

# Anarchist Propaganda

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## Anarchist Propaganda

It must be admitted that we anarchists, in outlining what we would like the future society to be a society without bosses and without gendarmes have, in general, made everything look a bit too easy.

While on the one hand we reproach our adversaries for being unable to think beyond present conditions and of finding communism and anarchy unattainable, because they imagine that man must remain as he is today, with all his meanness, his vices and his fears, even when their causes have been eliminated, on the other hand we skate over the difficulties and the doubts, assuming that the morally positive effects which will result from the abolition of economic privilege and the triumph of liberty have already been achieved.

So, when we are told that some people won't want to work, we immediately have a string of excellent reasons to show that work, that is the exercise of our faculties and the pleasure to produce, is at the root of man's well-being, and that it is therefore ridiculous to think that healthy people would wish to withdraw from the need to produce for the community when work would not be oppressive, exploited and despised, as it is today.

And if they bring up the inclinations to, or the anti-social, criminal ways of, a section, however small, of the population, we reply that, except in rare and questionable cases of congenital sickness which it is the task of alienists to deal with, crimes are of social origin and would change with a change of institutions.

Perhaps this exaggerated optimism, this simplification of the problems had its *raison d'être* when anarchism was a beautiful dream, a hurried anticipation, and what was needed was to push forward to the highest ideal and inspire enthusiasm by stressing the contrast between the present hell and the desired paradise of tomorrow.

But times have changed. Statal and capitalist society is in a state of crisis, of dissolution or reconstruction depending on whether revolutionaries are able, and know how, to influence with their concepts and their strength, and perhaps we are on the eve of the first attempts at realization.

It is necessary therefore to leave a little on one side the idyllic descriptions and visions of future and distant perfection and face things as they are today and as they will be in what one can assume to be the foreseeable future. When anarchist ideas were a novelty which amazed and shocked, and it was only possible to make propaganda for a distant future (and even the attempts at insurrection, and the prosecutions we freely invited and accepted, only served the purpose of drawing the public's attention to our propaganda), it could be enough to criticize existing society and present an exposition of the ideal to which we aspire. Even the questions of tactics were, in fact, simply questions of deciding which were the best ways of propagating one's ideas and preparing individuals and masses for the desired social transformation.

But today the situation is more mature, circumstances have changed ... and we must be able to show not only that we have more reason on our side than have the parties because of the nobility of our ideal of freedom, but also that our ideas and methods are the most practical for the achievement of the greatest measure of freedom and well-being that is possible in the present state of our civilization. Our task is that of "pushing" the people to demand and to seize all the freedom they can and to make themselves responsible for providing their own needs without waiting for orders from any kind of authority. Our task is that of demonstrating the uselessness and harmfulness of government, provoking and encouraging by propaganda and action, all kinds of individual and collective initiatives.

It is in fact a question of education for freedom, of making people who are accustomed to obedience and passivity consciously aware of their real power and capabilities. One must encourage people to do things for themselves, or to think they are doing so by their own initiative and inspiration even when in fact their actions have been suggested by others, just as the good school teacher when he sets a problem his pupil cannot solve immediately, helps him in such a way that the pupil imagines that he has found the solution unaided, thus acquiring courage and confidence in his own abilities.

This is what we should do in our propaganda. If our critic has ever made propaganda among those who we, with too much disdain, call politically “unconscious,” it will have occurred to him to find himself making an effort not to appear to be expounding and forcing on them a well-known and universally accepted truth; he will have tried to stimulate their thought and get them to arrive with their own reason at conclusions which he could have served up ready-made, much more easily so far as he was concerned, but with less profit for the “beginner” in politics. And if he ever found himself in a position of having to act as leader or teacher in some action or in propaganda, when the others were passive he would have tried to avoid making the situation obvious so as to stimulate them to think, to take the initiative and gain confidence in themselves.

The daily paper *Umanità Nova* is but one of our means of action. If instead of awakening new forces, and encouraging more ambitions and enthusiastic activity, it were to absorb all our forces and stifle all other initiatives, it would be a misfortune rather than an affirmation of vigor, and witness to our strength, vitality and boldness. Furthermore there are activities which cannot by definition, be carried out by the paper or by the press. Since the paper has to address itself to the public it must of necessity speak in the presence of the enemy, and there are situations in which the enemy must not be informed. The comrades must make other arrangements for these situations ... elsewhere!

## **Must organization be secret or public?**

In general terms the answer is obviously that one must carry out in public what it is convenient that everybody should know and in secret what it is agreed should be withheld from the public at large.

It is obvious that for us who carry on our propaganda to raise the moral level of the masses and induce them to win their emancipation by their own efforts and who have no personal or sectarian ambitions to dominate, it is an advantage where possible to give our activities a maximum of publicity to thereby reach and influence with our propaganda as many people as we can.

But this does not depend only on our wishes; it is clear that if, for example, a government were to prohibit us from speaking, publishing, or meeting and we had not the strength openly defy the ban, we should seek to do all these things clandestinely.

One must, however, always aim to act in the full light of day, and struggle to win our freedoms, bearing in mind that the best way to obtain a freedom is that of taking it, facing necessary risks; whereas very often a freedom is lost, through one's own fault, either through not exercising it or using it timidly, giving the impression that one has not the right to be doing what one is doing.

Therefore, as a general rule we prefer always to act publicly ... also because the revolutionaries of today have qualities, some good and others bad, which reduce their conspiratorial capacities

in which the revolutionaries of fifty or a hundred years ago excelled. But certainly there can be circumstances and actions which demand secrecy, and in which case one must act accordingly.

In any case, let us be wary of those “secret” affairs which everybody knows about, and first among them, the police.

Isolated, sporadic propaganda which is often a way of easing a troubled conscience or is simply an outlet for someone who has a passion for argument, serves little or no purpose. In the conditions of unawareness and misery in which the masses live, and with so many forces against us, such propaganda is forgotten and lost before its effect can grow and bear fruit. The soil is too ungrateful for seeds sown haphazardly to germinate and make roots.

What is needed is continuity of effort, patience, coordination and adaptability to different surroundings and circumstances.

Each one of us must be able to count on the cooperation of everybody else; and that wherever a seed is sown it will not lack the loving care of the cultivator, who tends it and protects it until it has become a plant capable of looking after itself, and in its turn, of sowing new, fruitful, seeds.

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Collection of writings of various dates from Verne Richards (ed.), *Malatesta: Life and Ideas*,  
Freedom Press 1966.

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