

ERRICO MALATESTA



READER



**PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &  
DISCUSSIONS  
FOR LAND & FREEDOM**

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE  
'ANARCHIVE'  
"Anarchy is Order!"

*I must Create a System or be enslav'd by  
another Man's.*  
*I will not Reason & Compare: my business  
is to Create'*  
(William Blake)

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchival' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order ( in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the 'new anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain

standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

**‘Anarchy Is Order’ does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.**

**Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing from the CD that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts ,...Become your own anarchiv!!!**

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and autors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchiv offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*‘demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down here;  
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and wish to  
squash us like horseflies;  
and the will- ‘o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance’.*

(L-P. Boon)

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us. Don’t mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism,cooperation can be send to  
[A.O@advalvas.be](mailto:A.O@advalvas.be)

A complete list and updates are available on this address, new texts are always

**welcome!!**

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## **MALATESTA'S BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Born: December 14, 1853; Santa Maria Capus Vetera,  
Italy

Died: July 22, 1932; Rome, Italy

Max Nettlau, Errico Malatesta: The Biography of an Anarchist, New York,  
1924.

### **TIMELINE**

1853 - Born in Caserta Province, S.Italy.

1867 - At the age of 14, Malatesta is arrested for writing a letter to King Victor Emmanuel II complaining about a local injustice.

1871 - Having been expelled from medical school for joining a demonstration, Malatesta becomes a member of the Italian section of the International He also trains himself as a mechanic and electrician.

1872 - Meets Bakunin in Switzerland.

1877 - With fellow anarchists Andrea Costa and Carlo Cafiero, he leads an armed band into two villages in Campania, where they burn the tax registers and declare an end to Victor Emmanuel's reign. The townspeople welcome them but refuse to join the insurrection. The group is broken up by the arrival of troops soon after.

1878 - Malatesta leaves Italy to visit friends in Egypt. The Italian government takes steps to prevent his return. He travels to Geneva, where he befriends Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus. Forced to leave a few months later, he visits Rumania and Paris.

1881 - Malatesta takes up residence in London.

1883 - Returns to Italy, where he writes his most widely read pamphlet, *Between Peasants*, in which he advocates anarcho-communism.

1884-5 - Visits Florence, assists in a cholera epidemic in Naples. He is arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment for his writing. He jumps bail and sails to Buenos Aires, where he spends the next four years, spreading anarchist ideas among Italian immigrants there.

1889 - Returns to London.

1891 - Publishes the influential pamphlet *Anarchy and* visits Spain during the Jerez uprising.

1892-3 - Witnesses the general strike for universal suffrage in Belgium and recognizes the limitations of this technique.

1896 - Organizes the London Congress of the Second Internationale.

1897 - Malatesta returns secretly to Italy, where he edits the anarchist paper *L'Agitazione*. During this period, rising prices and poor harvests result in peasant uprisings.

1898 - He is arrested in the city of Ancona following riots there, and charged with "criminal association". Convicted of belonging to a seditious organization, Malatesta is sentenced to imprisonment on the island of Lampedusa.

1899 - He escapes by boat during a storm and returns to London. He then visits the U.S., where he meets with Italian and Spanish anarchist groups in New Jersey. During a heated discussion at an anarchist meeting, he is shot in the leg.

1900 - Malatesta returns to London. Following the assassination of King Umberto by an Italian anarchist from New Jersey, Malatesta is watched by British police.

1907 - He attends an international anarchist conference in Amsterdam. Also present are Emma Goldman and Rudolf Rocker.

1909 - He and Rudolf Rocker are imprisoned for three months on charges of criminal libel. He is considered for deportation, but the attempt is dropped when supporters organize a demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

1910 - Malatesta is suspected of involvement in the Houndsditch Murders. Three policemen were shot during a jewel robbery in London's East End. The thieves tunneled in from an empty house nearby. A search revealed a card with Malatesta's name on it. The investigation revealed that, several months earlier, one of the thieves had contacted an anarchist group in the area, claiming to be an out-of-work mechanic. He was introduced to Malatesta, who was working as a mechanic at the time. Malatesta gave him a card of introduction to his suppliers. The thief used the card to buy tools (including a welding torch) that were used in the robbery. Malatesta was found innocent and the thieves were killed in a police raid on their hideout.

1913 - He again returns to Italy to take part in planned anti-clerical and anti-parliamentary demonstrations in Ancona.

1914 - A general strike begins when two demonstrators are killed by police in Ancona. Known as "Red Week", troops in the area fraternize with protesters while Malatesta and his fellow anarchists attempt to organize a revolt against the government. Their plans are frustrated when the General Confederation of Labor (which controlled most of Italy's trade unions) calls off the strike. Malatesta returns to London.

1919 - Malatesta returns to Italy, where he starts the first anarchist daily, *Umanità Nova*. It is a period of turmoil prior to Mussolini's ascent to power.

1920 - (October) He urges that workers strike and occupy their factories. Metalworkers in Milan and Turin do so. Other strikes follow, but the Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labor convince the workers to end the strike. Malatesta and 81 other anarchists are arrested.

1921 -(July) Malatesta goes on a hunger strike to protest the delay in being brought to trial. He is found not guilty and released, two months before the fascists gain power.

1924-6 - Despite harassment and censorship, Malatesta publishes the journal *Pensiero e Volontà*. In 1926, Mussolini silences all independent press.

1932 - Malatesta dies.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY "HASTE"

(UMANITÀ NOVA, N. 125, SEPTEMBER 6, 1921)

Let us deal again with G. Valenti's article republished by the Reggio Emilia newspaper Giustizia.

Valenti dwells on enumerating all the masses that are indifferent or hostile to subversive propaganda. Writing about the United States, he claims that there are 60 (?) million Catholics organized in religious associations who go to church and pray God, and he invites the anarchists to go and make propaganda among those 60 millions, if they want to speed up the revolution. He claims that only 4 and a half million producers out of 40 million are organized in organizations, the majority of which, as a matter of fact, are still opposed to socialism; he also invites trade unionists to start working at organizing workers in unions, if they really want to speed up the revolution. He claims that only one million voters out of twenty-five million voted for Debs in the last polls, he recalls that in the South socialist speakers get beaten and driven out of towns by mobs intoxicated with patriotism; finally, he invites communists to go and propagandize their 21 points in the South, instead of "bugging socialists into accepting them".

This is all too true and right, if it means that we have to make propaganda and do our best to win over as many individuals, as many masses as possible to the ideas of emancipation.

On the other hand, the argument is completely wrong if it means that the demolition of capitalism has to wait until those 60 million Catholics become free thinkers, all workers (or their majority) are organized for class struggle, and Debs gets out of prison thanks to the majority of voters. Let us not misunderstand. It is an axiomatic, self-evident truth that a revolution can only be made when there is

enough strength to make it. However, it is an historical truth that the forces determining evolution and social revolutions cannot be reckoned with census papers.

Catholics in the United States and elsewhere will remain as numerous as they are, or even grow, as long as there is a class, holding the power of wealth and science, interested in keeping the masses in their intellectual slavery, in order to dominate them more easily. Workers will never be fully organized, and their organizations will always be subject to breaking down or degenerating, as long as poverty, unemployment, fear of losing one's job, desire to improve one's conditions feed the antagonism among workers, and give the masters the opportunity to profit from any circumstances and any crises to make the workers compete against each other. And voters will always be sheep by definition, even if sometimes they happen to kick back.

Given certain economic conditions and a certain social environment, it is proven that the intellectual and moral conditions of the masses stay basically the same. Until an external, ideally or materially violent event comes and changes that environment, propaganda, education and instruction remain helpless; they only act upon those individuals who can overcome the environment in which they are forced to live, in virtue of natural or social privileges. However, that small number, that self-conscious and rebellious minority born by every social order in consequence of those injustices to which the masses are subject, acts like a historical ferment, which suffices, as it always did, to make the world progress.

Every new idea and institution, all progress and every revolution have always been the work of minorities. It is our aspiration and our aim that everyone should become socially conscious and effective; but to achieve this end, it is necessary to provide all with the means of life and for development, and it is therefore necessary to destroy with

violence, since one cannot do otherwise, the violence which denies these means to the workers.

Naturally, the "small numbers", the minority, must be sufficient, and those who imagine that we want to have an insurrection a day without taking into account the forces opposing us, or whether circumstances are in our favour or against us, misjudge us. In the, now remote, past, we were able, and did, carry out a number of minute insurrectionary acts which had no probability of success. But in those days we were indeed only a handful, and wanted the public to talk about us, and our attempts were simply means of propaganda.

Now it is no longer a question of uprising to make propaganda; now we can win, and so we want to win, and only take such action when we think we can win. Of course we can be mistaken, and on the grounds of temperament may be led into believing that the fruit is ripe when it is still green; but we must confess our preference for those who err on the side of haste as opposed to those who always play a waiting game and let the best opportunities slip through their fingers for they, through fear of picking a green fruit then let the whole crop go rotten!

In conclusion, we completely agree with La Giustizia when it emphasizes the necessity of making a lot of propaganda and of developing proletarian struggle organizations as much as possible; but we definitely depart from it when it maintains that we should not take action until we have drawn the majority of that inert mass, which will only be converted by the events and will only accept the revolution after the revolution has begun.

## CLASS STRUGGLE OR CLASS HATRED?

ABOUT MY TRIAL PUBLISHED IN  
(UMANITÀ NOVA, N. 137, SEPTEMBER 20, 1921)

I expressed to the jury in Milan some ideas about class struggle and proletariat that raised criticism and amazement. I better come back to those ideas.

I protested indignantly against the accusation of inciting to hatred; I explained that in my propaganda I had always sought to demonstrate that the social wrongs do not depend on the wickedness of one master or the other, one governer or the other, but rather on masters and governments as institutions; therefore, the remedy does not lie in changing the individual rulers, instead it is necessary to demolish the principle itself by which men dominate over men; I also explained that I had always stressed that proletarians are not individually better than bourgeois, as shown by the fact that a worker behaves like an ordinary bourgeois, and even worse, when he gets by some accident to a position of wealth and command.

Such statements were distorted, counterfeited, put in a bad light by the bourgeois press, and the reason is clear. The duty of the press paid to defend the interests of police and sharks, is to hide the real nature of anarchism from the public, and seek to accredit the tale about anarchists being full of hatred and destroyers; the press does that by duty, but we have to acknowledge that they often do it in good faith, out of pure and simple ignorance. Since journalism, which once was a calling, decayed into mere job and business, journalists have lost not only their ethical sense, but also the intellectual honesty of refraining from talking about what they do not know.

Let us forget about hack writers, then, and let us talk about those who differ from us in their ideas, and often only in

their way of expressing ideas, but still remain our friends, because they sincerely aim at the same goal we aim at.

Amazement is completely unmotivated in these people, so much so that I would tend to think it is affected. They cannot ignore that I have been saying and writing those things for fifty years, and that the same things have been said by hundreds and thousands of anarchists, at my same time and before me.

Let us rather talk about the dissent.

There are the "worker-minded" people, who consider having callous hands as being divinely imbued with all merits and all virtues; they protest if you dare talking about people and mankind, failing to swear on the sacred name of proletariat.

Now, it is a truth that history has made the proletariat the main instrument of the next social change, and that those fighting for the establishment of a society where all human beings are free and endowed with all the means to exercise their freedom, must rely mainly on the proletariat.

As today the hoarding of natural resources and capital created by the work of past and present generations is the main cause of the subjection of the masses and of all social wrongs, it is natural for those who have nothing, and therefore are more directly and clearly interested in sharing the means of production, to be the main agents of the necessary expropriation. This is why we address our propaganda more particularly to the proletarians, whose conditions of life, on the other hand, make it often impossible for them to rise and conceive a superior ideal. However, this is no reason for turning the poor into a fetish just because he is poor; neither it is a reason for encouraging him to believe that he is intrinsically superior, and that a condition surely not coming from his merit or his will gives him the right to do wrong to the others as the others did wrong to him. The tyranny of callous hands

(which in practice is still the tyranny of few who no longer have callous hands, even if they had once), would not be less tough and wicked, and would not bear less lasting evils than the tyranny of gloved hands. Perhaps it would be less enlightened and more brutal: that is all.

Poverty would not be the horrible thing it is, if it did not produce moral brutishness as well as material harm and physical degradation, when prolonged from generation to generation. The poor have different faults than those produced in the privileged classes by wealth and power, but not better ones.

If the bourgeoisie produces the likes of Giolitti and Graziani and all the long succession of mankind's torturers, from the great conquerors to the avid and bloodsucking petty bosses, it also produces the likes of Cafiero, Reclus and Kropotkine, and the many people that in any epoch sacrificed their class privileges to an ideal. If the proletariat gave and gives so many heroes and martyrs of the cause of human redemption, it also gives off the white guards, the slaughterers, the traitors of their own brothers, without which the bourgeois tyranny could not last a single day.

How can hatred be raised to a principle of justice, to an enlightened spirit of demand, when it is clear that evil is everywhere, and it depends upon causes that go beyond individual will and responsibility?

Let there be as much class struggle as one wishes, if by class struggle one means the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters for the abolition of exploitation. That struggle is a way of moral and material elevation, and it is the main revolutionary force that can be relied on.

Let there be no hatred, though, because love and justice cannot arise from hatred. Hatred brings about revenge, desire to be over the enemy, need to consolidate one's superiority. Hatred can only be the foundation of new

governments, if one wins, but it cannot be the foundation of anarchy.

Unfortunately, it is easy to understand the hatred of so many wretches whose bodies and sentiments are tormented and rent by society: however, as soon as the hell in which they live is lit up by an ideal, hatred disappears and a burning desire of fighting for the good of all takes over.

For this reason true haters cannot be found among our comrades, although there are many rhetoricians of hatred. They are like the poet, who is a good and peaceful father, but he sings of hatred, because this gives him the opportunity of composing good verses... or perhaps bad ones. They talk about hatred, but their hatred is made of love.

For this reason I love them, even if they call me names.

## WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

(REPLY TO AN ARTICLE BY "OUTCAST")  
(UMANITÀ NOVA, N. 185, AUGUST 26, 1922)

"What is to be done?" is the question that, more or less intensely, always troubles the minds of all men struggling for an ideal, and urgently comes back in moments of crisis, when a failure, a disillusionment induces one to re-examine the tactics adopted, to criticize possible errors and to seek more effective means. Comrade Outcast is right to bring up the question again and invite the comrades to think and decide about what to do.

Today our situation is difficult, and even dreadful in some areas. However, he who was anarchist before, remains anarchist after all; although we have been weakened by many defeats, we have also gained a valuable experience, which will increase our effectiveness, if only we are able to treasure it. The defections occurred on our side, which were actually rare, help us after all, because they rid us of weak and unreliable persons.

So, what is to be done?

I am not going to dwell upon the unrest occurred abroad against the Italian reaction. Certainly we can only expect benefits from anything that helps the proletariat of the world to know about the true conditions of Italy and the incredible infamies that have been committed and keep being committed by the bourgeoisie cops in order to stifle and destroy any emancipatory movement. We just read about an international rally of protest against fascism, that took place in New York on the 18th of the current month - and we are sure that our friends and those who have a sense of freedom and justice will do whatever they can in America, England, France, Spain, etc.

However, we are mainly interested in what is to be done here in Italy, because this is what is to be done by us. Although it is good to take into account all the auxiliary forces, it is very important not to rely too much on others, and seek our well being in ourselves and our own work.

In recent years we have approached the different avantgard parties with a view to joint action, and we have always been disappointed. Must we for this reason isolate ourselves, or take refuge from impure contacts and stand still trying to move only when we have the necessary strength and in the name of our complete programme?

I think not.

Since we cannot make the revolution by ourselves, i.e. our forces alone are not sufficient to attract and mobilize the large masses necessary to win, and since, no matter how long one waits, the masses cannot become anarchist before the revolution has started, and we will necessarily remain a relatively small minority until we can try out our ideas in the revolutionary practice, by denying our cooperation to others and by postponing the action until we are strong enough to act by ourselves, we would practically end up encouraging sluggishness, despite the high-sounding words and the radical intentions, and refusing to get started, with the excuse of jumping to the end with one big leap.

I know very well - if I had not known for a long time I would have learnt recently - that we anarchists are alone in wishing the revolution for good and as soon as possible, except some individuals and groups that champ the bit of the authoritarian parties' discipline, but remain in those parties in the hope that their leaders will resolve someday upon ordering a general action. However, I also know that the circumstances are often stronger than the individuals' will, and one day or another our cousins from all different sides will have to resolve upon venturing the final struggle, if they do not want to ignominiously die as parties and

make a present to the monarchy of all their ideas, their traditions, their best sentiments. Today they could be induced to that by the necessity of defending their freedom, their goods, their life.

Therefore we should always be prepared to support those who are prepared to act, even if it carries with it the risk of later finding ourselves alone and betrayed.

But in giving others our support, that is, in always trying to use the forces at the disposal of others, and taking advantage of every opportunity for action, we must always be ourselves and seek to be in a position to make our influence felt and count at least in direct proportion to our strength.

To this end it is necessary that we should be agreed among ourselves and seek to co-ordinate and organize our efforts as effectively as possible.

Let others keep misunderstanding and slandering our goals, for reasons we do not want to qualify. All comrades that seriously want to take action will judge what is better for them to do.

At this time, as at any time of depression and stagnation, we are afflicted by a recrudescence of hair-splitting tendencies; some people enjoy discussing whether we are a party or a movement, whether we have to associate into unions or federations, and hundreds of other similar trifles; perhaps we will hear again that "groups can have neither a secretary nor a cashier, but they have to entrust one comrade to deal with the group's correspondence and another to keep the money". Hair-splitters are capable of anything; but let practical men see to taking action, and let hair-splitters in good faith, and those in bad faith above all, stew in their own juice.

Let anyone do whatever they like, associate with whoever they like, but let them act.

No person of good faith and common sense can deny that acting effectively requires agreeing, uniting, organizing.

Today the reaction tends to stifle any public movement, and obviously the movement tends to "go underground", as the Russian used to say.

We are reverting to the necessity of a secret organization, which is fine.

However, a secret organization cannot be all and cannot include all.

We need to preserve and increase our contact with the masses, we need to look for new followers by propagandizing as much as possible, we need to keep in the movement all the individuals unfit for a secret organizations and those who would jeopardize it by being too well-known. One must not forget that the persons most useful to a secret organization are those whose beliefs are unknown to the adversaries, and who can work without being suspected.

Therefore, in my opinion, nothing that exists should be undone. Rather, it is a matter of adding something more; something with such characteristics as to respond to the current needs.

Let nobody wait for someone else's initiative; let anyone take the initiatives they deem appropriate in their place, in their environment, and then try, with due precautions, to connect their own to others' initiatives, to reach the general agreement that is necessary to a valid action.

We are in a time of depression, it is true. However, history is moving fast nowadays: let us get ready for the events to come.

## REVOLUTION IN PRACTICE

(UMANITÀ NOVA, N. 191, OCTOBER 7, 1922)

At the meeting held in Bienne (Switzerland) on the fiftieth anniversary of the Saint Imier Congress, comrade Bertoni and I expressed some ideas that comrade Colomer did not like. So much so that he wrote on the Paris Libertaire that he is sure those ideas contrast the most lively tendencies of the contemporary anarchist movement. Had the comrades of Germany, Spain, Russia, America, etc. been present at that meeting, he writes, they would have got moved and nearly indignant ("émus et presque indigné"), as he himself did.

In my opinion, comrade Colomer slightly overstates his knowledge of the real tendencies of anarchism. In any case, it is an improper use of language, at the least, to talk about "indignation" when the matter is a discussion where everyone honestly tries to contribute to the clarification of ideas in the best interest of the common goal. Anyway, it is better to keep discussing in a friendly manner, as we did in Bienne.

Bertoni will certainly defend his ideas on the Réveil; I will do the same on Umanità Nova, as will Colomer on the Libertaire. Other comrades, I hope, will join in the discussion; and it will be to the benefit of all, if everyone takes care not to alter the contradictor's thought in the translations imposed by the diversity of languages. And it does not hurt to hope that nobody will get indignant if he hears something that he had never thought of.

Two topics were discussed in Bienne: "Relationships between syndicalism and anarchism", and "Anarchist action at the outbreak of an insurrection". I will come back to the former topic some other time and unhurriedly, as the readers of Umanità Nova must already know what I think

about the issue. I will presently explain what I said on the latter topic.

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We want to make the revolution as soon as possible, taking advantage of all the opportunities that may arise.

With the exception of a small number of "educationists", who believe in the possibility of raising the masses to the anarchist ideals before the material and moral conditions in which they live have changed, thus deferring the revolution to the time when all will be able to live anarchically, all anarchists agree on this desire of overthrowing the current regimes as soon as possible: as a matter of fact, they are often the only ones who show a real wish to do so.

However, revolutions did, do and will happen independently from the anarchists' wish and action; and since anarchists are just a small minority of the population and anarchy cannot be made by force and violent imposition by few, it is clear that past and future revolutions were not and will not possibly be anarchist revolutions.

In Italy two years ago the revolution was about to break out and we did all we could to make that happen. We treated like traitors the socialists and the unionists, who stopped the impetus of the masses and saved the shaky monarchical regime on the occasion of the riots against the high cost of living, the strikes in Piedmont, the Ancona uprising, the factory occupations.

What would we have done if the revolution had broken out for good?

What will we do in the revolution that will break out tomorrow?

What did our comrades do, what could and should they have done in the recent revolutions occurred in Russia, Bavaria, Hungary and elsewhere?

We cannot make anarchy, at least not an anarchy extended to all the population and all the social relations, because no population is anarchist yet, and we cannot either accept another regime without giving up our aspirations and losing any reason for existence, as anarchists. So, what can and must we do?

This was the problem being discussed in Bienne, and this is the problem of greatest interest in the present time, so full of opportunities, when we could suddenly face situations that require for us to either act immediately and unhesitatingly, or disappear from the battle ground after making the victory of others easier.

It was not a matter of depicting a revolution as we would like it, a truly anarchist revolution as would be possible if all, or at least the vast majority of the people living in a given territory were anarchist. It was a matter of seeking the best that could be done in favour of the anarchist cause in a social upheaval as can happen in the present situation.

The authoritarian parties have a specific program and want to impose it by force; therefore they aspire to seizing the power, regardless of whether legally or illegally, and transforming society their way, through a new legislation. This explains why they are revolutionary in words and often also in intentions, but they hesitate to make a revolution when the opportunities arise; they are not sure of the acquiescence, even passive, of the majority, they do not have sufficient military force to have their orders carried out over the whole territory, they lack devoted people with skills in all the countless branches of social activity... therefore they are always forced to postpone action, until they are almost reluctantly pushed to the government by the popular uprising. However, once in power, they would like to stay there indefinitely, therefore they try to slow down, divert, stop the revolution that raised them.

On the contrary, we have indeed an ideal we fight for and would like to see realized, but we do not believe that an ideal of freedom, of justice, of love can be realized through the government violence.

We do not want to get in power neither we want anyone else to do so. If we cannot prevent governments from existing and being established, due to our lack of strength, we strive, and always will, to keep or make such governments as weak as possible. Therefore we are always ready to take action when it comes to overthrowing or weakening a government, without worrying too much (I say 'too much', not 'at all') about what will happen thereafter.

For us violence is only of use and can only be of use in driving back violence. Otherwise, when it is used to accomplish positive goals, either it fails completely, or it succeeds in establishing the oppression and the exploitation of the ones over the others.

The establishment and the progressive improvement of a society of free men can only be the result of a free evolution; our task as anarchists is precisely is to defend and secure the evolution's freedom.

Here is our mission: demolishing, or contributing to demolish any political power whatsoever, with all the series of repressive forces that support it; preventing, or trying to prevent new governments and new repressive forces from arising; in any case, refraining from ever acknowledging any government, keeping always fighting against it, claiming and requiring, even by force if possible, the right to organize and live as we like, and experiment the forms of society that seem best to us, as long as they do not prejudice the others' equal freedom, of course.

Beyond this struggle against the government imposition that bears the capitalistic exploitation and makes it possible; once we had encouraged and helped the masses to seize the existing wealth and particularly the means of production;

once the situation is reached whereby no one could impose his wishes on others by force, nor take away from any man the product of his labour, we could then only act through propaganda and by example.

Destroy the institution and the machinery of existing social organizations? Yes, certainly, if it is a question of repressive institutions; but these are, after all, only a small part of the complex of social life. The police, the army, the prisons, and the judiciary are potent institutions for evil, which exercise a parasitic function. Other institutions and organizations manage, for better or for worse, to guarantee life to mankind; and these institutions cannot be usefully destroyed without replacing them by something better.

The exchange of raw material and goods, the distribution of foodstuffs, the railways, postal services and all public services administered by the State or by private companies, have been organized to serve monopolistic and capitalist interests, but they also serve real needs of the population. We cannot disrupt them (and in any case the people would not in their own interests allow us to) without reorganizing them in a better way. And this cannot be achieved in a day; nor as things stand, have we the necessary abilities to do so. We are delighted therefore if in the meantime, others act, even with different criteria from our own.

Social life does not admit of interruptions, and the people want to live on the day of the revolution, on the morrow and always.

Woe betide us and the future of our ideas if we shouldered the responsibility of a senseless destruction that compromised the continuity of life!

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During the discussion of such topics, the issue of money, which is of the greatest importance, was raised in Bienne.

It is customary in our circles to offer a simplistic solution to the problem by saying that money must be abolished. And

this would be the solution if it were a question of an anarchist society, or of a hypothetical revolution to take place in the next hundred years, always assuming that the masses could become anarchist and communist before the conditions under which we live had been radically changed by a revolution.

But today the problem is complicated in quite a different way.

Money is a powerful means of exploitation and oppression; but it is also the only means (apart from the most tyrannical dictatorship or the most idyllic accord) so far devised by human intelligence to regulate production and distribution automatically.

For the moment, rather than concerning oneself with the abolition of money, perhaps one should seek a way to ensure that money truly represents the useful work performed by its possessors.

Anyway, let us come to the immediate practice, which is the issue that was actually discussed in Bienne.

Let us assume that a successful insurrection takes place tomorrow. Anarchy or no anarchy, the people must go on eating and providing for all their basic needs. The large cities must be supplied with necessities more or less as usual.

If the peasants and carriers, etc., refuse to supply goods and services for nothing, and demand payment in money which they are accustomed to considering as real wealth, what does one do? Oblige them by force? In which case we might as well wave goodbye to anarchism and to any possible change for the better. Let the Russian experience serve as a lesson.

And so?

The comrades generally reply: But the peasants will understand the advantages of communism or at least of the direct exchange of goods for goods.

This is all very well; but certainly not in a day, and the people cannot stay without eating for even a day.

I did not mean to propose solutions.

What I do want to do is to draw the comrades' attention to the most important questions which we shall be faced with in the reality of a revolutionary morrow.

Let the comrades contribute their clarifications on the issue; and do not let friend and comrade Colomer be outraged or indignant.

If these issues are novel for him, getting so much scared by novelties is not like an anarchist.

## **FURTHER THOUGHTS ON REVOLUTION IN PRACTICE**

(UMANITÀ NOVA, N. 192, OCTOBER 14, 1922)

My latest article on this topic drew the attention of many comrades and procured me numerous questions and remarks.

Perhaps I was not clear enough; perhaps I also disturbed the mental habits of some, who love to rest on traditional formulas more than tormenting their brain, and are bothered by anything that forces them to think.

In any case I will try to make myself clearer, and I will be happy if those who consider what I say quite heretical will enter the discussion and contribute to define a practical program of action, which can be used as a guide in the next social upheavals.

So far our propagandists have been mainly concerned with criticizing the present society and demonstrating the desirability and possibility of a new social order based on free agreement, in which everyone could find the conditions for the greatest material, spiritual and intellectual development, in brotherhood and solidarity and with the fullest freedom.

They strove above all to inflame with the idea of a condition of individual and social perfection, called 'utopia' by some and 'ideal' by us; they did a good and necessary work, because they set the goal to which our efforts must aim, but they (we) were insufficient and almost indifferent with respect to the search of ways and means that can lead us to that goal. We were very much concerned with the necessity of radically destroying the bad social institutions, but we did not pay enough attention to the positive actions that we needed to take, or let others take, on the day and the morrow of the destruction, in order for individual and social

life to be able to continue in the best possible way. We thought, or we acted as we thought, that things would fix themselves, by natural law, without any will consciously intervening to direct the efforts towards the goal previously set. This is probably the reason of the relative unsuccess of our work.

It is about time to look upon the problem of social transformation in all its broad complexity, and try to examine more closely the practical side of the issue. The revolution could happen tomorrow, and we must enable ourselves to act within it in the most effective possible way. Since at this transitory time the triumphant reaction prevents us from doing much to broaden our propaganda among the masses, let us use our time to examine more closely and clarify our ideas about what is to be done, while we try, by wishes and deeds, to hasten the time of acting and accomplishing.

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I based my remarks upon two principles:

First: Anarchy cannot be made by force. Anarchist communism, applied in its full breadth and with all its beneficial effects, is only possible when it is understood and wanted by large popular masses that embrace all the elements necessary to creating a society superior to the present one. One can conceive selected groups, whose members live in relationships of voluntary and free association among them and with similar groups, and it will be good that such groups exist, and it will be our task to create them as experiments and examples; however, such groups will not constitute the anarchist communist society, yet, rather they will be cases of devotion and sacrifice for the cause, until they succeed in involving all or large part of the population. Therefore, on the morrow of the violent revolution, if it has to come to a violent revolution, it will

not be a matter of accomplishing anarchist communism, but one of setting off towards anarchist communism.

Second: the conversion of the masses to anarchy and communism - and even to the mildest form of socialism - is not possible as long as the present social and economic conditions last. Since such conditions, which keep workers slave for the benefit of those privileged, are preserved and perpetuated by brutal force, it is necessary to change them violently through the revolutionary action of conscious minorities. Hence, if the principle is granted that anarchy cannot be made by force, without the conscious will of the masses, the revolution cannot be made to accomplish anarchy directly and immediately, but rather to create the conditions that make a rapid evolution towards anarchy possible.

The following sentence is often repeated: "The revolution will be anarchist or will not be at all". This claim may look very "revolutionary", very "anarchist"; however, it is actually nonsense, when it is not a means, worse than reformism itself, to paralyze good will and induce people to keep quiet, to peacefully put up with the present, waiting for the forthcoming heaven.

Evidently, either "the anarchist revolution" will be anarchist or it will not be at all. However, did not revolutions happen in the world, when the possibility of an anarchist society was yet to be conceived? Won't any revolution ever happen again until the masses are converted to anarchism? As we fail to convert to anarchism the masses brutalized by their life conditions, should we give up any revolution and submit to living in a monarchical and bourgeois regime?

The truth is that the revolution will be what it may be, and our task is to speed it up as much as possible and strive to make it as radical as possible.

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However, let us be quite clear.

The revolution will not be anarchist if the masses are not anarchist, as unfortunately it is presently the case. However, we are anarchists, we must remain anarchists and act like anarchists before, during and after the revolution.

Without the anarchists, without the anarchists' activity, if the anarchists accepted any kind of government whatsoever and any so called transition constitution, the next revolution would bear new forms of oppression and exploitation even worse than the present, instead of marking a progress of freedom and justice and the start of a complete liberation of mankind. At best, it would only bring about a shallow improvement, largely delusive and by no means adequate to the effort, the sacrifices, the pain of a revolution, such as expected in a more or less near future.

After contributing to overthrow the present regime, our task is to prevent, or try to prevent a new government from arising; failing to do that, at least we must struggle to prevent the new government from being exclusive and concentrating all social power in its hands; it must remain weak and unsteady, it must not be able to have enough military and financial strength, and it must be acknowledged and obeyed as little as possible. In any case, we anarchist should never take part in it, never acknowledge it, and always fight against it as we fight against the present government.

We must stay with the masses, encourage them to act directly, to take possession of the production means and organize the work and the product distribution, to occupy housing, to perform public services without waiting for resolutions or commands from higher-ranking authorities. We must contribute to such work with all our forces, and to that end we must immediately start to engage in acquiring as many skills as possible.

However, as we must uncompromisingly oppose all restraining and repressing bodies and everything that tends

to forcibly hinder the will of the people and the freedom of minorities, so we must take care not to destroy those things and disorganize those useful services that we cannot replace in a better way.

We must remember that violence, unfortunately necessary to resist violence, is no use to build anything good: it is the natural enemy of freedom, the procreator of tyranny, therefore it must be kept within the limits of strict necessity. Revolution is useful, necessary to tear down the violence of governments and privileged people; however, the establishment of a society of free people can only result from a free evolution.

It is the task of the anarchists to watch over the freedom of evolution, which is always at risk as long as men are thirsty for domination and privileges.

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A question of great, vital importance, nay, the question that must stand out on the revolutionaries' minds, is food.

There was a time when the prejudice spread out that industrial and farm products were so abundant that it would be possible to live on stockpiles for long, postponing the organization of production to a later time, after the accomplishment of the social transformation. It made an inviting propaganda item to be able to say: "People are out of everything, while everything abounds and the warehouses overflow with every good; people die of starvation and wheat rots in the granaries". Things were made so much simpler. An expropriation was enough to secure the well-being of everyone: there would be plenty of time to deal with all the rest.

Unfortunately, quite the opposite is true.

Everything is running out, and a bad harvest, or some major disaster, is enough to cause a complete shortage and the impossibility to provide to everyone's needs, even within the limits imposed by capitalism to the popular masses.

It is true that the production capacity has become almost unlimited, thanks to the means nowadays provided by mechanics, chemistry, scientific work organization, etc.

However, it's one thing to be able to produce and another to have produced. Owners and capitalists do not sufficiently exploit the means of production they own, and prevent other from exploiting them, partly for incompetence and indifference, and largely because of a system that often makes profits decrease with abundance and increase with shortage.

Because of the disorder inherent in the individualistic economy, there are unbalances between one place and the other, overproduction crises, etc., but all in all the general production is always on the verge of famine.

As a consequence, we must bear in mind that on the morrow of the revolution we shall be faced with the danger of hunger. This is not a reason for delaying the revolution, because the state of production will, with minor variations, remain the same, so long as the capitalist system lasts.

But it is a reason for us to pay attention to the problem and of how in a revolutionary situation, to avoid all waste, to preach the need for reducing consumption to a minimum, and to take immediate steps to increase production, especially of food.

This is a topic about which some essays already exist, but which needs to be investigated more thoroughly, mainly focusing on the technical means to bring the quantity of food to the level of needs.(1)

(1) I will soon come back to the issue of money.

# DEMOCRACY AND ANARCHY

ERRICO MALATESTA

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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 fellowtraveller 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-mache^ 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 the 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 parliament 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 anarchist propaganda is at last accepted and even repeated by those writers who most affect to despise our ideas ( e.g. Political Science 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 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

**NOTE TO THE ARTICLE**  
**"INDIVIDUALISM AND ANARCHISM"**  
**BY ADAMS**

(PENSIERO E VOLONTÀ, N. 15, AUGUST 1, 1924)

Adamas' reply to my article in n. 13 shows that I did not express my thought well, and induces me to add some clarifications.

I claimed that "individualist anarchism and communist anarchism are the same, or nearly so, in terms of moral motivations and ultimate goals".

I know that one could counter my claim with hundreds of texts and plenty of deeds of self-proclaimed individualist anarchists, which would demonstrate that individualist anarchist and communist anarchist are separated by something of a moral abyss.

However, I deny that that kind of individualists can be included among anarchists, despite their liking for calling themselves so.

If anarchy means non-government, non-domination, non-oppression by man over man, how can one call himself anarchist without lying to himself and the others, when he frankly claims that he would oppress the others for the satisfaction of his Ego, without any scruple or limit, other than that drawn by his own strength? He can be a rebel, because he is being oppressed and he fights to become an oppressor, as other nobler rebels fight to destroy any kind of oppression; but he sure cannot be anarchist. He is a would-be bourgeois, a would-be tyrant, who is unable to accomplish his dreams of dominion and wealth by his own strength and by legal means, and therefore he approaches anarchists to exploit their moral and material solidarity.

Therefore, I think the question is not about "communists" and "individualists", but rather about anarchists and non-

anarchists. And we, or at least many of us, were quite wrong in discussing a certain kind of alleged "anarchist individualism" as if it really was one of the various tendencies of anarchism, instead of fighting it as one of the many disguises of authoritarianism.

However, Adamas says, "if one strips individualist anarchism of all that is not anarchist, there is no individualist anarchism whatsoever left". We disagree about this.

Morally, anarchism is sufficient unto itself; but to be translated into facts it needs concrete forms of material life, and it is the preference for one or other form which differentiates the various anarchist schools of thought.

In the anarchist milieu, communism, individualism, collectivism, mutualism and all the intermediate and eclectic programmes are simply the ways considered best for achieving freedom and solidarity in economic life; the ways believed to correspond more closely with justice and freedom for the distribution of the means of production and the products of labour among men.

Bakunin was an anarchist, and he was a collectivist, an outspoken enemy of communism because he saw in it the negation of freedom and, therefore, of human dignity. And with Bakunin, and for a long time after him, almost all the Spanish anarchists were collectivists (collective property of soil, raw materials and means of production, and assignment of the entire product of labour to the producer, after deducting the necessary contribution to social charges), and yet they were among the most conscious and consistent anarchists.

Others for the same reason of defence and guarantee of liberty declare themselves to be individualists and they want each person, to have as individual property the part that is due to him of the means of production and therefore the free disposal of the products of his labour.

Others invent more or less complicated system of mutuality. But in the long run it is always the searching for a more secure guarantee of freedom which is the common factor among anarchists, and which divides them into different schools.

We are communist, because we believe that a way of social life based on brotherhood, with no oppressed nor oppressors, can be better accomplished through a freely established solidarity and a free cooperation in the interest of all, aiming at the fullest possible satisfaction of everyone's needs rather than the right to a higher or lower recompense.

We believe that the distribution of the natural means of production and the determination of the exchange value of things, both necessary in every system except communism, could be hardly be accomplished without struggle and injustice, which might eventually end up in the establishment of new forms of authority and governments. On the other hand, we readily admit the danger involved in trying to apply communism before its desire and awareness be deep-rooted, and to a larger extent than allowed by the objective conditions of production and social relations: a parasitic bureaucracy could arise, which would centralize everything in its hands and become the worst of governments.

Therefore we remain communist in our sentiment and aspiration, but we want to leave freedom of action to the experimentation of all ways of life that can be imagined and desired.

For us, it is necessary and sufficient that everyone have complete freedom, and nobody can monopolize the means of production and live on someone else's work.

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Adamas also talks about the necessity of "an organized, homogeneous, continuative anarchist movement, connected

for a common action of struggle and demand". He also says that our propaganda in deeds must not consist of "postponing action, initiative, organization, etc. until all who call themselves anarchists agree about what is to be done. Rather, we ourselves who already agree, must take immediate action, according to our general and tactical programs, without refraining from it for a silly fear of hurting the feelings of the dissenters belonging to the various fractions and tendencies".

. I perfectly agree with him; however, I believe he is wrong when he thinks the "individualists" are to blame if what he wishes has not been done so far, or it has been done insufficiently and badly.

In my opinion, the blame is on a state of mind of the anarchists, deriving >from wrong ideas spread since the origins of our movement, which made them balk at any practical plan of action. Such errors depend on a kind of natural providentialism, which led to believe that human events happen automatically, naturally, without preparation, without organization, without preconceived plans. Just as many among us think the revolution will come by itself, when the time is ripe, by the spontaneous action of the masses, so they also think that after the revolution the popular spontaneity will suffice for everything and that there is no need to foresee and prepare anything. This is the reason of the wrongs pointed out by Adamas, not the "individualists", which have always been a very small minority among us, after all, generally without credit and without influence.

The maxim "anarchy is the natural order", which, in my opinion, is diametrically opposed to the truth, was not invented by the individualists!

Anyway, we can talk about this some other time.

# **NEITHER DEMOCRATS, NOR DICTATORS : ANARCHISTS**

**ERRICO MALATESTA**

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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 of 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

# AGAINST THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AS AGAINST THE DICTATORSHIP

(ADUNATA, OCTOBER 4, 1930)

Everyone has the right to state and defend their ideas, but nobody has the right to misrepresent someone else's ideas to strengthen their own.

After years without seeing the Martello, the issue of June 21 fell into my hands. I found in it an article signed X., which talks, in a more or less imaginary way, about an insurrectionary project, which was allegedly promoted by myself, Giulietti and... D'Annunzio. From the article it appears that someone else who writes under the name of Ursus had previously written about such events, but I could not manage to find his article.

Never mind. I cannot tell now how the events referred to by X. and Ursus actually happened, because this is not the right time to let the public, and thus the police, know what one may have done or attempted to do. Also, I could not betray the trust that may have been put in me by persons, who would not like to be named now. I can be surprised, though, that these X. and Ursus, moved by the desire to find support to their tactical thesis, have not realized how tactless it is to involve someone who usually does not receive newspapers, and thus does not know what is said about him and cannot reply - in addition to their feeling no duty, in a personal matter, to take at least responsibility for what they say and sign with their real names.

What I care about - and what makes me take the trouble of pointing out said articles - is protesting the completely false statement that, at any moment whatsoever of my political activity, I may have been a supporter of the Constituent Assembly. The issue bears such a theoretical and practical

relevance, that it could become topical any moment, and it cannot leave cold anyone who calls himself anarchist and wants to act like an anarchist in any given situation.

To be precise, at the time when the events badly recollected by X. and Ursus occurred, I was striving, with my words and writings, to fight the faith and hope put by many subversives (obviously non-anarchist) in the possibility of a Constituent Assembly.

At that time I claimed, as I have always done before and after, that a Constituent Assembly is the means used by the privileged classes, when a dictatorship is not possible, either to prevent a revolution, or, when a revolution has already broken out, to stop its progress with the excuse of legalizing it, and to take back as much as possible of the gains that the people had made during the insurrectional period.

The Constituent Assembly, with its making asleep and smothering, and the dictatorship, with its crushing and killing, are the two dangers that threaten any revolution. Anarchists must aim their efforts against them.

Of course, since we are a relatively small minority, it is quite possible, and even likely, that the next upheaval will end up in the convocation of a Constituent Assembly. However, this would not happen with our participation and co-operation. It would happen against our will, despite our efforts, simply because we will not have been strong enough to prevent it. In this case, we will have to be as distrustful and inflexibly opposed to a Constituent Assembly as we have always been to ordinary parliaments and any other legislative body.

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Let this be quite clear. I am not an advocate of the 'all or nothing' theory. I believe that nobody actually behaves in such a way as implied by that theory: it would be impossible.

This is just a slogan used by many to warn about the illusion of petty reforms and alleged concessions from government and masters, and to always remind of the necessity and urgency of the revolutionary act: it is a phrase that can serve, if loosely interpreted, as an incentive to a fight without quarter against every kind of oppressors and exploiters. However, if taken literally, it is plain nonsense.

The 'all' is the ideal that gets farther and wider as progresses are made, and therefore it can never be reached. The 'nothing' would be some abysmally uncivilized state, or at least a supine submission to the present oppression.

I believe that one must take all that can be taken, whether much or little: do whatever is possible today, while always fighting to make possible what today seems impossible.

For instance, if today we cannot get rid of every kind of government, this is not a good reason for taking no interest in defending the few acquired liberties and fighting to gain more of those. If now we cannot completely abolish the capitalist system and the resulting exploitation of the workers, this is no good reason to quit fighting to obtain higher salaries and better working conditions. If we cannot abolish commerce and replace it with the direct exchange among producers, this is no good reason for not seeking the means to escape the exploitation of traders and profiteers as much as possible. If the oppressors' power and the state of the public opinion prevent now from abolishing the prisons and providing to any defence against wrongdoers with more humane means, not for this we would lose interest in an action for abolishing death penalty, life imprisonment, close confinement and, in general, the most ferocious means of repression by which what is called social justice, but actually amounts to a barbarian revenge, is exercised. If we cannot abolish the police, not for this we would allow, without protesting and resisting, that the policemen beat the prisoners and allow themselves all sorts of excesses,

overstepping the limit prescribed to them by the laws in force themselves...

I am breaking off here, as there are thousands and thousands of cases, both in individual and social life, in which, being unable to obtain 'all', one has to try and get as much as possible.

At this point, the question of fundamental importance arises about the best way of defending what one has got and fighting to obtain more; for there is one way that weakens and kills the spirit of independence and the consciousness of one's own right, thus compromising the future and the present itself, while there is another way that uses every tiny victory to make greater demands, thus preparing the minds and the environment to the longed complete emancipation.

What constitutes the characteristic, the *raison d'etre* of anarchism is the conviction that the governments - dictatorships, parliaments, etc. - are always instruments of conservation, reaction, oppression; and freedom, justice, well-being for everyone must come from the fight against authority, from free enterprise and free agreement among individuals and groups.

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One problem worries many anarchists nowadays, and rightly so.

As they find it insufficient to work on abstract propaganda and revolutionary technical preparation, which is not always possible and is done without knowing when it will be fruitful, they look for something practical to do here and now, in order to accomplish as much as possible of our ideas, despite the adverse conditions; something that morally and materially helps the anarchists themselves and at the same time serves as an example, a school, an experimental field.

Practical proposals are coming from various sides. They are all good to me, if they appeal to free initiative and to a spirit of solidarity and justice, and tend to take individuals away from the domination of the government and the master. And to avoid wasting time in continuously recurring discussions that never bring new facts or arguments, I would encourage those who have a project to try to immediately accomplish it, as soon as they find support from the minimal necessary number of participants, without waiting, usually in vain, for the support of all or many: - experience will show whether those projects were workable, and it will let the vital ones survive and thrive.

Let everyone try the paths they deem best and fittest to their temperament, both today with respect to the little things that can be done in the present environment, and tomorrow in the vast ground that the revolution will offer to our activity. In any case, what is logically mandatory for us all, if we do not want to stop being truly anarchist, is to never surrender our freedom in the hands of an individual or class dictatorship, a despot or a Constituent Assembly; for what depends on us, our freedom must find its foundation in the equal freedom of all.

# TOWARDS ANARCHISM"

**BY ERRICO MALATESTA (1853-1932)**

**"TOWARDS ANARCHISM" FIRST APPEARED IN ENGLISH  
IN THE DEPRESSION ERA PERIODICAL MAN! THIS  
LITTLE ESSAY WAS HIGHLY REGARDED BY THE  
REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHIST PRISONER CARL HARP  
(1949-1981) WHO SUGGESTED REPRINTING IT IN THIS  
FORM. FIRST PRINTING, 1982 BY BLACK CAT PRESS,  
CANADA.**

It is a general opinion that we, because we call ourselves revolutionists, expect Anarchism to come with one stroke – as the immediate result of an insurrection which violently attacks all that which exists and which replaces all with institutions that are really new. And to tell the truth this idea is not lacking among some comrades who also conceive the revolution in such a manner.

This prejudice explains why so many honest opponents believe Anarchism a thing impossible; and it also explains why some comrades, disgusted with the present moral condition of the people and seeing that Anarchism cannot come about soon, waver between an extreme dogmatism which blinds them to the realities of life and an opportunism which practically makes them forget that they are Anarchists and that for Anarchism they should struggle. This prejudice explains why so many honest opponents believe Anarchism a thing impossible; and it also explains why some comrades, disgusted with the present moral condition of the people and seeing that Anarchism cannot come about soon, waver between an extreme dogmatism which blinds them to the realities of life and an opportunism which practically makes them forget that they are Anarchists and that for Anarchism they should struggle.

If we should want to substitute one government for another, that is, impose our desires upon others, it would only be necessary to combine the material forces needed to resist the actual oppressors and put ourselves in their place.

But we do not want this; we want Anarchism which is a society based on free and voluntary accord – a society in which no one can force his wishes on another and in which everyone can do as he pleases and together all will voluntarily contribute to the well-being of the community. But because of this Anarchism will not have definitively and universally triumphed until all men will not only not want to be commanded but will not want to command; nor will Anarchism have succeeded unless they will have understood the advantage of solidarity and know how to organise a plan of social life wherein there will no longer be traces of violence and imposition.

And as the conscience, determination, and capacity of men continuously develop and find means of expression in the gradual modification of the new environment and in the realisation of the desires in proportion to their being formed and becoming imperious, so it is with Anarchism; Anarchism cannot come but little by little – slowly, but surely, growing in intensity and extension.

Therefore, the subject is not whether we accomplish Anarchism today, tomorrow, or within ten centuries, but that we walk towards Anarchism today, tomorrow, and always.

Anarchism is the abolition of exploitation and oppression of man by man, that is, the abolition of private property and government; Anarchism is the destruction of misery, of superstitions, of hatred. Therefore, every blow given to the institutions of private property and to the government, every exaltation of the conscience of man, every disruption of the present conditions, every lie unmasked, every part of human activity taken away from the control of the

authorities, every augmentation of the spirit of solidarity and initiative, is a step towards Anarchism.

The problem lies in knowing how to choose the road that really approaches the realisation of the ideal and in not confusing the real progress with hypocritical reforms. For with the pretext of obtaining immediate ameliorations these false reforms tend to distract the masses from the struggle against authority and capitalism; they serve to paralyse their actions and make them hope that something can be attained through the kindness of the exploiters and governments. The problem lies in knowing how to use the little power we have – that we go on achieving, in the most economical way, more prestige for our goal.

There is in every country a government which, with brutal force, imposes its laws on all; it compels all to be subjected to exploitation and to maintain, whether they like it or not, the existing institutions. It forbids the minority groups to actuate their ideas, and prevents the social organisations in general from modifying themselves according to, and with, the modifications of public opinion. The normal peaceful course of evolution is arrested by violence, and thus with violence it is necessary to reopen that course. It is for this reason that we want a violent revolution today; and we shall want it always – so long as man is subject to the imposition of things contrary to his natural desires. Take away the governmental violence and ours would have no reason to exist.

We cannot as yet overthrow the prevailing government; perhaps tomorrow from the ruins of the present government we cannot prevent the arising of another similar one. But this does not hinder us, nor will it tomorrow, from resisting whatever form of authority – refusing always to submit to its laws whenever possible, and constantly using force to oppose force.

Every weakening of whatever kind of authority, each accession of liberty will be a progress towards Anarchism; always it should be conquered – never asked for; always it should serve to give us greater strength in the struggle; always it should make us consider the state as an enemy with whom we should never make peace; always it should make us remember well that the decrease of the ills produced by the government consists in the decrease of its attributions and powers, and the resulting terms should be determined not by those who governed but by those were governed. By government we mean any person or group of persons in the state, country, community, or association who has the right to make laws and inflict them upon those who do not want them.

We cannot as yet abolish private property; we cannot regulate the means of production which is necessary to work freely; perhaps we shall not be able to do so in the next insurrectional movement. But this does not prevent us now, or will it in the future, from continually opposing capitalism or any other form of despotism. And each victory, however small, gained by the workers against their exploiters, each decrease of profit, every bit of wealth taken from the individual owners and put at the disposal of all, shall be a progress – a forward step towards Anarchism. Always it should serve to enlarge the claims of the workers and to intensify the struggle; always it should be accepted as a victory over an enemy and not as a concession for which we should be thankful; always we should remain firm in our resolution to take with force, as soon as it will be possible, those means which the private owners, protected by the government, have stolen from the workers. The right of force having disappeared, the means of production being placed under the management of whoever wants to produce, the result must be the fruit of a peaceful evolution.

Anarchism could not be, nor would it ever be if not for these few who want it and want it only in those things they can accomplish without the co-operation of the non-anarchists. This does not necessarily mean that the ideal of Anarchism will make little or no progress, for little by little its ideas will extend to more men and more things until it will have embraced all mankind and all life's manifestations.

Having overthrown the government and all the existing dangerous institutions which with force it defends, having conquered complete freedom for all and with it the means of regulating labour without which liberty would be a lie, and while we are struggling to arrive at this point, we do not intend to destroy those things which we little by little will reconstruct.

For example, there functions in the present society the service of supplying food. This is being done badly, chaotically, with great waste of energy and material and with capitalist interests in view; but after all, one way or another we must eat. It would be absurd to want to disorganise the system of producing and distributing food unless we could substitute for it something better and more just.

There exists a postal service. We have thousands of criticisms to make, but in the meantime we use it to send our letters, and shall continue to use it, suffering all its faults, until we shall be able to correct or replace it.

There are schools, but how badly they function. But because of this we do not allow our children to remain in ignorance – refusing their learning to read and write.

Meanwhile we wait and struggle for a time when we shall be able to organise a system of model schools to accommodate all.

From this we can see that, to arrive at Anarchism, material force is not the only thing to make a revolution; it is

essential that the workers, grouped according to the various branches of production, place themselves in a position that will insure the proper functioning of their social life – without the aid or need of capitalists or governments.

And we see also that the Anarchist ideals are far from being in contradiction, as the "scientific socialists" claim, to the laws of evolution as proved by science; they are a conception which fits these laws perfectly; they are the experimental system brought from the field of research to that of social realisation.

# **MAJORITIES & MINORITIES, AND** **OTHER ESSAYS**

**BY ERRICO MALATESTA**  
**(FROM MALATESTA: LIFE AND IDEAS, VERNE**  
**RICHARDS' ED.)**  
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## **MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES**

We do not recognize the right of the majority to impose the law on the minority, even if the will of the majority in somewhat complicated issues could really be ascertained. The fact of having the majority on one's side does not in any way prove that one must be right. Indeed, humanity has always advanced through the initiative and efforts of individuals and minorities, whereas the majority, by its very nature, is slow, conservative, submissive to superior force and to established privileges.

But if we do not for one moment recognize the right of majorities to dominate minorities, we are even more opposed to domination of the majority by a minority. It would be absurd to maintain that one is right because one is in a minority. If at all times there have been advanced and enlightened minorities, so too have there been minorities which were backward and reactionary; if there are human beings who are exceptional, and ahead of their times, there are also psychopaths, and especially are there apathetic individuals who allow themselves to be unconsciously carried on the tide of events.

In any case it is not a question of being right or wrong; it is a question of freedom, freedom for all, freedom for each

individual so long as he does not violate the equal freedom of others. No one can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is closer to the truth and which is the best road to the greatest good for each and everyone. Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.

In our opinion, therefore, it is necessary that majority and minority should succeed in living together peacefully and profitably by mutual agreement and compromise, by the intelligent recognition of the practical necessities of communal life and of the usefulness of concessions which circumstances make necessary.

As well as their reason and experience telling them that in spite of using all the alchemy of elections and parliament one always ends up by having laws which represent everything but the will of the majority, anarchists do not recognize that the majority as such, even if it were possible to establish beyond all doubt what it wanted, has the right to impose itself on the dissident minorities by the use of force.

Apart from these considerations, there always exists the fact that in a capitalist regime, in which society is divided into rich and poor, into employers and employees whose next meal depends on the absolute power of the boss, there cannot be really free elections.

## REFORMISM

The fundamental error of the reformists is that of dreaming of solidarity, a sincere collaboration, between masters and

servants, between proprietors and workers which even if it might have existed here and there in periods of profound unconsciousness of the masses and of ingenuous faith in religion and rewards, is utterly impossible today.

Those who envisage a society of well stuffed pigs which waddle contentedly under the ferule of a small number of swineherd; who do not take into account the need for freedom and the sentiment of human dignity; who really believe in a God that orders, for his abstruse ends, the poor to be submissive and the rich to be good and charitable-can also imagine and aspire to a technical organisation of production which assures abundance to all and is at the same time materially advantageous both to the bosses and to the workers. But in reality " social peace" based on abundance for all will remain a dream, so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes, that is employers and employees. And there will be neither peace nor abundance.

The antagonism is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers for the better exploitation of the forces of nature in the interests of mankind, because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don't want more! '

[Our good friends] are wasting their time when they tell us that a little freedom is better than a brutal and unbridled tyranny; that a reasonable working day, a wage that allows people to live better than animals, and protection of women and children, are preferable to the exploitation of human labour to the point of human exhaustion; or that the State school, bad as it is, is always better, from the point of view

of the child's moral development, than schools run by priests and monks . . . for we are in complete agreement. And we also agree that there may be circumstances in which the Election results, national or local, can have good or bad consequences and that this vote might be determined by the anarchists' votes if the strength of the rival parties were equally balanced.

In most cases it is an illusion; when elections are tolerably free, the only value they have is symbolic: they indicate the state of public opinion, which would have imposed itself by more efficacious means, and with more far reaching results, if it had not been offered the outlet of elections. But no matter; even if some minor advances were the direct result of an electoral victory, anarchists should not flock to the polling booths or cease to preach their methods of struggle.

Since no one can do everything in this world, one must choose one's own line of conduct.

There is always an element of contradiction between minor improvements, the satisfaction of immediate needs and the struggle for a society which is really better than the existing one. Those who want to devote themselves to the erection of public lavatories and drinking fountains where there is a need for them, or who use their energies for the construction of a road, or the establishment of a municipal school, or for the passing of some minor law to protect workers or to get rid of a brutal policeman, do well, perhaps, to use the\* ballot paper in favour of this or that influential personage. But then - since one wants to be "practical" one must go the whole hog - so, rather than wait for the victory of the opposition party, rather than vote for the more kindred party, it is worth taking a short cut and support the dominant party, and serve the government

already in office, and become the agent of the Prefect or the Mayor. And in fact the neo-converts we have in mind did not in fact propose voting for the most " progressive " party, but for the one that had the greater chance of being elected . . . But in that case where does it all end? . . .

In the course of human history it is generally the case that the malcontents, the oppressed, and the rebels, before being able to conceive and desire a radical change in the political and social institutions, restrict their demands to partial changes, to concessions by the rulers, and to improvements. Hopes of obtaining reforms as well as in their efficacy, precede the conviction that in order to destroy the power of a government or of a class, it is necessary to deny the reasons for that power, and therefore to make a revolution.

In the order of things, reforms are then introduced or they are not, and once introduced either consolidate the existing regime or undermine it; assist the advent of revolution or hamper it and benefit or harm progress in general, depending on their specific characteristic, the spirit in which they have been granted, and above all, the spirit in which they are asked for, claimed or seized by the people.

Governments and the privileged classes are naturally always guided by instincts of self preservation, of consolidation and the development of their powers and privileges; and when they consent to reforms it is either because they consider that they will serve their ends or because they do not feel strong enough to resist, and give in, fearing what might otherwise be a worse alternative.

The oppressed, either ask for and welcome improvements as a benefit graciously conceded, recognise the legitimacy of the power which is over them, and so do more harm than

good by helping to slow down, or divert and perhaps even stop the processes of emancipation. Or instead they demand and impose improvements by their action, and welcome them as partial victories over the class enemy, using them as a spur to greater achievements, and thus they are a valid help and a preparation to the total overthrow of privilege, that is, for the revolution. A point is reached when the demands of the dominated class cannot be acceded to by the ruling class without compromising their power. Then the violent conflict inevitably occurs.

It is not true to say therefore, that revolutionaries are systematically opposed to improvements, to reforms. They oppose the reformists on the one hand because their methods are less effective for securing reforms from governments and employers, who only give in through fear, and on the other hand because very often the reforms they prefer are those which not only bring doubtful immediate benefits, but also serve to consolidate the existing regime and to give the workers a vested interest in its continued existence. Thus, for instance, State pensions, insurance schemes, as well as profit sharing schemes in agricultural and industrial enterprises, etc.

Apart from the unpleasantness of the word which has been abused and discredited by politicians, anarchism has always been, and can never be anything but, reformist. We prefer to say reformative in order to avoid any possible confusion with those who are officially classified as " reformists " and seek by means of small and often ephemeral improvements to make the present system more bearable (and as a result help to consolidate it); or who instead believe in good faith that it is possible to eliminate the existing social evils by recognising and respecting, in practice if not in theory, the basic political and economic institutions which are the

cause of. as well as the prop that supports these evils. But in any case it is always a question of reforms, and the essential difference lies in the kind of reform one wants and the way one thinks of being able to achieve it. Revolution means, in the historical sense of the word, the radical reform of institutions, achieved rapidly by the violent insurrection of the people against existing power and privileges; and we are revolutionaries and insurrectionists because we do not just want to improve existing institutions but to destroy them completely, abolishing every form of domination by man over man, and every kind of parasitism on human labour; and because we want to achieve this as quickly as possible, and because we believe that institutions born of violence are maintained by violence and will not give way except to an equivalent violence. But the revolution cannot be made just when one likes. Should we remain inactive, waiting for the situation to mature with time?

And even after a successful insurrection, could we overnight realise all our desires and pass from a governmental and capitalist hell to a libertarian-communist heaven which is the complete freedom of man within the wished for community of interests with all men?

These are illusions which can take root among authoritarians who look upon the masses as the raw material which those who have power can, by decrees, supported by bullets and handcuffs, mold to their will. But these illusions have not taken among anarchists. We need the people's consensus, and therefore we must persuade by means of propaganda and example, we must educate and seek to change the environment in such a way that this education may reach an ever increasing number of people....

We are reformers today in so far as we seek to create the most favourable conditions and as large a body of enlightened militants so that an insurrection by the people would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. We shall be reformers tomorrow, after a triumphant insurrection, and the achievement of freedom, in that we will seek with all the means that freedom permits, that is by propaganda, example and even violent resistance against anyone who should wish to restrict our freedom in order to win over to our ideas an ever greater number of people.

But we will never recognise the institutions; we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to go on advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government, whether it be that of the monarchy today, or the republican or bolshevik governments of tomorrow.

## ORGANIZATION

ORGANISATION which is, after all, only the practice of co-operation and solidarity, is a natural and necessary condition of social life; it is an inescapable fact which forces itself on everybody, as much on human society in general as on any group of people who are working towards a common objective. Since man neither wishes to, nor can, live in isolation-indeed being unable to develop his personality, and satisfy his physical and moral needs outside society and without the co-operation of his fellow beings-it is inevitable that those people who have neither the means nor a sufficiently developed social conscience to permit them to associate freely with those of a like mind and with common interests, are subjected to organisation by

others, generally constituted in a class or as a ruling group, with the aim of exploiting the labour of others for their personal advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small privileged group has always been the result of the inability of most workers to agree among themselves to organise with others for production, for enjoyment and for the possible needs of defence against whoever might wish to exploit and oppress them. Anarchism exists to remedy this state of affairs....

There are two factions among those who call themselves anarchists, with or without adjectives: supporters and opponents of organisation. If we cannot succeed in agreeing, let us, at least, try to understand each other.

And first of all let us be clear about the distinctions since the question is a triple one: organisation in general as a principle and condition of social life today and in a future society; the organisation of the anarchist movement; and the organisation of the popular forces and especially of the working masses for resistance to government and capitalism....

The basic error committed by those opposed to organisation is in believing that organization is not possible without authority.

Now, it seems to us that organisation, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A man in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast, for he is unable to obtain nourishment for himself except in tropical regions or when the population is exceptionally sparse; and he is, without exception, unable to rise much above the level of the animals. Having therefore to join

with other humans, or more accurately, finding himself united to them as a consequence of the evolutionary antecedents of the species, he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity; and the most extreme anti-organisers not only are subject to the general organisation of the society they live in, but also in the voluntary actions in their lives, and in their rebellion against organisation, they unite among themselves, they share out their tasks, they organize with whom they are in agreement, and use the means that society puts at their disposal. . .

Admitting as a possibility the existence of a community organised without authority, that is without compulsion-and anarchists must admit the possibility, or anarchy would have no meaning-let us pass on to discuss the organisation of the anarchist movement.

In this case too, organisation seems useful and necessary. If movement means the whole-individuals with a common objective which they exert themselves to attain-it is natural that they should agree among themselves, join forces, share out the tasks and take all those steps which they think will lead to the achievement of those objectives. To remain isolated, each individual acting or seeking to act on his own without co-ordination, without preparation, without joining his modest efforts to a strong group, means condemning oneself to impotence, wasting one's efforts in small ineffectual action, and to lose faith very soon in one's aims and possibly being reduced to complete inactivity....

A mathematician, a chemist, a psychologist or a sociologist may say they have no programme or are concerned only with establishing the truth. They seek knowledge, they are not seeking to do something. But anarchy and socialism are not sciences; they are proposals, projects, that anarchists and socialists seek to realise and which, therefore need to be formulated as definite programmes....

If it is true that [organisation creates leaders]; if it is true that anarchists are unable to come together and arrive at agreement without submitting themselves to an authority, this means that they are not yet very good anarchists, and before thinking of establishing anarchy in the world they must think of making themselves able to live anarchistically. The remedy does not lie in the abolition of organisation but in the growing consciousness of each individual member.... In small as well as large societies, apart from brute force, of which it cannot be a question for us, the origin and justification for authority lies in social disorganisation.

When a community has needs and its members do not know how to organise spontaneously to provide them, someone comes forward, an authority who satisfies those needs by utilising the services of all and directing them to his liking. If the roads are unsafe and the people do not know what measures to take, a police force emerges which in return for whatever services it renders expects to be supported and paid, as well as imposing itself and throwing its weight around; if some article is needed, and the community does not know how to arrange with the distant producers to supply it in exchange for goods produced locally, the merchant will appear who will profit by dealing with the needs of one section to sell and of the other to buy, and impose his own prices both on the producer and the

consumer. This is what has happened in our midst; the less organised we have been the more prone are we to be imposed on by a few individuals. And this is understandable.

So much so that organisation, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each one of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders....

But an organisation, it is argued, presupposes an obligation to co-ordinate one's own activities with those of others; thus it violates liberty and fetters initiative. As we see it, what really takes away liberty and makes initiative impossible is the isolation which renders one powerless. Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting: this is true among ourselves as well as in society as a whole. And it is by co-operation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiatives

An anarchist organisation must, in my opinion [allow for] complete autonomy, and independence, and therefore full responsibility, to individuals and groups; free agreement between those who think it useful to come together for co-operative action, for common aims; a moral duty to fulfill one's pledges and to take no action which is contrary to the accepted programme. On such bases one then introduces practical forms and the suitable instruments to give real life to the organisation. Thus the groups, the federation of groups, the federations of federations, meetings, congresses, correspondence committees and so on. But this also must be done freely, in such a way as not to restrict the thought and the initiative of individual members, but only to give greater scope to the efforts which in isolation would

be impossible or ineffective. Thus for an anarchist organisation congresses, in spite of all the disadvantages from which they suffer as representative bodies . . . are free from authoritarianism in any shape or form because they do not legislate and do not impose their deliberations on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal contacts among the most active comrades, to summarise and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means for action; to acquaint everybody with the situation in the regions and the kind of action most urgently needed; to summarise the various currents of anarchist opinions at the time and to prepare some kind of statistics therefrom. And their decisions are not binding but simply suggestions, advice and proposals to submit to all concerned, and they do not become binding and executive except for those who accept them and for as long as they accept them. The administrative organs they nominate - Correspondence Commissions, etc.-have no directive powers, do not take initiatives except for those who specifically solicit and approve of them, and have no authority to impose their own views, which they can certainly hold and propagate as groups of comrades, but which cannot be presented as the official views of the organisation. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals communicated to them by groups and individuals; and they act for those who want to make use of them, to facilitate relations between groups, and co-operation between those who are in agreement on various initiatives; each is free to correspond with whoever he likes direct, or to make use of other committees nominated by specific groupings

In an anarchist organisation individual members can express any opinion and use every tactic which is not in contradiction with the accepted principles and does not

interfere with the activities of others. In every case a particular organisation lasts so long as the reasons for union are superior to those for dissension: otherwise it disbands and makes way for other, more homogenous groupings.

Certainly the life and permanence of an organisation is a condition for success in the long struggle before us, and besides, it is natural that every institution should by instinct aim at lasting indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the result of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continually changing circumstances. When it can no longer serve a useful purpose it is better that it should die.

We would certainly be happy if we could all get along well together and unite all the forces of anarchism in a strong movement; but we do not believe in the solidity of organisations which are built up on concessions and assumptions and in which there is no real agreement and sympathy between members.

Better disunited than badly united. But we would wish that each individual joined his friends and that there should be no isolated forces, or lost forces.

It remains for us to speak of the organisation of the working masses for resistance against both the government and the employers.

. . . Workers will never be able to emancipate themselves so long as they do not find in union the moral, economic and physical strength that is needed to subdue the organised might of the oppressors.

There have been anarchists, and there are still some, who while recognising the need to organise today for propaganda and action, are hostile to all organisations which do not have anarchism as their goal or which do not follow anarchist methods of struggle.... To those comrades it seemed that all organised forces for an objective less than radically revolutionary, were forces that the revolution was being deprived of. It seems to us instead, and experience has surely already confirmed our view, that their approach would condemn the anarchist movement to a state of perpetual sterility. To make propaganda we must be amongst the people, and it is in the workers' associations that workers find their comrades and especially those who are most disposed to understand and accept our ideas. But even when it were possible to do as much propaganda as we wished outside the associations, this could not have a noticeable effect on the working masses. Apart from a small number of individuals more educated and capable of abstract thought and theoretical enthusiasms, the worker cannot arrive at anarchism in one leap. To become a convinced anarchist, and not in name only, he must begin to feel the solidarity that joins him to his comrades, and to learn to cooperate with others in the defence of common interests and that, by struggling against the bosses and against the government which supports them, should realise that bosses and governments are useless parasites and that the workers could manage the domestic economy by their own efforts. And when the worker has understood this, he is an anarchist even if he does not call himself such.

Furthermore, to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our programme.

An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore always easily dominated. And it follows, logically, that it cannot desire more than that much organisation, and of the kind it needs to attain power: Electoral organisations if it hopes to achieve it by legal means; Military organisation if it relies on violent action.

But we anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves. We do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force; we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance. It matters to us therefore that all interests and opinions should find their expression in a conscious organisation and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance.

We have undertaken the task of struggling against existing social organisation, and of overcoming the obstacles to the advent of a new society in which freedom and well being would be assured to everybody. To achieve this objective we organise ourselves in a party and seek to become as numerous and as strong as possible. But if it were only our party that was organised; if the workers were to remain isolated like so many units unconcerned about each other and only linked by the common chain; if we ourselves besides being organised as anarchists in a party, were not as workers organised with other workers, we could achieve nothing at all, or at most, we might be able to impose ourselves . . . and then it would not be the triumph of anarchy but our triumph. We could then go on calling ourselves anarchists, but in reality we should simply be

rulers, and as impotent as all rulers are where the general good is concerned.'

# **THE ANARCHIST REVOLUTION:** **POLEMICAL ARTICLES 1924 -1931:**

**ERRICO MALATESTA.**

## **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

**[\*OPEN LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE EDITORS OF EL  
PRODUCTOR, AN ANARCHIST JOURNAL PUBLISHED IN  
BARCELONA - EDITOR.]**

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 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. Other wise 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 [Diego Abad de Santillan (1897-1983), Argentinean by birth. Active in the Spanish Civil War. Journalist and editor. ] which Opposes this view ... Santillan believes that I confuse syndicalism with 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 q because, too, it is a grand and universal enterprise that can be ignored 3 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 i 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 Feliu de Guixol, *Accion 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

It should be pointed out that the piece above in no way implies Malatesta was in agreement with the Platform. The same collection of translations also includes two critical articles he wrote about the platform.

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