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Averting Sclerosis

We are currently witnessing the rebirth of a strong libertarian current in most of the countries of Europe and the Americas. In France, *Le Libertaire*, the mouthpiece of the Anarchist Federation there, has a print-run of 60,000 copies, which is a figure never attained even in its most flourishing times, which is to say, back in 1936. In Italy numerous newspapers are published and enthusiastic crowds attend our meetings. News trickling out of Spain bears out the idea that the CNT and the FAI are engaged in intense illegal activity there, whilst the emigre movements have, most of them, kept faith with us. In England, where libertarian ideas had, prior to 1930, met with no success outside of immigrant groups, the perseverance of a bunch of militants has managed to break through the traditional English diffidence and spread lively literature in avant-garde circles. In South America, we have seen a similar reawakening of the organizations: the FORA is behind the strikes in Argentina, the Chilean CGT has steered labour disputes to victory just last winter. In Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Uruguay, the comrades are banding together and carrying out vigorous propaganda. Notwithstanding the difficulties created created by the Russian occupation, we see Bulgaria reclaiming her place among those territories which boast a powerful anarchist movement. And from China, from German-speaking Switzerland, from North Africa, from Austria we are hearing echoes of militants' efforts to put anti-authoritarian doctrine, spirit and methods to the labouring masses.

Is this upsurge going to carry on, or are we dealing with a fleeting hiccup to be followed by dismal tomorrows? That is the question that lots of militants reluctant to get carried away by fleeting signals are asking themselves.

We are reaping the benefits of the immense weariness that has come over the best of the working class in the wake of the war, after the dictatorships and the constant inroads made by the state-ification of thoughts and things. To many, we represent an untainted sector of the socialist movement, a sector where words still have some meaning, whereas all the others are merely an amalgam of interests that brandish the flag of socialism merely as a way of attracting the easily deceived. We are harvesting the fruits of disappointments derived from the insubstantiality and shortcomings of the social democrats and the U-turns and treacheries of the Stalinists. Finally, we are still the ones who offer hope of a better world, a hope rooted deep in most men's hearts. The conscience of the workers' movement and the torch-bearers of the socialist faith; that is what we represent these days.

This messianic aspect to anarchism constitutes our strength, but alas! Our weakness as well and, depending on whether we accept it as definitive or as a temporary, incomplete thing, we will adopt different approaches. The harsh realities of everyday living, as well as those of social living, are problems the solution of which involves not just incontrovertibly important moral factors, but also a modicum of material, organizational and technical ones. The political parties and the privileged strata of society have set about solving those problems. Therein lies the reason for the success of some and the ascendancy of others. This is the terrain on which the anarchist movement has had its shortcomings exposed, so that, sympathizers or militants, having for a greater or shorter period of time caressed the Statue of Liberty, they go to bed with the first trollop whose tricks cannot disguise her brutishness but who has the advantage of being lively.

This is what will happen if our movement proves unable to hang on to its doctrinal novelty and, at the same time, weather the complicated activities of daily life.

If we examine the past, we can see that our movement has rarely managed to strike that balance. Either the most prominent militants, after having, by word of mouth, pamphlet or book spread the unassailable principles of anarchist thought, lost the run of themselves at their first stern trial: the 1914-1918 war (the name Kropotkin springs to mind, closely followed by a multitude of others), or they retreated from the word and established a brand-new style of monastic order whose contempt for the masses justified their isolation.

To be sure, there were attempts to turn the anarchist movement into a social movement capable of fertilizing every manifestation of social life with the libertarian spirit and of provoking or protecting the birth of new cells the structure of which would not thwart the normal development of the individual, nor sterilize his initiatives. Crude soviets, factory councils, free agricultural communes, workers' unions have, in certain areas and at very specific times, provided a sound base for the movement by conjuring up a favourable climate and have represented centres receptive to its propaganda.

In the quest for practical formulas which vary according to circumstances, origins and history, anarchism has met with a startling wealth of creativity and growth welling up from deep within the masses. Whilst anarchism had a hard time putting down roots in Russia, because its militants came largely from outside, the Makhnovists resurrected the tradition of the Republic of Zaporozhye and the Kronstadt sailors made their own way, despite seemingly contradictory slogans, moving in the direction of a doctrine that spoke to their thirty year-long experience of struggle. And the peasants of Levante and Aragon

who knew that, for two centuries, the civil servants in Madrid had never and never could in any way ease their poverty, found their own beliefs spelled out plainly in libertarian pamphlets.

This confluence of doctrine with facts, most often the result of circumstances or instinct, is something to be systematically pursued today.

Not because of any need to look upon success as proof of a truth, but because it would be puerile to countenance the truth we believe we hold not to be practicable. The popular instincts, strength and resources upon which we think we can call after the revolutionary transformation, should be harnessed, starting right now, notwithstanding and indeed because of the difficulties of the moment.

If, in this period of widespread convulsion, when the public authorities, like the parties, cannot come up with genuine solutions to the issues worrying the worker and peasant masses, we have no way of knowing which of the mish-mash of initiatives and rumblings from below represents the future, unless we can choose the slogans that address the deepest interests of the wretched masses, then what sort of belief in us can our listeners have and what respect can we have for ourselves and for our actions? Putting off concrete action, putting off work in society until the post-revolutionary period is upon us is in actuality an abdication of our vanguard task and settling for the role of custodians of the holy scriptures.

Let it not be thought that it is a matter of introducing into the movement some brand-new reformism or parliamentarism. Quite the opposite. But we should expect the most dynamic among us to get fed up with gazing at the sacred heads and, in order to banish the rumblings of mind and limbs, to switch to those who will offer them action and movement damaging to our ideological inheritance. And then our sclerosis will aid and abet our adversaries' recruitment drive.

A militant recently released from prison and whose many adventures have taken him to Russia, Germany and the Balkans and whom we asked for his impressions after reading some Italian anarchist newspapers, answered candidly: archival materials. In fact, we need to acknowledge that, from a reading of our papers, it is virtually impossible to follow what is actually happening in Italy – not the ministerial speeches nor the official texts, but the big issues and the big needs.

Are not the experience of the Carrara comrades and of the rebuilt “anarchist” bridge there worth a thousand speeches, provided that it is repeated in other regions and industries? Have we forgotten that propaganda by deed is the sort that produces the best results? Do we need convincing that the print-run of a newspaper, the size of the audience at meetings have an effective impact on the

fate of a people? If that were so, the canker of politics will have contaminated us in an unexpected are

If, faced with the solution offered by the state, the parties or imperialism, we cannot offer any solutions of our own then the unions, the cooperatives, the tenants and the unemployed will listen all the closer to theirs, unless we have it in us to solidly back wholesome initiatives that erupt everywhere to help break down the vice-like grip of regulations, laws and prohibitions, then let us make do with living on the edges of events, but let us also expect to suffer the consequences of that attitude.

We stand for a force that aims to be used, not out of any appetite for power, but because it actually does constitute a chance of bringing influence to bear on events.

And let no one be afraid of contact with real life any more. If we talk about the people's constructive capabilities let us put it to the test in the here and now and drop the arrogance that all too often has us scorning the masses as if they bore the stain of original sin.

How can we avoid anarchism's sclerosis from finally consigning us to the museum of social curiosities?

Primarily, it is a matter of overhauling our literature, not in pursuit of the pointless pleasure of reiterating in different words what the theorists of the late 19th century spelled out so clearly, but in order to examine brand-new problems raised by current events, problems that could not have been foreseen fifty years back and which the Marxists cannot analyze without confessing that their methods and their forecasts have failed. Let us cite, principally, the advent of the class of the technicians, the end of the myth of the inevitability of a socialist society to follow the passing of Capitalism, the multiple deviations of the workers' movement and the pseudo-socialism of fascist or Catholic tendencies.

But, in addition, we need to establish between the various local movements a swapping of documentation, in the absence of which no issue can be seriously tackled, nor any problem internationally understood.

Finally, in our everyday activities, the same concern with clarity should be shared by the entire movement and, through it, the working class.

Needless to say, this endeavour should not in any way make doctrinarians or dogmatists of our militants. Information should not make do with heads and schemes but must be complemented by an ongoing flow of exchanges with the worker and peasant masses.

Part of this, too, is the desire not to lose close contact with reality, by which we mean the people's real life, which should be our guide. Making ground in a rather mixed-up situation, with a clear vision of the factors at work in it, we can hope to respond to the worries that afflict the entirety of the people, and ourselves. We may hope to provide answers in this way to the workers' difficulties: dismissals, unemployment, wages, distribution, by proposing and applying, if only on a partial basis, solutions which, without bordering on reformist, restore the belief in the free functioning of social democracy as we conceive it.

Can these suggestions be taken into consideration in some practical form by the International Congress, the calling of which is becoming a matter of urgent necessity?

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