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Revolution in Practice
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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.

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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.

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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 form 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.

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.

* * *

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,

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.

* * *

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.

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.

* * *

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

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

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

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.