

DEFENCE OF THE REVOLUTION

BY ALEXANDER BERKMAN

"Suppose your system is tried, would you have any means of defending the revolution?" you ask—Certainly! "Even by armed force?"—Yes, if necessary. "But armed force is organised violence, didn't you say Anarchism was against it?" Anarchism is opposed to any interference with your liberty, be it by force and violence or by any other means. It is against all invasion and compulsion. But if anyone attacks *you*, then it is *he* who is invading you, he who is employing violence against you. You have a right to defend yourself. More than that, it is your duty, as an Anarchist, to protect your liberty, to resist coercion and compulsion. Otherwise you are a slave not a free man. In other words the social revolution will attack no one, but it will defend itself against invasion from any quarter.

Besides, you must not confuse the social revolution with Anarchy. Revolution in some of its stages is a violent upheaval; Anarchy is a social condition of freedom and peace. The revolution is the *means* of bringing Anarchy about, but it is not Anarchy itself. It is to pave the way for Anarchy, to establish conditions which will make a life of liberty possible.

But to achieve its purpose the revolution must be imbued with and directed by the Anarchist spirit and ideas. The end shapes the means, just as the tool you use must be fit to do the work you want to accomplish. That is to say, the social revolution must be Anarchistic in method as in aim.

Revolutionary defence must be in consonance with this spirit. Self-defence excludes all acts of coercion, of persecution or revenge. It is concerned only with repelling attack and depriving the enemy of opportunity to invade you.

"How would you repel foreign invasion?" By the strength of the revolution. In what does that strength consist? First and foremost, in the support of the people, in the devotion of the industrial and agricultural masses. If they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, they have become the masters of their own lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their own welfare, then in that very sentiment you have the greatest strength of the revolution. The masses fight today for king, capitalist or president because they believe them worth fighting for. Let them believe in the revolution and they will defend it to the death.

They will fight for the revolution with heart and soul, as the half-starved working men, women and even children of Petrograd defended their city, almost with bare hands, against the White army of General Yudenditch. Take that

faith away, deprive the people of power by setting up some authority over them, be it a political party or a military organization, and you have dealt a fatal blow to the revolution. You will have robbed it of its main source of strength, the masses. You will have made it defenceless.

It was the *volunteer* Red Guard that successfully defended the Russian Revolution in its most critical initial stages. The later Red Army was powerless without the volunteer divisions. The volunteers defeated the White armies, freed Siberia from Kolchak, and the north of Russia from the foreign armies assisting the Tchaikovsky-Miller government. In the south they saved the revolution from Denikin, etc., defeated the invading Germans, French, Italians and Greeks, and subsequently routed the forces of General Wrangel.

The only really effective defence of the revolution lies in the attitude of the people. Popular discontent is the worst enemy of the revolution, and its greatest danger. We must always bear in mind that the strength of the social revolution is organic, not mechanistic: not in mechanical measures lies its might, but in its industry, in its agility to reconstruct life, to establish liberty and justice. Let the people feel that it is indeed their own cause which is at stake, and the last man of them will fight like a lion on its behalf.

The same applies to internal as to external defence. What chance would any White general or counter-revolutionist have if he could not exploit oppression and injustice to incite the people against the revolution? Counter-revolution can feed only on popular discontent. Where the masses are conscious that the revolution and all its activities are in their own hands that they themselves are managing things and are free to change their methods when they consider it necessary, counter-revolution can find no support and is harmless. "But would you let counter-revolutionists incite the people?"

By all means. Let them talk all they like. To restrain them would serve only to create a persecuted class, and thereby enlist popular sympathy for them and their cause. To suppress speech and press is not only a theoretic offence against liberty: it is a direct blow against the very foundations of the revolution. It would, first of all, raise problems where none had existed before. It would introduce methods which must lead to discontent and opposition, to bitterness, strife, and to prison, Teheka and civil war.

The social revolution must from the very start be based on entirely different principles, on a new conception and attitude. Full freedom is the very breath of its existence; and be it never forgotten that the cure for evil and disorder is *more* liberty, not suppression. Suppression leads only to violence and destruction.

"Will you not defend the revolution?"

Certainly we will. But not against mere talk, not against an expression of opinion. The revolution must be big enough to welcome even the severest criticism, and profit by it if it is justified. The revolution will defend itself most determinedly against real counter-revolution, against all active enemies, against any attempt to defeat or sabotage it by forcible invasion or violence. That is the right of the revolution and its duty. But it will not persecute the conquered foe, nor wreak vengeance upon an entire social class because of the fault of individual members of it. The sins of the fathers shall not be visited upon their children.

"What will you do with the counter-revolutionists?"

Actual combat and armed resistance involve human sacrifices, and the counter-revolutionists who lose their life under such circumstances suffer the unavoidable consequences of their deeds. But the revolutionary people will not slaughter the wounded and prisoners, nor shoot hostages.

"How will you treat counter-revolutionists taken prisoners during an engagement?"

The old method is to imprison them, support them in idleness, and employ numerous men to guard and punish them, embittering them further against the revolution, so that they nurse thoughts of vengeance and new conspiracies. The revolution will regard such methods as stupid and detrimental to its best interests. It will try instead by humane treatment to convince the defeated enemy of the error and uselessness of his resistance. It will apply liberty instead of revenge. It will take into consideration that most of the counter-revolutionists are dupes rather than enemies, deluded victims of some individuals seeking power and authority. It will know that they need enlightenment rather than punishment and that the former will accomplish more than the latter. Even today this perception is gaining ground. The Bolsheviks defeated the Allied armies in Russia more effectively by revolutionary propaganda among the enemy soldiers than by the strength of their artillery.

"Do you think that would really be the best way to deal with counter-revolution?"

By all means. Humane treatment and kindness are more effective than cruelty and vengeance. The new attitude in this regard would suggest also a number of other methods of similar character. Various modes of dealing with conspirators and active enemies of the revolution would develop as soon as you begin to practice the new policy. They might be scattered among more revolutionary parts of the community. They must eat and must find means of existence before harbouring wrecking ideas. They would have to depend on the

goodwill of the community to enjoy its hospitality: presently they would cease to be a danger to the revolution. We have repeatedly seen such examples in Russia, in cases where counter-revolutionists had escaped the Tcheka and settled down in some village or city, where as a result of considerate and decent treatment they became useful members of the community, often more zealous on behalf of the public welfare than the average citizen, while hundreds of their fellow conspirators, who had not been lucky enough to avoid arrest, were busy in prison with thoughts of revenge and new plots.

Whatever the methods of treating such "prisoners in freedom" they will be more satisfactory than the present system of revenge and punishment, the complete failure of which has been demonstrated throughout human experience. The revolution would be the greatest gainer, spiritually, by forsaking methods of revenge and persecution and practising humanity and magnanimity. Revolutionary self defence, inspired by such methods, will be the more effective because of the very freedom it will guarantee even to its enemies. Its appeal to the masses and to the world at large will thereby be the more irresistible and universal. In its justice and humanity lies the invincible strength of the revolution.

No revolution has yet tried the true way of liberty. None have had sufficient faith in it. Force and suppression, persecution, revenge and terror have characterised all revolutions in the past and have thereby defeated their original aims. The time has come to try new methods, new ways. The social revolution is to achieve the emancipation of man through liberty, but if we have no faith in the latter, revolution becomes a denial and betrayal of itself. Let us then have courage of freedom: let it replace suppression and terror. Let liberty become our faith and our *deed* and we shall grow strong therein.

Only liberty can make the social revolution effective and wholesome. It alone can pave the way to greater heights and prepare a society where well-being and joy shall be the heritage of all. Then will dawn the day when man shall for the first time have full opportunity to grow and expand in the free and generous sunshine of Anarchy.

(Extract from "What is Communist Anarchism?")

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