



**LIBERTAT**

**THE  
ANARCHIST  
REVOLUTION**

*Polemical Articles 1924-1931*

**Errico Malatesta**

**FREEDOM PRESS**

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# **THE ANARCHIST REVOLUTION**

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**Errico Malatesta**

**THE ANARCHIST REVOLUTION**  
**Polemical Articles 1924-1931**

**Edited and Introduced**  
**by**  
**Vernon Richards**

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## *Editor's Introduction*

Though complete in itself this volume of Malatesta's writings is intended as a 'supplementary' to the *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* which I compiled and edited in 1965 and of which the fourth reprint appeared in 1993. That volume is 311 pages long and includes more than 200 pages of Malatesta's writings, mostly translated for the first time. But in order to present as complete a picture of Malatesta's life as an agitator and as a propagandist for nearly sixty years, it was impossible to do so within 200-odd pages and at the same time print complete articles by him. Instead what I did was to make a list of topics that he dealt with constantly in his propaganda and so arrived at the 27 selections which comprise the main volume. I feel it is important to explain how that volume developed in order to 'justify' (if I have to) the publication of the latest Malatesta volume. And I quote from *Life and Ideas*:

"The next stage was to condense the material within each classification and then to reduce the number of headings, either by combining some or by deciding that the material in others was not sufficient or specially interesting to justify inclusion. The picture that emerged was one of anarchist Ends and Means, and I therefore grouped the sections accordingly, ending with the complete text of the Anarchist Programme which Malatesta drafted and which was accepted by the Italian anarchist Congress in Bologna in 1920, for it seems to me to synthesise Malatesta's ideas and his commonsense approach to anarchist tactics."

Because I assume that this volume of Malatesta's writings will attract readers already familiar with the main *Life and Ideas* volume, I have not included either the 'Anarchist Programme' of 1920 (17 pages) or his quite remarkable 'Peter Kropotkin – Recollections and Criticisms of an Old Friend' (12 pages) written in the last year of his life (1931) both included in *Life and Ideas*.



Again to avoid repetition I have to mention that in the main volume I produced a 42-page ‘Notes for a Biography’ as well as ‘An Assessment [of] Malatesta’s Relevance for Anarchists Today’ (40 pages).

Malatesta’s dates are 1853 to 1932. Unlike the other so-called classic anarchists, his lifespan extended into post World War One and the rise of fascism in Italy and also the Republic in Spain in 1931. Also, unlike the ‘aristocratic’ anarchists, Bakunin and Kropotkin, he was throughout his life closely involved in the working class struggle. Unlike them he had no illusions about the ‘working class’ while at the same time making it absolutely clear that anarchist propaganda, while directed to everybody, could not succeed until it persuaded the victims of the capitalist system, the ordinary workers, to actively oppose it.

\* \* \*

For the historians Malatesta was the swarthy Neapolitan insurrectionist, while some of our contemporary anarcho-sindicalists (Laurens Otter in *Freedom* recently) attack him for opposing the Monatte faction at the 1907 Amsterdam Conference.

They all want to label the man without bothering to examine what he had to say about these important problems.

In my introduction to *Life and Ideas* I suggested that:

“some readers may think that in presenting extracts rather than selections one is presenting Malatesta out of context as well as doing him an injustice as a writer.”

I agreed, since I have always admired the logic and the construction of his articles, and I added that: “Perhaps one of these days it will be possible to make good this ‘injustice’.”

This volume consists of 24 articles by Malatesta, most of which appeared in the fortnightly journal *Pensiero e Volontà* which he edited from 1924-26. The March on Rome by the former revolutionary socialist and journalist, Benito Mussolini, in 1922 had resulted in the anarchist daily paper *Umanità Nova* being suppressed and government censorship by 1926 made it impossible for *Pensiero e Volontà* to go on. And Malatesta, until his death in 1932, was like the Burmese lady in the news at the moment under house arrest – which

explains why in those articles after 1926 he was complaining about being cut off from anarchist literature published elsewhere in Europe.

\* \* \*

The title of this volume, and especially the subtitle *Polemical Articles*, reflect the choice by this editor. To explain, I have to quote what I wrote in the introduction to the main volume, namely that:

“he is seen by the historians more as a revolutionary agitator than as a thinker [which] explains in part their superficial treatment of his role in what they call the ‘historic anarchist movement’.”

In 1924 when Malatesta started editing *Pensiero e Volontà* not only was he in his early seventies with a lifetime of experience in propaganda and agitation and first-hand contacts with the political parties and Unions; he also realised that the possibility of revolution in Italy at the end of World War One had been lost thanks to the Social Democrats and the spineless role of the reformist unions and their leaders. At that time the anarchist Armando Borghi was general secretary of the USI (the revolutionary syndicalist union). Not only did they not succeed in persuading the reformist unions to oppose Mussolini but eventually Borghi, while remaining an outstanding anarchist propagandist, lost faith in anarcho-syndicalism!

So the main period covered by this volume of polemical articles deals with the practical problems facing anarchists *when the tide is flowing against them*. Of course Malatesta was a revolutionary and believed that the oppressed would only free themselves when they were convinced that their bosses and oppressors would never give up their power unless opposed by a power greater than theirs.

But he was such a practical man (after all, he worked most of his life as an electrician – coupled with a good education which made him *think*) that he just could not repeat all the slogans of revolution and of life without toil or problems once the revolution had taken place. Nor could he accept the arguments, including those of anarchists, who thought that science would solve all our problems (he didn’t live long enough to tell those critics about the nuclear bomb). And of course there were, like the New Labour lot, also the New Anarchist lot and sure enough, following the Russian Revolution, the anarchists who escaped the Leninist dictatorship launched their ‘Project of Anarchist Organisation’ headed by Nestor Makhno the anarchist

guerrilla leader, and there are still today those who propagate the ideas of 'The Platform'. Hence this volume is truly polemical but, as the reader will soon realise, Malatesta had an open mind, unlike many of his critics even when they called themselves anarchists.

\* \* \*

The volume consists of 24 articles unedited and translated for the first time into English, mainly by Gillian Fleming but with the editor having the last word! They have been grouped in six sections without specific headings.

The first is, in my opinion, of vital importance to anarchists who are involved in anarchist propaganda and have reservations about the adjectives: anarcho-syndicalist- communist- individualist- *anarchists*. I feel Malatesta covers the ground to encourage less 'dogmatic' attitudes! I have included in that section two articles on 'Republic and Revolution'. Though the Italian Republicans in the early '20s were rather more 'revolutionary' than *our* 1995 'republicans', I think that his analysis should be of interest to left-wing 'republicans' in this country today.

Section Two is more than topical, surely, in this age where not just science but technology – the Internet and its potential and pretensions – are destroying all human values. If anarchism has any message for mankind it is to build up *human relations; co-operatives in our daily activities* to produce what we need to physically survive – and then the leisure *to live!*

In Section Three are four articles to demonstrate for all that Malatesta was not remotely concerned with violence *per se*. In this section I have included not only his important articles on 'Anarchy and Violence' and 'Revolutionary Terror' but the equally important and significant 'Let's Demolish ... and Then?' followed by the 'Postscript to Let's Demolish ... and Then?' which should silence all those academics once and for all who label Malatesta as the romantic 'insurrectionist' of the anarchist movement.

In Section Four Malatesta brilliantly relates anarchism to Democracy, Reformism, Gradualism, Revisionism, as he does in the first section to Individualism, Syndicalism, Communism. Once again I earnestly refer our historians to these articles if they are concerned with discovering what Malatesta believed and advocated as a propagandist.

Section Five follows on with a vengeance in that it deals with a 'Project of Anarchist Organisation' launched by Russian anarchist refugees, the most eminent of whom was Nestor Makhno the guerrilla fighter whose men defeated the *White Army* but were finally overwhelmed by Trotsky's *Red Army*. Obviously I have reproduced Makhno's reply to Malatesta's response to the 'Project' and Malatesta's further reply, to which apparently Makhno did not reply.

And finally Section Six consists of two articles prospecting the future and the problems of a successful revolution – again a very important aspect of Malatesta's approach to revolution. For him, not only have anarchists to make the revolution, they must also know what to do on the morrow of a successful 'insurrection'.

\* \* \*

In my opinion this modest volume is a *vade mecum* for all revolutionaries who are really involved and concerned with trying to change our greedy, unjust, unequal society. There can be no doubt that Malatesta placed no faith in the ballot box!

One final suggestion: do not try to read the volume in one session. There is too much food for thought in the pages that follow to consume in one 'sitting' without having indigestion and failing to enjoy the meal!

*Colchester, August 1995*

**VR**



# I

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## *Communism and Individualism* (Comment on an article by Max Nettlau)

In his recent article Nettlau\* states that the reason, or at least one of the reasons why, after so many years of propaganda, struggle and sacrifices, Anarchism has still not managed to attract the great mass of the people and inspire them to revolt, lies in the fact that the anarchists of the two schools of communism and individualism have each set out their own economic theory as the only solution to the social problem and have not, as a result, succeeded in persuading people that their ideas can be realised.

I really believe that the essential reason for our lack of success is that given the present environment – given, that is, the material and moral conditions of the mass of the workers and those who, though not workers producing goods are victims of the same social structure – our propaganda can only have limited scope, and none whatsoever in some wretched areas and among those strata of the population that live in the greatest physical and moral misery. And I believe that only when the situation changes and becomes more favourable to us (something which could happen particularly in revolutionary times and through our own efforts) will our ideas win over an increasing number of people and increase the possibility of our putting them into practice. The division between communists and individualists has little to do with it, since this really only interests those who already are anarchists, and the small minority of potential anarchists.

But it nevertheless is true that the polemics between individualists and communists have often absorbed much of our energy. They have prevented, even when it was possible, the development of a frank and fraternal collaboration between all anarchists and have held at bay many who, had we been united, would have been attracted by our passion for liberty. Nettlau therefore does well to preach harmony and

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\* Max Nettlau (1865-1944) the Austrian anarchist historian.

to show that for real freedom, that is Anarchy, to exist, there has to be the possibility of choice, and that everyone can arrange their lives to suit themselves, whether on communist or individualist lines, or some mixture of both.

But Nettlau is mistaken, in my view, to believe that the differences among anarchists who call themselves communists, and those calling themselves individualists is really based on the idea that each has of economic life (production and distribution) in an anarchist society. After all, these are questions that concern a far distant future; and if it is true that the ideal, the ultimate goal, is the beacon that guides or should guide the conduct of men and women, it is even more true that what, more than anything else, determines agreement and disagreement is not what we want to do tomorrow, but what we do and want to do today. In general we get on better and have more interest in getting on with fellow-travellers who make the same journey as us but with a different destination in mind, than we do with those who, though they say they want to go to the same place as us, take an opposite road! Thus it has happened that anarchists of various tendencies, despite basically wanting the same thing, find themselves, in their daily lives and in their propaganda, in fierce opposition to one another.

Given the fundamental principle of anarchism – namely, that no-one should have the desire or the means to oppress others and force others to work for them – it is clear that Anarchism involves all and only those forms of life that respect liberty and recognise that every person has an equal right to enjoy the good things of nature and the products of their own activity.

It is uncontested by anarchists that the real, concrete being, the being who has consciousness and feels, enjoys and suffers, is the individual and that Society, far from being superior to the individual, is that individual's instrument and slave; must be no more than the union of associated men and women for the greater good of all. And from this point of view it could be said that we are all individualists.

But to be anarchists it is not enough to want the emancipation of the individual alone. We must also want the emancipation of all. It is not enough to rebel against oppression. We must refuse to be oppressors. We need to understand the bonds of solidarity, natural or desired which link humanity, to love our fellow beings, suffer from

others' misfortune, not feel happy if one is aware of the unhappiness of others. And this is not a question of economic assets, but of feelings or, as it is theoretically called, a question of ethics.

Given such principles and such feelings which, despite differences of language, are common to all anarchists, it is a question of finding those solutions to the practical problems of life that most respect liberty and best satisfy our feelings of love and solidarity.

Those anarchists who call themselves communists (and I am among them) are communist not because they want to impose their specific way of seeing or believe that it is the only means of salvation, but because they are convinced, and will remain so unless there is evidence to the contrary, that the more men and women, united in comradeship, and the closer their cooperation on behalf of all, the greater will be the well-being and the freedom that everybody will enjoy. They believe that even where people are freed from human oppression they remain exposed to the hostile forces of nature, which they cannot overcome on their own, but that with the cooperation of others, they can control and transform into the means of their well-being. The individual who wished to supply his own material needs by working alone would be the slave of his labours. A peasant, for instance, who wanted to cultivate a piece of ground all alone, would be renouncing all the advantages of cooperation and condemning himself to a wretched life: no rest, no travel, no study, no contacts with the outside world ... and he would not always be able to appease his hunger.

It is grotesque to think that some anarchists, in spite of calling themselves and being communists, want to live as it were in a convent, submitting themselves to a common regime of uniform meals, clothes, etc. But it would be just as absurd to think they sought to do what they wanted without reference to the needs of others, the rights of all to equal freedom. Everyone knows, for instance, that Kropotkin, one of the most passionate and eloquent propagators of the communist view, was at the same time a great apostle of individual independence, with a passionate desire for everyone to be able to freely develop and satisfy their own artistic tastes, devote themselves to scientific research, find a means of harmoniously uniting manual and intellectual labour so that human beings could become so in the most elevated sense of the word.



Moreover, the communists (the anarchist ones) believe that because of natural differences in fertility, health and location of the soil it would be impossible to ensure that every individual enjoyed equal working conditions. But at the same time they are aware of the immense difficulties involved in putting into practice, without a long period of free development, the universal, voluntary communism which they believe to be the supreme ideal of humanity, emancipated and brought together in comradeship. They have therefore come to a conclusion that could be summed up with this formula: The greater the possibility of communism, the greater the possibility of individualism; in other words, the greatest solidarity to enjoy the greatest liberty.

On the other hand, individualism (the anarchist variety) is a reaction against authoritarian communism – the first concept in history to have presented itself to the human mind in the form of a rational and just society, influencing to a greater or lesser extent all utopias and attempts at setting them up in practice – a reaction, I repeat, against authoritarian communism which, in the name of equality, obstructs and almost destroys the human personality. The individualists give the greatest importance to an abstract concept of freedom and fail to take into account, or dwell on the fact that real, concrete freedom is the outcome of solidarity and voluntary cooperation. It would be unjust to believe the individualists seek to deprive themselves of the benefits of cooperation and condemn themselves to an impossible isolation. They certainly believe that to work in isolation is fruitless and that an individual, to ensure a living as a human being and to materially and morally enjoy all the benefits of civilisation, must either exploit – directly or indirectly – the labour of others and wax fat on the misery of the workers, or associate with his fellows and share with them the pains and the joys of life. And since, being anarchists, they cannot allow the exploitation of one by another, they must necessarily agree that to be free and live as human beings they have to accept some degree and form of voluntary communism.

In the economic field, therefore, which is where the split between communists and individualists apparently lies, conciliation should rapidly be brought about by common struggle for the conditions of true liberty and then by leaving it to experience to resolve the practical problems of life. Discussions, studies, theories, even conflicts between

different tendencies, would then all be grist to the mill as we prepare ourselves for our future tasks.

But why then, if on the economic question the differences are more apparent than real, and in any case are easily overcome, is there this eternal dissension, this hostility which sometimes becomes outright enmity between those who, as Nettlau says, are so close to one another, motivated by the same passions and ideals?

As I mentioned earlier, differences as to the plans and theories regarding the future economic organisation of society are not the real reason for this persistent division, which is, rather, created and maintained by more important, and above all, more topical dissent on moral and political issues.

I do not speak of those who describe themselves as anarchist individualists only to show their ferociously bourgeois instincts when they proclaim their contempt for humanity, their insensibility to the sufferings of others and their longing for dominion. Nor do I speak of those who call themselves communist anarchist, but are basically authoritarian, and believe they are in possession of the absolute truth and award themselves the right to impose it on the rest of us.

Communists and individualists have often made the mistake of welcoming and recognising as comrades those who share with them only some common vocabulary or external appearance.

I mean to speak of those I consider the real anarchists. These are divided on many points of genuine and topical importance and can be classed as communists or individualists, generally out of habit, without the issues that really divide them having anything to do with questions concerning the future society.

Among the anarchists there are the revolutionaries, who believe that the violence that upholds the present order must be defeated by violence in order to create an environment which allows the free development of individuals and collectivities; and there are the educationalists, who believe that social change can only come about by first changing individuals through education and propaganda. There are the partisans of non-resistance or passive resistance, who shrink from violence even where it serves to repel violence, and there are those who admit to the necessity for violence but who are in turn divided as to the nature, scope and boundaries of legitimate violence. There are disagreements over the attitude of anarchists to the unions;

disagreements on the autonomous organisation or non-organisation of anarchists; permanent or occasional disagreements on the relations between the anarchists and other subversive groupings.

It is on these and similar problems we need to come to some understanding; or if, as it appears, agreement is not possible, then we need to know how to tolerate one another. Work together when there is consensus and when there is not, allow each other to act as they think best, without interfering.

After all, when one thinks about it, no-one can be sure of being right, and no-one is always right.

*April 1926*

### ***Individualism and Communism in Anarchism***

In the first issue of *Pensiero e Volontà* Saverio Merlino\* wrote: ‘The anarchists have been tormented and rendered powerless by the conflict, which has never ceased to rage among them, between individualists and communists. They are poles apart and agree on only one thing – their abhorrence of parliamentarism.’

I think Merlino exaggerates when he ascribes the impotence of the anarchists to the conflict between communists and individualists. When circumstances have favoured action and, in general, when there have been the will and the ability to do something practical, any dispute has been forgotten and communists and individualists (I speak, of course, of true anarchists who are loyal to the principle, Neither Slaves Nor Masters) have always found themselves on the same side.

The impotence of the anarchists depends on a number of other reasons, in particular the lack of a practical programme that could be

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\* Saverio Merlino (1858-1930) was a contemporary of Malatesta’s and they remained friends until Merlino’s death in 1930 in spite of the fact that he had stopped calling himself an anarchist many years before and became a kind of social democrat who, according to Malatesta in his obituary of his friend, ‘in his intentions and in his hopes, sought to bring together all the advanced parties and groups’ – including the anarchists – though he declared himself in favour of parliamentary elections and, according to Malatesta, ‘joined the Neapolitan section of the Socialist Party’ – Editor.

implemented in the short term, as well, of course, as from the general conditions in which they have been obliged to act. In other words, the fact that they looked to an ideal and therefore, rather than putting their ideas into practice, they felt obliged to hasten the hour of the revolution.

And Merlino exaggerates when he says that the ideas of the communists and the individualists (I am still, of course, speaking of sincere, thinking anarchists) are diametrically opposed to each other. They may seem to be to those who take certain literary and 'philosophical' digressions seriously, but in reality it is usually a question of verbal misunderstanding.

Anarchist individualism has had the misfortune to be frequently professed by those who lacked any sense of anarchism: bourgeois literati who tried to attract attention to themselves by the use of paradox in order to re-enter and succeed in the mainstream literary field; semi-cultured and semi-literate youngsters who wished to *distinguish themselves*; idiots whose brains were addled by the reading of obscure books; and worst of all, the more sophisticated criminals, superior criminals who sought to justify their crimes with a theory. And in Italy these generally ended up as fascists. Bourgeoisie, government and parties opposed to anarchism have profited from these deviations to pour scorn on anarchism and they have, unfortunately, succeeded to wrongfoot us where the mass of the people is concerned. Misunderstandings and issues about individuals have clouded discussion and often embittered even the anarchists themselves. But none of this detracts from the fact that essentially, in, that is, their moral motivations and ultimate goals, individualist and communist anarchism is one and the same thing – or almost.

I warmly recommend the book by Armand\*. It is a conscientious book, written by one of the most respected of individualist anarchists and it has been generally well received by the individualists. But, reading this book, one wonders why on earth Armand insists on referring to 'anarchist individualism' as a distinct body of doctrine when in general he is setting out principles common to all anarchists of whatever tendency. In reality Armand, who likes to call himself 'amoral', has produced a kind of manual of anarchist morality – not

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\* E. Armand (1872-1962), *Ainsi Chantait un 'En Dehors'*. He was for many years editor of the individualist journal *l'En Dehors* – Editor.

‘individualist anarchist’ but anarchist in general. Indeed, beyond anarchist, a widely human morality because based on the human sentiments that render anarchy desirable and possible.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that there exists among the anarchists a self-styled individualist minority which is a permanent cause of unpleasantness and weakness.

And, now that the anarchists are in a ferment over preparations for the future, it is worthwhile to re-examine the question calmly and without preconceptions.

I shall do so briefly from my point of view as a communist or *associationist*; others will do so, should they wish, from the individualist point of view.

(I use the word ‘associationist’ as an alternative to the word ‘communist’, not because I like pointless new jargon, but because I foresee the possibility that the communist anarchists will gradually abandon the term ‘communist’; it is growing in ambivalence and falling into disrepute as a result of Russian ‘communist’ despotism. If the term is eventually abandoned this will be a repetition of what happened with the word ‘socialist’. We who, in Italy at least, were the first champions of socialism and maintained and still maintain that we are the true socialists in the broad and human sense of the word, ended by abandoning the term to avoid confusion with the many and various authoritarian and bourgeois deviations of socialism. Thus too we may have to abandon the term ‘communist’ for fear that our ideal of free human solidarity will be confused with the avaricious despotism which has for some while triumphed in Russia and which one party, inspired by the Russian example, seeks to impose worldwide. Then perhaps we would need another adjective to distinguish us from the rest – and this could well be *associationist* or *societist* or such like, although it seems to me that simply to use the term ‘anarchist’ would suffice.

First of all let us avoid one common mistake which underlines the whole misunderstanding.

The individualists presume, or speak as if they presume, that the anarchist communists wish to impose communism, and that this would actually place them beyond the anarchist pale.

The communists presume, or speak as if they presume, that the anarchist individualists reject any idea of association, looking instead to the struggle of individual against individual, the dominion of the strongest (and there are those who, in the name of individualism, have supported such ideas and worse, but these people cannot be called anarchists) – and this would place them not only beyond the anarchist pale but beyond human society too.

In reality the communists are communists because in freely accepted communism they see the fruits of solidarity and a better guarantee of individual liberty. And the individualists, the truly anarchist ones, are anti-communist because they fear that communism would subject individuals to the tyranny, nominally, of the collectivity and, in practice, to the party or cast, and that this, on the pretext of having to administrate, would manage to invest itself with the power to dispose of things, and consequently of the people who need those things. They want every individual or group to be able to freely carry out their own activities and freely reap the fruits of their equality with other individuals and groups, conserving relations of justice and equity between one another.

If this is so, clearly no fundamental difference exists.

Only that, according to the communists, justice and equity are, for natural reasons, impossible to achieve in an individualist system and that freedom would thus also be unachievable. It would also be impossible to achieve equality from the beginning – a state of affairs, that is, in which every person would be born into conditions that were equally ripe for development and into equal material means, enabling them to achieve some kind of upward mobility, and to rejoice in a reasonably long and happy life, according to their own natural abilities and their own actions.

If the same climate were to prevail over the whole earth; if the soil were everywhere equally fertile; if raw materials were everywhere equally distributed and available to those who needed them; if civilisation were general and had everywhere reached the same level of development; if the work of past generations had raised all countries to the same standards; if population were equally distributed over the habitable surface of the earth – then one can imagine that everyone (whether group or individual) would have land and the means and raw materials to work and produce on an independent basis, without

exploiting or being exploited. But natural and historical conditions being what they are, how to bring about equity and justice between those who live on arid land and those who happen to find themselves on fertile, well-situated land? Or between the inhabitants of a village lost between the mountains or in the midst of the marshes and the inhabitants of a city which hundreds of generations have enriched with the legacy of human intelligence and labour?

On the other hand, is it possible to set up the communist system, immediately, as the general basis of social life? Would people moulded by a history of struggle between peoples, classes and individuals, in which every person has had to think for themselves in order to survive and not be trampled underfoot, want such a thing? And could it not, in the present climate of public morality, lead to the exploitation of the good or the weak by the bad and the unscrupulous? And even supposing that people did want it, how to make it work on a large scale, as things are now, whether throughout the world or in a single country, and without bringing about a monstrous process of centralisation and relying on a faceless bureaucracy, by definition incompetent and oppressive?

From all that has been said, and from much more that could be said, I conclude – and the true anarchists have always drawn similar conclusions – that desires and aspirations should not be mistaken for unshakeable dogmas, beyond which there is no salvation.

Communism is our ideal.

We are communists because communism seems to us to be the best way in which people can live together, in which people can best demonstrate their love for one another and at the same time render more productive human attempts to conquer natural resources. For this reason we must preach it; and as soon as circumstances allow we must apply it through example and experiment, in all those places and in all those branches of activity where it is possible so to do. For the rest we must trust in freedom, which ever remains our aim and the means of all human progress.

*July 1924*

## *Syndicalism and Anarchism*

The relationship between the labour movement and the progressive parties is an old and worn theme. But it is an ever topical one, and so it will remain while there are, on one hand, a mass of people plagued by urgent needs and driven by aspirations – at times passionate but always vague and indeterminate – to a better life, and on the other, individuals and parties who have a specific view of the future and of the means to attain it, but whose plans and hopes are doomed to remain utopias ever out of reach unless they can win over the masses. And the subject is all the more important now that, after the catastrophes of war and of the post-war period, all are preparing, if only mentally, for a resumption of the activity which must follow upon the fall of the tyrannies that still rant and rage [across Europe] but are beginning to tremble.

For this reason I shall try to clarify what, in my view, should be the anarchists' attitude to labour organisations.

Today, I believe, there is no-one, or almost no-one amongst us who would deny the usefulness of and the need for the labour movement as a mass means of material and moral advancement, as a fertile ground for propaganda and as an indispensable force for the social transformation that is our goal. There is no longer anyone who does not understand what the workers' organisation means, to us anarchists more than to anyone, believing as we do that the new social organisation must not and cannot be imposed by a new government by force but must result from the free cooperation of all. Moreover, the labour movement is now an important and universal institution. To oppose it would be to become the oppressors' accomplices; to ignore it would be to put us out of reach of people's everyday lives and condemn us to perpetual powerlessness.

Yet, while everyone, or almost everyone, is in agreement on the usefulness and the need for the anarchists to take an active part in the labour movement and to be its supporters and promoters, we often disagree among ourselves on the methods, conditions and limitations of such involvement.

Many comrades would like the labour movement and anarchist movement to be one and the same thing and, where they are able – for instance, in Spain and Argentina, and even to a certain extent in



Italy, France, Germany, etc. – try to confer on the workers' organisations a clearly anarchist programme. These comrades are known as 'anarcho-syndicalists', or, if they get mixed up with others who really are not anarchists, call themselves 'revolutionary syndicalists'.

There needs to be some explanation of the meaning of 'syndicalism'.

If it is a question of what one wants from the future, if, that is, by syndicalism is meant the form of social organisation that should replace capitalism and state organisation, then either it is the same thing as anarchy and is therefore a word that serves only to confuse; or it is something different from anarchy and cannot therefore be accepted by anarchists. In fact, among the ideas and the proposals on the future which some syndicalists have put forward, there are some that are genuinely anarchist. But there are others which, under other names and other forms, reproduce the authoritarian structure which underlies the cause of the ills about which we are now protesting, and which, therefore, have nothing to do with anarchy.

But it is not syndicalism as a social system which I mean to deal with, because it is not this which can determine the current actions of the anarchists with regard to the labour movement.

I am dealing here with the labour movement under a capitalist and state regime and the name syndicalism includes all the workers' organisations, all the various unions set up to resist the oppression of the bosses and to lessen or altogether wipe out the exploitation of human labour by the owners of the raw materials and means of production.

Now I say that these organisations cannot be anarchist and that it does no good to claim that they are, because if they were they would be failing in their purpose and would not serve the ends that those anarchists who are involved in them propose.

A Union is set up to defend the day to day interests of the workers and to improve their conditions as much as possible before they can be in any position to make the revolution and by it change today's wage-earners into free workers, freely associating for the benefit of all.

For a union to serve its own ends and at the same time act as a means of education and ground for propaganda aimed at radical social change, it needs to gather together all workers – or at least those workers who look to an improvement of their conditions – and to be

able to put up some resistance to the bosses. Can it possibly wait for all the workers to become anarchists before inviting them to organise themselves and before admitting them into the organisation, thereby reversing the natural order of propaganda and psychological development and forming the resistance organisation when there is no longer any need, since the masses would already be capable of making the revolution? In such a case the union would be a duplicate of the anarchist grouping and would be powerless either to obtain improvements or to make revolution. Or would it content itself with committing the anarchist programme to paper and with formal, unthought-out support, and bringing together people who, sheeplike, follow the organisers, only then to scatter and pass over to the enemy on the first occasion they are called upon to show themselves to be serious anarchists?

Syndicalism (by which I mean the practical variety and not the theoretical sort, which everyone tailors to their own shape) is by nature reformist. All that can be expected of it is that the reforms it fights for and achieves are of a kind and obtained in such a way that they serve revolutionary education and propaganda and leave the way open for the making of ever greater demands.

Any fusion or confusion between the anarchist and revolutionary movement and the syndicalist movement ends either by rendering the union helpless as regards its specific aims or with toning down, falsifying and extinguishing the anarchist spirit.

A union can spring up with a socialist, revolutionary or anarchist programme and it is, indeed, with programmes of this sort that the various workers' programmes originate. But it is while they are weak and impotent that they are faithful to the programme – while, that is, they remain propaganda groups set up and run by a few zealous and committed men, rather than organisations ready for effective action. Later, as they manage to attract the masses and acquire the strength to claim and impose improvements, the original programme becomes an empty formula, to which no-one pays any more attention. Tactics adapt to the needs of the moment and the enthusiasts of the early days either themselves adapt or cede their place to 'practical' men concerned with today, and with no thought for tomorrow.

There are, of course, comrades who, though in the first ranks of the union movement, remain sincerely and enthusiastically anarchist, as

there are workers' groupings inspired by anarchist ideas. But it would be too easy a work of criticism to seek out the thousands of cases in which, in everyday practice, these men and these groupings contradict anarchist ideas.

Hard necessity? I agree. Pure anarchism cannot be a practical solution while people are forced to deal with bosses and with authority. The mass of the people cannot be left to their own devices when they refuse to do so and ask for, demand, leaders. But why confuse anarchism with what anarchism is not and take upon ourselves, as anarchists, responsibility for the various transactions and agreements that need to be made on the very grounds that the masses are not anarchist, even where they belong to an organisation that has written an anarchist programme into its constitution?

In my opinion the anarchists should not want the unions to be anarchist. The anarchists must work among themselves for anarchist ends, as individuals, groups and federations of groups. In the same way as there are, or should be, study and discussion groups, groups for written or spoken propaganda in public, cooperative groups, groups working within factories and workshops, fields, barracks, schools, etc., so they should form groups within the various organisations that wage class war.

Naturally the ideal would be for everyone to be anarchist and for all organisations to work anarchically. But it is clear that if that were the case, there would be no need to organise for the struggle against the bosses, because the bosses would no longer exist. In present circumstances, given the degree of development of the mass of the people amongst which they work, the anarchist groups should not demand that these organisations be anarchist, but try to draw them as close as possible to anarchist tactics. If the survival of the organisation and the needs and wishes of the organised make it really necessary to compromise and enter into muddled negotiations with authority and the employers, so be it. But let it be the responsibility of others, not the anarchists, whose mission is to point to the inadequacy and fragility of all improvements that are made within a capitalist society and to drive the struggle on toward ever more radical solutions.

The anarchists within the unions should strive to ensure that they remain open to all workers of whatever opinion or party on the sole

condition that there is solidarity in the struggle against the bosses. They should oppose the corporatist spirit and any attempt to monopolise labour or organisation. They should prevent the Unions from becoming the tools of the politicians for electoral or other authoritarian ends; they should preach and practice direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and free initiative. They should strive to help members learn how to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to do without leaders and permanent officials.

They must, in short, remain anarchists, remain always in close touch with anarchists and remember that the workers' organisation is not the end but just one of the means, however important, of preparing the way for the achievement of anarchism.

*April-May 1925*

## *The Labour Movement and Anarchism*

Dear comrades\*

In your journal I came across the following sentence: 'If we must choose between Malatesta, who calls for class unity, and Rocker, who stands for a labour movement with anarchist aims, we choose our German comrade.'

This is not the first time that our Spanish language press has attributed to me ideas and intentions I do not have, and although those who wish to know what I really think can find it clearly set out in what I myself have written, I have decided to ask you to publish the following explanation of my position.

Firstly, if things were really as you present them, I too would opt for Rocker against your 'Malatesta', whose ideas on the labour movement bear little resemblance to my own.

Let's get one thing clear: a labour movement with anarchist objectives is not the same thing as an anarchist labour movement. Naturally everyone desires the former. It is obvious that in their activities anarchists look to the final triumph of anarchy – the more

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\* Open letter addressed to the editors of *El Productor*, an anarchist journal published in Barcelona – Editor.

so when such activities are carried out within the labour movement, which is of such great importance in the struggle for human progress and emancipation. But the latter, a labour movement which is not only involved in propaganda and the gradual winning over of terrain to anarchism, but which is already avowedly anarchist, seems to me to be impossible and would in every way lack the purpose which we wish to give to the movement.

What matters to me is not 'class unity' but the triumph of anarchy, which concerns everybody; and in the labour movement I see only a means of raising the morale of the workers, accustom them to free initiative and solidarity in a struggle for the good of everyone and render them capable of imagining, desiring and putting into practice an anarchist life.

Thus, the difference there may be between us concerns not the ends but the tactics we believe most appropriate for reaching our common goals. Some believe anarchists must assemble the anarchist workers, or at the least those with anarchist sympathies, in separate associations. But I, on the contrary, would like all wage-earners, whatever their social, political or religious opinions – or non-opinions – bound only in solidarity and in struggle against the bosses, to belong to the same organisations, and I would like the anarchists to remain indistinguishable from the rest even while seeking to inspire them with their ideas and example. It could be that specific circumstances involving personalities, environment or occasion would advise, or dictate the breaking up of the mass of organised workers into various different tendencies, according to their social and political views. But it seems to me in general that there should be a striving towards unity, which brings workers together in comradeship and accustoms them to solidarity, gives them greater strength for today's struggles or prepares them better for the final struggle and the harmony we shall need in the aftermath of victory.

Clearly, the unity we have to fight for must not mean suppression of free initiative, forced uniformity or imposed discipline, which would put a brake on or altogether extinguish the movement of liberation. But it is only our support for a unified movement that can safeguard freedom in unity. Otherwise unity comes about through force and to the detriment of freedom.

The labour movement is not the artificial creation of ideologists

designed to support and put into effect a given social and political programme, whether anarchist or not, and which can therefore, in the attitudes it strikes and the actions it takes, follow the line laid down by that programme. The labour movement springs from the desire and urgent need of the workers to improve their conditions of life or at least to prevent them getting worse. It must, therefore, live and develop within the environment as it is now, and necessarily tends to limit its claims to what seems possible at the time.

It can happen – indeed, it often happens – that the founders of workers’ associations are men of ideas about radical social change and who profit from the needs felt by the mass of the people to arouse a desire for change that would suit their own goals. They gather round them comrades of like mind: activists determined to fight for the interests of others even at the expense of their own, and form workers’ associations that are in reality political groups, revolutionary groups, for which questions of wages, hours, internal workplace regulations, are a side issue and serve rather as a pretext for attracting the majority to their own ideas and plans.

But before long, as the number of members grows, short-term interests gain the upper hand, revolutionary aspirations become an obstacle and a danger, ‘pragmatic’ men, conservatives, reformists, eager and willing to enter into any agreement and accommodation arising from the circumstances of the moment, clash with the idealists and hardliners, and the workers’ organisation becomes what it perforce must be in a capitalist society – a means not for refusing to recognise and overthrowing the bosses, but simply for hedging round and limiting the bosses’ power.

This is what always has happened and could not happen otherwise since the masses, before taking on board the idea and acquiring the strength to transform the whole of society from the bottom up, feel the need for modest improvements, and for an organisation that will defend their immediate interests while they prepare for the ideal life of the future.

So what should the anarchists do when the workers’ organisation, faced with the inflow of a majority driven to it by their economic needs alone, ceases to be a revolutionary force and becomes involved in a balancing act between capital and labour and possibly even a factor in preserving the status quo?

There are comrades who say – and have done so when this question is raised – that the anarchists should withdraw and form minority groupings. But this, to me, means condemning ourselves to going back to the beginning. The new grouping, if it is not to remain a mere affinity group with no influence in the workers' struggle, will describe the same parabola as the organisation it left behind. In the meantime the seeds of bitterness will be sown among the workers and its best efforts will be squandered in competition with the majority organisation. Then, in a spirit of solidarity, in order not to fall into the trap of playing the bosses' game and in order to pursue the interests of their own members, it will come to terms with the majority and bow to its leadership.

A labour organisation that were to style itself anarchist, that was and remained genuinely anarchist and was made up exclusively of dyed-in-the-wool anarchists could be a form – in some circumstances an extremely useful one – of anarchist grouping; but it would not be the labour movement and it would lack the purpose of such a movement, which is to attract the mass of the workers into the struggle, and, especially for us, to create a vast field for propaganda and to make new anarchists.

For these reasons I believe that anarchists must remain – and where possible, naturally, with dignity and independence – within those organisations as they are, to work within them and seek to push them forward to the best of their ability, ready to avail themselves, in critical moments of history, of the influence they may have gained, and to transform them swiftly from modest weapons of defence to powerful tools of attack.

Meanwhile, of course, the movement itself, the movement of ideas, must not be neglected, for this provides the essential base for which all the rest provides the means and tools.

Yours for anarchy

*December 1925*

Errico Malatesta

### ***Further Thoughts on Anarchism and the Labour Movement***

Obviously I am unable to make myself understood to the Spanish speaking comrades, at least as regards my ideas on the labour movement and on the role of anarchists within it.

I tried to explain these ideas in an article that was published in *El Productor* on 8th January (an article whose heading, 'The Labour Movement and Anarchism' was wrongly translated as 'Syndicalism and Anarchism'). But from the response that I saw in those issues of *El Productor* that reached me I see I haven't managed to make myself understood. I will therefore return to the subject in the hope of greater success this time.

The question is this: I agree with the Spanish and South American comrades on the anarchist goals that must guide and inform all our activity. But I disagree with some as to whether the anarchist programme, or rather, label, should be imposed on workers' unions, and whether, should such a programme fail to meet with the approval of the majority, the anarchists should remain within the wider organisation, continuing from within to make propaganda and opposing the authoritarian, monopolist and collaborationist tendencies that are a feature of all workers' organisations, or to separate from them and set up minority organisations.

I maintain that as the mass of workers are not anarchist a labour organisation that calls itself by that name must either be made up exclusively of anarchists – and therefore be no more than a simple and useless duplicate of the anarchist groups – or remain open to workers of all opinions. In which case the anarchist label is pure gloss, useful only for helping to commit anarchists to the thousand and one transactions which a union is obliged to carry out in the present day reality of life if it wishes to protect the immediate interests of its members.

I have come across an article by D. Abad de Santillan\* which opposes this view ... Santillan believes that I confuse syndicalism with

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\* Diego Abad de Santillan (1897-1983), Argentinian by birth. Active in the Spanish Civil War. Journalist and editor.



the labour movement, while the fact is that I have always opposed syndicalism and have been a warm supporter of the labour movement.

I am against syndicalism, both as a doctrine and a practice, because it strikes me as a hybrid creature that puts its faith, not necessarily in reformism as Santillan sees it, but in classist exclusiveness and authoritarianism. I favour the labour movement because I believe it to be the most effective way of raising the morale of the workers and because, too, it is a grand and universal enterprise that can be ignored only by those who have lost their grip on real life. At the same time I am well aware that, setting out as it does to protect the short-term interests of the workers, it tends naturally to reformism and cannot, therefore, be confused with the anarchist movement itself.

Santillan insists on arguing that my ideal is 'a pure labour movement, independent of any social tendency, and which holds its own goals within itself.' When have I ever said such a thing? Short of going back – which I could easily do – to what Santillan calls the *prehistoric* time of my earlier activities, I recall that as far back as 1907, at the Anarchist Congress of Amsterdam, I found myself crossing swords with the 'Charter of Amiens' syndicalists and expressing my total distrust of the miraculous virtues of a 'syndicalism that sufficed unto itself.'

Santillan says that a *pure labour movement has never existed, does not exist and cannot exist* without the influence of external ideologies and challenges me to give a single example to the contrary. But what I'm saying is the same thing! From the time of the First International and before, the parties – and I use the term in the general sense of people who share the same ideas and aims – have invariably sought to use the labour movement for their own ends. It is natural and right that this is so, and I should like the anarchists, as I think Santillan would too, not to neglect the power of the labour movement as a means of action.

The whole point at issue is whether it suits our aims, in terms of action and propaganda, for the labour organisations to be open to all workers, irrespective of philosophical or social creed, or whether they should be split into different political and social tendencies. This is a matter not of principle but of tactics, and involves different solutions according to time and place. But in general to me it seems better that the anarchists remain, when they can, within the largest possible groupings.

I wrote: 'A labour organisation that styles itself anarchist, that was and is genuinely anarchist and is made up exclusively of dyed-in-the-wool anarchists, could be a form – in some circumstances an extremely useful one – of anarchist grouping; but it would not be the labour movement and it would lack the purpose of such a movement.' This statement, which seems simple and obvious to me, dumbfounds Santillan. He throws himself at it in transcendental terms, concluding that 'if anarchism is the idea of liberty it can never work against the ends of the labour movement as all other factions do.'

Let's keep our feet firmly on the ground. What is the aim of the labour movement? For the vast majority, who are not anarchist, and who, save at exceptional times of exalted heroism, think more of the present moment than of the future, the aim of the labour movement is the protection and improvement of the conditions of the workers now and is not effective if its ranks are not swelled with the greatest possible number of wage earners, united in solidarity against their bosses. For us, and in general all people of ideas, the main reason for our interest in the labour movement is the opportunities it affords for propaganda and preparation for the future – and even this aim is lost if we gather together solely with like-minded people.

Santillan says that if the Italian anarchists had managed to destroy the General Confederation of Labour there would perhaps be no fascism today. This is possible. But how to destroy the General Confederation if the overwhelming majority of the workers are not anarchist and look to wherever there is least danger and the greatest chance of obtaining some small benefit in the short term?

I do not wish to venture into that kind of hindsight that consists in saying what would have happened if this or that had been done, because once in this realm anyone can say what they like without fear of being proved wrong. But I will allow myself one question. Since the General Confederation could not be destroyed and replaced with another equally powerful organisation, would it not have been better to have avoided schism and remain within the organisation to warn members against the somnolence of its leaders? We can learn something from the constant efforts made by those leaders to frustrate any proposal for unification and keep the dissidents at bay.

A final proof of the mistaken way in which certain Spanish comrades interpret my ideas on the labour movement:

In the periodical from San Feliú de Guixol, *Acción Obrera* is an article by Vittorio Aurelio in which he states:

‘I believe that my mission is to act within the unions, seeking to open from within the labour organisations an ever upward path towards the full realisation of our ideals. And whether we achieve that depends on our work, our morale and our behaviour. But we must act through persuasion, not imposition. For this reason I disagree that the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) in Spain should directly call itself anarchist, when, unfortunately, the immense majority of its members do not know what this means, what libertarian ideology is about. I wonder, if the defenders of this argument know that the members of the workers’ organisation do not think or act anarchically, why is there this anxiety to impose a name, when we know full well that names alone mean nothing?’

This is precisely my point. And I wonder why, in saying this, Vittorio Aurelio finds it necessary to declare that he does not agree with Malatesta!

Either my style of writing is getting too obscure or my writings are being regularly distorted by the Spanish translators.

*March 1926*

### ***Republic and Revolution***

Our avowed intention to take part in any revolutionary movement aimed at gaining greater liberty and justice, together with recent statements by certain comrades – whose real ideas have possibly been distorted by the haste with which newspaper articles are written – have convinced some people, unfamiliar with our ideas, that we would accept, albeit on a provisional basis, a so-called ‘social’ and ‘federated’ republic. There are even some people who send us republican propaganda articles, in the confident belief that they will be published, for all the world as though we were a republican periodical!

It would not seem necessary to waste words on this subject, given that the anarchists have never allowed of misunderstandings about their relations with the republicans. But it is useful to return to the

subject because the danger of confusion is always greater when there is the wish to advance from propaganda to deeds and when, therefore, one's own work must be coordinated with that of the other participants in the struggle. And it is surely very hard to distinguish in practice between the point where useful cooperation in the struggle against the common enemy comes to an end and a merger begins which would lead the weaker parties to surrender their own specific objectives.

It is a matter of urgency that we understand one another on the question of the republic, because the regime which emerges from the direction in which Italy is more or less rapidly heading will very probably be a republican one. And it seems to us that if we support a republic we shall be betraying not only our anarchist purposes but also those same libertarian and egalitarian ideals which the majority of republican workers – and those young people who, while themselves privileged, are motivated by a need for justice which unites them with the workers – intend to pursue by republican means.

We said above that the regime which, in Italy, will replace the present institutions will probably be a republican one. But what form of political conspiracy might follow immediately on the heels of those institutions that gave us fascism and whose fate has become inextricably bound up with it?

We do not wish to predict how much longer fascism will last, especially as wishful thinking could give us too much hope. Nevertheless we have reason to believe that Italy will not be increasingly driven back to medieval barbarisms and that sooner or later she will shake off the yoke that burdens her. But then?

People only bestir themselves for what is immediately obtainable, and basically they are right. Man cannot live by self-denial alone, and if there is nothing new to set up there is an inevitable tendency to fall back on the old ways.

It does not seem possible to us that there will be a return to pre-war conditions and the days of anti-fascism – and certainly we should do our best to avoid such a thing happening.

Anarchy is still not understood by the vast majority of people and we cannot reasonably expect that they will wish and know how to organise their own lives on a social level, on the basis of free agreement, without awaiting their leaders' orders and submitting to commands

of whatever kind. Except for a small minority with anarchist ideas, the people, used to being governed, only overthrow one government to replace it with another from which they hope for better things.

If one excludes, therefore, as undesirable a return to the hypocrisy of constitutional monarchy, which would lead us to a new fascism as soon as the monarchy and bourgeoisie felt themselves to be in imminent danger; and excluding anarchy as being inapplicable in the near future, we see only the possibility of communist dictatorship or a republic.

It seems to us that a communist dictatorship has little chance of even short-term success: there are few communists; their authoritarianism would not go down well in a movement which would, above all, be an explosion of the need for liberty – either because their programme would meet with practical difficulties, or because of the unpleasant results of the Russian experiment, which is leading the country towards capitalism and militarism.

There remains the Republic, which would have the support of the republicans in the strict sense of the word, the social democrats, the industrial workers anxious for change but without specific ideas on the future, and also the mass of the bourgeoisie which rushes to support any government that seems able to guarantee ‘order’ – which, for them, means no more than the protection of their own privileged economic status.

But what is a Republic?

The republicans – or that proportion of them who sincerely wish for a radical change in the social institutions and are thus closer to us – do not appear to understand what a republic is.

They say ‘their’ republic is not like any of the others, that ‘their’ republic will be organised on a social basis and with a federal structure – that is, it will expropriate, or at least heavily tax the capitalists, give land to the peasants, encourage the transfer of the means of production to workers’ associations, respect rights and freedoms, all individual, corporate and local groupings, etc.

Now language like this can be either anarchist or authoritarian: anarchist if such fine things can be achieved through the agency of the more enlightened minorities which, overthrowing or resisting the government, carry them out where and when it is possible to do so, and certainly by propaganda and by the deed; authoritarian if, on the

other hand, it means taking over power by force and imposing their programme by force. But what such language is not, is republican.

A republic is a democratic government, indeed the only real form of democracy, if by this one means a government of the majority of the people ruling through their freely elected representatives. A republican can thus say what his wishes are, what are the criteria that would guide him as a voter, what the proposals he would make or approve were he elected a deputy. But what he cannot say is what kind of republic the parliament (or constituent assembly, if you prefer) that is called upon to prepare the new constitution and the laws that will follow, will come up with. A republic remains a republic, even if, governed by reactionaries, it merely consolidates and even worsens existing structures.

There would no longer be a king and royally appointed senate and this would certainly be progress. But progress of very small practical account. Today the predominating and determining force behind all government is finance and royal power counts only as a tool in the hands of the financiers, who well know how to jettison it without reducing their baleful influence.

Anyway, do 'social' republicans really want the abolition of capitalism, namely the rights and the opportunities to make a profit out of the labour of others through the monopoly of the means of production? But then why don't they rid themselves of that ambiguous term and call themselves socialists outright?

To us it seems that while they aim to improve the conditions of the poorer classes and to reduce exploitation, they are happy to preserve the right of the owners to make others work for their benefit and thus leave the way open to all those evils that arise from capitalist property rights.

As for their federalism, what does it come down to? Do they acknowledge the right of the regions and the municipalities to leave the federation and independently choose those groupings that best suit their individual needs? Do they acknowledge that members of the federation have the right to refuse any participation in military or financial affairs when they see fit? We fear they do not, because this would leave as basis for national unity only the good will of the federated regions; a thing which hardly seems characteristic of the traditions and spirit of the republicans.

In reality it is but a question of a forced federation, like Switzerland,

the USA or Germany, which continues to leave the federated regions subject to centralised power, and there is therefore little to choose between them and the centralised states.

If that is so, how and why could we agree with republicans in any kind of movement?

We could join with the republicans on the question of revolution, just as we could join with the communists on that of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, so long as they act in a revolutionary manner, without having first set up their State, their Dictatorship. But this does not mean we would ourselves become republicans or communists.

There is a need to make a clear distinction between the revolutionary act, which overthrows as much as it can of the old regime, replacing it with new institutions, and governments that follow to halt revolution and suppress as much as they can of the revolutionary conquests.

History teaches us that whatever progress is made by revolution occurs in the period when popular activity is at its height, when either a recognised government does not yet exist or is too weak to openly set itself against the revolution. Then, once government is established reaction invariably sets in, serving the interests of the old and new privileged classes, and seizes from the masses everything it possibly can seize back from them.

Thus our task is to make, or help to make, the revolution, taking advantage of all the occasions that come our way and from all available forces. To push the revolution as far forward as possible, not only in terms of destruction but above all in terms of reconstruction, and to remain opposed to any embryonic government, ignoring it or fighting it to the best of our ability.

We shall no more recognise the republican Constituent Assembly than the monarchist parliament. If the people want such an assembly, so be it; in fact we could find ourselves alongside the republicans in resisting any attempts at restoration of the monarchy. But we ask, we demand, complete freedom for those who think as we do, to live outside state protection and oppression and to spread our ideas by word and deed.

We are revolutionaries, yes, but above all we are anarchists.

*June 1924*

## ***Further Thoughts on Republic and Revolution***

In the *Voce Repubblicana*, our friend Carlo Francesco Ansaldi comments on our discussions about the immediate future, and in particular my article 'Republic and Revolution,' which appeared in the last issue of that periodical. He expresses what basically are aspirations and desires that approximate and even perhaps blend with ours, but it seems to me that he runs away from the heart of the matter – the way in which, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the existing institutions, we set up the new social structures and decide on the source of the constituent power. In our current discussions it is not really a question of the point of arrival – since on this we can all perhaps agree, Ansaldi included – but of the ways and means by which we put our ideals into practice.

Do the republicans, and especially those, Ansaldi again included, who describe themselves as 'social', 'federalists' or 'syndicalists', intend convening the 'Constituent Assembly' (the legislative body elected by universal suffrage) immediately after the fall of the present regime and submit to their being set up by majority vote?

Another republican writer, Paolo Albatrelli, again in *La Voce*, clearly says yes. But what does Ansaldi say? What do the 'social and federalist' republicans say?

'Our republic', says Albatrelli, 'must spring from the direct will of the people ... If the majority of the Italian people is with us, we do not intend to resort to any violence against them. We do, however, desire that they be allowed a free vote and do not come under any pressure or violence from an executive power devoid of scruples and morality.'

Does this, therefore, mean that if the Constituent Assembly voted for a monarchy the republicans would submit and that the whole movement would have served for nothing more than to save and to supply a new virginity to this monarchy that fascism is now dragging with it into the gutter?

And what about the preconditions of an anti-monarchist position? Albatrelli suggests that the party 'jealously retains it in its specific programme and does not present it to any possible opposition as a bill to be settled in advance.' But are the antimonarchist preconditions not based on the conviction that the institution of monarchy is opposed to any real political and social progress and that until it is



abolished there will be no guarantee of liberty or possibility of a wide general education of the mass of the people? Does it mean nothing to Albatrelli that fifty years of republican, socialist and anarchist propaganda have resulted in ... fascism? Where we are concerned, the antimonarchist preconditions should be accompanied by anticapitalist ones. But the republicans, who ascribe prime importance to political form, should at the least insist on ... a republic. Otherwise their republicanism reduces to no more than the assertion of a far-off ideal, a vague 'potential' which could even be accepted by Mussolini and Victor Emanuel.

True enough, it is not probable that a Constituent Assembly set up upon the fall of fascism would vote for a monarchy. The mass of the people are tired of change and the bourgeoisie needs order and peace which, in the circumstances, are more likely to prevail under a republic, bolstered by all the illusions that new regimes carry with them, rather than the hard-won fight for restoration of a monarchy. On the other hand, it is most probable – almost certain – that the Constituent Assembly, being what it would inevitably be in present moral and economical times in Italy – that is, made up of a majority of conservatives and clericals, landowners and lawyers, representing the great industrial interests of the land – would give us a conservative and clerical republic like the republic of France on the fall of the Second Empire and which, after more than fifty years, is still a centralising and capitalist republic.

Apart from the right of the majority, which we do not recognise, to impose its will, by force, on the minority; apart from the consideration that no electoral mechanism can succeed in electing a chamber that would express the will of the majority – even if such a thing as a majority with one common will existed – there always remains the fact that under a capitalist regime, when society is divided between rich and poor, bosses and workers whose ration of daily bread depends on the whim of those bosses, there cannot be such a thing as a free election. There also remains the fact that under a centralised regime the more developed regions exploit the less developed ones, while the latter regions, more heavily populated, hamper progress and tend to be a drag on reform.

'The free vote of the people', says Albatrelli. But can he really believe what he says?

In some of the bigger cities and in some of the more progressive regions the conservatives would be eclipsed and the mass of the people, in a state of revolutionary ferment, would vote in a majority of socialists, republicans and communists – and even anarchists, should the latter allow themselves to take part in the comedy. But even in these circumstances it is a deception to maintain that the elections would be free. Unfortunately we are a violent people and the recent experiences of war and fascism have exacerbated, to the point of paroxysm, all our worst instincts. Even if our leaders, the most well-known and popular of men, sincerely wished for the liberty of the individual, force, fraud and violence would exert yet greater influence over the choice of deputies than the informed and free will of the majority.

But remember that, offsetting and overwhelming the revolutionary forces of the cities and regions that I shall call subversive, are the countless *Vendées*\* of Italy, where the elections would be subject to the economic and moral pressure of the bosses and priests, backed up by the violence of those elements which are always ready for a bit of bloodletting on behalf of anyone who cares to pay for it.

Then what to do? Make of the Italian Constituent Assembly a carbon copy of the French Convention of 1792-93, when the rival parties guillotined one another and prepared the way for a Bonaparte? Or imitate the ‘rural’ Assembly of 1871 which began with the massacre of the Communards and continued as symbol and shield of bourgeois clerical reaction?

But, it will be asked, if you don’t want the Constituent Assembly, what do you want?

Revolution. And by revolution we don’t mean the insurrectionary phase alone, which would be indispensable, save in the highly unlikely eventuality that the regime, collapsing from within, falls of its own accord. But insurrection would be sterile if it were not followed by the liberation of the people and would serve merely to replace one state of violence by another.

*Revolution* is the creation of new institutions, new groupings, new social relations. *Revolution* is the destruction of privilege and

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\* A western region of France which, during the Revolution and early Napoleonic period, was home to the forces of royalist insurrection – Editor.

monopoly, a new spirit of justice, solidarity and freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling upon them to provide for their own future through their direct and conscious action. *Revolution* is the organisation of all public services by those who work within them in their own interests, as well as in those of the wider public. *Revolution* is the destruction of all coercive bonds, and is the autonomy of groups, communes and regions. *Revolution* is the free federation, brought about by solidarity, by individual and collective interests and by the needs of production and defence. *Revolution* is the establishment of a myriad free groupings based on the ideas, desires, needs and tastes of all and every individual. *Revolution* is the formation and dissolution of thousands of representative, neighbourhood, communal, regional and national bodies which, lacking any kind of legislative power, serve to make them known and harmonise the wishes and interests of the people near and far, and act through propagation of information, advice and example. *Revolution* is freedom proved in the crucible of events – and lasts as long as freedom lasts, that is, until such time as others, profiting from the weariness that overtakes the masses, the inevitable disappointments that follow upon exaggerated hopes, possible mistakes and human error, succeed in creating a power which, backed by an army of conscripts and mercenaries, makes laws and blocks any forward movement – and reaction sets in.

To my question, ‘How do you know in what direction your republic will go?’ Ansaldi counters by asking, ‘How do you know in what direction your anarchism will go?’ And he’s right. There are too many and complicated historical factors, too great a factor of uncertainty in the human will for anyone to be able seriously to predict the future. But the difference between us and the republicans is that we seek neither to harden our anarchism in dogma, nor impose it by force. It will be what it can be, and will develop as people and institutions grow more supportive of complete liberty and justice. The republicans, on the other hand, seek to make laws which, by definition, would be obligatory for all and must therefore necessarily be imposed on the recalcitrants by material force. If the republicans renounce the *gendarmes*, then agreement can soon be reached.

It is possible – even certain – that the next movement will lead to the establishment of a republic. But this will be a ‘social’ republic only

if the social reforms are carried out beforehand and only to the extent that they have been carried out. And it will be 'federalist' only if the unity of the state has firstly been broken up and the autonomy of the regions and communes has been set in motion. The forces of reaction, to which all governments tend, will be proportionately less effective the more radical the reforms carried out in the revolutionary period.

If, however, as it seems, the republicans intend to begin with the Constituent Assembly and only then proceed to carry out reforms through the agency of that Assembly, the antifascist movement would be of little use.

Even so, we shall take part, but only to work within the masses, outside and if necessary against the Constituent Assembly, to draw the maximum possible advantage for our ideas in favour of freedom and justice.

*June 1924*



## II

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### *Comments on the Article 'Science and Anarchy'*

Kropotkin's definition of anarchy – a definition to which Nino Napolitano\* refers [in his article] as virtually beyond question – in spite of being accepted quite uncritically by many anarchists because of the great and deserved prestige of the author and his agreement with the scientific and philosophical ideas which were widespread when anarchism was first being propagated, seems to me both mistaken and harmful. Mistaken because it confuses different things; harmful because it obliges even those anarchists who accept it to debate those contradictions that weaken the reasoning of all or almost all those who subscribe to the positivist and naturalist schools of thought when they deal with moral questions.

In his attempt to fix 'the place of Anarchy in modern science' Kropotkin writes: 'Anarchy is a concept of the universe based on a mechanistic interpretation of all natural phenomena, not excluding human society.'

This is philosophy. It may or may not be acceptable philosophy, but it certainly is neither science nor anarchy.

Science is the gathering and systematising of everything that is known or thought to be known. It explains an event and seeks to discover the law governing that event, i.e. the conditions under which the event occurs and recurs. This satisfies certain intellectual needs and at the same time is an extremely effective instrument of power. While it demonstrates the limits of the human will within the framework of natural laws, it increases the effective freedom of humankind, providing it with the means to turn those laws to its advantage. Science is equal for all and serves impartially both good and evil, both liberation and repression.

Philosophy can be either a hypothetical explanation of what is known or an attempt to guess at what is not known. It poses those

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\* Nino Napolitano (1898-1958), Italian anarchist propagandist.

problems which have, at least until now, eluded the competence of science and suggests solutions which, because they cannot yet be proven, vary and contradict one another from philosophy to philosophy. When it does not descend to mere word play and illusionism, philosophy may act as a stimulus or guide to science, but it is not science.

Anarchy, on the other hand, is a human aspiration which is not founded on any true or supposed natural law, and which may or may not come about depending on human will. Anarchy profits from the means with which science provides human beings in their struggle with nature and against contrasting wills. It may profit from progress in philosophical thought where this serves to educate people to reason better and to better distinguish between the real and the imagined, but it cannot, without falling into the realms of the absurd, be confused either with science or with any philosophical system.

But let us see if a 'mechanistic concept of the universe' really does explain the known facts.

We shall then see if it can at least be reconciled and logically coexist with anarchism, or indeed with any aspiration to a state of things different from what now exists.

The basic principle of mechanics is the conservation of energy: nothing is created and nothing destroyed.

A body cannot yield any given amount of heat to another without cooling by the same amount; one form of energy cannot be transformed into another (movement into heat, heat into electricity, or vice versa) without losing in one form what it gains in another. In short, the whole of the physical world is subject to this same extremely basic fact: if you have ten pence and spend five, you will be left with five – no more and no less.

And yet, if you have an idea you can communicate it to a million people and lose nothing in the process, and the more the idea is propagated the more it acquires in power and effectiveness. Teachers teach others what they know and, in so doing, do not become less knowledgeable; indeed, in teaching they learn more easily how to enrich their own minds. If a grenade tossed by a homicidal hand cuts short the life of a genius, science may explain what happens to all the material elements of which the murdered genius consisted when living

and demonstrate that after the body has dissolved nothing remains of the old form, while at the same time, nothing is materially lost because all the atoms of the body, with all their energy, live on in other combinations. But the ideas and inventions which that genius gave the world remain and spread and can become enormously powerful, while those ideas that were still maturing and would have been further developed if the murder had not occurred are lost for ever.

Can mechanics explain this power, this specific quality that is the product of the mind?

But for goodness sake, do not ask *me* to explain in another way what mechanistic science has failed to explain.

I am no philosopher. But there is no need to be one to see some of the problems that, to a greater or lesser extent, torment all thinking minds. Not knowing the answer to a problem does not oblige one to accept solutions that seem unsatisfactory ... especially when the solutions that philosophers offer are so many and so contradictory.

Now let us see if 'mechanics' is compatible with anarchism.

According to the mechanistic view (and indeed the theist view) everything is programmed, determined, nothing can be different from what it is.

In fact, if nothing is created and nothing destroyed, if matter and energy (whatever they may be) are fixed entities subjected to mechanical laws, all phenomena must be immutably linked. Kropotkin says:

'Since man is a part of nature, since his personal and social life is also a phenomenon of nature – in the same way as the growth of a flower, or in the evolution of life in the community of ants and bees – there is no reason why in passing from the flower to Man and from a colony of beavers to a human city, we should abandon the system which had hitherto served us so well, to seek another in the arsenal of metaphysics.'

And before him, at the end of the eighteenth century, the great mathematician Laplace, said: 'Given the forces that animate nature and the respective situation of the beings that comprise it, a great enough intelligence could know the past and the future as well as the present.'

This is pure mechanistic thinking: all that has been had to be, all that is must be and all that will be will necessarily be in every minute



detail of position, movement, intensity and velocity.

In such a view what meaning can there be for the words 'free will', 'freedom' and 'responsibility'? The predestined events of human history cannot be changed, any more than we can change the orbit of the stars 'or the growth of a flower'. And then?

What has this to do with anarchy?

There was a time when anarchists would quote the declarations that a French comrade (Etiévant) made in his defence speech before a Paris court. He could have limited his defence to a critique of society, demonstrating that if he had indeed committed a crime he had been driven to it by force of circumstance and that the main responsibility lay with others. But our poor comrade, who later fell victim to police brutality, was imbued with philosophy and, as a good determinist, he wanted to show that he could not be declared responsible or be punished because he was not a free agent – everything in nature is programmed and predetermined.

A hard-hearted but quick-witted judge could have replied: You're right. I can't in justice punish you or even blame you, for the reasons you have yourself given. But for the same reasons, the priest who deceived you is not responsible; neither are the employers who starved you or the copper who tortured you – and by the same token I am not responsible for sentencing you to hard labour or the guillotine. Everything that happens must perforce happen.

So, once again, where does Anarchy come into all this?

There are innumerable philosophical systems and, like everything that lacks a solid foundation, they also follow trends. At the end of the last century materialism was all the rage; today it's idealism; tomorrow, who knows what our philosophers will have invented for us?

Should those who, like Kropotkin, face persecution and torture for Anarchy's sake, those who are anarchists because they love and suffer and rebel against injustice and oppression, wait for scientists and philosophers to really explain this immense mystery that is the universe?

No matter what philosophical system you prefer, you can still be an anarchist. There are materialist anarchists as well as spiritualist ones;

there are monist anarchists and there are pluralist ones, agnostics and those who, like me, without prejudice to the possible future development of the human intellect, prefer to simply call themselves ignorant.

It is certainly difficult to understand how some theories can be reconciled with the practical realities of life.

The mechanistic theory, like theism and pantheism, would logically lead to indifference and inertia, to the supine acceptance of all that is, both in moral or material questions.

But, fortunately, philosophical concepts have little or no bearing on behaviour.

Anyway, in spite of their own logic, the materialists and the 'mechanists' often sacrifice themselves for an ideal. For that matter, so do the religious folk who believe in the eternal joys of paradise, yet who look to their well-being in this world and who, when they fall ill, or fear to die call in the doctor. Just as the poor mother who loses her little child believes, she is sure, that her child has become an angel and awaits her in heaven ... But in the meantime she weeps and despairs.

*July 1925*

### ***Note on Hz's article, 'Science and Anarchy'***

... In his lecture of 6 March 1896, to which our Norwegian comrade Hz refers, Kropotkin neither explains nor justifies the idea – to me an absurd and arbitrary one – that Anarchy is 'a concept of the universe based on a mechanistic interpretation of phenomena.'

Kropotkin makes obscure and debatable analogies between society and certain facts (or supposed facts) of the physical and biological world. He must have made them because it was the vogue in those days to relate everything to 'Science' without attaching great importance to it. For instance, Kropotkin begins by saying:

'Let me take some examples from the field of the natural sciences, *not to draw our social ideas from them* – far be it from us to do that – but simply to clarify certain relationships that are easier to understand in the context of the events observed by the exact sciences than by surrounding ourselves with examples taken from such a complex phenomenon as human society.'

And, in fact, once he had paid his tribute to the fashion of the time, he suddenly, without any apparent logical connection, went on to defend anarchy with arguments derived from the desire for justice, liberty, the well-being of all – none of which have anything to do with the natural sciences.

Moreover, if one cares to make a rigorous analysis of the contents of Kropotkin's lecture, one is forced to the conclusion that, fundamentally, he himself was far from being a *mechanist*. 'Nothing,' he says, 'in what we call the harmony of nature is preordained. It can be established by a chance collision'. *Chance?* But how can one suppose that something occurs by chance without also supposing a free agent, a force that, without prior cause, suddenly appears on the scene to alter the static and dynamic balance already in existence?

And then, what is this *harmony of nature* – this *natural order* to which Kropotkin-inspired anarchists so frequently appeal? What do harmony and order have in common with the *social harmony* which is the true goal of anarchism?

Nature builds and destroys, gives birth, causes suffering and death, creates life and works in such a way that a life can only be maintained at the expense of other lives. Love and joy are natural as are hatred and pain. Abundance is natural as are sterility and poverty. The crushing of the weak by the strong is a natural phenomenon; so are the hurricane and the earthquake, so are cancer and tuberculosis ... Upon my word this natural order looks much more like bourgeois order than to what we anarchists want! All that exists and occurs independently of the will and of human endeavour is natural and, possibly, responds to a mechanistic necessity. But it is certainly not *harmonious*, not at least in the sense that we give to the word 'harmony' when we invoke it for the salvation and happiness of humankind.

Hz objects to the principle, generally accepted by the physical sciences, of the conservation of energy. He observes that 'a lighted candle can light a thousand others without burning itself out more quickly, and a machine does not wear out more quickly by doing a useful job than by standing idle.'

Without claiming to understand a great deal, I would certainly not be shocked if the principle of energy conservation were ever refuted. Like any other principle on which science is founded, it is basically no more than a hypothesis, extremely useful for linking known events

and stimulating the discovery of others. But it fails to give complete satisfaction because it does not reveal to us what energy really is.

If someone were to demonstrate the inadequacy of this theory and thus stimulate research and reflection in a new direction, it could only be cause for rejoicing. But criticism must be supported by fact and reasoning, while the objections of our comrade seem to me to lack any validity.

When the lighted candle flame communicates its flame to others, it loses a little heat each time it makes contact with a cold wick and, if successive contacts occur too fast and the chemical energy released by the candle in the process of transforming into heat is too rapid to compensate for the cooling produced by contact with cold wicks, the candle will burn itself out. In short, the candle could last longer, with a dimmer and less constant light, but neither it nor the other candles which it has lighted would produce more or less calorific, luminous, etc., energy than the energy which, in other forms, is contained in their components and in the oxygen with which these components combine.

*A machine does not wear out more quickly by doing a useful job than by standing idle.* What does *useful job* mean? 'Usefulness' is a human concept with no place in rational mechanics. Useful, useless or injurious to people as a machine's movement may be, it neither produces nor destroys energy, but simply transforms and transports it.

In any case, even if the examples given by Hz were really to prove some point against the conservation of energy, he would end up with a curious result: wishing with Kropotkin to extend the law of mechanics to the moral and social world, he would end by removing it even from that material world in which its reign would seem incontestable.

It seems to me that if Kropotkin's definition of anarchy is accepted, we would fall into an irremediable illogicality. It has been said that everyone is free to make their own judgements – i.e. that everyone may base their reasoning on whatever principle seems true to them, extracting from it whatever experience or fantasy it may suit them to do. But once that principle has been affirmed, the consequences that inevitably flow from it are governed by logic, the law of thought which

is the same for all.

If you affirm that ‘everything that occurs must occur’, including in that *everything* what people think and want and do; if you hold that thought and will are not the products of mechanistic forces, of the *collisions*, whether inevitable or accidental, of material atoms, you cannot then go on to say that there is a sense in which human endeavour can also act upon events – not even by way of speeding up or slowing down the rate at which they occur. If you hold that human beings cannot do otherwise than they do, there is no acrobatic feat of logic than can give any real meaning to the words *freedom* and *responsibility*.

To conclude, if Kropotkin’s definition is taken seriously, all those who entertain a view of the universe which differs from the mechanistic one, or who have no view at all – which, I fear, is the case of this writer – would be placed beyond the pale of anarchism. This is certainly not Kropotkin’s intention, nor can it be that of our *mechanistic, materialist* and *determinist* comrades. Above all, it doesn’t suit us.

Therefore, leaving philosophic uncertainty aside, I prefer to keep to those popular definitions which tell us that *Anarchy* is a form of living together in society; a society in which people live as brothers and sisters without being able to oppress or exploit others and in which everyone has at their disposal whatever means the civilisation of the time can supply in order for them to attain the greatest possible moral and material development. And *Anarchism* is the method of reaching anarchy, through freedom, without government – that is, without those authoritarian institutions that impose their will on others by force, even if it happens to be in a good cause.

September 1925

## *Pseudo-Scientific Aberrations*

According to the Franco-Russian socialist, Frederic Stackelberg, who is well-known not only for his political activity but for his valuable work in popularising astronomy:

‘socialism is nothing more than the biological monism\* of the arts and sciences of the 19th century and the astronomical monism of the Renaissance, confirmed by recent astronomical discoveries.’ (*Le Semeur de Normandie*, 25th October).

In ordinary vulgar language this means that if recent discoveries were to give rise to biological theories that differ from the dominant theories of the nineteenth century, and if astronomical research were to show that the stars were composed of matter different from our own planet’s, there would be no point in socialism existing and socialists would be wrong!

Now Stackelberg is not just an astronomer who lives with his head in the clouds and the kind of snob-socialist who talks about socialism without knowing what it really means. He is, or was, a militant socialist (who at one time flirted with anarchism). He made his contribution to the struggle for human liberation and still has a passionate interest in social questions. In point of fact, in the same article from which we have drawn that bewildering definition of socialism we also find that:

‘The programme, the immediate aim of scientific Socialism and Communism is:

- I) The common ownership of the land and all means of production;
- II) The emancipation of women in terms of civil, political and economic equality, with men, which will put an end to the old moral code of our ancestors;
- III) The replacement of the rule of man over man by the worldwide administration of production based on equivalence of labour.

So far so good. But what does astronomy have to do with it?!

We would not have raised the matter if it had simply been some isolated example of academics who, tormented by the need to search

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\* For the benefit of readers as ‘ignorant’ as Malatesta and this editor of the subtleties of philosophy, monism is the doctrine that reality consists of only one basic substance or element, such as mind or matter – Editor.

for a universal formula that would explain everything that the senses perceive, that thought conceives and that life actually does, allow themselves to be drawn into making rash statements and grotesque judgements.

But unfortunately the habit is widespread, perhaps especially in our milieu.

Our desk is littered with the writings of good comrades who feel the need to give their anarchism a 'scientific base' and who consequently fall into the sort of traps which would seem ridiculous were they not rendered pathetic by the obvious efforts they have made in the sincere belief that they are furthering their cause. And most pathetic of all are the many who make excuses for not doing better ... because they haven't had the opportunity to pursue their studies.

But why get bogged down in things one doesn't know about, instead of making sound propaganda based on human needs and aspirations?

Clearly it isn't necessary to be a learned scholar to be a good and useful anarchist. On the contrary, being a scholar can sometimes be a positive hindrance. But to talk about science it would perhaps be advisable to know a little about it!

And let no one accuse us, as a comrade did recently, of having scant respect for science. On the contrary, we know what beauty, greatness and power there is in science. We recognise the part it plays in the liberation of thought and in the triumph of humankind over the hostile forces of nature, and we therefore hope that we and all comrades will be able to form a clear and coherent idea about Science and deepen our understanding of it in at least one of its innumerable branches.

Our programme does not only include *bread for all*, but also *science for all*. But it seems to us that in order to speak at all usefully about science we first need to clarify what its aims and its functions are.

Like bread, science is not a free gift of Nature. It must be conquered by struggle. And we are fighting to create the conditions which give to all the possibilities of joining in the struggle.

*November 1925*

## ***Further Thoughts on Science and Anarchy Necessity and Liberty***

Some comrades have been horrified by the observations I have made here and there recently on the relation between Science and Anarchy, and particularly by my having described, as absurd, Kropotkin's definition of Anarchy: *Anarchy is a concept of the universe based on a mechanistic interpretation of the phenomena which embrace nature as a whole, not excluding society.*

These comrades fail to understand what I meant, and clearly the fault is mine. Since they make me to have said that I believe science and philosophy have nothing to do with anarchism; and have indulged in demonstrating the great merits of science. Anarchism, they say, is a general concept of life, therefore a philosophy, without touching in any way upon the point I was really trying to raise for discussion.

I will try to explain myself more clearly.

Let's forget about philosophy, of which there are a thousand different definitions – and which often, and in fact, to quote the words of a philosopher who is himself not distinguished for excessive clarity – *is the art of obscuring what is clear.* As a layman I empirically, for my own personal use, divide what 'philosophers' say into two parts: what I understand and what I do not. As regards the part I understand I find truths, errors, doubts, hypotheses and problems – all of great interest but which, in the end, can all be subsumed under the heading of scientific inquiry – if, that is, logic and psychology may be included among the sciences. As regards the part I don't understand, I sense daydreams, tautologies, arguments about words ... but since I don't understand it is prudent to abstain from making judgements.

So let us remain on the solid ground of science proper.

The aim of scientific research is to study nature and discover events and the 'laws' that govern them; that is, the conditions under which an event *of necessity* occurs and *of necessity* re- occurs. A science comes into being when it can foresee what will happen, irrespective of any whys and wherefores. If an event does not occur as foreseen, then this implies error and abandonment of a particular line of inquiry. Chance, whim and caprice have no place in science, which is a quest for the inevitable, for what cannot happen in any other way, for what necessarily occurs.



But does such necessity, which links all naturally occurring events in time and space, and which it is the task of scientific endeavour to probe into and discover, embrace everything that happens in the universe, including psychological and social truths?

In saying yes to this, the mechanists believe that everything is subject to the same mechanical laws. Everything is predetermined by the laws of physics and chemistry – thus, the course of the stars, the blossoming of a flower, a lover's heartbeat, the evolution of human history. And I freely admit that such a model seems beautiful and grandiose, less absurd and incomprehensible than the metaphysical models, and that if it could be proven it might give full spiritual satisfaction. But, despite all the pseudo-logical efforts of the determinists to reconcile the model with life and moral sentiment, there is no room at all for free will and liberty. Our life, and that of society as a whole is, it seems, completely predestined and foreseeable, *ab eterno* and for all time, and in the minutest detail, and free will is illusion pure and simple, like Spinoza's stone which, falling, is aware that it falls and believes it does so because it wishes to.

If that is the case – and mechanists and determinists cannot fail to believe it without contradicting themselves – it is clearly absurd to wish to control one's own life, to desire to educate and be educated or to re-organise society in whatever manner. All this rushing around, preparing for a better future, stems from nothing but futile illusion, and would cease as soon as we had realised the fact. True, even illusion, even the absurd, would have to be seen as the inevitable products of the mechanical functions of the brain and as such would be recycled into the system. But, I repeat, what place is there then for free will and liberty, for the role of human endeavour in the life and destiny of humankind?

Since human beings believe, or at least hope, that they can be useful in their lives, there clearly does exist a creative force, a first cause, or first causes, independent of the physical world and of mechanical laws, and this force is what we call will.

Of course, to recognise the existence of such a force would mean to deny that the principles of causality and sufficient reason can be generally applied, and our logic is then thrown into confusion. But is that not always the case when we want to return to the origin of things? We do not know what free will is, but then do we know what matter

and energy are? We know that events occur but not the reason behind those events. However hard we try we invariably come up against an effect without a cause, against a first cause – and if to explain events to ourselves we need first causes to be ever present and ever active, we shall accept their existence as a necessary, or at least convenient hypothesis.

Viewed in this light, the task of science is to discover what is determined (natural laws) and to set the boundary where the inevitable ends and freedom begins; and the great advantage of this is in freeing human beings from the illusion that everything is possible and that they can endlessly increase their effective liberty. When the laws that subjected all matter to gravity were not known, people could believe they could fly at will, yet remained on earth. When science discovers the means of remaining in and moving through the air, then we shall have gained the genuine freedom to fly.

In conclusion, the main thrust of my argument is that the existence of a human will, able to produce new effects, independent of the mechanical laws of nature, is a *necessary precondition* for those who believe in the possibility of reforming society.

*February 1926*

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Ma, pur fatte tutte le  
 riserve che la convinzione  
 o la prudenza s'impone,  
~~per~~ non possiamo fare  
 a meno - in questo momento  
 in cui sotto il manto di amor  
 patrio si eleva a vista scien-  
 ca l'omicidio per furto -  
 di manifestare il nostro ri-  
 spetto, la nostra ammirazio-  
 ne per Toller, come per  
 Manetti, per tutti coloro  
 che, senza un pensiero di  
 interesse personale, s'immo-  
 lano per una causa che  
 credono giusta.

Enrico Malatesta

A manuscript page from an article by Malatesta with the title *l'Attentato di Roma* dealing with the attempt on the life of King Victor Emanuel by the building worker Antonio d'Alba.

### III

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#### *Anarchy and Violence*

Anarchy means non-violence, non-domination by human beings over human beings, non-imposition by force of will of one or more over others.

*Anarchy* can and must triumph only through a harmonisation of interests brought about by voluntary cooperation, love, respect, mutual tolerance, persuasion, example and mutual benefits of goodwill. Anarchy is a society of brothers and sisters living freely in solidarity with one another and which assures to all the maximum possible amount of freedom, the greatest possible degree of development and benefit.

There are certainly other people, other parties, other schools as sincerely devoted to the general good as are the best among us. But what distinguishes the anarchists from all the others is precisely the horror of violence, the desire and the proposal to eliminate violence, material violence, that is, from human affairs.

Thus, it could be said that the specific idea that distinguishes the anarchists from the rest is the abolition of the professional police and the exclusion from society of order imposed by brute force, whether legal or illegal.

But then, it may be asked, why in the present struggle against the political and social institutions which they deem to be oppressive, have the anarchists preached and practiced – as they continue to do, where they are able – the use of violent means, which are in clear contradiction with their ends? And this to the point at which many adversaries have honestly believed, and all adversaries of bad faith have claimed to believe, that the specific character of anarchism is, precisely, violence.

The question may seem an embarrassing one, but it can be answered in a few words. For two people to live in peace both must want peace; if one of the two insists on trying to force the other to work for him

and serve him, while the other wishes to preserve human dignity and not be reduced to the role of abject slave, the latter, despite loving peace and harmony, will be forced to resist with all possible means.

Suppose, for example that you come into conflict with some Dumini-type gangster\* and he is armed and you are unarmed; he is surrounded by a big gang and you are alone or with just a few companions; he is confident of going unpunished and you fear the eruption on the scene of the carabinieri, who will arrest and maltreat you and throw you into jail for an indefinite time ... Then tell me if you could escape from your predicament by persuading the Dumini-type with good arguments to be just, good and gentle!

The source of the ills which have beset humanity – apart, of course, from those which originate in Nature’s force majeure – is that people have failed to understand that agreement and cooperation are the best ways of procuring the greatest possible good; that the strongest and the most cunning have sought to suppress and exploit the rest, and when they managed to gain their advantage they have sought to secure and perpetuate it by creating all kinds of permanent forces of coercion in their defence.

This is why the whole of history is fraught with bloody strife: arrogant bullying, injustices, ferocious oppression on one hand, rebellion on the other.

There is no cause to draw distinctions between sides: anyone, no matter who, who has desired emancipation or attempted to achieve emancipation, has had to oppose force with force, arms with arms.

But, while finding it necessary and right to use force to defend their own liberty, their own interests, their own class, their own country, every faction has, in the name of their own particular code of values, gone on to condemn violence when this is turned against them by others, who seek to defend *their* freedom, *their* interests, *their* class and *their* country.

Thus, those same people who, in Italy for instance, rightly glorify the wars of independence and erect statues of marble and bronze to Agesilao Milano, Felice Orsini, Guglielmo Oberdan, and those who raise their voices in passionate paens to Sofia Perovskaya and other martyrs of distant countries, have treated as criminals the anarchists

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\* Dumini was an Italian fascist ~~human~~ responsible for a number of murders of anti-fascists – Editor.

when they set out to demand total liberty and equal justice for all and openly declare that so long as oppression and privilege are defended by the brute force of the bayonet, popular insurrection, the revolt of the individual and of the mass of the people, would continue to be the necessary means for bringing about their emancipation.

I remember that at the time of an anarchist attentat which caused something of a sensation, one leading light in the Socialist Party, newly returned from the Greco-Turkish war, proclaimed, with the backing of his comrades, that human life is always sacred and that not even the cause of liberty calls for an attack on human life. It seems that he made an exception of the lives of the Turks and the cause of Greek independence!

Illogicality or hypocrisy?

Yet anarchist violence is the only violence that can be justified, the only violence that is not criminal.

I speak, of course, of the violence which has truly anarchist characteristics, not of the various blind and irrational acts of violence attributed to anarchists or which have, indeed, been committed by real anarchists roused to fury by abominable persecution, or blinded through an irrational excess of feeling by the sight of social injustice and sorrow for others' sorrow.

Real anarchist violence ceases where the need for defence and liberation ceases. It is tempered by the awareness that individuals, taken in isolation, are hardly, if at all responsible for the positions which heredity or environment have bestowed on them. It is inspired not by hatred but love, and it is sacred because its goal is the liberation of all and not the substitution of one form of domination with another.

There has been in Italy a party which, with the most civilised aims in mind, did its utmost to extinguish any trust in the efficacy of violence in the mass of the people, and has rendered them powerless to put up any resistance to the advent of fascism. It strikes me that Turati [Italian Socialist Party leader] has more or less admitted and regretted the fact in his Paris speech in memory of Jaures [the assassinated leader of the French Socialists].

Anarchists are not hypocritical. Force must be countered with force – today against today's oppression, tomorrow against forms of oppression which might seek to replace today's.

We want liberty for all, for ourselves and our friends as well as for our adversaries and enemies. Freedom of thought and freedom to propagate our own point of view, freedom to work and organise our own lives in the way we want; not, of course, freedom – and let the communists not equivocate – not freedom to suppress freedom and to exploit the work of others.

*September 1924*

### ***Revolutionary Terror*** ***(Thoughts on a Possibly Near Future)***

My short article in the last number, 'Against the Excesses of Language,' has provoked some criticism which, over and above the original scope of the argument, raises the general problem of revolutionary tactics. which always need to be discussed, and discussed again, because upon its solution could depend the fate of the revolution to come.

I will not deal here with the way in which the tyranny oppressing the Italian people today can be fought and destroyed. I propose simply to clarify ideas and speak of moral preparation, with either a near or distant future in mind, because it is not possible for us to do anything else. Moreover, when we think the moment for real action has come, we shall have even less opportunity than we do now to discuss it.

I am here concerned exclusively, and hypothetically, with the aftermath of a triumphant insurrection and the violent methods which some would like to adopt by way of 'dispensing justice' and which others believe to be necessary to defend the Revolution against the tricks of the enemy.

Let us leave 'justice' aside. It is too relative a concept; it has always served as a pretext for all manner of oppression and injustice and has often come to mean no more than vendetta. Hatred and lust for vengeance are irrepressible feelings which are naturally awakened and fuelled by oppression. But if they can be a positive force in shaking off the yoke, they become a negative force when the moment comes to replace oppression, not with a new oppression but with freedom and solidarity. We must therefore strive to awaken higher sentiments,

which draw their energy from the love of what is good, while at the same time guarding against a loss of impetus. Let the mass of the people act as passion dictates, if the alternative is a controlling force that puts a brake on it, that would translate into a new tyranny. But let us always remember that, as anarchists, we can neither be avengers nor executioners. If we want to be liberators we must act as such by propaganda and deed.

Let us deal with the most important question, which is also the only serious one to have been raised on this subject by my critics: defence of the revolution.

Many people are still fascinated by the idea of 'terror.' To them it seems that guillotines, firing squads, massacres, deportations and imprisonment ('gallows and the galley,' as a prominent communist recently put it to me) are powerful and indispensable weapons of the revolution, and that if so many revolutions have been defeated or expectations dashed, this has been because of too much kindness, 'weakness' on the part of the revolutionaries, who have not persecuted, repressed or killed enough.

This bias that runs through certain revolutionary groups originated in the rhetoric and historical falsifications of the apologists of the French Revolution, and in recent years has been given fresh life by Bolshevik propaganda. But in fact the opposite is true. Terror has always been the tool of tyranny. In France it served the grim tyranny of Robespierre and paved the way for Napoleon and the subsequent counter-revolution. In Russia it persecuted and killed anarchists and socialists, massacred rebellious workers and peasants and, indeed, brought a halt to a revolution that stood a real chance of opening up the civilised world to a new era.

Those who believe in the liberatory revolutionary efficiency of repression and ferocity, have the same backward mentality as the *jurists* who believe that meting out severe punishments is the key to avoiding crime and making the world more law abiding.

Terror, like war, awakens brutal, atavistic sentiments, still only thinly veiled by the varnish of civilisation, and it brings the worst elements of the people to the fore. Rather than help to defend the revolution it helps to discredit it, make it hateful to the majority; and after a period of ferocious struggle, leads inevitably to what is nowadays called 'normalisation' – the legalisation and perpetuation



of tyranny. Whatever party wins out, it always ends in the establishment of strong government, to some assuring peace at the expense of liberty, to others power without too many dangers.

I am well aware that the terrorist anarchists (the few there are) reject any form of organised terror, government-ordered by hired agents, and that they would like their enemies to be put to death by the mass of the people directly. But this would only make the situation worse. Terror can please the fanatics, but above all it suits the real villains, greedy for blood and money. And there should be no attempt to idealise the masses and imagine them to be composed of simple men and women who, if they commit excesses, do so from good intentions. The police and the fascists serve the bourgeoisie, but come from the bosom of the people!

Fascism has welcomed many criminals into its ranks and has thus, to some extent, purified in advance the ambiance in which the revolution will take place. But there is no need to believe that all the Duminis and the Cesarino Rossis of this world are fascists. There are those who, for whatever reason, do not want or have not been able to become fascists, but who, in the name of 'revolution' are willing to do what the fascists do in the name of the 'fatherland'. Just as the cuthroats of any and all regimes are ever ready to hire themselves out to new ones, and become their most zealous supporters, so today's fascists will hasten to become tomorrow's anarchists or communists, or whatever, as long as they can tyrannise others and give vent to their own wicked intentions. And if they cannot do so in their own land, because they are known and compromised there, they will bring the revolutionary standard to other lands and will try to rise to prominence by being more violent, more 'energetic' than the others, and by treating as moderates, reactionaries and counter-reactionaries those who see the revolution as a great labour of goodness and love.

Of course, the revolution has to be defended and developed with an inexorable logic; but it must not and cannot be defended with means that contradict its own ends.

The great means for the defence of the revolution remain as ever that of depriving the bourgeoisie of the economic means by which they rule, of arming everyone (until such time as they can be induced to toss their weapons aside as useless and dangerous toys) and of interesting the great mass of the population in victory.

If, to win, we have to set up the gallows in the public square, I would prefer to lose.

October 1924

### *Let's Demolish – and then?*

In No. 9 of *Pensiero e Volontà* I wrote a review of Galleani's\* Book, *La Fine dell'Anarchismo?* Benigno Bianchi replies:

'I hope you will not mind if I write to bring to your attention a sentence that would give rise to regrettable misunderstandings. I refer to the second paragraph of Galleani's words quoted in your article.

In the passage in question Galleani spoke of the need to clear the decks for posterity, of prejudices, privileges, churches, prisons, barracks, brothels, etc. It is therefore necessary to destroy, not to construct.

You honestly reply that 'it would be ridiculous, and fatal, to want to destroy all unhygienic ovens, all anti-economic mills, all backward cultures, leaving to posterity the task of seeking better means of growing wheat, grinding flour and baking bread.'

Oh, Errico, yes indeed, baking bread, in one form or another is indispensable, as is growing wheat and grinding it, and wanting to destroy the means of doing so, and of destroying other similar processes would be worse than ridiculous, it would be madness!

These things will be renewed, reformed, perfected; but there is no way I would wish to renew and perfect prisons, churches, barracks and brothels, nor yet the monopolies and privileges of which Galleani spoke.

It seems to me that the comparison does not hold and therefore that the whole thrust of the article is lost.

Such polemical distortions ill befit the seriousness of the Review and the authority of your writing.'

Naturally I do not in the least mind comrade Bianchi's comments. On the contrary, I thank him for giving me the opportunity to return to a question which I consider of vital importance for the development and success of our movement.

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\* Luigi Galleani (1861-1931). In a review of *The End of Anarchism?* Malatesta described it 'in substance [as] a clear, serene, eloquent exposition of *communist anarchism* in the Kropotkinian interpretation which personally I find too optimistic, too simplistic and too trusting in the *natural harmonies*' – Editor.

Let us leave Galleani aside. If I have misinterpreted him, then he is the best person to tell me so and I am always ready to make amends. Let us, rather, discuss the argument in itself.

My reference to bread strikes Bianchi as a polemical distortion. To me, on the other hand, it is fitting. I am in the habit – I don't know if it's a virtue or a fault – of always looking for the simplest, most obvious examples, because these don't permit of rhetorical tricks and plainly reveal the kernel of the question.

It is essential, says Bianchi, to have the means of making bread; it would therefore be madness to think of destroying rather than perfecting those means. But bread is not the only indispensable item. Indeed, I believe it would be very difficult to find any present institution, including the worst of them – even prisons, brothels, barracks, privileges and monopolies – that does not respond, directly or indirectly, to a social need and that it would be possible to truly destroy and for ever unless it was replaced by something that better satisfies the need that generated it in the first place.

Do not ask, a comrade said, what we should substitute for cholera. It is an evil, and evil has to be eliminated, not replaced. This is true. But the trouble is that cholera persists and returns unless conditions of improved hygiene have replaced those that first allowed the disease to gain a foothold and spread.

Bread is a need, yes. But the question of bread is more complicated than those who live in a small farming centre and produce wheat for their own families might suppose. Providing bread for all is a problem that involves an entire social organisation: type of land ownership, method of working the land, means of exchange, transport systems, importation of grain, should the amount produced at home not be enough, means of distribution to the various centres of population, and thereafter to the individual consumers. In other words, it means that solutions must be found to the questions of ownership, value, currency, trade, etc.

Present day production and distribution of bread are exploitative and humiliating for the workers; the consumers are robbed and a whole army of parasites benefits at the expense of both producers and consumers. We, on the other hand, want bread to be produced and distributed for the greater benefit of all, without draining energy and materials, without oppression and parasitism and with fairness and

efficiency. And we must seek the means of realising this goal, or as great an approximation to it as we can manage. Our descendants will certainly do better than us; but we must do as we know and can – and do it at once, the very same day as the crisis breaks, because if there were an interruption in rail services, or the milling and baking bosses began manoeuvring and concealing the bread, the urban centres would not receive it (nor would they receive other basic necessities); the revolution would be lost and the forces of reaction would triumph under the guise of restoration of the monarchy or under the form of dictatorship.

By all means let us destroy the monopolies. But when they are not to do with shirt buttons or lipstick for the ladies, the big monopolies (water, electricity, coal, road, rail and sea transport, etc) they are the response to a necessary public service, and such monopolies cannot be destroyed without bringing about their swift return – unless, in the act of dismantling them the service itself is not continued, possibly with more efficiency than before.

By all means let us destroy the gaols – those dismal regions of suffering and corruption, where brutalised screws end up worse than those they guard. But in the case of, say, some *satyr* who rapes and tortures the little bodies of children, there has to be some means of preventing him from doing harm if he is not to make other victims before falling to lynch violence. Shall we leave such a problem to our descendants? Surely not. We must concern ourselves with it now, because these things are happening now. Let us hope that in the future the advances of science and the changed social scene will make such monsters impossible.

Let us destroy the brothels, those vile dens of human shame – shame more for those who live outside them than within. By all means. But the brothels will return, either publicly or in secret, so long as there are women who cannot find a decent job or gainful employment. Labour needs to be organised in such a way that there is a place for all; consumption must be organised in such a way that everyone can satisfy their own needs.

Of course, let us abolish the *gendarme*, that man who protects all privilege by force and is the living symbol of the State. But to be able to abolish him for good, and not see him reappear under another name and in a different guise, we have to know how to live without him – that is,

without violence, without oppression, without injustice, without privilege.

Yes, let us abolish ignorance. But obviously we need first to teach and educate, and before even this, to create the social conditions that would permit everyone to avail themselves of education and training.

‘To leave to posterity a land without privileges, without churches, without tribunals, without brothels, without barracks, without ignorance, without stupid fears.’ Yes, this is our dream, and we fight to bring it about. But this means bequeathing to future generations a new social organisation, new and better moral and material conditions. You cannot clear the decks and leave them bare if people are living on them. You cannot destroy evil without substituting good, or at least something that is less bad.

This does not mean imposing nothing on our descendants. It is to be hoped, I repeat, that they will do better than us. But we must do here and now what we know and can, for our own benefit and hand down to future generations something more than fine words and vague aspirations.

There is a state of mind which, despite much propaganda to the contrary, persists in a number of comrades and which, to my view, should be changed as a matter of urgency.

The conviction, which I share, is the need for a revolution to eliminate those material forces which defend privilege and obstruct any real social progress, has meant that many have dwelt exclusively on the act of insurrection, without considering what needs to be done to prevent an insurrection becoming a sterile act of violence to which a further act of revolutionary violence responds. For these comrades all practical questions – means of organisation, method of supplying our daily bread, are idle questions for now: matters, they say, that will resolve themselves or be resolved by future generations.

I remember an episode in 1920, when I was editor of *Umanità Nova*\*. It was the period when the socialists were trying to impede the revolution, and unfortunately they succeeded. They said that if an insurrection took place the lines of communication with abroad

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\* The daily anarchist paper *Umanità Nova* (New Humanity) was banned in 1922 by Mussolini's fascists. Since the end of World War Two it has been published weekly – Editor.

would be severed and we would have all died of starvation as a result of the grain shortage. There were even those who said there could be no revolution because Italy did not produce rubber! Concerned with the basic question of food and convinced that the grain shortage could be made good by using all the available arable land for the cultivation of plants and fast-growing nutritional grains, I asked our comrade, Dr G. Rossi, an experienced agronomist, to write a series of articles on practical concepts of agriculture, directed precisely at the goal we had in mind. Rossi kindly did so. His articles were obviously very useful, but also practical, and did not therefore please everyone. One comrade, annoyed that I had rejected some poem or short story of his – I no longer recall exactly what – said brusquely: 'Yes, you prefer *Umanità Nova* to be about ploughs, chick-peas, beans, cabbages and stupid things like that!'

And another comrade, who then had pretensions of being some sort of super-anarchist, unwittingly expressed the logical consequences of this kind of mentality. Finding himself with his back to the wall in just such a discussion as this, he said to me: 'But these are matters that don't concern me. Providing bread and so on is the responsibility of the leaders.'

The conclusion, indeed, is this: either we all apply our minds to thinking about social reorganisation, and right away, at the very same moment that the old structures are being swept away, and we shall have a more humane and more just society, open to future advances; or we shall leave such matters to the 'leaders' and we shall have a new government; and this will do exactly what governments have always done – make the masses pay for the limited and bad services it provides, taking away their freedom while allowing the parasites and the privileged of all stripes the freedom to exploit them by every means.

*June 1926*

### ***Postscript to Let's Demolish - and then?***

My article 'Let's Demolish – and then?' has left some comrades, bewildered perhaps because it shook old ways of looking at things, or rather perhaps because I did not sufficiently develop my line of thought and was not clear.

I shall now try to make myself clearer.

Comrade Salvatore Carrone comes to the conclusion, no less, than that, after or during the revolution, I would like to retain, *provisionally*, the gendarmes, the courts, the prisons and the whole repressive apparatus of the State; and he raises his voice in a cry of alarm against this way of understanding revolution, which would condemn us to a vicious circle: the reaction provoked by the revolution and the revolution which leads to a new reactionary regime. And, rightly, he observes that:

'the revolution can be guided by sincere, sensible men, anxious to work for the general well being, but gradually they would be infiltrated by murky elements who, with a vast network of acolytes throughout the land, would surround the good elements and inevitably drive them out; or these, to gain power, would betray the revolution, having recourse precisely to the gendarmes and the courts, with all their accessories.'

I quite agree, and have never said anything to the contrary.

I say that to abolish the gendarmerie, and baleful social institutions of whatever kind, we need to know what we want to replace them with – not in a more or less distant future but now, the very same day the demolition work begins. You cannot really destroy, and permanently, without having what we put in its place. To postpone to a later date the solution to the urgent problems that arise would be to give a breathing space to those same institutions that we want to abolish, to recover from the received blow and to re-impose themselves once more, perhaps under other names but certainly the same in essence.

Our solutions will be accepted by a sufficiently large section of the population and we shall have created anarchy, or at least made a step towards it. Or it may be that they will not have been understood and accepted and in that case our work will serve as propaganda, and will be placed before the general public as the programme for the near future. But in any case, we must have our solutions: provisional

solutions, no doubt; ones that can be revised and modified in the light of experience, but necessary if we do not wish to endure passively the solutions of others, limiting ourselves to the hardly useful role of grumblers who are both incapable and impotent.

On the subject of gendarmes, I offered the case of the *satyr* and spoke of the need to ensure that he could no longer do any harm.

Carrone seems to favour *lynching*. This is a primitive and savage solution, repugnant to the modern mind, but it is a solution; and it would always be better than to trust innocently that after the revolution such things will no longer happen, or than to hold onto the straw of entrusting the problem to posterity ... Except for the fact that there would be, as in similar cases (including recently in Rome and elsewhere) there always has been, an angry and emotional crowd which, not knowing who to kill, hurls itself on any poor devils, pointed out by women made hysterical by anger and fear. Then, calmer people would call on the police, on the intervention of any professional police force ... which in turn would molest many innocents while, usually, failing to find the guilty party.

So what needs to be done?

We need to persuade people that public security, the individual's right to safety and freedom, must be available to *all*; that everyone must be on the alert, everyone must blacklist the bully and intervene in defence of the weak – themselves become judges and, in extreme cases, like the one above-mentioned, entrust the guilty party to the custody and care of the asylum, its doors kept ever open to public scrutiny. And in any case ensure that protection against criminals must never be allowed to become a profession and serve as a pretext for the establishment of permanent tribunals and armed groups, which would soon become the tools of tyranny.

But really this question of crime is only a side issue, despite the fact that it is the first to surface when one talks to someone for the first time about the uselessness and harmfulness of government. No-one would, surely, claim that a few violent lechers or bloody ruffians can halt the course of revolution!

What matters, what is most urgent and vital, is the organisation of material life, that is, the satisfaction of basic needs and the work that must be done to provide for those needs. Since what we won't succeed in doing ourselves and in getting done by our methods will inevitably



be done by others with authoritarian methods.

Anarchy can only come about when we will know how to live without authority, and then only to the degree in which we succeed in managing without authority.

But that does not mean, as Carrone thinks or believes I believe, that 'in the event of a revolution we must help the party with most affinities to us in the hope that they will be less reactionary during our work in replacing evil with good.'

We can have relations of cooperation with non-anarchist parties so long as we have a common enemy to fight and could not do it alone. But from the moment a party takes power and becomes the government, our relationship can only be that between enemies.

Obviously so long as governments exist we are concerned with the least oppressive, in other words with a minimum of government.

But freedom, even relative freedom, is not gained from a government by helping it. It is only gained by making a government sense the danger of being too oppressive.

*August 1926*

## IV

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### *Neither Democrats, nor Dictators: Anarchists*

Theoretically 'democracy' means popular government; government by all for everybody by the efforts of all. In a democracy the people must be able to say what they want, to nominate the executors of their wishes, to monitor their performance and remove them when they see fit.

Naturally this presumes that all the individuals that make up a people are able to form an opinion and express it on all the subjects that interest them. It implies that everyone is politically and economically independent and therefore no-one, to live, would be obliged to submit to the will of others.

If classes and individuals exist that are deprived of the means of production and therefore dependent on others with a monopoly over those means, the so-called democratic system can only be a lie, and one which serves to deceive the mass of the people and keep them docile with an outward show of sovereignty, while the rule of the privileged and dominant class is in fact salvaged and consolidated. Such is democracy and such it always has been in a capitalist structure, whatever form it takes, from constitutional monarchy to so-called direct rule.

There could be no such thing as a democracy, a government of the people, other than in a socialistic regime, when the means of production and of living are socialised and the right of all to intervene in the running of public affairs is based on and guaranteed by the economic independence of every person. In this case it would seem that the democratic system was the one best able to guarantee justice and to harmonise individual independence with the necessities of life in society. And so it seemed, more or less clearly, to those who, in the era of the absolute monarchs, fought, suffered and died for freedom.

But for the fact that, looking at things as they really are, the

government of all the people turns out to be an impossibility, owing to the fact that the individuals who make up the people have differing opinions and desires and it never, or almost never happens, that on any one question or problem all can be in agreement. Therefore the 'government of all the people', if we have to have government, can at best be only the government of the majority. And the democrats, whether socialists or not, are willing to agree. They add, it is true, that one must respect minority rights; but since it is the majority that decides what these rights are, as a result minorities only have the right to do what the majority wants and allows. The only limit to the will of the majority would be the resistance which the minorities know and can put up. This means that there would always be a social struggle, in which a part of the members, albeit the majority, has the right to impose its own will on the others, yoking the efforts of all to their own ends.

And here I would make an aside to show how, based on reasoning backed by the evidence of past and present events, it is not even true that where there is government, namely authority, that authority resides in the majority and how in reality every 'democracy' has been, is and must be nothing short of an 'oligarchy' – a government of the few, a dictatorship. But, for the purposes of this article, I prefer to err on the side of the democrats and assume that there can really be a true and sincere majority government.

Government means the right to make the law and to impose it on everyone by force: without a police force there is no government.

Now, can a society live and progress peacefully for the greater good of all, can it gradually adapt to ever-changing circumstances if the majority has the right and the means to impose its will by force on the recalcitrant minorities?

The majority is, by definition, backward, conservative, enemy of the new, sluggish in thought and deed and at the same time impulsive, immoderate, suggestible, facile in its enthusiasms and irrational fears. Every new idea stems from one or a few individuals, is accepted, if viable, by a more or less sizeable minority and wins over the majority, if ever, only after it has been superseded by new ideas and new needs and has already become outdated and rather an obstacle, rather than a spur to progress.

But do we, then, want a minority government?

Certainly not. If it is unjust and harmful for a majority to oppress minorities and obstruct progress, it is even more unjust and harmful for a minority to oppress the whole population or impose its own ideas by force which even if they are good ones would excite repugnance and opposition because of the very fact of being imposed.

And then, one must not forget that there are all kinds of different minorities. There are minorities of egoists and villains as there are fanatics who believe themselves to be possessed of absolute truth and, in perfectly good faith, seek to impose on others what they hold to be the only way to salvation, even if it is simple silliness. There are minorities of reactionaries who seek to turn back the clock and are divided as to the paths and limits of reaction. And there are revolutionary minorities, also divided on the means and ends of revolution and on the direction that social progress should take.

Which minority should take over?

This is a matter of brute force and capacity for intrigue, and the odds that success would fall to the most sincere and most devoted to the general good are not favourable. To conquer power one needs qualities that are not exactly those that are needed to ensure that justice and well-being will triumph in the world.

But I shall here continue to give others the benefit of the doubt and assume that a minority came to power which, among those who aspire to government, I considered the best for its ideas and proposals. I want to assume that the socialists came to power and would add, also the anarchists, if I am not prevented by a contradiction in terms.

This would be the worst of all?

Yes, to win power, whether legally or illegally, one needs to have left by the roadside a large part of one's ideological baggage and to have got rid of all one's moral scruples. And then, once in power, the big problem is how to stay there. One needs to create a joint interest in the new state of affairs and attach to those in government a new privileged class, and suppressing any kind of opposition by all possible means. Perhaps in the national interest, but always with freedom-destructive results.

An established government, founded on the passive consensus of the majority and strong in numbers, in tradition and in the sentiment – sometimes sincere – of being in the right, can leave some space to

liberty, at least so long as the privileged classes do not feel threatened. A new government, which relies for support only on an often slender minority, is obliged through necessity to be tyrannical.

One need only think what the socialists and communists did when they came to power, either betraying their principles and comrades or by flying colours in the name of socialism and communism.

This is why we are neither for a majority nor for a minority government; neither for democracy nor for dictatorship.

We are for the abolition of the gendarme. We are for the freedom of all and for free agreement, which will be there for all when no one has the means to force others, and all are involved in the good running of society. We are for anarchy.

*May 1926*

### *Democracy and Anarchy*

The rampant dictatorial governments in Italy, Spain and Russia, which arouse such envy and longing among the more reactionary and timid parties across the world, are supplying dispossessed 'democracy' with a sort of new virginity. Thus we see the creatures of the old regimes, well-accustomed to the wicked art of politics, responsible for repression and massacres of working people, re-emerging – where they do not lack the courage – and presenting themselves as men of progress, seeking to capture the near future in the name of liberation. And, given the situation, they could even succeed.

There is something to be said for the criticisms made of democracy by dictatorial regimes, and the way they expose the vices and lies of democracy. And I remember that anarchist, Hermann Sandomirski, a Bolshevik fellow-traveller with whom we had bittersweet contact at the time of the Geneva conference, and who is now trying to couple Lenin with Bakunin, no less; I say I remember Sandomirski who in order to defend the Russian regime dragged out his Kropotkin to demonstrate that democracy is not the best imaginable form of social structure. His method of reasoning, as a Russian, put me in mind –

and I think I told him so – of the reasoning made by some of his compatriots when, in response to the indignation of the civilised world at the Tsar's stripping, flogging and hanging of women, they argued that if men and women were to have equal rights they should also accept equal responsibilities. Those supporters of prison and the scaffold remembered the rights of women only when they could serve as a pretext for new outrages! Thus dictatorships oppose democratic governments only when they discover that there is a form of government which leaves even greater room for despotism and tyranny for those who manage to seize power.

For me there is no doubt that the worst of democracies is always preferable, if only from the educational point of view, than the best of dictatorships. Of course democracy, so-called government of the people, is a lie; but the lie always slightly binds the liar and limits the extent of his arbitrary power. Of course the 'sovereign people' is a clown of a sovereign, a slave with a papier-maché crown and sceptre. But to believe oneself free, even when one is not, is always better than to know oneself to be a slave, and to accept slavery as something just and inevitable.

Democracy is a lie, it is oppression and is in reality, oligarchy; that is, government by the few to the advantage of a privileged class. But we can still fight it in the name of freedom and equality, unlike those who have replaced it or want to replace it with something worse.

We are not democrats for, among other reasons, democracy sooner or later leads to war and dictatorship. Just as we are not supporters of dictatorships, among other things, because dictatorship arouses a desire for democracy, provokes a return to democracy, and thus tends to perpetuate a vicious circle in which human society oscillates between open and brutal tyranny and a false and lying freedom.

So, we declare war on dictatorship and war on democracy.

But what do we put in their place?

Not all democrats are like those described above – hypocrites who are more or less aware that in the name of the people they wish to dominate the people and exploit and oppress them.

There are many, especially among the young republicans, who have a serious belief in democracy and see it as the means of obtaining full and complete freedom of development for all. These are the young

people we should like to disabuse, persuade not to mistake an abstraction, 'the people', for the living reality, which is men and women with all their different needs, passions and often contradictory aspirations.

It is not the intention here to repeat our critique of the parliamentary system and all the means thought up to have deputies who really do represent the will of the people; a critique which, after fifty years of anarchist propaganda is at last accepted and even repeated by those writers who most affect to despise our ideas (e.g. *Political Science* by Senator Gaetano Mosca).

We will limit ourselves to inviting our young friends to use greater precision of language, in the conviction that once the phrases are dissected they themselves will see how vacuous they are.

'Government of the people' no, because this presupposes what could never happen – complete unanimity of will of all the individuals that make up the people.

It would be closer to the truth to say, 'government of the majority of the people.' This implies a minority that must either rebel or submit to the will of others.

But it is never the case that the representatives of the majority of the people are all of the same mind on all questions; it is therefore necessary to have recourse again to the majority system and thus we will get closer still to the truth with: 'government of the majority of the elected by the majority of the electors.'

Which is already beginning to bear a strong resemblance to minority government.

And if one then takes into account the way in which elections are held, how the political parties and parliamentary groupings are formed and how laws are drawn up and voted and applied, it is easy to understand what has already been proved by universal historical experience: even in the most democratic of democracies it is always a small minority that rules and imposes its will and interests by force.

Therefore, those who really want 'government of the people' in the sense that each can assert his or her own will, ideas and needs, must ensure that no-one, majority or minority, can rule over others; in other words, they must abolish government, meaning any coercive organisation, and replace it with the free organisation of those with common interests and aims.

This would be very simple if every group and individual could live in isolation and on their own, in their own way, supporting themselves independently of the rest, supplying their own material and moral needs.

But this is not possible, and if it were, it would not be desirable because it would mean the decline of humanity into barbarism and savagery.

If they are determined to defend their own autonomy, their own liberty, every individual or group must therefore understand the ties of solidarity that bind them to the rest of humanity, and possess a fairly developed sense of sympathy and love for their fellows, so as to know how voluntarily to make those sacrifices essential to life in a society that brings the greatest possible benefits on every given occasion.

But above all it must be made impossible for some to impose themselves on, and sponge off, the vast majority by material force.

Let us abolish the gendarme, the man armed in the service of the despot, and in one way or another we shall reach free agreement, because without such agreement, free or forced, it is not possible to live.

But even free agreement will always benefit most those who are intellectually and technically prepared. We therefore recommend to our friends and those who truly wish the good of all, to study the most urgent problems, those that will require a practical solution the very day that the people shake off the yoke that oppresses them.

*March 1924*



## *Anarchism and Reforms*

A brief review of our first issue in the Naples-based Communist periodical *Prometeo* deals mainly with an article by Merlino\* and the reviewer, reflects on the basic incomprehension of those who claim to know all and are never wrong. He says, 'Although the definition may seem strange, there does undoubtedly exist a category of reformist anarchist'.

Clearly *Prometeo* believes it has made a discovery.

Despite the unpleasantness of the word, which has been abused and discredited by the politicians, anarchism has always and could never be other than reformist. We prefer to use the word *reformer* to avoid any possible confusion with those who are officially classed as 'reformist' and who strive for small and often illusory improvements in order to make the regime more palatable, thereby helping to reinforce it; or those who, in good faith, seek to eliminate social ills while recognising and respecting (in practice if not in theory) the very political and social institutions which have given rise to and which feed those ills.

Revolution, in the historical sense of the word, means the radical reform of institutions, swiftly executed through the violent insurrection of the people against entrenched power and privilege. And we are revolutionaries and insurrectionaries because we want not just to improve the institutions that now exist, but to destroy them utterly, abolish all and every form of power by man over man and all parasitism, of whatever kind, on human labour. Because, too, we want to do so as quickly as possible and because we are convinced that institutions born of violence maintain themselves by violence and will only fall if opposed by sufficient violence.

But revolution cannot happen on demand. Must we, then, remain passive spectators, awaiting the right moment to present itself.

And even after a successful insurrection, shall we be able to realise suddenly all our desires and by some miracle convert from the hell of government and capitalism to the heaven of libertarian communism – that is, complete liberty of the individual in solidarity of interest with others?

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\* Saverio Merlino, Italian anarchist and contemporary of Malatesta's. See footnote on page 18 – Editor.

These are illusions which take root in authoritarian soil; for authoritarians see the mass of the people as raw material to be manipulated into whatever mould they please through the wielding of power by decree, the gun and the handcuff.

But they are not anarchist illusions. We need the consent of the people and must therefore persuade by propaganda and by example. We must educate and seek to change the environment in such a way that education is accessible to an ever-increasing number of people.

Everything in history as in nature occurs gradually. When a dam bursts (that is, very rapidly, though always under the influence of time) it is either because the pressure of water has become too great for the dam to hold any longer or because of the gradual disintegration of the molecules of which the matter of the dam is made. In the same way revolutions break out under growing pressure of those forces which seek social change and the point is reached when the existing government can be overthrown and when, by processes of internal pressure, the forces of conservatism are progressively weakened.

We are reformers today in that we seek to create the most favourable conditions and the greatest possible number of responsible and aware people necessary in order to bring about a successful people's insurrection. We shall be reformers tomorrow, when the insurrection has triumphed and liberty been won, in that we shall seek, by all the means of which freedom disposes – by propaganda, example and resistance – including violent resistance against those who would destroy our freedom – to win over an ever greater number of people to our ideas.

But we shall never recognise – and this is where our 'reformism' differs from that kind of 'revolutionism' which ends submerged in the ballot-boxes of Mussolini or others of his ilk – we shall never recognise the [existing] institutions. We shall carry out all possible reforms in the spirit in which an army advances ever forwards by snatching the enemy-occupied territory in its path. And we shall always remain hostile to any government – whether monarchist like today's or republican or Bolshevik, like tomorrow's.

*March 1924*

## *Gradualism*

In the course of those polemics which arise among anarchists as to the best tactics for achieving, or approaching the creation of an anarchist society – and they are useful, and indeed necessary arguments when they reflect mutual tolerance and trust and avoid personal recriminations – it often happens that some reproach others with being *gradualists*, and the latter reject the term as if it were an insult.

Yet the fact is that, in the real sense of the word and given the logic of our principles, we are all gradualists. And all of us, in whatever different ways, have to be.

It is true that certain words, especially in politics, are continually changing their meaning and often assume one that is quite contrary to the original, logical and natural sense of the term.

Thus with the word *possibilist*. Is there anyone of sound mind who would seriously claim to want the impossible? Yet in France the term became the special label of a section of the Socialist Party who were followers of the former anarchist, Paul Brousse – and more willing than others to renounce socialism in pursuit of an impossible cooperation with bourgeois democracy.

Such too is the case with the word *opportunist*. Who actually wants to be an in-opportunist, and as such renounce what opportunities arise? Yet in France the term *opportunist* ended up by being applied specifically to followers of Gambetta\* and is still used in the pejorative sense to mean a person or party without ideas or principles and guided by base and short-term interests.

The same is true of the word *transformist*. Who would deny that everything in the world and in life evolves and changes? Who today is not a 'transformer'? Yet the word was used to describe the corrupt and short-term policies pioneered by the Italian Depretis.\*\*

It would be a good thing to put a brake on the habit of attributing to words a meaning that is different from their original sense and which gives rise to such confusion and misunderstanding. But how to

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\* Léon Gambetta (1838-1882), lawyer and French politician – Editor.

\*\* Agostino Depretis, Italian politician and prime minister at various times between 1876 and 1887 – Editor.

do it is another matter, particularly when the change in meaning is a deliberate tactic on the part of politicians to disguise their iniquitous purposes behind fine words.

Maybe it is true, therefore, that the word *gradualist*, as applied to anarchists, could end up in fact describing those who use the excuse of doing things gradually, as and when they become possible, and in the last analysis doing nothing at all – either that or moving, if they move at all, in a contrary direction to anarchy. If this is the case the term has to be rejected. Yet the real sense of gradualism remains the same: everything in nature and in life changes by degrees, and this is no less true of anarchy. It can only come about little by little.

As I was saying earlier, anarchism is of necessity gradualist.

Anarchy can be seen as absolute perfection, and it is right that this concept should remain in our minds, like a beacon to guide our steps. But quite obviously, such an ideal cannot be attained in one sudden leap from the hell of the present to the longed-for heaven of the future.

The authoritarian parties, by which I mean those who believe it is both moral and expedient to impose a given social order by force, may hope – vain hope! – that when they come to power they can, by using the laws, decrees ... and *gendarmes* subject everybody indefinitely to their will.

But such hopes and wishes are inconceivable for the anarchists, since anarchists seek to impose nothing but respect for liberty and count on the force of persuasion and perceived advantages of free cooperation for the realisation of their ideals.

This does not mean I believe (as, by way of polemic, one unscrupulous and ill-informed reformist paper had me believe) that to achieve anarchy we must wait till *everyone* becomes an anarchist. On the contrary, I believe – and this is why I'm a revolutionary – that under present conditions only a small minority, favoured by special circumstances, can manage to conceive what anarchy is. It would be wishful thinking to hope for a general conversion before a change actually took place in the kind of environment in which authoritarianism and privilege now flourish. It is precisely for this reason that I believe in the need to organise for the bringing about of anarchy, or at any rate that degree of anarchy which could become gradually feasible, as soon as a sufficient amount of freedom has been

won and a nucleus of anarchists somewhere exists that is both numerically strong enough and able to be self-sufficient and to spread its influence locally. I repeat, we need to organise ourselves to apply anarchy, or that degree of anarchy which becomes gradually possible.

Since we cannot convert everybody all at once and the necessities of life and the interests of propaganda do not allow us to remain in isolation from the rest of society, ways need to be found to put as much anarchy as possible into practice among people who are not anarchist or who are only sympathetic.

The problem, therefore, is not whether there is a need to proceed gradually but to seek the quickest and sincerest way that leads to the realisation of our ideals.

Throughout the world today the way is blocked by the privileges conquered, as a result of a long history of violence and mistakes, by certain classes which in addition to an intellectual and technical superiority which they enjoy as a result of these privileges, also dispose of armed forces recruited among the subject classes and use them when they think necessary without scruples or restraint.

That is why revolution is necessary. Revolution destroys the state of violence in which we live now, and creates the means for peaceful development towards ever greater freedom, greater justice and greater solidarity.

What should the anarchists' tactics be before, during and after the revolution?

No doubt censorship\* would forbid us to say what needs to be done before the revolution, in order to prepare for it and to carry it out. In any case, it is a subject badly handled in the presence of the enemy. It is, however, valid to point out that we need to remain true to ourselves, to spread the word and to educate as much as possible, and avoid all compromise with the enemy and to hold ourselves ready, at least in spirit, to seize all opportunities that might arise.

And during the revolution?

Let me begin by saying, we can't make the revolution on our own;

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\* Malatesta was writing in 1925 in Italy under the Mussolini dictatorship with all publications having to be passed by the fascist press censor – Editor.

nor would it be desirable to do so. Unless the whole of the country is behind it, together with all the interests, both actual and latent, of the people, the revolution will fail. And in the far from probable case that we achieved victory on our own, we should find ourselves in an absurdly untenable position: either because, the very fact of imposing our will, commanding and constraining, we would cease to be anarchists and destroy the revolution by our authoritarianism; or because, on the contrary, we retreated from the field, leaving others, with aims opposed to our own, to profit from our effort.

So we should act together with all progressive forces and vanguard parties that we arouse the interest of and attract the mass of the people into the movement, allowing the revolution – of which we would form a part, among others – to yield what it can.

This does not mean that we should renounce our specific aims. On the contrary, we would have to keep closely united and distinctly separate from the rest in fighting in favour of our programme: the abolition of political power and expropriation of the capitalists. And if, despite our efforts, new forms of power were to arise that seek to obstruct the people's initiative and impose their own will, we must have no part in them, never give them any recognition. We must endeavour to ensure that the people refuse them the means of governing – refuse them, that is, the soldiers and the revenue; see to it that those powers remain weak ... until the day comes when we can crush them once and for all.

Anyway, we must lay claim to and demand, with force if needs be, our full autonomy, and the right and the means to organise ourselves as we see fit and to put our own methods into practice.

And after the revolution – that is after the fall of those in power and the final triumph of the forces of insurrection?

This is where gradualism becomes particularly relevant.

We must pay attention to the practical problems of life: production, trade, communications, relations between anarchist groups and those who retain a belief in authority, between communist collectives and individualists, between the city and the countryside. We must make sure to use to our advantage the forces of nature and raw materials, and that we attend to industrial and agricultural distribution – according to the conditions prevailing at the time in the various

different countries – public education, childcare and care for the handicapped, health and medical services, protection both against common criminals and those, more insidious, who continue to attempt to suppress the freedom of others in the interests of individuals and parties, etc. The solution to each problem must not only be the most economically viable one but must respond to the imperatives of justice and liberty and be those most likely to keep open the way to future improvements. If necessary, justice, liberty and solidarity must take priority over economic benefit.

There is no need to think in terms of destroying everything in the belief that things will look after themselves. Our present civilisation is the result of thousands of years of development and has found some means of solving the problem of how millions and millions of people co-habit, often crowded together in restricted areas, and how their ever-increasing and ever more complex needs can be satisfied.

Such benefits are reduced – and for the great majority of people virtually denied – due to the fact that the development has been carried out by authoritarian means and in the interests of the ruling class. But, if the rules and privileges are removed, the real gains remain: the triumphs of humankind over the adverse forces of nature, the accumulated weight of experience of past generations, the sociable habits acquired throughout the long history of human cohabitation, the proven advantages of mutual aid. It would be foolish, and besides impossible, to give up all this.

In other words, we must fight authority and privilege, while taking advantage from the benefits that civilisation has conferred. We must not destroy anything that satisfies human need however badly – until we have something better to put in its place.

Intransigent as we remain to any form of capitalist imposition or exploitation, we must be tolerant of all those social concepts that prevail in the various human groupings, so long as they do not harm the freedom and equal rights of others. We should content ourselves with gradual progress while the moral level of the people grows, and with it, the material and intellectual means available to mankind; and while, clearly, doing all we can, through study, work and propaganda, to hasten development towards ever higher ideals.

I have here come up with more problems than solutions. But believe I have succinctly presented the criteria which must guide us in the search and application of the solutions which will certainly be many and vary according to the circumstances. But, so far as we are concerned, they must always be consistent with the fundamental principles of anarchism: no-one orders anyone else around, no-one exploits anyone else.

It is the task of all comrades to think, study and prepare – and to do so with all speed and thoroughly because the times are ‘dynamic’ and we must be ready for what might happen.

*October 1925*

### ***On 'Anarchist Revisionism'***

A comrade writes: ‘*After your act of contrition in No. 3 [see ‘Further Thoughts on Anarchism and the Labour Movement’, p. 31] it is your duty to tell us openly what the practical means are for carrying out the revolution. Only then can we discuss it.*’

Another asks me to ‘unbutton’; many others await for as it were a magic formula to resolve all the difficulties.

Strange mentality for anarchists!

Let me begin by saying that I have made no ‘act of contrition’. I could easily document that what I am saying now I have been saying for years; and if now I place more emphasis on it and others pay more attention to it than before. It is because the times are riper, in that experience has persuaded many, who formerly luxuriated in that blessed Kropotkinian optimism – which I used to call ‘atheist providentialism’ – to descend from the clouds and look at things as they are – so different from how we would like them to be.

But let us leave these recollections of personal interest behind us and come to the general and contemporary problem.

We, of this review, like our comrades from other anarchist publications, make no claim to have prepared some pre-packaged, infallible and universal solution to all problems that come to mind. But, recognising the need for a practical programme that can be adapted to the various circumstances that may arise as society



develops prior to, during and after the revolution, we have invited all comrades with ideas to present and proposals to make to take part in the drawing up of such a programme. Those, therefore, who feel that everything has so far gone well and that we should continue as we have been doing, need only defend their point of view, while those who, like us, think we need to prepare intellectually and materially for the practical task which awaits the anarchists, rather than wait passively upon our words should try to make their own contribution to the discussion where it interests them.

For my part, I believe there is no 'single solution' to social problems, but a thousand different and varying ones, just as the life of a society, in time and space, is diverse and changeable.

Basically all institutions, all projects, all utopias, would be equally good for resolving the problem, if that problem is defined as satisfying a people who all have the same desires and opinions and are all living in the same conditions. But such unanimity of thought and identity of conditions are impossible and, to tell the truth, would not even be desirable. And therefore in our present behaviour and in our projects for the future we must bear in mind that we do not live, nor shall we live tomorrow in a world populated exclusively by anarchists. On the contrary, we are and shall be for a long time a relatively small minority. To isolate ourselves is not, on the whole, possible, and even if it were it would be detrimental to the mission we have set ourselves. We must therefore find a way of living among non-anarchists in the most anarchic fashion possible and to the best possible advantage for our propaganda and the realisation of our ideas.

We want to make the revolution because we believe in the need for radical change and this, owing to the resistance of the powers-that-be, cannot be brought about peacefully. We believe in a need for change in the prevailing political and social order because we want to create a new social environment which would enable that moral and material elevation of the people that propaganda and education are helpless to create under present circumstances. But we cannot make the revolution exclusively 'ours' because we are a small minority, because we lack the consent of the mass of the people and because, even if we were able, we would not wish to contradict our own ends and impose our will by force.

To escape from the vicious circle we must therefore content ourselves with a revolution that is as much 'ours' as possible, favouring and taking part, both morally and materially, in every movement directed towards justice and liberty and, when the insurrection has triumphed, ensure that the pace of the revolution is maintained, advancing towards ever greater freedom and justice. This does not mean 'hanging on' to the other parties, but spurring them forward, so that the people are able to choose between a range of options. We could be abandoned and betrayed, as has happened on other occasions. But we have to run that risk if we do not want to remain ineffectual and renounce the opportunity for our ideas and actions to have an influence on the course of history.

Another observation. Many anarchists, including some among the best known, and I would add among the most eminent, who – whether because they really believe it or because they think it useful for propaganda – have spread about the idea that the quantity of goods produced and in the warehouses of the landowners and proprietors is so great that all that would be required would be to draw freely from those stocks. These would amply satisfy the needs and desires of all, and some time would pass before we were obliged to worry over problems of work and production. And naturally, they found people who were willing to accept the idea. Unfortunately, people tend to avoid exertion and danger. Like the democratic socialists who found widespread support by persuading people that all they needed to do to emancipate themselves was to slip a piece of paper in the ballot box and entrust their fate to others, so certain anarchists have won others over by telling them that one day of epic struggle – without effort, or with only the minimum of effort – will suffice to be able to enjoy a paradise of abundance and liberty.

Now precisely the opposite is true. The capitalists go into production to sell at a profit; they therefore cease production when they realise that they are getting diminishing or no returns. They generally find a greater advantage in keeping the market relatively short of goods, and this is proved by the fact that a bad harvest is enough for products to really run short or disappear altogether. So that it can be said that the worst harm done by the capitalist system is not so much the army of parasites it feeds as the obstacles it presents to the production of useful things. The ragged and the hungry are dazed when they pass stores

crammed with goods of all kinds. But try to distribute those riches among the needy and see how little there actually is for each person!

Socialism, in the widest sense of the term, the aspiration to socialism, involves a problem of distribution, in that it is the spectacle of the misery of the workers when confronted with the affluence and luxury of the parasites and the moral revolt against patent social injustice that has driven the victims and all generous people to seek and imagine better means of living together in society. But the bringing about of socialism -whether anarchist or authoritarian, mutualist or individualist -is predominantly a problem of production. If there are no goods there is no point finding a better means of distributing them and if people are reduced to quarrel over a crust of bread, feelings of love and solidarity run the great danger of giving way to a brutal struggle for survival.

Today, fortunately, the means of production abound. Engineering, chemistry, agriculture, etc., have increased a hundredfold the productive power of human labour. But it is necessary to work and to work usefully it is necessary to know: know how the work must be done and how labour can be economically organised.

If the anarchists want to act effectively among the various parties they must deepen their understanding of the field of expertise to which they feel most suited, and make a study of all the theoretical and practical problems of useful activity.

Another point. We no longer live at a time or in a country when a family could be content with a piece of land, a spade, a handful of seeds, a cow and a few hens. Today our needs have multiplied and become enormously complex. The unequal natural distribution of raw materials forces any agglomeration of men and women to have international relations. The very density of the human population makes it not only a miserable thing but utterly impossible to live a hermit's life - supposing there are many so inclined.

We need to import from all over the world; we want schools, railways, postal and telegraph services, theatres, public sanitation, books, newspapers, etc.

All this, the achievement of civilisation, may work well or badly; it works mainly for the benefit of the privileged classes. But it works and its benefits can, relatively easily, be extended to all, once the monopoly of wealth and power were to be abolished.

Do we want to destroy it?

Or are we in a position to organise it from the outset in a better way?

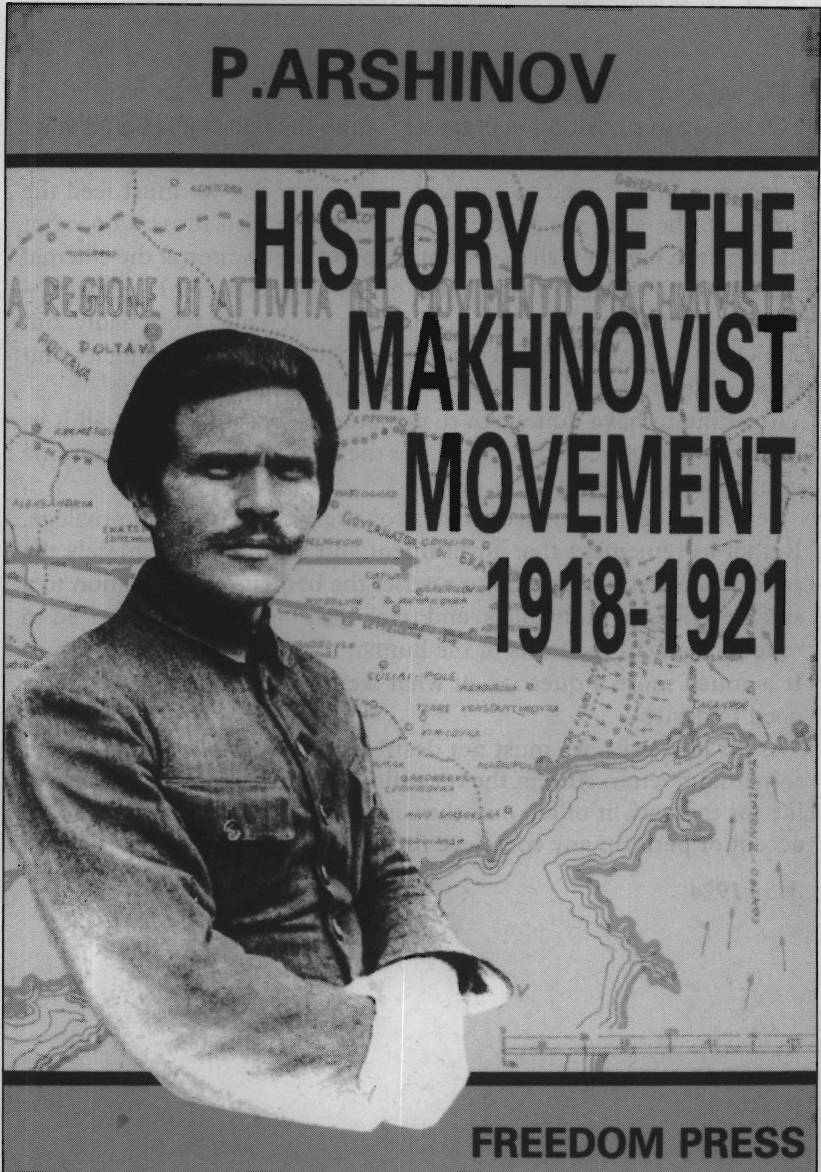
Especially at an economic level, social life does not permit of interruption. We need to eat every day; every day we must feed the children, the sick, the helpless; and there are also those who, after having been hard at it all day, want to spend the evening at the cinema. To supply all these unpostponable needs – forget about the cinema – there is a whole commercial organisation which may work badly, but somehow fulfills its task. This must clearly be used, depriving it as far as possible of its exploitative and profiteering nature.

It is time to have done with that rhetoric – because that is all it is, rhetoric – which seeks to summarise the whole anarchist programme in one word: 'Destroy!'

Yes, let us destroy, or seek to destroy every tyranny, every privilege. But let us remember that government and capitalism are merely the superstructures which tend to restrict the benefits of civilisation to a small number of individuals, and to abolish them there is no need to renounce any of the fruits of the human mind and of human labour. It is much more a question of what we need to keep than what we need to destroy.

As for ourselves, we must not destroy what we cannot replace with something better. And in the meantime we must work in all areas of life for the benefit of all, ourselves included – refusing, of course, to accept or perform any coercive function.

*May 1924*



Cover of the Freedom Press edition of *History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918-1921)* by P. Arshinov, 284 pages, £5.00

## V

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### *A Project of Anarchist Organisation*

I recently happened to come across a French pamphlet (in Italy today [1927], as is known, the non-fascist press cannot freely circulate), with the title 'Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Project)'.

This is a project for anarchist organisation published under the name of a 'Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad' and it seems to be directed particularly at Russian comrades. But it deals with questions of equal interest to all anarchists; and it is, clear, including the language in which it is written, that it seeks the support of comrades worldwide. In any case it is worth examining, for the Russians as for everyone, whether the proposal put forward is in keeping with anarchist principles and whether implementation would truly serve the cause of anarchism.

The intentions of the comrades are excellent. They rightly lament the fact that until now the anarchists have not had an influence on political and social events in proportion to the theoretical and practical value of their doctrines, nor to their numbers, courage and spirit of self-sacrifice – and believe that the main reason for this relative failure is the lack of a large, serious and active organisation.

And thus far I could more or less agree.

Organisation, which after all only means cooperation and solidarity in practice, is a natural condition, necessary to the running of society; and it is an unavoidable fact which involves everyone, whether in human society in general or in any grouping of people joined by a common aim.

As human beings cannot live in isolation, indeed could not really become human beings and satisfy their moral and material needs unless they were part of society and cooperated with their fellows, it is inevitable that those who lack the means, or a sufficiently developed awareness, to organise freely with those with whom they share common interests and sentiments, must submit to the organisations

set up by others, who generally form the ruling class or group and whose aim is to exploit the labour of others to their own advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small number of the privileged has always been the outcome of the inability of the greater number of individuals to agree and to organise with other workers on production and enjoyment of rights and benefits and for defence against those who seek to exploit and oppress them.

Anarchism emerged as a response to this state of affairs, its basic principle being free organisation, set up and run according to the free agreement of its members without any kind of authority; that is, without anyone having the right to impose their will on others. And it is therefore obvious that anarchists should seek to apply to their personal and political lives this same principle upon which, they believe, the whole of human society should be based.

Judging by certain polemics it would seem that there are anarchists who spurn any form of organisation; but in fact the many, too many, discussions on this subject, even when obscured by questions of language or poisoned by personal issues, are concerned with the means and not the actual principle of organisation. Thus it happens that when those comrades who sound the most hostile to organisation want to really do something they organise just like the rest of us and often more effectively. The problem, I repeat, is entirely one of means.

Therefore I can only view with sympathy the initiative that our Russian comrades have taken, convinced as I am that a more general, more *united*, more enduring organisation than any that have so far been set up by anarchists – even if it did not manage to do away with all the mistakes and weaknesses that are perhaps inevitable in a movement like ours – which struggles on in the midst of the incomprehension, indifference and even the hostility of the majority – would undoubtedly be an important element of strength and success, a powerful means of gaining support for our ideas.

I believe it is necessary above all and urgent for anarchists to come to terms with one another and organise as much and as well as possible in order to be able to influence the direction the mass of the people take in their struggle for change and emancipation.

Today the major force for social transformation is the labour movement (union movement) and on its direction will largely depend the course events take and the objectives of the next revolution.

Through the organisations set up for the defence of their interests the workers develop an awareness of the oppression they suffer and the antagonism that divides them from the bosses and as a result begin to aspire to a better life, become accustomed to collective struggle and solidarity and win those improvements that are possible within the capitalist and state regime. Then, when the conflict goes beyond compromise, revolution or reaction follows. The anarchists must recognise the usefulness and importance of the union movement; they must support its development and make it one of the levers in their action, doing all they can to ensure that, by cooperating with other forces for progress, it will open the way to a social revolution that brings to an end the class system, and to complete freedom, equality, peace and solidarity for everybody.

But it would be a great and a fatal mistake to believe, as many do, that the labour movement can and should, of its own volition, and by its very nature, lead to such a revolution. On the contrary, all movements based on material and immediate interests (and a big labour movement can do nothing else) if they lack the stimulus, the drive, the concerted effort of people of ideas, tend inevitably to adapt to circumstances, they foster a spirit of conservatism and fear of change in those who manage to obtain better working conditions, and often end up creating new and privileged classes, and serving to uphold and consolidate the system we would seek to destroy.

Hence there is an impelling need for specifically anarchist organisations which, both from within and outside the unions, struggle for the achievement of anarchism and seek to sterilise all the germs of degeneration and reaction.

But it is obvious that in order to achieve their ends, anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, remain in harmony with the principles of anarchism; that is, they must know how to blend the free action of individuals with the necessity and the joy of cooperation which serve to develop the awareness and initiative of their members and a means of education for the environment in which they operate and of a moral and material preparation for the future we desire.

Does the project under discussion satisfy these demands?

It seems to me that it does not. Instead of arousing in anarchists a greater desire for organisation, it seems deliberately designed to



reinforce the prejudice of those comrades who believe that to organise means to submit to leaders and belong to an authoritarian, centralising body that suffocates any attempt at free initiative. And in fact it contains precisely those proposals that some, in the face of evident truths and despite our protests, insist on attributing to all anarchists who are described as organisers. Let us examine the Project.

First of all, it seems to me a mistake – and in any case impossible to realise – to believe that all anarchists can be grouped together in one ‘General Union’ – that is, in the words of the Project, in a *single*, active revolutionary body.

We anarchists can all say that we are of the same party, if by the word ‘party’ we mean all who are *on the same side*, that is, who share the same general aspirations and who, in one way or another, struggle for the same ends against common adversaries and enemies. But this does not mean it is possible – or even desirable – for all of us to be gathered into one specific association. There are too many differences of environment and conditions of struggle; too many possible ways of action to choose among, and also too many differences of temperament and personal incompatibilities for a *General Union*, if taken seriously, not to become, instead of a means for coordinating and reviewing the efforts of all, an obstacle to individual activity and perhaps also a cause of more bitter internal strife.

As an example, how could one organise in the same way and with the same group a public association set up to make propaganda and agitation, publicly and a secret society restricted by the political conditions of the country in which it operates to conceal from the enemy its plans, methods and members? How could the *educationalists*, who believe that propaganda and example suffice for the gradual transformation of individuals and thus of society, adopt the same tactics as the *revolutionaries*, who are convinced of the need to destroy by violence a status quo that is maintained by violence and to create, in the face of the violence of the oppressors, the necessary conditions for the free dissemination of propaganda and the practical application of the conquered ideals? And how to keep together some people who, for particular reasons, do not get on with and respect one another and could never be equally good and useful militants for anarchism?

Besides, even the authors of the Project (*Plateforme*) declare as 'inept' any idea of creating an organisation which gathers together the representatives of the different tendencies in anarchism. Such an organisation, they say, 'incorporating heterogeneous elements, both on a theoretical and practical level, would be no more than a mechanical collection (*assemblage*) of individuals who conceive all questions concerning the anarchist movement from a different point of view and would inevitably break up as soon as they were put to the test of events and real life.'

That's fine. But then, if they recognise the existence of different tendencies they will surely have to leave them the right to organise in their own fashion and work for anarchy in the way that seems best to them. Or will they claim the right to expel, to *excommunicate* from anarchism all those who do not accept their programme? Certainly they say they 'want to assemble in a single organisation' all the *sound elements* of the libertarian movement; and naturally they will tend to judge as *sound* only those who think as they do. But what will they do with the elements that are *not sound*?

Of course, among those who describe themselves as anarchists there are, as in any human groupings, elements of varying worth; and what is worse, there are some who spread ideas in the name of anarchism which have very little to do with anarchism. But how to avoid the problem? *Anarchist truth* cannot and must not become the monopoly of one individual or committee; nor can it depend on the decisions of real or fictitious majorities. All that is necessary – and sufficient – is for everyone to have and to exercise the widest freedom of criticism and for each one of us to maintain their own ideas and choose for themselves their own comrades. In the last resort the facts will decide who was right.

Let us therefore put aside the idea of bringing together *all* anarchists into a single organisation and look at this *General Union* which the Russians propose to us for what it really is – namely the Union of a particular fraction of anarchists; and let us see whether the organisational method proposed conforms with anarchist methods and principles and if it could thereby help to bring about the triumph of anarchism.

Once again, it seems to me that it cannot.

I am not doubting the sincerity of the anarchist proposals of those

Russian comrades. They want to bring about anarchist communism and are seeking the means of doing so as quickly as possible. But it is not enough to want something; one also has to adopt suitable means; to get to a certain place one must take the right path or end up somewhere else. Their organisation, being typically authoritarian, far from helping to bring about the victory of anarchist communism, to which they aspire, could only falsify the anarchist spirit and lead to consequences that go against their intentions.

In fact, their *General Union* appears to consist of so many partial organisations with *secretariats* which *ideologically* direct the political and technical work; and to coordinate the activities of all the member organisations there is a *Union Executive Committee* whose task is to carry out the decisions of the Union and to oversee the 'ideological and organisational conduct of the organisations in conformity with the ideology and general strategy of the Union.'

Is this anarchist? This, in my view, is a government and a church. True, there are no police or bayonets, no faithful flock to accept the dictated *ideology*; but this only means that their government would be an impotent and impossible government and their church a nursery for heresies and schisms. The spirit, the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist.

Listen if this is not true.

'The executive organ of the general libertarian movement – the anarchist Union – will introduce into its ranks the principle of collective responsibility; the whole Union will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member; and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.'

And following this, which is the absolute negation of any individual independence and freedom of initiative and action, the proponents, remembering that they are anarchists, call themselves federalists and thunder against centralisation, 'the inevitable results of which', they say, 'are the enslavement and mechanisation of the life of society and of the parties.'

But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means

to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?

Moreover, the authors of the Project say that it is the 'Union' which proposes and disposes. But when they refer to the wishes of the Union do they perhaps also refer to the wishes of all the members? If so, for the Union to function it would need everyone always to have the same opinion on all questions. So if it is normal that everyone should be in agreement on the general and fundamental principles, because otherwise they would not be and remain united, it cannot be assumed that thinking beings will all and always be of the same opinion on what needs to be done in the different circumstance and on the choice of persons to whom to entrust executive and directional responsibilities.

In reality – as it emerges from the text of the Project itself – the will of the Union can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the *Executive Committee* and decide on all the important questions. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups, and these representatives would decide on what to do, as ever by a majority of votes. So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by the majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority.

Furthermore it should be pointed out that, given the conditions in which anarchists live and struggle, their congresses are even less truly representative than the bourgeois parliaments. And their control over the executive bodies, if these have authoritarian powers, is rarely opportune and effective. In practice anarchist congresses are attended by whoever wishes and can, whoever has enough money and who has not been prevented by police measures. There are as many present who represent only themselves or a small number of friends as there are those truly representing the opinions and desires of a large

collectivity. And unless precautions are taken against possible traitors and spies – indeed, because of the need for those very precautions – it is impossible to make a serious check on the representatives and the value of their mandate.

In any case this all comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism.

It is well known that anarchists do not accept majority government (*democracy*), any more than they accept government by the few (*aristocracy, oligarchy*, or dictatorship by one class or party) nor that of one individual (*autocracy, monarchy* or personal dictatorship).

Thousands of times anarchists have criticised so-called majority government, which anyway in practise always leads to domination by a small minority.

Do we need to repeat all this yet again for our Russian comrades?

Certainly anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need to adapt to the wishes of the many. And usually, in the interests of living peacefully together and under conditions of equality, it is necessary for everyone to be motivated by a spirit of concord, tolerance and compromise. But such adaptation on the one hand by one group must on the other be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm. This is an ideal which, perhaps, in daily life in general, is difficult to attain in entirety, but it is a fact that in every human grouping anarchy is that much nearer where agreement between majority and minority is free and spontaneous and exempt from any imposition that does not derive from the natural order of things.

So if anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern human society in general – in which individuals are nonetheless constrained to accept certain restrictions, since they cannot isolate themselves without renouncing the conditions of human life – and if they want everything to be done by the free agreement of all, how is it possible for them to adopt the idea of government by majority in their essentially free and voluntary associations and begin to declare that

anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?

It is understandable that non-anarchists would find Anarchy, defined as a free organisation without the rule of the majority over the minority, or vice versa, an unrealisable utopia, or one realisable only in a distant future; but it is inconceivable that anyone who professes to anarchist ideas and wants to make Anarchy, or at least seriously approach its realisation – today rather than tomorrow – should disown the basic principles of anarchism in the very act of proposing to fight for its victory.

In my view, an anarchist organisation must be founded on a very different basis from the one proposed by those Russian comrades.

Full autonomy, full independence and therefore full responsibility of individuals and groups; free accord between those who believe it useful to unite in cooperating for a common aim; moral duty to see through commitments undertaken and to do nothing that would contradict the accepted programme. It is on these bases that the practical structures, and the right tools to give life to the organisation should be built and designed. Then the groups, the federations of groups, the federations of federations, the meetings, the congresses, the correspondence committees and so forth. But all this must be done freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed, and with the sole view of giving greater effect to efforts which, in isolation, would be either impossible or ineffective.

Thus congresses of an anarchist organisation, though suffering as representative bodies from all the above-mentioned imperfections, are free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal relationships among the most active comrades, to coordinate and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means of taking action, to acquaint all on the situation in the various regions and the action most urgently needed in each; to formulate the various opinions current among the anarchists and draw up some kind of statistics from them – and their decisions are not obligatory rules but suggestions, recommendations, proposals to be submitted to all involved, and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them, and for as long as

they accept them.

The administrative bodies which they nominate – Correspondence Commission, etc. – have no executive powers, have no directive powers, unless on behalf of those who ask for and approve such initiatives, and have no authority to impose their own views – which they can certainly maintain and propagate as groups of comrades, but cannot present as the official opinion of the organisation. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals which groups and individuals communicate to them; and they serve – for those who require such a service – to facilitate relations between the groups and cooperation between those who agree on the various initiatives. Whoever wants to is free to correspond with whomsoever he wishes, or to use the services of other committees nominated by special groups.

In an anarchist organisation the individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others. In any case a given organisation lasts for as long as the reasons for union remain greater than the reasons for dissent. When they are no longer so, then the organisation is dissolved and makes way for other, more homogeneous groups.

Clearly, the duration, the permanence of an organisation depends on how successful it has been in the long struggle we must wage, and it is natural that any institution instinctively seeks to last indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the consequence of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continual changes of circumstances. When it is no longer able to accomplish a useful task it is better that it should die.

Those Russian comrades will perhaps find that an organisation like the one I propose and similar to the ones that have existed, more or less satisfactorily at various times, is not very efficient.

I understand. Those comrades are obsessed with the success of the Bolsheviks in their country and, like the Bolsheviks, would like to gather the anarchists together in a sort of disciplined army which, under the ideological and practical direction of a few leaders, would march solidly to the attack of the existing regimes, and after having

won a material victory would direct the constitution of a new society. And perhaps it is true that under such a system, were it possible that anarchists would involve themselves in it, and if the leaders were men of imagination, our material effectiveness would be greater. But with what results? Would what happened to socialism and communism in Russia not happen to anarchism?

Those comrades are anxious for success as we are too. But to live and to succeed we don't have to repudiate the reasons for living and alter the character of the victory to come.

We want to fight and win, but as anarchists – for Anarchy.

*Il Risveglio (Geneva), October 1927*

### ***About the 'Platform'***

***Letter to Errico Malatesta from Nestor Makhno\*  
and Malatesta's reply***

Dear Comrade Malatesta,

I have read your response to the project for an 'Organisational Platform of a General Union of Anarchists', a project published by the group of Russian anarchists abroad.

My impression is that either you have misunderstood the project for the 'Platform' or your refusal to recognise collective responsibility in revolutionary action and the directional function that the anarchist forces must take up, stems from a deep conviction about anarchism that leads you to disregard that principle of responsibility.

Yet, it is a fundamental principle, which guides each one of us in our way of understanding the anarchist idea, in our determination that it should penetrate to the masses, in its spirit of sacrifice. It is thanks to this that a man can choose the revolutionary way and ignore others. Without it no revolutionary could have the necessary strength or will or intelligence to bear the spectacle of social misery, and even

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\* Nestor Makhno (1889-1934), Russian revolutionary organiser of the guerrilla army in the Ukraine (1918-1921) which defeated the White Army but lost to Trotsky's Red Army. He managed to escape and spent the rest of his life in Paris. He was one of the authors of the 'Platform'. Freedom Press are the publishers of P. Arshinov's *History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918-1921)*, 284 pages, £5.00 (post free inland) – Editor.



less fight against it. It is through the inspiration of collective responsibility that the revolutionaries of all epochs and all schools have united their forces; it is upon this that they based their hope that their partial revolts – revolts which opened the path for the oppressed – were not in vain, that the exploited would understand their aspirations, would extract from them the applications suitable for the time and would use them to find new paths toward their emancipation.

You yourself, dear Malatesta, recognise the individual responsibility of the anarchist revolutionary. And what is more, you have lent your support to it throughout your life as a militant. At least that is how I have understood your writings on anarchism. But you deny the necessity and usefulness of collective responsibility as regards the tendencies and actions of the anarchist movement as a whole. Collective responsibility alarms you; so you reject it.

For myself, who has acquired the habit of fully facing up to the realities of our movement, your denial of collective responsibility strikes me not only as without basis but dangerous for the social revolution, in which you would do well to take account of experience when it comes to fighting a decisive battle against all our enemies at once. Now my experience of the revolutionary battles of the past leads me to believe that no matter what the order of revolutionary events may be, one needs to give out serious directives, both ideological and tactical. This means that only a collective spirit, sound and devoted to anarchism, could express the requirements of the moment, through a collectively responsible will. None of us has the right to dodge that element of responsibility. On the contrary, if it has been until now overlooked among the ranks of the anarchists, it needs now to become, for us, communist anarchists, an article of our theoretical and practical programme.

Only the collective spirit of its militants and their collective responsibility will allow modern anarchism to eliminate from its circles the idea, historically false, that anarchism cannot be a guide – either ideologically or in practice – for the mass of workers in a revolutionary period and therefore could not have overall responsibility.

I will not, in this letter, dwell on the other parts of your article against the ‘Platform’ project, such as the part where you see ‘a church and

an authority without police'. I will express only my surprise to see you use such an argument in the course of your criticism. I have given much thought to it and cannot accept your opinion.

No, you are not right. And because I am not in agreement with your confutation, using arguments that are too facile, I believe I am entitled to ask you:

1. Should anarchism take some responsibility in the struggle of the workers against their oppressors, capitalism, and its servant the State? If not, can you say why? If yes, must the anarchists work towards allowing their movement to exert influence on the same basis as the existing social order?

2. Can anarchism, in the state of disorganisation in which it finds itself at the moment, exert any influence, ideological and practical, on social affairs and the struggle of the working class?

3. What are the means that anarchism should adopt outside the revolution and what are the means of which it can dispose to prove and affirm its constructive concepts?

4. Does anarchism need its own permanent organisations, closely tied among themselves by unity of goal and action to attain its ends?

5. What do the anarchists mean by *institutions to be established* with a view to guaranteeing the free development of society?

6. Can anarchism, in the communist society it conceives, do without social institutions? If yes, by what means? If no, which should it recognise and use and with what names bring them into being? Should the anarchists take on a leading function, therefore one of responsibility, or should they limit themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries?

Your reply, dear Malatesta, would be of great importance to me for two reasons. It would allow me better to understand your way of seeing things as regards the questions of organising the anarchist forces and the movement in general. And – let us be frank – your opinion is immediately accepted by most anarchists and sympathisers without any discussion, as that of an experienced militant who has remained all his life firmly faithful to his libertarian ideal. It therefore depends to a certain extent on your attitude whether a full study of the urgent questions which this epoch poses to our movement will be undertaken, and therefore whether its development will be slowed down or take a new leap forward. By remaining in the stagnation of

the past and present our movement will gain nothing. On the contrary, it is vital that in view of the events that loom before us it should have every chance to carry out its functions.

I set great store by your reply.

1928

With revolutionary greetings

Nestor Makhno

### ***Malatesta's Reply to Nestor Makhno***

Dear Comrade

I have finally seen the letter you sent me more than a year ago, about my criticism of the Project for organising a General Union of anarchists, published by a group of Russian anarchists abroad and known in our movement by the name of 'Platform'.

Knowing my situation as you do, you will certainly have understood why I did not reply.

I cannot take part as I would like in discussion of the questions which interest us most, because censorship prevents me from receiving either the publications that are considered subversive or the letters which deal with political and social topics, and only after long intervals and by fortunate chance do I hear the dying echo of what the comrades say and do. Thus, I knew that the 'Platform' and my criticism of it had been widely discussed, but I knew little or nothing about what had been said; and your letter is the first written document on the subject that I have managed to see.

If we could correspond freely, I would ask you, before entering into the discussion, to clarify your views which, perhaps owing to an imperfect translation of the Russian into French, seem to me to be in part somewhat obscure. But things being as they are, I will reply to what I have understood, and hope that I shall then be able to see your response.

You are surprised that I do not accept the principle of collective responsibility, which you believe to be a fundamental principle that guides, and must guide the revolutionaries of the past, present and future.

For my part, I wonder what that notion of collective responsibility can ever mean from the lips of an anarchist.

I know that the military are in the habit of decimating corps of rebellious soldiers or soldiers who have behaved badly in the face of the enemy by shooting at them indiscriminately. I know that the army chiefs have no scruples about destroying villages or cities and massacring an entire population, including children, because someone attempted to put up a resistance to invasion. I know that throughout the ages governments have in various ways threatened with and applied the system of collective responsibility to put a brake on the rebels, demand taxes, etc. And I understand that this could be an effective means of intimidation and oppression.

But how can people who fight for liberty and justice talk of collective responsibility when they can only be concerned with moral responsibility, whether or not material sanctions follow?!!!

If, for example, in a conflict with an armed enemy force the man beside me acts as a coward, he may do harm to me and to everyone, but the shame can only be his for lacking the courage to sustain the role he took upon himself. If in a conspiracy a co-conspirator betrays and sends his companions to prison, are the betrayed the ones responsible for the betrayal?

The 'Platform' said: *'The whole Union is responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of every member and each member will be responsible for the revolutionary and political activity of the Union.'*

Can this be reconciled with the principles of autonomy and free initiative which the anarchists profess? I answered then: 'If the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its individual members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they see fit? How can it be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Thus, the Union and through it the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual members and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything before having obtained the go-ahead, permission from the committee. And then, can an individual accept responsibility for the action of a collectivity before knowing what the latter will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves?'

Certainly I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and cooperates with others for a common purpose must feel the need

to coordinate his actions with those of his fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others and, thus, the common cause; and respect the agreements that have been made – except when wishing sincerely to leave the association when emerging differences of opinion or changed circumstances or conflict over preferred methods make cooperation impossible or inappropriate. Just as I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.

Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among the members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts, in my view, to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached.

The really important question that you raise in your letter concerns the function (*le rôle*) of the anarchists in the social movement and the way they mean to carry it out. This is a matter of basics, of the *raison d'être* of anarchism and one needs to be quite clear as to what one means.

You ask if the anarchists should (in the revolutionary movement and communistic organisation of society) assume a directional and therefore responsible role, or limit themselves to being irresponsible auxiliaries.

Your question leaves me perplexed, because it lacks precision. It is possible to direct through advice and example, leaving the people – provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves – to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods.

In which way would you want to direct?

We are anarchists because we believe that government (any government) is an evil, and that it is not possible to gain liberty, solidarity and justice without liberty. We cannot therefore aspire to government and we must do everything possible to prevent others – classes, parties or individuals – from taking power and becoming governments.

The responsibility of the leaders, a notion by which it seems to me that you want to guarantee that the public are protected from their abuses and errors, means nothing to me. Those in power are not truly responsible except when faced with a revolution, and we cannot make the revolution every day, and generally it is only made after the government has already done all the evil it can.

You will understand that I am far from thinking that the anarchists should be satisfied with being the simple auxiliaries of other revolutionaries who, not being anarchists, naturally aspire to become the government.

On the contrary, I believe that we, anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideals. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will only be useful if won in that way.

Today we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and coordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system; and we must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised, and perhaps unorganisable, masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in short, prepare, and prepare ourselves, morally and materially, for the revolutionary act which will open the way to the future.

And then, in the revolution, we must take an energetic part (if possible before and more effectively than the others) in the essential material struggle and drive it to the utmost limit in destroying all the repressive forces of the State. We must encourage the workers to take possession of the means of production (land, mines, factories and workshops, means of transport, etc) and of stocks of manufactured goods; to organise immediately, on their own, an equitable distribution of consumer goods, and at the same time supply products for trade between communes and regions and for the continuation and intensification of production and all services useful to the public.

We must, in all ways possible and according to local circumstances and opportunities, promote action by the workers' associations, the cooperatives, the voluntary groups – to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian powers, new governments, opposing them with violence if necessary, but above all rendering them useless. And where we do not find sufficient consensus among the people and cannot prevent the re-establishment of the State with its authoritarian institutions and its coercive bodies, we must refuse to take part or to recognise it, rebelling against its impositions and demanding full autonomy for ourselves and for all the dissident minorities. In other words, we must remain in an actual or potential state of rebellion and, unable to win in the present, must at least prepare for the future.

Is this what you too mean by the part the anarchists should take in the preparation and carrying out of the revolution?

From what I know of you and your work I am inclined to believe that you do.

But, when I see that in the Union that you support there is an Executive Committee to give ideological and organisational direction to the association I am assailed by the doubt that you would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme of the revolution.

If this is so we are poles apart.

Your organisation, or your managerial organs, may be composed of anarchists but they would only become nothing other than a government. Believing, in completely good faith, that they are necessary to the triumph of the revolution, they would, as a priority, make sure that they were well placed enough and strong enough to impose their will. They would therefore create armed corps for material defence and a bureaucracy for carrying out their commands and in the process they would paralyse the popular movement and kill the revolution.

That is what, I believe, has happened to the Bolsheviks.

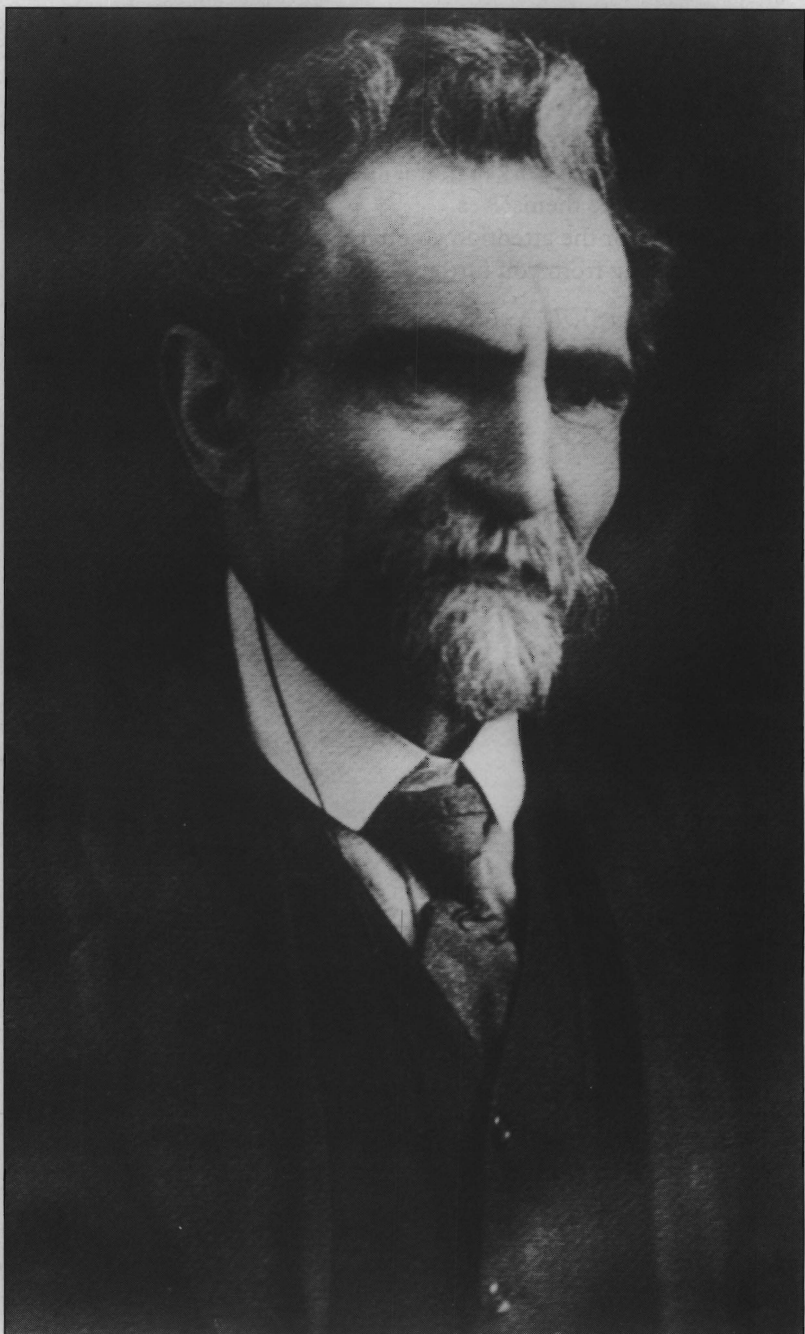
There it is. I believe that the important thing is not the victory of our plans, our projects, our utopias, which in any case need the confirmation of experience and can be modified by experience, developed and adapted to the real moral and material conditions of the age and place. What matters most is that the people, men and

women lose the sheeplike instincts and habits which thousands of years of slavery have instilled in them, and learn to think and act freely. And it is to this great work of moral liberation that the anarchists must specially dedicate themselves.

I thank you for the attention you have given to my letter and, in the hope of hearing from you further, send you my cordial greetings.

*Risveglio (Geneva), December 1929*





# VI

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## *Some Thoughts on the Post-Revolutionary Property System*

Our opponents, the beneficiaries and defenders of the current social system, are in the habit of justifying the right to private property by stating that property is the condition and guarantee of liberty.

And we agree with them. Do we not say repeatedly that poverty is slavery?

But then, why do we oppose them?

The reason is clear: in reality the property that they defend is capitalist property, namely property that allows its owners to live from the work of others and which therefore depends on the existence of a class of the disinherited and dispossessed, forced to sell their labour to the property owners for a wage below its real value.

Indeed, in all countries of the modern world the majority of the population must live by seeking work from those with a monopoly of the land and means of labour and when they obtain it they receive a wage that is always below its value and often barely sufficient to ward off starvation. This means that workers are subjected to a kind of slavery which, though it may vary in degree of harshness, always means social inferiority, material penury and moral degradation, and is the primary cause of all the ills that beset today's social order.

To bring freedom to all, to allow everyone, in full freedom, to gain the maximum degree of moral and material development, and enjoy all the benefits that nature and labour can bestow, everyone must have their own property; everyone, that is, must have the right to that piece of land and those raw materials and tools and equipment that are needed to work and produce without exploitation and oppression. And since we cannot expect the propertied classes to spontaneously surrender the privileges they have usurped, the workers will have to expropriate that property and it must become the property of all.

This has to be the task of the next revolution and to it we must lend

our best efforts. But since social life cannot allow for interruption, must at the same time give consideration to the practical means using the assets we would by then hold in common, and the ways of ensuring that all members of society enjoy equal rights.

The property system will therefore be the problem that arises at the very same moment that we proceed with expropriation.

Naturally we cannot claim or hope to pass at one fell swoop from the current system to other perfect and definitive systems. During the moment of revolution, when the first priority is to act quickly and to immediately fulfill the most urgent needs, everything possible will be done, depending on the will of those involved and the actual conditions which are determined and circumscribed by them. But it is essential that from the very beginning there is an idea of what needs to be done to propel things as far as possible towards that end.

Should property be individually or collectively owned? And should the collective owner of undivided assets be the local group, the operational group, the ideological affinity group, the family group – or shall it involve all the members of the whole nation and, beyond that, of all mankind?

What will the forms of production and exchange be? Will the victorious system be *communism* (producers' associations and free consumption for all) or *collectivism* (production in common and distribution of goods according to the labour of the individual) or *individualism* (to each the individual means of production and possession of the product of their own labour), or some other compound form which individual interests and social instincts, illuminated by experience, might suggest?

Probably all possible forms of ownership, use of the means of production and all forms of distribution will be experimented with simultaneously, in the same or other locations, and they will be merged together and adapted in various ways until practical experience identifies the best form or forms.

In the meantime, as I have already mentioned above, the need not to interrupt production and the impossibility of suspending consumption of basic necessities will ensure that little by little, as expropriation takes place, agreement will be reached on the way to continue running social life. Whatever is possible will be done, and so long as everything is done to prevent the establishment and

consolidation of new privileges there will be time to find better solutions.

But what is the solution that seems best to me and which is the one to aim for?

I call myself a communist because communism seems to me the ideal target for humanity, as people's love for one another grows and large-scale production frees them from fear of hunger, and thereby destroys the main obstacle to solidarity. But, really, more than the practical forms of economic organisation, which must necessarily be adapted to circumstance and will be under continual development, the important thing is the spirit which moves these organisations and the methods with which they are set up. What is important, in my opinion, is that they are guided by the spirit of justice and a desire for the good of all, and that they are always created freely and on a voluntary basis.

All forms of organisation, if there really is freedom and a spirit of solidarity, aim at the same goal – human emancipation and progress – and will end by agreeing with one another and merging. But if, on the other hand, there is a lack of freedom and goodwill to all, then there is no form of organisation that will not breed injustice, exploitation and despotism.

Let us briefly look at the main systems which have been proposed as a solution to the problem.

As regards anarchist aspirations, the two basic systems in contention are: *individualism* (by which I mean individualism as a means of distribution of wealth and I will not struggle with abstruse philosophical concepts which, in this context, are irrelevant) and *communism*.

*Collectivism*, about which little is said nowadays, is an intermediate system which brings together the merits and the defects of the two above-mentioned systems and, perhaps, precisely because it is a halfway house, will be widely applied, at least during the transition between the old and the new society. But I will not deal specifically with this because the same objections can be made of it as are made of individualism and communism.

Complete individualism would seem to consist in dividing between

all individuals all land and all other wealth in proportions that are virtually equal and equivalent, in such a way that all persons, from the outset of their lives, are supplied with equal means, and each individual can rise to the heights that their faculties and activities permit. In order to preserve this equality from the outset the concept of heredity would be abolished and periodically there would be fresh divisions of land and wealth to keep pace with changes in the population figures.

This system would clearly not be economically viable; that is, it would not be conducive to the best use of wealth. Even if it could be applied in small and primitive agrarian communities it would certainly be impossible in an extensive collective and advanced agrarian-industrial civilisation, in which a considerable portion of the population would not be in direct touch with the land and equipment for producing material goods, but would be carrying out useful and essential services for all. Moreover, how can the land be divided with at least relative justice, given that the value of various different areas of land differs so much according to productivity, health of the soil and position? And how can one divide up the great industrial enterprises which, to operate, depend on the labour of a great number of workers, working simultaneously? And how to fix the value of things and trade without at the same time falling back on the evils of competition and hoarding?

It is quite true that advances in chemistry and engineering tend towards an equalling out of productivity and fertility of different areas of land; that the development of means of transport – the motor car and the aeroplane – will tend to spread benefits far more widely; that the electric motor is a decentralising factor in industry and enables isolated individuals and small groups to do machine work; that science may, in all countries, discover or synthesise the raw materials needed for production. And then, when these and other advances come about, ease and abundance of production will cease to be the overriding economic problem it is today and growth in human solidarity will render useless and repugnant any minute and hair-splitting calculations as to what one or the other person is entitled to.

But these are things that will happen in a more or less distant future, while here I have been dealing with today [1929] and the near future. And today a social organisation based on individual ownership of the

means of production, maintaining and creating antagonisms and rivalries between producers and a conflict of interests between producers and consumers, would always be under threat from the possible advent of authority, a government that would re-establish the privileges that had been overthrown. In any case it could not exist, not even provisionally, unless it were moderated and strengthened by all kinds of voluntary associations and cooperatives.

The primary dilemma for the revolution always remains: whether to organise voluntarily to the advantage of all, or to be organised under the power of a government to the advantage of the ruling class.

Let us now turn to communism.

Theoretically, so far as human relations are concerned, communism seems the ideal system to replace struggle by solidarity, to make the best possible use of natural energy and human labour and of humanity one great family of brothers and sisters whose purpose is to help and love one another.

But is this practicable in the moral and material condition in which humanity now finds itself? And what are its boundaries?

Universal communism – a single community of all human beings – is an aspiration, an ideal goal towards which to move, but certainly it could not now take on a concrete form of economic organisation; nor probably could it do so for a long time to come: the longer term will be the concern of our descendants.

At present one can think only of a multiplicity of communities made up of neighbouring and kindred populations, who would have a number of different relationships between one another, whether communist or commercial; and even within these limits there is always the problem of a possible conflict between communism and liberty. Because unless there is a residual sentiment, propelling people towards a conscious and desired solidarity which would induce us to fight for and put into practice the greatest possible degree of communism, I believe that total communism – especially if extended over a vast area of territory – would be as impossible and antilibertarian today as complete individualism would be economically unviable and impossible.

To organise a communist society on the grand scale, the whole of economic life – means of production, exchange and consumption –

would have to be radically transformed. And this could only be done gradually, as objective circumstances permit, and to the extent that the majority of the population understand the advantages and know how to provide for themselves. If, on the other hand, this could be done at one stroke, at the wishes and through the excessive power of one party, the masses, used to obeying and serving, would accept the new form of life as a new law, imposed by a new government, and would wait for a supreme power to impose on all how to produce and to control consumption. And the new power, not knowing and not able to satisfy immensely varied and often contradictory needs and desires, and not wanting to declare itself a useless bystander by leaving to the interested parties the freedom to do as they wanted and could, would reconstitute a State, founded, like all States, on military and police power; and this, if it managed to last, would only substitute new and more fanatical bosses for the old ones. On the pretext (and indeed with the honest and sincere intention of regenerating the world with a new Gospel) that single rule must be imposed on all, all liberties suppressed and all free initiative made impossible. In consequence, discouragement and paralysis of production would set in; clandestine and fraudulent commercial practices would take over; there would be an arrogant and corrupt bureaucracy, general misery and, finally, a more or less complete return to the same conditions of oppression and exploitation that the revolution was meant to abolish.

The Russian experience must not have taken place in vain.

To conclude, it seems to me that no system can be viable and truly liberate humanity from atavistic bondage, if it is not the result of free development.

If there is to be a society in which people live together on a free and cooperative basis for the greater good of all and no longer convents and despotisms, held together by religious superstition or brute force, human societies cannot be the artificial creation of one person or sect. They must be the result of the competing or conflicting needs and desires of all members of society who, through repeated trial and error, find the institutions which, at a given moment, are the best ones possible, and develop and change them according to changing circumstances and desires.

Communism, individualism, collectivism or any other imaginable

system may be preferred and its triumph worked for through propaganda and example. But, at the risk of sure disaster, what must always guard against is the claim that one's own system is the only and infallible system, good for all, and in all places and for all time; and that victory can be won in other ways than by persuasion, based on the evidence of the facts.

What is important, and indispensable, indeed the essential departure point, is to ensure that every person has the means to be free.

When the government, which defends the proprietors and the landowners, is defeated, or at any rate rendered powerless, it will be up to everybody, and especially those among the populace who have the spirit of initiative and organisational ability, to provide for the satisfaction of immediate needs and to prepare for the future, destroying privileges and harmful institutions and at the same time making the useful institutions, which today exclusively or mainly serve the ruling classes, work for the benefit of all.

The special mission for the anarchists is to be on guard for liberty against the aspirants to power and against the possible despotism of the majority.

*Risveglio (Geneva), November 1929*



## *Questions of Tactics*

The present uncertain, tormented and unstable political and social situation in Europe and the world [1931], which gives rise to all sorts of hopes and fears, makes it more urgent than ever to be prepared for the upheavals which, sooner or later, but inevitably, will come. And this revives discussion – which is in any case always topical – as to how we can adapt our idealistic aspirations to the situation prevailing in various countries at the present time, and how to pass from the preaching of ideals to their practical application.

Since it is natural in a movement like ours, which does not recognise the authority either of persons or of texts and which is entirely founded on free criticism, there are a number of different opinions and many the tactics to follow.

Thus, some devote their whole activity to perfecting and preaching the ideal, without paying much attention to whether they are being understood or followed, and whether the ideals in question can be realised in view of the current state of popular opinion and existing material resources. These comrades, more or less explicitly and in degrees that vary from individual to individual, restrict the role of the anarchists to demolition of the present institutions of repression today and to guarding against the establishment of new governments and new privileges tomorrow. But they ignore all the rest, which just happens to be the serious, unavoidable and unpostponable problem of social reorganisation along libertarian lines.

They believe that, as far as the problems of reconstruction are concerned, everything will sort itself out, spontaneously, without advance preparation and planning, thanks to some mythical creative capacity of the masses, or by virtue of a supposed natural law according to which, as soon as state violence and capitalist privilege were eliminated, the people would all become good and intelligent, conflicts of interest would vanish and prosperity, peace and harmony would reign supreme in the world.

Others, motivated above all by the desire to be, or to appear to be, practical are concerned with the perceived difficulties inherent in the aftermath of the revolution and aware of the need to win over the hearts and minds of the greater part of the public, or at least to overcome hostility, caused by ignorance, for our proposals, wish to

set out a programme, a complete plan of social reorganisation which would respond to all problems and satisfy those who (to use a phrase borrowed from the English) they refer to as 'the man in the street'. Any man, that is, who has no particular party line or fixed idea and makes up his mind according to the passions and interests of the moment.

For my part, I believe both attitudes have their good and bad points, and that if it were not for an unfortunate tendency to exaggeration and dogmatism, they could complement one another, adjusting our conduct to the demands of the ideal goal and the needs of the situation and thus bringing about the greatest practical effectiveness, while remaining utterly faithful to our programme of true liberty and justice.

To neglect all the problems of reconstruction or to pre-arrange complete and uniform plans are both errors, excesses which, by different routes, would lead to our defeat as anarchists and to the victory of new or old authoritarian regimes. The truth lies in the middle.

It is absurd to believe that, once the government has been destroyed and the capitalists expropriated, 'things will look after themselves' without the intervention of those who already have an idea on what has to be done and who immediately set about doing it. Perhaps this could happen – and indeed it would be better if it were so – if there was time to wait for people, for everyone, to find a way, by trial and experience, of satisfying their own needs and tastes in agreement with the needs and tastes of others. But social life as the life of individuals does not permit of interruption. The immediate aftermath of the revolution, indeed on the very same day of the insurrection, there will be the need to supply food and other urgent needs of the population, and therefore to ensure the continued production of basics (bread, etc.), the running of the main public services (water, transport, electricity, etc.,) and uninterrupted exchange between city and countryside.

Later the greatest difficulties will disappear. Labour, organised by those who do the real work, will become easy and attractive; high productivity will render superfluous any sort of calculation of the relation between products made and products consumed and everyone will literally be able to take what they want from the pile. The monstrous urban conglomerations will melt away, the population will be spread out rationally over the country and every area, every

grouping, while conserving and adding to the commodities supplied by the big industrial undertakings and yet remaining linked to human society as a whole through a sense of sympathy and solidarity, will in general be self-sufficient, not afflicted by the oppressive and costly complications of economic life now.

But these and a thousand other beautiful things which come to mind are the concern of the future, while we, here and now, need to think how to live in today's world, in the situation that history has handed down to us and which revolution, that is an act of violence, cannot radically change overnight by waving a magic wand. And since, for better or worse, we need to live, if we do not know how and cannot do what needs to be done, others with different aims will do it instead, with results quite contrary to those we are striving for.

We must not neglect the 'man in the street', who after all represents the majority of the population in all countries and without whose involvement emancipation is out of the question; but neither is there any need to rely too heavily on his intelligence and initiative.

The ordinary man, the 'man in the street', has many excellent qualities; he has immense potential, which gives the certain hope that he will one day become the ideal humanity upon which we have set our sights. But meanwhile he has one serious defect, which largely explains the emergence and persistence of tyranny: he does not like to think. And even when he makes attempts at emancipation he is always more inclined to follow those who spare him the effort of thinking and who take over for him the responsibility for organising, directing ... and commanding. So long as his habits are not overly disrupted he is satisfied if others do the thinking for him and tell him what to do, even if he is left with nothing but the obligation to work and obey.

This weakness, this tendency of the herd to wait for and follow orders has been the bane of many a revolution and remains the danger for the revolutions in the near future.

If the crowd does not look to itself, and right away, people of good will, capable of initiative and decision-making, must necessarily do things for them. And it is in this, in the means of providing for the urgent necessities, that we must clearly be distinguishable from the authoritarian parties.

The authoritarians mean to resolve the question by setting themselves up in government and imposing their programme by force. They may

even be in good faith and believe sincerely that they do the good of all, but in fact they would succeed only in creating a new privileged class concerned with maintaining the new government and, in effect, substituting one tyranny for another.

Certainly the anarchists must strive to make the transition from the state of servitude to one of freedom as unlaborious as possible providing the public with as many practical and immediately applicable ideas as possible; but they must beware of encouraging that intellectual inertia and that above-lamented tendency of obeying and leaving it to others to act.

To truly succeed as an emancipating force, for the free initiative of all and everyone, the revolution must develop freely in a thousand different ways, corresponding to the thousand different moral and material conditions in which the people now find themselves. And we must put forward and carry out as far as we can those ways of life that best correspond to our ideals. But above all we must make a special effort to awaken in the mass of the people a spirit of initiative and the habit of doing things for themselves.

We must also avoid appearing to be in command by acting through words and deeds as comrades among comrades. We must remind ourselves that if we are too zealous in forcing the pace in our direction to implement our plans, we run the risk of clipping the wings of the revolution and of ourselves assuming, more or less unwittingly, that function of government that we deplore so much in others.

And as a government we would not be worth any more than the others. Perhaps we might even be more dangerous to freedom, because, so strongly convinced as we are of being right and doing good, we could tend, like real fanatics, to hold all who do not think or act like us to be counter-revolutionaries and enemies of the public good.

If, then, what the others do is not what we would want, it does not matter, so long as the liberty of all is safeguarded.

What really matters is that the people do what they want. For the only assured conquests are what the people do with their own efforts. The only definitive reforms are those which are demanded and imposed by the popular conscience.

**Errico Malatesta**

**THE  
ANARCHIST  
REVOLUTION**

*Polemical Articles 1924-1931*

Edited and Introduced by Vernon Richards

Though complete in itself, this volume is intended as a 'supplementary' to the *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* compiled by the same editor which includes in its 311 pages not only 200 pages of Malatesta's writings, mostly translated for the first time, but also a 42 page 'Notes for a Biography' as well as the editor's assessment of Malatesta's 'Relevance for Anarchists Today' (40 pages)

The importance of this volume is that 23 articles published between 1924 and 1931 – the last year of his life – have been translated in full for the first time, and have been selected, as the sub-title 'polemical articles' makes clear, because they deal with issues which were of much concern amongst anarchists and which this editor, himself involved with anarchist propaganda for some 60 years, considers to be as relevant today as when they were written.

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