The Anarchists in the Present Time

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June 1930

A section of our movement is eagerly discussing about the practical problems that the revolution will have to solve.

This is good news and a good omen, even if the solutions proposed so far are neither abundant nor satisfactory.

The days are gone when people used to believe that an insurrection would suffice for everything, that defeating the army and the police and knocking down the powers that be would be enough to bring about all the rest, i.e. the most essential part.

It used to be claimed that providing sufficient food, adequate accommodations and good clothes to everyone immediately after the victorious uprising would be enough for the revolution to be founded on unshakable ground and be able to readily proceed towards higher and higher ideals. Nobody took the trouble to check whether there would be actually enough goods for everyone and whether the existing goods were or not in the places where they were most needed. The display of stores overflowing with goods deceptively influenced the hungry and ragged crowds. The agitators, whether conscious or not of the error, found that illusion an effective means of propaganda. However, if on the one hand it is well known today that the production done by everyone for the benefit of everyone else with the aid of mechanics and chemistry can indefinitely grow, on the other hand it is also true that the current system's rule is that capitalists get the workers to produce only as much as they can profitably sell, stopping the production at the point where their profit stops growing. If by mistake or by competition among capitalists an overproduction occurs, a crisis comes and drives the marketplace back to that condition of relative scarcity which is most advantageous for manufacturers and dealers. Hence it is clear how dangerous it is to spread the belief that goods abound and that there is no urge to set to work.

Gone are also the days when we could say that demolishing is our task, and that our descendants will see to reconstructing. That was a cheap statement that could only be accepted back when an imminent revolution was unlikely. It only aimed at arousing aversion and hate against the present situation, to sharpen the desire of change. However, the European situation is now full of revolutionary potential; at any time we might have to pass from theory to practice, from propaganda to action. Now it is time to remember that the social and individual lives allow no interruption: both we and our children have to eat and live every day, before our children can start seeing to it.

So, we are agreed in thinking that apart from the problem of assuring victory against the material forces of the adversary there is also the problem of giving life to the revolution after victory. We are in agreement that a revolution which were to result in chaos would not be a vital revolution.

But one must not exaggerate; it should not be thought that we must, and can, find, here and now, a perfect solution for every possible problem. One should not want to foresee and determine too much, because instead of preparing for anarchy we might find ourselves indulging in unattainable dreams or even becoming authoritarians, and consciously or otherwise, proposing to act like a government which in the name of freedom and the popular will subject people to its domination.

I happen to read the strangest things: strange if one considers that they were written by anarchists.

For instance, a comrade says that "the crowd would rightly rail against us if we had first urged them to the painful sacrifices of a revolution and then we told them: do what your will suggests you, get together, produce and live together as it best suits you".

What! Did not we always tell the crowd that they can expect their good neither from us nor from others? That they have to win their good for themselves? That they will get only what they can take and they will keep only what they can defend? It is just and natural for us, initiators, animators and part ourselves of the mass, to try and push the movement in the direction that seems us best, and be as ready as possible for anything that needs to be done. However, the fundamental principle is still that making decisions is up to the free will of those concerned.

I also read: "We will create a regime that, though not fully libertarian, will have our mark and above all will pave the way to the progressive realization of our principles."

What is this? A little tiny government, a model of goodness, which will kill itself as soon as possible to give way to anarchy‼!

Were not we already in agreement that governments do not tend to kill themselves, but rather to perpetuate themselves and become more and more despotic? Were not we agreed that the mission of the anarchists is to fight, while enduring it, any regime not based on a complete freedom? Did not we also use to claim that anarchists in power would not fare better than the others?

Another comrade, who is among those who most care about the necessity of having a "plan", and basically puts all his hope in the workers' unions, says:

"After the triumph of the revolution, let the management of all the means of production, transportation, exchange, etc. be given to the working class, previously educated by us to this great social function."

Previously educated by us to this great social function! How many centuries should go by before the revolution wished by that comrade? If only centuries were sufficient! The fact is that one cannot educate the masses if they are not in a position, or obliged by necessity, to act for themselves; the revolutionary organization of the workers, useful and necessary as it is, cannot be stretched indefinitely: at a certain point if it does not erupt in revolutionary action, either the government strangles it or the organization itself degenerates and breaks up — and one has to start all over again from the beginning.

How true that the most 'practical' people are often the most naive utopians!

Would not all this discussion sound quite academic if in the concrete it was about a country where the free workers' organization is destroyed and prohibited, the freedoms of press, assem-

bly and association are abolished, and the agitators, be they anarchist, socialist, communist or republican are either abroad as refugees, or on forced residence on an island, or locked in prison, or put in the condition of being unable to speak, to move about and almost even to breath?

Can one reasonably hope that the next upheaval, in a country in such conditions, will be a social revolution, in the broad and utter sense that we attribute to this word? Does not it look like winning back the necessary conditions for propaganda and organization is rather the one possible and urgent task nowadays?

It seems to me that all these difficulties, uncertainties and contradictions crop up when one wants to make anarchy without anarchists, or believes that propaganda is enough to convert the whole of the population, or its vast majority, before the surrounding conditions have radically changed.

Some people claim that "the revolution will be anarchist or will not be at all". This is yet another of those pretentious phrases that a thorough analysis proves to be either meaningless or greatly mistaken. In fact, if one means that the revolution, as we intend it, must be anarchist, such claim is just a tautology, i.e. a roundabout that explains nothing, as if one claimed, for instance, that white paper must be white. If it is meant, instead, that there cannot be any other revolution but an anarchist one, then the claim is a great mistake, as the life of human societies has already seen and will certainly see again movements that radically change the existing conditions and give a new direction to the history to come, thus deserving the name of revolutions. I would be unable to accept the view that all past revolutions though they were not anarchist revolutions were useless, nor that future ones which will still not be anarchist will be useless. Indeed, I incline to the view that the complete triumph of anarchy will come by evolution, gradually, rather than by violent revolution: when an earlier or several earlier revolutions will have destroyed the major military and economic obstacles which are opposed to the spiritual development of the people, to increasing production to the level of needs and desires and to the harmonizing of contrasting interests.

In any case, if we take into account our sparse numbers and the prevalent attitudes among the masses, and if we do not wish to confuse our wishes with the reality, we must expect that the next revolution will not be an anarchist one, and therefore what is more pressing, is to think of what we can and must do in a revolution in which we will be a relatively small and badly armed minority.

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Some comrades, perhaps still under the spell of the socialist brags and illusions born by the Russian revolution, believe that the authoritarians have an easier task than ourselves, because they have a 'plan': get hold of the power and forcibly impose their system.

Such belief is wrong. Communists and socialists certainly wish to grab the power, and in certain circumstances they may succeed. However, the most intelligent among them know too well that, once in power, they could well tyrannize the people and submit it to whimsical and dangerous experiments, they could well replace the bourgeoisie with a new privileged class, but they could not realize socialism, they could not apply their 'plan'. How can a millenary society be destroyed and a new and better society be established by the decrees made by few people and imposed by bayonets! This is the one honest reason (I do not want to deal with others that can be less easily confessed) why in Italy socialists and communists withheld their co-operation and

blocked the revolution when it was possible to make one. They felt they would not be able to keep control of the situation and would have to either give way to the anarchists or become an instrument of reaction. As for the countries where they actually got the power… what they did is well-known.

If only we had the material force to get rid of the material force that oppresses us, our task would be much easier, because we require nothing of the masses but what the masses can and want to do; we only do all that we can to develop their capability and will.

But we must, however, beware of ourselves becoming less anarchist because the masses are not ready for anarchy. If they want a government, it is unlikely that we will be able to prevent a new government being formed, but this is no reason for our not trying to persuade the people that government is useless and harmful or of preventing the government from also imposing on us and other like us who do not want it. We will have to exert ourselves to ensure that social life and especially economic standards improve without the intervention of government, and thus we must be as ready as possible to deal with the practical problems of production and distribution, remembering, incidentally, that those most suited to organize work are those who now do it, each in his own trade.

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We must seek to play an active, and if possible a preponderant role in the insurrectionary act. But with the defeat of the forces of repression which serve to keep the people in slavery; with the demobilization of the army, the dissolution of the police and the magistrature, etc.; having armed the people so that it can resist any armed attempt by reaction to reestablish itself; having called on willing hands to undertake the organization of public services and to provide, with concepts of just distribution, for the most urgent needs, using with care the existing stocks in the various localities — having done all this, we shall have to see to it that there must be no wasted effort and that those institutions, those traditions and habits, those methods of production, exchange and aid should be respected and utilized, if they perform, even insufficiently or badly, necessary services, seeking by all means to destroy every trace of privilege, but being chary of destroying anything that cannot be replaced by something which serves the general good more effectively. We must push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community, and similarly the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers on the necessary exchange of goods.

If we are unable to prevent the constitution of a new government, if we are unable to destroy it immediately, we should in either case refuse to support it in any shape or form. We should reject military conscription, and refuse to pay taxes. Disobedience on principle, resistance to the bitter end against every imposition by the authorities, and an absolute refusal to accept any position of command.

If we are unable to overthrow capitalism, we shall have to demand for ourselves and for all who want it, the right of free access to the necessary means of production to maintain an independent existence.

Advise when we have suggestions to offer; teach if we know more than others; set the example for a life based on free agreement between individuals; defend even with force if necessary and possible, our autonomy against any government provocation… but command — never.

In this way we shall not achieve anarchy, which cannot be imposed against the wishes of the people, but at least we shall be preparing the way for it.

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Retrieved on March 4th, 2009 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu
From Vogliamo!, June, 1930

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