

## REVOLUTION IN PRACTICE

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**(*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.