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Luigi Galleani
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1925

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Workers' Organizations

Luigi Galleani

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The anarchist movement and the labor movement follow two parallel lines, and it has been geometrically proven that parallel lines never meet.

And since our good burghers, even those who pretend philanthropy redeems usury, will never stop being exploiters or give back what they have unjustly taken; the anarchists, including those who abhor violence and bloodshed, are compelled to conclude that the expropriation of the ruling class will have to be accomplished by the violent social revolution. And they dedicate themselves to this, seeking to prepare the proletariat with every means of education, propaganda and action at their disposal.

Do not forget and do not delude yourselves! The proletariat is still a mass, not a class. If it were a class, if it had a clear, full consciousness of its rights, of its function, of its strength, the egalitarian revolution would be a thing of the past, freeing us of these melancholy and bitter musings.

The great mass is bourgeois *non natione sed moribus* (not by birth but by custom) — not by origin, for nothing was found in its cradle, but by habit, superstition, prejudice and by interest, too, because it feels its own interests are tied to and dependent upon the

masters', who therefore, become providence itself, providing jobs, wages, bread, life for father and children. And for job, life and security, the great mass is grateful to the master who has always existed and will exist forever: blessed be he — and blessed be the institutions, the laws, the policeman who defend and protect him.

In other words, while the anarchist makes a sharp, severe positive diagnosis, and sinks the scalpel deep to remove the main source of the malaise at its root... the great mass remains empirical. It does not contest property, let alone reject it; it wishes only that it were less greedy. It does not repudiate the master; it only desires that he be better. It does not reject the State, law, tribunals and the police, it only wants a fatherly State, just laws and honest courts, police that are more humane.

We do not argue about whether property is greedy or not, if masters are good or bad, if the State is paternal or despotic, if laws are just or unjust, if courts are fair or unfair, if the police are merciful or brutal. When we talk about property, State, masters, government, laws, courts and police, we say only *we don't want any of them*. And we pursue with passion, patience and faith, a society incompatible with these monstrosities. And meanwhile, with all the means we can muster, we contest and oppose their arbitrary and atrocious functions, quite often sacrificing our freedom, our well being, even our loved ones for many long years, sometimes forever. As you can see we follow different roads, and it is unlikely we will ever meet.

However labor organizations are a fact, they exist. And even if their rusty and blind conservatism is an obstacle and oftentimes a danger, they deserve our consideration and our careful attention.

If we find ourselves, facing an ignorant child, a devout woman or a blockhead who doesn't see, or doesn't want to see, we do not react with derision or contempt to the immaturity of one, the ingenuousness of the other, nor to the blindness of most.

We treat them with the same kindness and assist them all with care, because we are proud to uncover the shining metal hidden beneath the rude and rash exterior, to transform a primitive being

into a person who has value, individually and socially, because we know above all we have chosen is too important to neglect any energy that might contribute to the success of our ideal, and finally, because we know that our freedom, security and individual well being would be precarious and ephemeral — even in an egalitarian society — if they did not find their basis and protection in the freedom and welfare of those around us. If freedom is knowledge, if well being is solidarity; then the educational work to be performed among proletarians, organized or not appears only as a pressing need, but one which cannot be delayed.

“Well then, would you be willing to join any organizations? To remain outside them prevents you from exerting any influence or action.”

Certainly! We should enroll in labor organizations whenever we find it useful to our struggle and whenever it is possible to do so under *well defined pledges and reservations*.

Pledge number one! As we are anarchists outside the organization, so we shall remain anarchists inside it. First reservation! We shall never be a part of the leadership; we shall always be in the opposition and never assume any responsibility in running the union. This is for us an elementary position of coherence.

It has been firmly established that the labor organizations, those that are managed by somnolent conservatives, as well as the red ones led by the so-called revolutionary syndicalists, recognize and consent to the existing economic system in all its manifestations and relations. They limit their demands to immediate and partial improvements, high salaries, shorter hours, old age pensions, unemployment benefits, social security, laws protecting women's and children's working conditions, factory inspections, etc., etc... They are the main purpose for which the organization was established, and it is clear that an anarchist cannot assume the responsibility for sponsoring aspirations of this kind. He knows that every conquest of such improvements is deceitful and inconsistent, since in the increased cost of food, rent and clothes, the worker as a con-

sumer will pay more to live no matter how much he earns as a producer. No comrade of ours, therefore can assume the management of such an organization, nor any role implying any solidarity whatever with its programme or action, without denying all his anarchist and revolutionary convictions, without aligning himself with the reformist crowds whose spearhead he pretends to be.

Our place is in opposition, continually demonstrating with all possible vigilance and criticism the vanity of such aims, the futility of such efforts, the disappointing results; relentlessly pointing out, in contrast, the concrete and integral emancipation that could be achieved quickly and easily different ways and other means.

The outcome of every agitation, of every union struggle would confirm the foresight and the fairness of our criticism. Even if it is not easy to hope that an organization might soon follow our suggestions, it is nevertheless believable that the more intelligent and bold among its members would be inclined to favor our point of view. They would form a nucleus ready to fight with passion in the struggles of the future, attracting their fellow workers to shake the authority of their union leaders.

If you join an organization with ideas like this and mean to keep them, you'll be gagged and expelled as a provocateur at the first opportunity. That is something you've had occasion to see not long ago.

That is why those of our comrades who undertake this task must possess the qualities of seriousness, humility, coherence and great patience that are required to gain, first the liking, then the esteem and finally the trust of the best of their fellow workers. They must be in the front line where there is danger, last in line always, where there is ambition or personal gain; they must be bitter opponents when faced with deals and compromises that are inconsistent with their faith and dignity as workers and revolutionists.

And if they fail, if they have to pack up and go, there will be no regrets. They will have sown the good seeds of independence, of consciousness and of courage. Their work will be remembered and

invoked wherever leaders waver or manoeuvre, wherever the hard, fruitless struggle is followed by renewed pain and disillusionment, wherever the fortunes of battle end in disaster for want of boldness and self denial they always practised.

The sympathy and the trust that go beyond the personal, into the action and the ideal which inspired it; the sympathy and trust in revolutionary action and in the anarchist ideal, the sympathy and trust which will end by transforming themselves into passionate and persistent cooperation, isn't this all we can expect from our modest but earnest work of propaganda, education and renovation?

We have no dogmatic pretence whatsoever. Modestly, we have said what we think about a controversial question, conscious of the fact it has the consent of a considerable number of comrades — and we expressed it in all sincerity without hate or contempt.

Furthermore, hate and contempt would be misplaced, since action, either within or without a labor organization, should imply neither merit nor demerit. Everyone should choose the ways, means and field more suited to his ability and preference.¹

¹ Nowadays, it is impossible for workers of any trade to remain independent from their union. In the United States, at least, those who remain separate are considered "scab", even if they are respected for their ability and are already paid above the union scale. But above all the employers claim that all their employees belong to a union, so they can discharge those who cannot show a union card.

Employers have learned from their experience that it is easier to bargain with the union committee, which is composed of intelligent workers, generally well-placed and jealous of their privileged positions, but after all, still pliant and corruptible, than it is to quarrel with a rough, variable and restless crowd of individuals who have no legal standing to establish a long term, comfortable agreement, and are more easily blinded by their delegates' stories than bought by a shining coin. It would take too much money to deal with them, and the quarrel would have to be repeated every day.)