

The Anarchist Revolution

Errico Malatesta

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3rd Zabalaza Books Edition
January, 2019



The **Errico Malatesta** Online Archive

“We anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves.”

The archive aims to provide an easily-accessible and comprehensive online collection of Errico Malatesta’s writings in English. It comes out of a deep respect for his commitment to the movement, and the clarity and importance of his ideas, even for us today. As Vernon Richards, in his introduction to the third edition of *Malatesta: Life & Ideas* put it, “...Malatesta’s analysis of the political situation in the Western world and his realistic approach to the role that anarchists could play in changing that society are as valid today as ever they were.” Hopefully, it will provide a useful resource for the movement.

The **Errico Malatesta Online Archive** is a work in progress, and will take shape as more works are located and added. It is envisaged as an addition and complement to existing online collections, many of which are often incomplete, do not include important works, or do not represent the full range of his ideas.

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Footnotes:

The Anarchist Revolution

1. *Pensiero e Volontà*, June 15, 1924
2. *Umanità Nova*, October 28, 1921
3. *Umanità Nova*, September 30, 1920
4. *Umanità Nova*, April 22, 1920
5. *Umanità Nova*, August 30, 1921
6. *Il Risveglio*, December 30, 1922
7. *Umanità Nova*, November 25, 1922
8. *Pensiero e Volontà*, June 15, 1924
9. *Pensiero e Volontà*, June 1, 1926
10. *Pensiero e Volontà*, July 1, 1926
11. *Pensiero e Volontà*, June 16, 1926
12. *Pensiero e Volontà*, August 1, 1926
13. *Il Risveglio*, December 14, 1929
14. *Il Risveglio*, November 30, 1929
15. *Vogliamo*, June, 1930
16. *Vogliamo*, June, 1930

The Insurrection

1. *Umanità Nova*, August 12, 1920
2. *Umanità Nova*, August 7, 1920
3. *Umanità Nova*, September 6, 1921
4. *Vogliamo*, June 1930
5. *Umanità Nova*, April 7, 1922
6. *Il Programma Anarchico*, Bologna, 1920

Expropriation

1. *Il Programma Anarchico*, Bologna, 1920
2. *Umanità Nova*, June 19, 1920
3. *Umanità Nova*, April 1, 1920

Defence of the Revolution

1. *Fede!*, November 25, 1923
2. *Umanità Nova*, August 27, 1920
3. *Umanità Nova*, October 7, 1922
4. *Pensiero e Volontà*, October 1, 1924
5. *Pensiero e Volontà*, October 1, 1925
6. *Umanità Nova*, August 12, 1920



★ The Anarchist Revolution ★

THE REVOLUTION IS THE CREATION OF NEW LIVING INSTITUTIONS, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscious action, for their own futures. Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who work in them in their own interest as well as the public's; Revolution is the destruction of all coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions; Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence; Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes, and tastes of all kinds that exist among the people; Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative, district, communal, regional, national bodies which, without having any legislative power, serve to make known and to coordinate the desires and interests of people near and far and which act through information, advice and example. Revolution is freedom proved in the crucible of facts — and lasts so long as freedom lasts, that is until others, taking advantage of the weariness that overtakes the masses, of the inevitable disappointments that follow exaggerated hopes, of the probable errors and human faults, succeed in constituting a power, which supported by an army of conscripts or mercenaries, lays down the law, arrests the movement at the point it has reached, and then begins the reaction.¹

The great majority of anarchists, if I am not mistaken, hold the view that human perfectibility and anarchy would not be achieved even in a few thousand years, if first one did not create by the revolution, made by a conscious minority, the necessary environment for freedom and well-being. For this reason we want to make the revolution as soon as possible, and to do so we need to take advantage of all positive forces and every favourable situation that arises.²

The task of the conscious minority is to profit from every situation to change the environment in a way that will make possible the education and spiritual elevation of the people, without which there is no real way out.

And since the environment today, which obliges the masses to live in misery, is maintained by violence, we advocate and prepare for violence. That is why we are revolutionaries, and not because “we are desperate men, thirsting for revenge and filled with hate.”³

We are revolutionaries because we believe that only the revolution, the violent revolution, can solve the social question... We believe furthermore that the revolution is an act of will — the will of individuals and of the masses; that it needs for its success certain objective conditions, but that it does not happen of necessity, inevitably, through the single action of economic and political forces.⁴

I told the jury [at my trial] in Milan that I am a revolutionary not only in the philosophical meaning of the word but also in the popular and insurrectionalist sense; and I said so in order to clearly distinguish between my views and those of others who call themselves revolutionaries, but who interpret the world even astronomically so as not to have to bring in the fact of violence, the insurrection, which must open the way to revolutionary achievements. I declared that I had not sought to provoke revolution because at the time there was no need to provoke it; what was urgently needed instead was to bend all our efforts for the generally desired revolution to succeed and not lead to new tyrannies; but I insisted that I would have provoked it if the situation demanded then, just as I would in a similar situation in the future.⁵

I had said “we want to make the revolution as soon as possible”; Colomer replies that it would be wiser to say “We want to make anarchy as soon as possible.” A poor polemical expedient! Since we are convinced that anarchy cannot be achieved until after the revolution which will sweep away the first material obstacles, it is clear that our efforts must in the first instance be directed to making the revolution and in such a way that it is in the direction of anarchy... I have repeated thousands of times that we would have to provoke the revolution with all the means at our disposal and act in it as anarchists, that is to say, opposing the constitution of any authoritarian regime and putting into operation as much as we can of our programme. And I would wish that, to take advantage of the increased freedom that we would have won, anarchists were morally and technically prepared to realise within the limits of their numbers, those forms of social life and cooperation which they consider best and most suitable for paving the way for the future.⁶

We do not want to “wait for the masses to become anarchist before making the revolution,” the more so since we are convinced that they will never become

of the community; that committees composed of volunteers or elected by the people should take over, under the direct control of the population, all available accommodation to house, as well as is possible in the circumstances, those most in need; that other committees, always under the direct control of the people, should deal with provisioning and the distribution of consumer goods; that all the members of the bourgeoisie should of necessity have to “muck in” with those who were the proletarian masses and work like everybody else in order to enjoy the same benefits as everybody else. And all this must be done immediately, on the very day, or the morrow of the successful insurrection, without waiting for orders from central committees or from any other kind of authority.

This is what the anarchists want, and it is in fact what would naturally happen if the revolution were to be a truly social revolution and not just a political change, which after a few convulsions would lead things back to what they were formerly. For, if one did not deprive the bourgeoisie of its economic power at once, it would in a short time recapture the political power which the insurrection had torn from its grasp. And in order to take away economic power from the bourgeoisie, it is necessary to organise immediately a new economic structure based on justice and equality. Economic needs, at least the most essential ones, cannot be interrupted; they must be satisfied immediately. “Central Committees” either do nothing or act when their services are no longer required.⁶

for justice and freedom and leave the way open for future improvements, which other solutions might not.

In the event justice, liberty and solidarity should override economic advantages. One must not think of destroying everything in the belief that later things will look after themselves. Present civilisation is the result of development extending over thousands of years, and has solved, in a way, the problem of large concentrations of population, often crowded into small territories, and of satisfying their ever-increasing and complex needs. Its benefits have decreased — because development has been taking place under the pressure of authority in the interests of the ruling classes; but even if one takes away authority and privilege, the advantages acquired, the triumphs of man over the adverse forces of nature, the accumulated experience of past generations, sociability learned through cohabitation throughout the ages and by the proven benefits of mutual aid — all these advantages will remain, and it would be foolish, and in any case impossible, to give up all these things.

We must therefore fight authority and privilege, but take advantage of all the benefits of civilisation; and nothing must be destroyed which satisfies, even badly, a human need until we have something better to put in its place. We must be intransigent in our opposition to all capitalist imposition and exploitation, and tolerant of all social concepts which prevail in different human groupings, so long as they do not threaten the equal rights and freedom of others; and content ourselves with advancing gradually in step with the moral development of the people and as the available material and intellectual means increase — doing all we can, of course, by study, work, and propaganda to hasten the development towards ever more advanced ideals.⁵

But after the successful insurrection, when the government has fallen, what must be done?

We anarchists would wish that in every district the workers, or, more accurately, those among them who are more socially conscious and have a spirit of initiative, should take possession of all the means of production, of all the wealth — land, raw materials, houses, machines, food stocks, etc., and to the best of their ability, initiate new forms of social life. We would wish that the land workers who today work for masters should no longer recognise the landowners' property rights but continue and intensify production on their own account, establishing direct contacts with workers in industry and transport for the exchange of goods and services; that industrial workers, including engineers and technicians, should take possession of the factories and continue and intensify production for their own benefit and that of the whole community; immediately switching production in those factories which today turn out useless or harmful goods to supplying the articles most urgently required to satisfy the needs of the public; that the railwaymen should continue to operate the railways but in the service

anarchist if the institutions which keep them enslaved are not first violently destroyed. And since we need the support of the masses to build up a force of sufficient strength and to achieve our specific task of radical change of the social organism by the direct action of the masses, we must get closer to them, accept them as they are, and from within their ranks seek to “push” them forward as much as possible. That is, of course, if we really intend to work for the practical achievement of our ideals, and are not content with preaching in the desert for the simple satisfaction of our intellectual pride.

We are accused of a “reconstructive mania”; we are told that to speak of the “morrow of the revolution” as we do, is a meaningless phrase because the revolution is a profound change in the whole of social life, which has already started and will go on for centuries to come.

All this is simply a misuse of words. If one takes revolution in that sense, it is synonymous with progress, with a historic view of life, which through a thousand and one vicissitudes will end, if our wishes come true, in the total triumph of anarchy throughout the world. In that sense all kinds of people are revolutionary. When you introduce the centuries into the argument, everyone will agree with everything you say.

But when we speak of revolution, when the masses speak of it, as when one refers to it in history, one simply means the insurrection triumphant. Insurrections will be necessary as long as there are power groups which use their material force to exact obedience from the masses. And it is only too clear that there will be many more insurrections before the people win that minimum of indispensable conditions for free and peaceful development, when humanity will be able to advance towards its noblest objectives without cruel struggles and useless suffering.⁷

By revolution we do not mean just the insurrectionary act, which is nevertheless indispensable (except in the most unlikely event that the existing regime collapses without the need for a push from outside), but would be sterile if it served to replace one state of coercion by another.⁸

One must dearly distinguish between the revolutionary act which destroys as much as it can of the old regime and puts in its place new institutions, and government which comes afterwards to halt the revolution and suppress as many of the revolutionary conquests as it can.

History teaches us that all advances that are the result of revolutions were secured in the period of popular enthusiasm, when either a recognised government did not exist or was too weak to make a stand against the revolution. But once the government was formed, so reaction started which served the interest of the old and the new privileged classes and took back from the masses all that it could.

Our task then is to make, and to help others make, the revolution by taking advantage of every opportunity and all available forces: advancing the revolution as much as possible in its constructive as well as destructive role, and always remaining opposed to the formation of any government, either ignoring it or combatting it to the limits of our capacities.

We will no more recognise a republican Constituent than we now recognise the parliamentary monarchy. We cannot stop it if the people want it; we might even occasionally be with them in fighting attempts to bring about a restoration [of the monarchy]; but we will want and will demand complete freedom for those who think as we do and who wish to live outside the tutelage and oppression of the State, to propagate their ideas by word and deed. Revolutionaries, yes; but above all anarchists.⁹

1. Destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat.
2. Any organisation of an allegedly provisional revolutionary political power to achieve this destruction cannot be other than one trick more, and would be as dangerous to the proletariat as are all present governments.
3. In refusing every compromise for the achievement of the social revolution, workers of the world must establish solidarity in revolutionary action outside the framework of bourgeois politics.

These [anarchist] principles [as formulated in 1872 at the Congress of St. Imier under the inspiration of Bakunin] continue to point to the right road for us. Those who have tried to act in contradiction to them have disappeared, because however defined, State, dictatorship and parliament can only lead the masses back to slavery. All experience so far bears this out. Needless to say, for the delegates of St. Imier as for us and all anarchists, the abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege.¹⁰

The conviction, which I share, of those who see the need for a revolution to eliminate the material forces which exist to defend privilege and to prevent every real social progress, has led many of them to believe that the only important thing is the insurrection, and to overlook what has to be done to prevent an insurrection from remaining a sterile act of violence against which an act of reactionary violence would be the eventual reply. For these comrades all practical questions, of organisation, of how to make provisions for the distribution of food, are today idle questions: for them these are matters which will solve themselves, or will be solved by those who come after us.... Yet the conclusion we come to is: Social reorganisation is something we must all think about right now, and as the old is destroyed we shall have a more human and just society as well as one more receptive to future advances. The alternative

anarchists and socialists, and massacred rebellious workers and peasants, and has halted the development of a revolution which really might have ushered in a new era for mankind. Those who believe in the liberating and revolutionary efficacy of repression and savagery have the same kind of backward mentality as the jurists who believe that crimes can be prevented and the world morally improved by the imposition of stiff punishments.

The Terror, like war, awakens atavistic and bellicose sentiments, still barely covered by a cloak of civilisation, and raises to the highest posts the worse elements of the population. And far from serving to defend the revolution it discredits it, makes it repellent to the masses and after a period of fierce struggles, gives rise, of necessity, to what they would today call “a return to normality,” that is, to the legalisation and perpetuation of tyranny. Whichever side wins, one always arrives at the creation of a strong government, which assures peace to some at the price of freedom, and to others domination without too many risks....

Certainly the revolution must be defended and developed with an inexorable logic; but one must not and cannot defend it with means which contradict its ends.

The most powerful means for defending the revolution remains always that of taking away from the bourgeoisie the economic means on which their power is based, and of arming everybody (until such time as one will have managed to persuade everybody to throw away their arms as useless and dangerous toys), and of interesting the mass of the population in the victory of the revolution.

If in order to win it were necessary to erect the gallows in the public square, then I would prefer to lose.⁴

And after the revolution, that is, after the defeat of the existing powers and the overwhelming victory of the forces of insurrection, what then?

It is then that gradualism really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country, the utilisation for the benefit of everybody of all natural sources of power and of raw materials; distribution of industries and, cultivation according to the natural resources of the different regions; public education, care of children and the aged, health services, protection against common criminals and the more dangerous ones who might again try to suppress the freedom of others for the benefit of individuals or parties — and so on. And in every problem [anarchists] should prefer the solutions which not only are economically superior but which satisfy the need

The dangers with which a revolution is faced do not come solely or principally from the reactionaries conspiring for a restoration and calling for foreign intervention; they also come from the possibility of degeneration of the revolution itself; and from the arrivistes who, though revolutionaries, nevertheless retain a mentality and sympathies which are bourgeois and seek to direct the revolution towards ends which are anything but equalitarian and libertarian.²

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, anarchists could then only act through propaganda and by example.

Destroy the institutions and the machinery of existing social organisations? 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 organisations 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 materials and goods, the distribution of foodstuffs, the railways, postal services, and all public services administered by the State or by private companies, have been organised 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 re-organising 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.³

There are still many people who are fascinated by the idea of "terror." For them it seems that the guillotine, firing squads, massacres, deportations, and jails are powerful and indispensable arms of the revolution, and observe that if so many revolutions have been defeated and have not produced the results hoped for, it is the fault of the goodness, and "weakness" of the revolutionaries, who have not persecuted, repressed and killed on a large enough scale.

It is a prejudice current in some revolutionary circles which had its origins in the rhetoric and historic falsification of the apologists of the Great French Revolution and has been revived in recent years by the Bolsheviks in their propaganda. But the truth is just the opposite; Terror has always been the instrument of tyranny. In France it served the grim tyranny of Robespierre and paved the way for Napoleon and the subsequent reaction. In Russia it persecuted and killed

is that "the leaders" will think about these problems, and we shall have a new government, which will do exactly as all previous governments have done, in making the people pay for the scant and poor services they render, by taking away their freedom and allowing them to be oppressed by every kind of parasite and exploiter.¹¹

I say that in order to abolish the "gendarme" and all the harmful social institutions we must know what to put in their place, not in a more or less distant future but immediately, the very day we start demolishing. One only destroys, effectively and permanently, that which one replaces by something else; and to put off to a later date the solution of problems which present themselves with the urgency of necessity, would be to give time to the institutions one is intending to abolish to recover from the shock and reassert themselves, perhaps under other names, but certainly with the same structure.

Our solutions may be accepted by a sufficiently large section of the population and we shall have achieved anarchy, or taken a step towards anarchy; or they may not be understood or accepted and then our efforts will serve as propaganda and place before the public at large the programme for a not distant future. But in any case we must have our solutions: provisional, subject to correction and revision in the light of experience, but we must have our solutions if we do not wish to submit passively to those of others, and limit ourselves to the unprofitable role of useless and impotent grumblers.¹²

I believe that we anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must make special efforts to acquire a predominating influence in order to be able to swing the movement towards the realisation of our ideals; but we must acquire this influence by being more active and more effective than the others. Only in this way will it be worth acquiring. Today, we must examine thoroughly, develop and propagate our ideas and coordinate our efforts for common action. We must act inside the workers' movement to prevent it from limiting itself to, and being corrupted by, the exclusive demand for the small improvements possible under the capitalist system, and seek to make it serve for the preparation of the complete social transformation. We must work among the mass of unorganised, and possibly unorganisable, workers, to awaken in them the spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy existence. We must initiate and support every possible kind of movement which tends to weaken the power of the State and of the capitalists and to raise the moral level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in a word, get ready and prepare, morally and materially, for the revolutionary act which has to open the way to the future.

And tomorrow, in the revolution, we must play an active part (if possible before, and more effectively, than the others) in the necessary physical struggle, seeking to make it as radical as possible, in order to destroy all the repressive forces of the State and to induce the workers to take possession of the means of

production (land, mines, factories, transport, etc.) and of all existing goods, and themselves organise, immediately, a just distribution of food products. At the same time we must arrange for the exchange of goods between communities and regions and continue to intensify production and all those services which are of use to the public.

We must, in every way possible, and in accord with local conditions and possibilities, encourage action by workers' associations, co-operatives, groups of volunteers — in order to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian groups, new governments, combating them with violence if necessary, but above all by rendering them useless.

And if there were not sufficient support among the people to prevent the reconstitution of the State, its authoritarian institutions and its organs of repression, we should refuse to co-operate or recognize it, and rebel against its demands, claiming full autonomy for ourselves and for all dissident minorities. In short, we should remain in a state of open rebellion if possible, and prepare the way to convert present defeat into a future success...

I do not think that what matters is the triumph of our plans, our projects and our utopias, which in any case will need the confirmation of experiment, and may as a result have to be modified, developed or adapted to the true moral and material conditions of time and place. What matters most of all is that the people, all people, should lose their sheeplike instincts and habits with which their minds have been inculcated by an age-long slavery, and that they should learn to think and act freely. It is to this great task of spiritual liberation that anarchists must especially devote their attention.¹³

Once the government has been overthrown, or at least neutralised, it will be the task of the people, and especially of those among them who have initiative and organising ability, to provide for the satisfaction of immediate needs and to prepare for the future by destroying privileges and harmful institutions and in the meantime seeing to it that those useful institutions which today serve the ruling class either exclusively or principally, shall operate in favour of all.

Anarchists will have the special mission of being the vigilant custodians of freedom, against all aspirants to power and against the possible tyranny of the majority.¹⁴

We are agreed in thinking that apart from the problem of assuring victory against the material forces of the adversary there is also the problem of giving life to the revolution after victory.

We are in agreement that a revolution which were to result in chaos would not be a vital revolution.



★ Defence of the Revolution ★

THE REVOLUTION WE WANT CONSISTS IN DEPRIVING THE PRESENT holders of their power and wealth and in putting the land and the means of production and all existing wealth at the disposal of the workers, that is of everybody, since those who are not, will have to become, workers. And the revolutionaries must defend this revolution by seeing to it that no individual, party or class finds the means to constitute a government and restore privilege in favour of new or old bosses....

To defend, to save the revolution there is only one means: that of pushing the revolution as far as it will go. So long as there are those who will be in a position to oblige others to work for them; so long as there are those who are in a position to violate the freedom of others, the revolution will not be complete, and we will be still in a state of legitimate defence and to the violence which oppresses we will oppose the violence that liberates.

Do you fear that the dispossessed bourgeoisie may hire soldiers of fortune to restore the old regime? Dispossess them completely and you will see that without money you can employ no one.

Do you fear a military coup? Arm all the population, ensure that they really are in possession of all wealth so that every person will have to defend his own freedom and the means which can ensure his well-being, and you will see whether the generals seeking adventures will find who to follow them. But if after that, the people in arms, in possession of the land, the factories, and all the natural wealth were incapable of defending themselves, and allowed themselves once again to be brought under the yoke, it would mean that they were still not capable of enjoying freedom. The revolution would have failed and the work of education and preparation would have to be resumed for another attempt which would have greater chances of success because it would benefit from the seeds that had been sown at the previous attempt.¹

Since anarchist ideas cannot be used to push people into becoming capitalists, neither can they be used to make people into thieves. On the contrary, by giving discontented people ideas about a better life and the hope of general emancipation, anarchist ideas if anything advocate withdrawal from all legal or illegal actions which encourage adaptation to the capitalist system and tend to perpetuate it.

In spite of all this, the social environment is so powerful and personal temperaments so diverse, that there is no reason why some anarchists should not become thieves, just as there are some who become business men or industrialists; but in that case both the former and the latter act not because of any anarchist ideas but in spite of them.

But one must not exaggerate; it should not be thought that we must, and can, find, here and now, a perfect solution for every possible problem. One should not want to foresee and determine too much, because instead of preparing for anarchy we might find ourselves indulging in unattainable dreams or even becoming authoritarians, and consciously or otherwise, proposing to act like a government which in the name of freedom and the popular will subject people to its domination.... The fact is that one cannot educate the masses if they are not in a position, or obliged by necessity, to act for themselves, and that the revolutionary organisation of the workers, useful and necessary as it is, cannot be stretched indefinitely: at a certain point if it does not erupt in revolutionary action, either the government strangles it or the organisation itself degenerates and breaks up — and one has to start all over again from the beginning.¹⁵

I would be unable to accept the view that all past revolutions though they were not anarchist revolutions were useless, nor that future ones which will still not be anarchist will be useless. Indeed, I incline to the view that the complete triumph of anarchy will come by evolution, gradually, rather than by violent revolution: when an earlier or several earlier revolutions will have destroyed the major military and economic obstacles which are opposed to the spiritual development of the people, to increasing production to the level of needs and desires, and to the harmonizing of contrasting interests.

In any case, if we take into account our sparse numbers and the prevalent attitudes among the masses, and if we do not wish to confuse our wishes with the reality, we must expect that the next revolution will not be an anarchist one, and therefore what is more pressing, is to think of what we can and must do in a revolution in which we will be a relatively small and badly armed minority.... But we must, however, beware of ourselves becoming less anarchist because the masses are not ready for anarchy. If they want a government, it is unlikely that we will be able to prevent a new government being formed, but this is no reason for our not trying to persuade the people that government is useless and harmful or of preventing the government from also imposing on us and others like us who don't want it. We will have to exert ourselves to ensure that social life and especially economic standards improve without the intervention of government, and thus we must be as ready as possible to deal with the practical problems of production and distribution, remembering, Incidentally, that those most suited to organise work are those who now do it, each in his own trade.... If we are unable to prevent the constitution of a new government, if we are unable to destroy it immediately, we should in either case refuse to support it in any shape or form. We should reject military conscription and refuse to pay taxes. Disobedience on principle, resistance to the bitter end against every imposition by the authorities, and an absolute refusal to accept any position of command.

If we are unable to overthrow capitalism, we shall have to demand for ourselves and for all who want it, the right of free access to the necessary means of production to maintain an independent existence.

Advise when we have suggestions to offer; teach if we know more than others; set the example for a life based on free agreement between individuals; defend even with force if necessary and possible, our autonomy against any government provocation... but command — never.

In this way we shall not achieve anarchy, which cannot be imposed against the wishes of the people, but at least we shall be preparing the way for it.¹⁶

abolition of exploitation of the labour of others by those who possess the means of production. The appropriation of the labour of others, of all that permits a man to live without contributing his share to society, is from the anarchist and socialist point of view, theft.

Landowners, capitalists have robbed the people, with violence and dishonesty, of the land and all the means of production, and in consequence of this initial theft can each day take away from the workers the product of their labour. But they have been lucky thieves, they have become strong, have made laws to legitimate their situation, and have organised a whole system of repression to defend themselves both from the demands of the workers as well as from those who would want to replace them by the same means. And now the theft of the former is called property, commerce, industry, etc.; whereas the term robbers in common parlance, is reserved for those who would wish to follow the example of capitalists but who, having arrived too late, and in unfavourable circumstances, cannot do so without rebelling against the law.

But a difference in the names by which they are usually referred to, cannot cancel out the moral and social identity of the two situations. The capitalist is a thief who has succeeded through his efforts or those of his ancestors; the common thief is a would-be capitalist, who is simply waiting to become one in fact, to live, without working, on the proceeds of his hauls, that is on the work of others.

As enemies of the capitalists, we cannot have sympathy for the thief who aspires to become a capitalist. As partisans of expropriation by the people for the benefit of everybody, we cannot, as anarchists, have anything in common with actions, the purpose of which, is simply to transfer wealth from the hands of one boss into the hands of another.

Of course I am speaking of the professional thief, the person who does not want to work and seeks the means to live parasitically on the work of others.

It is quite another matter when a man denied the means of working robs in order that he or his family shall not die of hunger. In such a case, theft (if it can thus be called) is a revolt against social injustice, and can become the most sacred right and also the most urgent of duties....

It is true that the professional thief is also a victim of the social environment. The example set by his superiors, his educational background, and the disgusting conditions in which many people are obliged to work, easily explain why some men, who are not morally better than their contemporaries, finding themselves with the choice of being exploiters or exploited choose to be the former and seek to become exploiters with the means they are capable of. But these extenuating circumstances could equally be applied to the capitalists, but in so doing one only demonstrates more clearly the basic identity between the two professions.



★ Expropriation ★

TO DESTROY RADICALLY THIS OPPRESSION WITHOUT ANY DANGER of it re-emerging, all people must be convinced of their right to the means of production, and be prepared to exercise this basic right by expropriating the landowners, the industrialists and financiers, and putting all social wealth at the disposal of the people.¹

[In Teramo] at a meeting of peasants the local secretary of the Trade Unions, the president of the socialist cooperative and two socialist MPs told the peasants: “Keep yourselves ready; when your leaders will tell you to strike, abandon the fields, and if on the other hand they tell you to gather in only your share, obey them and leave the other half unharvested.”

This is the advice of good reformists. For in fact when the crop is lost one can more easily tell the people that the revolution cannot be made because one would die of hunger.

When will these bad shepherds make up their minds to tell the peasants: “harvest everything and give nothing to the bosses? And after the harvest get the land ready and sow for the coming year with the firm conviction that the bosses must never get anything again.”²

If one really wants to change the system in fact and not just superficially, it will be necessary to destroy capitalism de facto, expropriating those who now control all social wealth, and immediately set about organising, on a local basis, and without passing through legal channels, a new social life. Which means to say that in order to create the “social republic” one must first bring about ... Anarchy!³

One of the basic tenets of anarchism is the abolition of monopoly, whether of the land, raw materials, or the means of production, and consequently the



★ The Insurrection ★

BUT HOW WILL THIS REVOLUTION BE ACHIEVED?

Naturally one must begin with the insurrectionary act which sweeps away the material obstacles, the armed forces of the government which are opposed to any social transformation.

For the insurrection it is desirable, and it may well be indispensable, that all the anti-monarchical forces, since we are living under a monarchist regime, should be united. It is necessary to be as prepared as possible, morally and materially; and it is above all necessary to profit by all agitations and to seek to extend them and transform them into resolute movements, to avoid the danger that while the organisations are getting ready the popular forces exhaust themselves in isolated actions.¹

The masses will make the insurrection, but cannot prepare it technically. Men, groups, and parties are needed who are joined by free agreement, under oath of secrecy, and provided with the necessary means to create the network of speedy communications to keep those concerned informed of all incidents likely to provoke a widespread popular movement.

And when we say that the specific task of organisation must be carried outside the official parties it is because the latter have other tasks which exclude the secrecy needed for the preparation of illegal activities; but it is above all because we have no faith in the revolutionary fervour of the progressive parties as constituted today.²

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 everybody 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 uprisings 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 rotten! ³

We must seek to play an active, and if possible a preponderant role in the insurrectionary act. But with the defeat of the forces of repression which serve to keep the people in slavery; with the demobilisation of the army, the dissolution of the police and the magistrature, etc.; having armed the people so that it can resist any armed attempt by reaction to reestablish itself; having called on willing hands to undertake the organisation of public services and to provide, with concepts of just distribution, for the most urgent needs, using with care existing stocks in the various localities — having done all this, we shall have to see to it that there must be no wasted effort and that those institutions, those traditions and habits, those methods of production, exchange and aid should be respected and utilised, if they perform, even insufficiently or badly, necessary services, seeking by all means to destroy every trace of privilege, but being chary of destroying anything that cannot be replaced by something which serves the general good more effectively. We must push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community, and similarly the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers on the necessary exchange of goods. ⁴

We will see to it that all empty and under-occupied houses are used so that no one will be without a roof over his head. We will hasten to abolish banks and destroy title deeds and all that represents and guarantees the power of the State and capitalist privilege. And we will try to reorganise things in such a way that it will be impossible for bourgeois society to be reconstituted. And all this, and whatever else would be required to satisfy public needs and the development

of the revolution would be the task of volunteers, by all kinds of committees, local, intercommunal, regional, and national congresses which would attend to the coordination of social activity; would take necessary decisions, advising and carrying out what they considered useful, but without having any right, or the means, to impose their wishes by force, and relying for approval only on the services they rendered and on the demands of the situation as recognised by all concerned. Above all no gendarmes, by whatever name they might be called. The creation of voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to reestablish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution. ⁵

A successful insurrection is the most potent factor in the emancipation of the people, for once the yoke has been shaken off, the people are free to provide themselves with those institutions which they think best, and the time lag between passing the law and the degree of civilisation which the mass of the population has attained, is breached in one leap. The insurrection determines the revolution, that is, the speedy emergence of the latent forces built up during the “evolutionary” period.

Everything depends on what the people are capable of wanting. In past insurrections the people unaware of the real reasons for their misery, have always wanted very little, and have achieved very little. What will they want from the next insurrection?

The answer in part, depends on our propaganda and what efforts we put into it. ⁶