverse layers of society. In a brief definition, anarchism<sup>[4]</sup> is a form of socialism that seeks, through revolutionary and violent disruption, the abolition of the state and capitalism, and their replacement by a system of self-management, or direct democracy. The most popular strategy adopted and developed by anarchists was revolutionary syndicalism, which was subdivided into revolutionary syndicalism, the historical examples of which were the French CGT and the IWW in English-speaking countries, especially in the USA, and anarcho-syndicalism, with the most prominent organisation being the Spanish CNT. Through the self-organisation of workers in trade unions, anarchists hoped to intensify the class struggle by stirring up strikes and demonstrations that would trigger a context of revolution.

Anarchism, unlike Marxism (at least at a first historical moment, which is the section covered in this article), was dedicated to the broad mobilisation of the working class, in all its segments: the salaried proletariat of the countryside and the city, the peasantry and the marginalised in general. This flexibility allowed the anarchists to expand into countries considered "backward" by the Marxists, whether in Europe itself (as was the case in Spain and Italy) or on other continents (as in the case of the United States).

Mexico and Korea). Furthermore, until the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik rise caused a change in direction, most Marxist parties were mostly dedicated to electoral and reformist strategy, which contrasted sharply with the practice of direct action and radicalism that anarchists adopted (Skirda, 2002; Viana, 2013; Corrêa, 2022; Baker, 2023).

It was during these times that, in 1870, Lucy and her husband, Albert Parsons (1848-1887), arrived in the city of Chicago, in the midst of the consolidation of industrial capitalism and the tensions surrounding the formation of trade unionism. They were an interracial couple from the American South, which was marked by legal racism and the terror promoted by militias linked to the Ku Klux Klan.

The contrast between poverty and wealth generated class tensions and, in 1867, the city's workers began the first movement for an eight-hour working day. The city's manufacturers refused to comply with the workers' demands and, after five days of strikes, the authorities brutally repressed the first eight-hour strike, marking the beginning of a long history of violent labour repression (Williams, 2007, online).

Between 1876 and 1877, Lucy and Albert moved closer to Marxist social democracy, but in the 1880s, annoyed by the emphasis on electoralism, they became anarchists. In 1886, a large-scale general strike<sup>[5]</sup> broke out in Chicago, demanding a reduction in daily working hours. The police brutally repressed the protests and several strike leaders, including Albert Parsons and four other anarchists, were arrested and finally executed the following year<sup>[6]</sup>.

Since then, Lucy Parsons has become a celebrated figure in the US labour movement, even taking part in the Socialist Labour Party, the International Working People's Association and the Industrial Workers of the World. In the decades that followed, she continued to reminisce about the 1886 episode and argued that the only way to emancipate the working class was through revolution. In the 1920s, Parsons also was actively involved in the campaign for the release of Italian immigrants and anarchists Bartholomew Vanzetti (1888-1927) and Nicola Sacco (1891-1927), who had been sentenced to death, and undertook various initiatives in support of other imprisoned socialists and communists (Ashbaugh, 1976; Rosenthal, 2011).

## **1. Capitalism, the social question and the class struggle**

Lucy Parsons was a materialist - like other famous anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin and Piotr Kropotkin (1842-1921) - and therefore understood that human history was shaped by material conditions - that is, the search for existence through control of the means necessary for life. She denounced capitalism as wage slavery under which the

working class, or proletariat, was subject to the boss class, or bourgeoisie. Between these two classes there would also be an intermediate sector, aligned with the bourgeoisie, whose aim would be "to sustain the 'rights of property'" (Parsons, 1905e, online). As part of this unproductive class, there would be "lawyers, jailers, policemen, bankers, insurance agents and companies, and almost every boss in every branch of industry" (Parsons, 1905e, online). The working class, which would be the only productive class, would end up supporting the capitalists, the unproductive workers and all the other layers of the population, such as the unemployed and prisoners, who would end up excluded from access to work (Parsons, 1905e; Ashbaugh, 1976; Baker, 2023).

The capitalist system would be fundamentally based on the commodification of all aspects of life, "in which if you can't pay, you can't have" (Parsons, 1905d, online). Land, air, water and light would become commodities, only accessible by purchase, and those without money would be condemned to starve. Millions would find themselves in a helpless situation - landless and destitute housing had become a matter of private property. In this sense, morality was also being impregnated with commercial values, becoming an object to be bought and sold.

Despite the exploitation and cruelty to which the working class would be subjected, Parsons observed that the capitalist class tried to convince workers that social classes did not exist, or at least not in any meaningful way. Thus, workers were convinced that "every man's son may aspire to become president of these United States" (Parsons, 1905a, online). Since the boundaries between social classes were being blurred, workers would believe in the possibility of ascending to more favoured strata and, consequently, would not organise themselves as a working class to fight for their rights.

Because he sees some of the wage class occasionally escape from the wage to the middle class, he thinks maybe he can do so too; thus he bribes himself to keep quiet, while wrong and oppression are seen on every hand. If he joins his union, it is as a sort of temporary makeshift, or convenience, as he expects to become a businessman, or learn a profession or his son will be a professional or businessman, or his daughter will marry a rich man or something of the kind will happen; so he goes on from year to year, bribing himself; meanwhile his condition and that of his class become more and more hopeless. (Parsons, 1905a, online).

By not recognising the social roots of the problem - capitalism - society also ended up being convinced by punitive propaganda about crime. For Parsons, crime was nothing more than a consequence of the inequality and poverty that capitalism produced and, therefore, all the clamour for prisons and punishments would be pointless. Instead of investing in state repression, she said, better results could be obtained if society was

transformed so that children could grow up "under the best possible conditions" (Parsons, 1906, online).

How much better that would be than building huge, gloomy prisons overseen by jailers who harden and corrupt their natures even more. And the same goes for murders, legal or illegal, or lynchings. The sensationalist media gives all the gory details of such occurrences in huge, screaming headlines. [...] The community is shocked and wonders where such a monster could have come from. Another candidate starts for prison or the gallows. Thus, the long procession is always making its way through the ages. The grey-headed old hag, society, throws up its hands in "holy" horror when one of its children commits a horrible act. It never recognises the fact that it's just a reflection of its own evil deeds. Crime is just a social disease (Parsons, 1906, online).

Lucy Parsons also pointed to "the teachings of the reformist trade unions [which] are based on false premises, since they teach the 'identity of interests between capital and labour'" (Parsons, 1905a, online). But, Parsons questioned, "if the interests of capital and labour are identical, why do they not both belong to the same organisation?" (Parsons, 1905a, online).

Since capitalism was based on a material reality, this reality had to be transformed through the direct action of the working class, which had to avoid the passive attitudes of voting and praying. Since the class struggle is a concrete fact that pits the interests of wage earners against those of the bosses, trade unions should be organisations aimed at making the working class aware of the need to confront the capitalist class. It is important to note that Lucy Parsons was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an organisation that adhered to revolutionary syndicalism<sup>[7]</sup>, i.e. that promoted a notion of radical combat against the bosses with a view to a future socialist society (Ashbaugh, 1976).

## 2. State, government and elections

Lucy Parsons, in line with other anarchists, understood the state - the set of political and legal institutions - as a structure that would necessarily be based on the centralisation of power "in the hands of a few" disconnected "from the body of the people" (Parsons, 1886b, online). All governments, elected or not, would be formed by a minority that is inevitably confronted by a concrete need: to guarantee its own perpetuation in power. If this group were to fail in this endeavour, it would be unable to implement its political and administrative project. Thus, the interests of the population would end up being abandoned to the detriment of maintaining government power.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most Marxist socialist parties, organised around the Second International, had as their main strategy electoral action and advancement in the bourgeois parliament (Skirda, 2002; Baker, 2023). Although she initially began her political work in this field, Parsons soon came to consider that "of all modern illusions, the vote has certainly been the greatest" (Parsons, 1905c, online). Suffrage is based on the general principle that the majority should be able to decide the direction of the nation and the defeated minority should adapt to that decision. However, once in parliament, the elected legislators, assuming they are honest, would still need to make deals with each other in order to pass any bills - at the risk of not meeting the interests of their voter base in the slightest and not being re-elected. In the ensuing game of negotiation, some demands would inevitably be pushed aside, while others would be diminished and distorted. In the end, few of the people's interests that were initially sought would be maintained in the result obtained. In addition, lobbyists for private interests, representing the capitalist ruling class, would also be present, pressurising and co-opting legislators to put forward certain proposals, often to the detriment of the population (Parsons, 1905c).

The fact is that money, not votes, governs the people. And the capitalists no longer bother to buy voters, they simply buy the "servants" after they have been elected to "serve". The idea that a poor person's vote is worth anything is the biggest illusion. The ballot paper is only the paper veil that hides the tricks (Parsons, 1905c, online).

Therefore, elections and parliament would only fulfil the function of deluding the working class, because laws would never really be passed in their interests. What's more, all the legislative discussions about fighting crime, for example, would be much better replaced by a transformation in society that would eliminate poverty and guarantee access to work for all, combined with a fair distribution of wealth under socialism.

The social democratic or Marxist parties - in this period these terms were synonymous - also presented themselves as "scientific socialists", and were directly criticised by Lucy Parsons.

Scientific socialism (so-called) was taught in Germany for more than fifty years. The state scientists renounced the principle "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", but adopted instead the text: "Workers of all countries, unite!". This beautiful phraseology "shone through" when the political representatives of "science" (supported by more than four million voters) helped their imperial overlord to establish a war tax of one billion marks or more for the prosecution of a war against workers from other countries (Parsons, 1915, online).

When the First World War broke out, the German Social Democratic Party, Europe's largest Marxist party, supported its country's military endeavours and "stifled the once



promising revolutionary trend" (Parsons, 1915, online). Marxists' confidence in the nation-state proved decisive in their adherence to militarism. Ironically, Parsons commented that while on the one hand social democracy accused anarchists of on the other hand, the goal towards which the Social Democrats advanced resulted in disaster for millions of workers (Ashbaugh, 1976).

### **3. Anarchism, organisation and social revolution**

In contrast to the electoral strategy adopted by the socialist parties, Lucy Parsons, as an anarchist, argued that the class struggle should necessarily move towards a revolutionary rupture. Initially, she sympathised with insurrectionist anarchism<sup>[8]</sup>, a strategic conception based on carrying out violent acts as a way of triggering a revolutionary uprising of the working class. However, she later came to consider that individual terrorist attacks did not help to raise workers' consciousness, and began to align herself with what would come to be called mass anarchism, that is, the defence that anarchists should be inserted into working class organisations - trade unions - in order to promote the radicalisation of the class struggle (Rosenthal, 2011; Baker, 2023).

For Parsons - as for anarchism in general - it was unlikely that a significant social transformation could occur through peaceful means, "for history shows that every attempt to wrest from the rich and powerful what they have has been made by force" (Parsons, 1886b, online). However, Parsons emphasised, it was important not to confuse the final goal - an anarchist society - with "the revolutionary period, as people are in the habit of doing" (Parsons, 1886b, online). During the revolution, the working class would be at war with the capitalist class, and there would not yet be the full material conditions for the realisation of libertarian socialism. But as the proletariat advanced against its enemies, the centralised power of the government should be decentralised to the trade union organisations - which would represent the embryo of the new socialist society, organising the working class into professional segments, such as farmers, shoemakers and others. The economy would be socialised and goods would be distributed according to need. With technological development, working hours would be reduced and people would have free time to devote to recreational and intellectual activities. However, everyone would have to collaborate with society and, consequently, work would be a requirement - under penalty of losing the right to access consumer goods (Parsons, 1886b, online).

She demonstrated her sympathy for the need for a specifically anarchist organisation, in addition to the broader trade union organisation, allowing her to be understood as a supporter of organisational dualism - the defence that anarchists should organise both on a social level, as the working class, and on a political level, as anarchists (Flood, 2005;

Corrêa, 2022). In 1907, in the wake of the Amsterdam Anarchist Congress, Parsons took a positive view of the signals in favour of a more structured anarchist organisation.

The anarchist cause (there has been no movement in recent years) has lacked a plan of action or organisation. To be honest, here and there there have been a few people who have got together and loosely formed some kind of group, calling themselves anarchists, but these groups were mostly formed by young and inexperienced people who had as many conceptions about the true aims of anarchism as there were members in the group; as a result, the outcome has been fairly what you would expect. The anarchist cause has lacked concentration of effort and an intensifying force to give energy and direction to a common goal (Parsons, 1907, online).

Parsons observed that, at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, anarchists were downplaying the need for organisation, which ended up hampering their ability to intervene in reality. Even the publication of periodicals, she noted, used to have an extremely short lifespan. To get round these difficulties, a proposal organisational line should be accompanied by "an expectation of responsibility on the part of its members, such as paying monthly dues and collecting funds for propaganda purposes" (Parsons, 1907, online). She even mentioned that, because she advocated a more rigid organisational line, she was criticised for being too orthodox and outdated.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Lucy Parsons began to feel increasingly uncomfortable with the majority of anarchists in the United States, because she felt that they were too far removed from the practical needs of the working class. Consequently, she began a political rapprochement with the Communist Party<sup>[9]</sup>, since they would be more involved with the real struggles of the workers - which led to her being reprimanded by other US anarchists, particularly Emma Goldman (1869-1940). On the other hand, Parsons reproached the anarchists of his time for criticising other people's political organisations, but not dedicating themselves to presenting a concrete and realistic alternative.

In 1934, Parsons, in a letter to a friend, resumed her criticism of the disorganisation of anarchism, which continued to be represented by small, scattered groups that would occasionally meet at conferences and disappear "until another conference is held" (Parsons, 1934, online). For her, this type of practice meant that anarchism continued to lose ground among the population, who yearned for a political proposal capable of minimising their own suffering (Jones, 2017).

## **4. Gender, race and nationality**

Lucy Parsons didn't limit herself to discussing class issues only in the context of trade unionism, but also debated their relationship to gender, race and nationality. She actively



sided with immigrant communities, such as the Italians, who were located in neighbourhoods they were accused of being a threat to Anglo-Saxon racial purity. She also denounced the imperialism of the capitalist powers and, after 1917, defended the Soviet experiment<sup>[10]</sup> against the counter-revolution of the international bourgeoisie (Ashbaugh, 1976; Jones, 2017).

Regarding racism against the black population, which manifested itself brutally in massacres and lynchings, particularly in southern regions, Parsons argued that it was necessary to oppose the violence of the oppressed against the violence of the oppressor, because "the whites of the South are not only sowing the wind that they will reap in the storm, but the flame that they will reap in the conflagration" (Parsons, 1892, online).

However, beyond the self-defence of black communities, Parsons stated that it was necessary to understand that racism did not occur "on the black man because he is black", in an abstract way, but "because he is poorer [...] than his white wage slave brother" (Parsons apud McKean, 2006, online). Thus, what perpetuated inequality between whites and blacks was not, for example, a question of culture or individual choice, but material inequality. If, in the past, slave exploitation took place in a direct way, carried out by the whip of the overseer - in other words, by brute force - in the post-abolition period, capitalism replaced it with indirect slavery, based on economic blackmail. The black population, like the rest of the working class, would be threatened with starvation if they didn't submit to their bosses and the owners of private property. In this way, Parsons said:

The same land you once farmed as a slave, you still farm as a wage slave, and in the same hut where you entered at night, not knowing what you would be sold for and separated from your wife and children before sunset the next day, you now enter in fear of being killed by the murderous hands of those who previously would simply have sold you if they didn't like you (Parsons, 1886, online).

Just as the election did nothing to abolish slavery, neither would it be able to appease the racist violence that was being exercised against the black population. The only path to the emancipation of black people, Parsons argued, would be the same path as the working class as a whole, that is, economic emancipation, socialism.

Not only did the race issue need to be understood from a class perspective, but also the gender debates. According to Parsons, male domination over women had its origins in the material aspects of human history. In the beginning, the male sex - which biologically possessed more physical strength than the female sex - asserted its superiority over women and subjected them to its domination. With the passage of time, man "began to acquire property, which he wished to transmit along with his name to his offspring - and so woman became his domestic servant" (Parsons, 1905b, online).

Women therefore spent the next few generations restricted to domestic labour, acting as men's property and reproducing their children, until, with the Industrial Revolution, physical strength became an increasingly secondary factor. This change "enabled women to leave the narrow confines of the kitchen where they had been kept for so long" (Parsons, 1905b, online). In the end, progress came and women began to study and obtain university degrees, and the catastrophic predictions attributed to women's equality were not borne out. However, Parsons acknowledged, capitalism took advantage of this positive factor to increase the supply of available labour and therefore reduce the wages of the working class as a whole. Therefore, women had to act in the fight against wage flattening, "or their labour will benefit from a loss" (Parsons, 1905b, online).

Lucy Parsons defended reproductive rights and access to sex education for young people, and condemned government censorship on the subject. She also spoke out in favour of the right to divorce and against moral condemnation of prostituted women. Having been the target of prejudice herself, Parsons stated that "woman must always be free to dispose of her affections as she pleases" (Parsons apud Ashbaugh, 1976, p. 205). Contrary to other anarchists of the period, who thought of sexual freedom from a voluntarist approach of changing lifestyles<sup>[11]</sup>, Parsons stated that women's liberation should be linked to the class question and could not be understood as "a separate issue" (Parsons apud Ashbaugh, 1976, p. 202). Since the working class lacked material independence because they didn't own the means of production, the majority of women, because they were poor, were often forced to remain submissive to their husbands because, in the event of a divorce, they would have nowhere else to go (Ashbaugh, 1976; Jones, 2017). In Parsons' words, "it is the woman's economic dependence that makes her slavery possible" (Parsons apud Ashbaugh, 1976, p. 202).

## Conclusion

Lucy Parsons was an adherent of anarchism and, above all, revolutionary syndicalism throughout her life, or at least most of her political work. Capitalism, seen as responsible for the cruel commodification of life, resulted in poverty and exploitation, as well as other consequences such as crime. Parsons rejected both reformist syndicalism and parliamentary socialism, advocating that only the class struggle, with a revolutionary aim, could overcome capitalist exploitation and state oppression. Within the anarchist camp, she was certainly an organisationalist, arguing that anarchists should unite in a specifically anarchist organisation with explicit rules based on rights and duties.

With regard to gender and race issues, Lucy Parsons understood that they could only be fully resolved through a unity between the oppressed and the exploited against the capitalist system. Struggles for equality could not be realised from formalist (equality before the law), culturalist (changing mentalities) or individualist (personal will)

perspectives, but from material struggles associated with the broader issues of the working class. The achievement of equal rights for women, for example, was a step forward, but it was being instrumentalised by the bosses to reduce wages, and joint cooperation by both sexes was needed for class resistance. On the racial question, legal slavery was replaced by economic slavery, which continued to keep the black population victims of cruel exploitation; moreover, especially in the US South, racist movements continued to attack black people. To win their liberation, black people had to not only be prepared to defend themselves with the use of violence, but also seek an alliance with the wider working class for the destruction of capitalism.

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## Notes

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1. All quotes from references in English have been translated for this article. ↩
  2. Lucy Parsons has always claimed to be a descendant of indigenous peoples, more specifically of the Creek ethnic group, despite the press and some researchers claiming that she was actually a descendant of enslaved blacks (Williams, 2007). ↩
  3. Carolyn Ashbaugh, one of Parsons' main biographers, presented Lucy as far removed from anarchism, which showed a certain lack of knowledge about this political current. Her work served as a reference for renowned Marxists, such as Angela Davis, who stated that it was possible to distinguish between a more childish, anarchist Parsons and a more mature, Marxist Parsons. However, as more accurate research has shown, it is not correct to say that Lucy Parsons made a break with anarchism (McKean, 2006; McKay, 2018). ↩
  4. "Anarchism is a socialist and revolutionary ideology that is based on principles in structural terms, anarchism advocates a social transformation based on strategies that should allow a system of domination to be replaced by a system of self-management. Anarchism emerges from a

relationship between certain practices of the dominated classes and the formulations of different theoreticians and aims to transform the ability of the dominated classes to achieve into social strength and, through the social conflict characterised by class struggle, replace the dominating power that emerges as a vector resulting from social relations with a self-managing power, consolidated in the three structured spheres of society" (Corrêa, 2022, p. 104). ↩

5. This strike reached its peak on 1 May, and was the origin of International Workers' Day (Williams, 2007; Corrêa, 2022; Baker, 2023). ↩
6. McKay (2018) noted that important names in Marxism in that period - such as Friedrich Engels and Eleanor Marx - distanced themselves from anarchism in Chicago and the union mobilisations under its influence. ↩
7. Revolutionary syndicalism, unlike anarcho-syndicalism, argued that unions should not be explicitly linked to a political programme. Thus, for Parsons, workers' organisations should affiliate their members regardless of their doctrinal sympathies, and could include reformists and revolutionaries, anarchists and Marxists, as long as they were willing to take direct action in the fight for rights. ↩
8. Insurrectionary anarchism could be defined mainly around three axes. The first was the strategic bet that violent acts by individuals or small groups could spur workers towards radicalisation. The second was the preference for small affinity groups over political and/or trade union organisations, which were seen as excessively bureaucratic. The third would be distrust of short-term struggles, such as reforms, because they would appease social conflict (Corrêa, 2022; Baker, 2023). ↩
9. It is important to emphasise that, at least until the 1930s, Parsons continued to publicly declare herself an anarchist, and there is no evidence that she changed her political position. She told her friends that she had not joined the Communist Party and that her closeness to this organisation was due to the fact that it was the only one that - in her opinion - maintained some kind of proximity to the working class (McKay, 2013; Jones, 2017). ↩
10. This issue again resulted in a political polemic with Emma Goldman. For Emma, after the Bolshevik repression of Kronstadt in 1921, it became impossible to maintain any practices of solidarity with the Soviet state. For Parsons, the denunciations of anarchists ended up being echoed by the capitalist press, which used them to attack socialism as a whole (Ashbaugh, 1976; Jones, 2017). ↩
11. During this period, significant sectors of the libertarian camp were championing the banner of "free love", which emphasised a campaign to raise awareness about the benefits of open sexuality - multiple partners - to the detriment of the sexual exclusivity of the monogamous family. For Parsons, this discussion was taking place detached from the material reality of most working-class women, because for many of them, the monogamous family - with all its problems - was understood as a space of mutual support against the oppression of the state and the capitalist class. What's more, free relationships would not necessarily become an environment of liberation for women, since men could still, for example, use pretexts to avoid taking responsibility for childcare. Therefore, private relationships between individuals should not be considered the main focus of political action (Ashbaugh, 1976; Rosenthal, 2011). ↩