

Things well done and things done by half

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1983

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The relation with the level of the clash

The known, from which we must move, has to be the unknown, the absolutely known.

(Novalis)

We are not the only ones facing the level of the clash. As anarchists we can have all the illusions we like, illusions of purity and being a voice in the desert, but sooner or later we must concede that we are in company, bad company.

And it is the relations with this bad company that we need to ponder on. The more these seem obvious and well known, the more they turn out to be incomprehensible, and it is precisely here that we see the point to start off from.

We are not alone, whether it be concerning information, theory, intermediate struggles or armed struggle.

The authoritarian concept of revolutionary struggle continues to pollute the relationship that the exploited have with the class struggle everywhere. It continues to pollute it but, at the same time is a direct expression of it.

This problem is very important.

The development of the revolution is certainly only possible if self-organised forms of struggle are strengthened. But it is clear that the present level of the class struggle has a low development of self-organisation, and to this low development corresponds a predominance of the action of the authoritarians in the field of revolutionary action. When the level rises, these organisations are swept away by the impetuous of the revolution, to then present itself again in an attempt to renew the ranks of the party and reap the fruits of others' incapacities. We must have no illusions. The defeat of a certain model of revolutionary intervention at the present time has taught us something, but it does not mean that if the same kind of intervention were to be taken up again, it would not repeat the mistakes of the past, albeit revised and corrected.

On the other hand anarchists, also as an organisation, develop alongside the development of the self-organisation of the struggle. Not falling into the delusion of quantity, the growth of the movement as a whole also means growth in the specific sense, and the approach of the revolutionary storm never corresponds to panic and apprehension but to joy and the explosion of regenerating destruction.

So at a low level of the class clash it is the stalinists who turn out to be more appropriate to the social reality in movement and present themselves as the only force capable of giving life to revolutionary action. They are the visible point of a subterranean continent that attention is often turned to but which means little compared to the capacities of the submerged continent that are not yet active. As the authoritarians develop their action this has negative consequences on the level of the clash, as by definition they propose the centralisation of the organisational forms of the struggle, and end up lowering the level even more. But this is practically infinitesimal due to the low level that the clash already finds itself in. When the clash reaches a high level their action always tends towards the same aim (subject to various disguises of the kind 'all power to the Soviets'), but given the euphoric climate it is once again negligible. One could conclude paradoxically that it is precisely the authoritarians that constitute that dustbin of history into which the slaughterer Trotsky wanted to throw the anarchists. No matter what they do, they have no hope of being anything other than the gravediggers of the revolution. At a time when

the development of the struggles is extremely modest, they certainly cannot make things worse than they are; at the moment of the great upsurge they will be completely wiped out.

Yet they also have a significant function. They serve as a negative test. They serve to demonstrate to the exploited what they must not do, a limit that real revolutionaries clearly must not go beyond.

That is why we have never fought these organisations on the level of abstract empty criticism based on the strong points of anarchist theory; although it could open theoretical gaps, such a critique would never be able to demonstrate anything beyond a banal clash of ways of interpreting history and reality. That is why we prefer the verification of facts, the measure of their mistakes on the basis of their limitations, starting precisely from their obvious incapacity to understand the development of the class conflict and modifications in the level of the clash.

Things done by half

Those with too clear vision lose the sense of the indistinct totality, the magic intuition of objects together, in varied illumination and obscurity.

(Novalis)

There are precise conditions in order for human action to be defined such: it must have completeness, that is it must correspond to intentions or at least have some relationship with the accidents determined by a deviation from these intentions. Action that stops half way, that hesitates and remains uncertain, that takes place in unresolved dilemmas and remains contradictory and partial, is not real human action, it is an attempt, a sketch, an unrealised project, a desire.

In the social clash actions aimed at modifying the conditions of the class relationship are particularly affected by this status of action. Here uncertainty or hesitancy have far more serious consequences and transform themselves into negative aspects, often in opposition to the intentions and original aims that inspired the action.

This principle of 'things done by half' goes for all four of the methodological directions of social action. (see 'Anarchismo' no. 41, Revolutionary strategy and methods). Information that is incomplete, partial or uncertain, is equivalent to the manipulated information that is typical of power. Theory that remains on the surface of problems and does not have the courage to penetrate them in depth, is afraid of consequences, ends up educating to conformity and servility. Any intermediate struggle that loses sight of the revolutionary goal, no matter how far off it is, is a losing struggle from the start, an appalling waste of living social forces, a negative experiment that can do no more than put the conscience of the exploited to sleep. A project of armed struggle that is incapable of developing fully when the strategic conditions of the level of the clash permit it is a pointless, often counter-productive, brazenly timid effort to put one's own conscience at rest, refusing to see the reality of the problem.

To stop half way in the name of ill-conceived purity is a crime. Better not to communicate at all. If one is not sure of going on to the end, if one has unconfessed qualms, one might as well dedicate oneself to something else: it does less damage and is also better for one's health.

It is not true that this principle only applies to armed struggle and only marginally concerns other methodological facets. The damage that can ensue from inadequate information due to inefficiency or superficiality can be just as serious as the physical damage that can derive from bad clandestine organisation or strategic errors in the use of the method of armed struggle.

Things done well

We look for our project in the world, this project is we ourselves. What are we? Personified points, omnipotent.

(Novalis)

Revolutionary action that exhausts its operative potential and reaches its aims can define itself something well done. It is often impossible to see this potential in advance, as it only emerges during the action itself. The same can be said for aims. This creative aspect of action often dissuades revolutionaries, leading to more than one failure, and is one of the main reasons for things getting done by halves. Many apprentice sorcerers have become so scared by the great operative and destructive capacity of the broom that they could not manage to stop it. Why they should ever have had to stop remains one of the mysteries of the psyche of the revolutionary.

The individual is the primary source of revolutionary potentiality. Not all individuals are equal, just as not all comrades are revolutionary. The search for affinity is one of the great problems of revolutionary activity. Discourses and theories are worth a lot, often a great deal, but at times, in the face of such problems, different levels of understanding come into play. Affinity can spring from a sentiment, an attachment, a gesture, a look, a way of keeping silent or a way of listening. This great wealth can be thrown away in a few seconds. A word too many, an out of place suggestion of a symbol, an acronym, an attempt at enlistment that cannot fail to sound obnoxious and sectarian, and one ends up feeling extraneous. Wasted potential cannot be recovered, the sensitivity of a moment is easily lost, one ends up going on the defensive.

In another dimension, a group of comrades might develop particular potential at a given moment. It could even be a simple external occurrence—a discussion, the study of a book, going into a problem—to push them to awareness. A particular moment of acute sensitivity is created in the group for the solution of a problem. If the affinity between the various components of the group is considerable this acuteness can transform potential into operativity. But something can also go wrong. You begin to detect the shadow of an organisation in the background—an acronym, a project wrapped up and ready for use. The seed of suspicion and mistrust can easily develop. Nobody likes to be instrumentalised. Especially when the experience of a not-far-off past has shown us that what the big organisation proposes is certainly not defence or any kind of guarantee, but simply a label and a flag.

The aims are clear. Revolutionary sensitivity grasps them silently, almost without discussion. Debate and going into things often serves to keep it at bay, allowing us to resist the sudden temptation to attack immediately, right here, at the corner of the street, without stopping to think about it. But analysis is right and is important. If one loses the opportunity to attack immediately one gains the alternative of a reasoned, programmed attack that is strategically more valid and significant. And in this perspective one must give space to critical argumentation, analytical examination.

But for the thing to be done well it is necessary that the goal be reached, not just the initial aim, but that which emerges during the course of the action itself, even when the aim intervenes to correct the initial objective, amplifying or reducing it. Only on this condition are we facing an action that is well done, a revolutionary action.

The self-organisation of struggles

*The greatest spellcaster would be he who
could enchant himself, so that his enchantments
came to him first of all as strange and autonomous.
Could it not be that this is our case?*

Novalis

The main objective that anarchists want to reach in the strategic orientation of their proposed methods is the self-organisation of the struggles of the exploited.

Not for this however are their actions disorganised, devoid of internal logic or lacking in a well-defined minoritarian aspect. To state otherwise would be to deny reality. Today, at a time of a lowering of the level of the clash, the exploited's tendency to self-organise is fairly modest. It appears here and there, gives a sign of itself sporadically, but it is certainly not one of the most obvious conditions of the movement as a whole. Not for this do anarchists adapt to the situation by talking of a supine acceptance of the conditions of the clash in act. They often face the current situation in a clearcut way, trying to fight against it. They confront the exploited with their responsibilities, pointing out their mistakes, showing up the betrayals in course, doing actions in place of the exploited who are numbed by the tricks of power.

Armed struggle is one of the methods that anarchists, also as a specific minoritary organisation, use in place of the self-organised action of the exploited when this does not exist or is clearly lacking. The aim of this substitution is obvious: to serve as a stimulous, to detonate, to show that the struggle is possible even in minoritarian conditions, to demonstrate that from the small to the large the passage can come about suddenly, when one least expects it. Shutting up and waiting, or criticising and working cynically and skeptically as a deterrent is certainly not what anarchists should be doing. Criticism is all very well. Demonstrating the limitations of a method, fine. But that does not negate the impetus to enthusiasm, the stimulous to the clash, even when it is unequal. The candour and stupidity of Don Quixote are preferable to the criticism and measuring of the shopkeeper.

The concerned discourses that stop at measuring and calculation are like the theses of those who would be there to destroy the whole world if we were many, decided and well-armed. Meanwhile, until these ideal conditions materialise, one ends up doing nothing, waiting, only to fret and perhaps conclude that nothing can be done. How much revolutionary potential has been wasted this way, how many comrades have gone towards fictitious organisations that offered apparent security of project and means. Instead of going into the aspects of a possible action, no matter how circumscribed, they chose to let themselves be dissuaded, inviting waiting because 'it is not the right moment', and disaffecting from the immediacy of acting.

Basically, it is always the right moment to attack. The terrorism of the State and the bosses is always in act. No shopkeeping subtlety will ever be able to convince me that there are times for using certain methods and times for using others. Strategic choices are commensurate to the conditions of the clash but cannot exclude a given method completely. They can, at best, suggest a different mixture of the various methods, more subtlety in the various interventions. Never the condemnation of a method in advance based on presupposed principles. Never the condemnation of a method based on fixed assumptions.

We are for the self-organisation of the struggles of the exploited, but that does not in the least prevent us from communicating and organising our structures of intervention in the social clash, here and now. If the future self-organisation of the exploited will be able to coordinate with these structures of ours or not is a problem which, although not of secondary importance, can never block our present revolutionary activity. Otherwise we would end up postponing everything indefinitely to a situation where our action would end up becoming so facile as to risk being pointless. The insurgent people certainly do not need anarchists to show them how to bring about an insurrection. On the other hand, under conditions of subjection and apathy the exploited have a great need for stimuli for struggle, clarification and information. To block some of these contributions—the method of armed struggle for example—in advance would be a dangerous mutilation of the whole revolutionary process.

A possible organisational project

Activity is the real Reality. The active use of reality is nothing other than thought, the will is nothing other than energetic capacity of thought. Must the supreme active principle contain in its exercise the supreme paradox? A proposition that leaves no peace, that always attracts and repulses, and always becomes incomprehensible again, as soon as it is understood? That continually stimulates our activity without tiring it, without ever generating habit? All symbols are mystifications. External reality is an interior elevated to the state of mystery.

(Novalis)

Anarchist revolutionary activity is not a joke, it cannot be considered something pleasant to be done from time to time to fill up the emptiness of everyday life. Regarding the complexity of the anarchist ideology, as it has been built over time by the numerous theoretical contributions, such a thing is possible. Quite a number of good people dedicate themselves to the agreeable reading of anarchist texts and perhaps deep in their bourgeois hearts they are lovers of destruction and violence (at a distance), in this way trying to find more or less remote compensation for their frustrations. Reading the theories of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and the adventurous deeds of Di Giovanni, Durruti, Ascaso, Makhno, Sabate, etc., is comforting and helps one to face the difficulties of living in the shit day after day.

But as soon as one commits oneself in the substance of the social clash one cannot avoid choosing. Trifling is no longer enough. Efforts need to be made. The police don't joke. Neither do the judiciary. For someone who has a job with the council or a small business activity, these can be irritating factors. One might end up having to reckon with trials, sentences, being held hostage, short or long periods of time in prison, social discrimination, emargination, all kinds of difficulties. And it is not true that this only happens to those who move towards methods closer to armed struggle. Comrades who dedicate themselves to information, publish theoretical books and pamphlets or are involved in intermediate struggles are also under the iron heel of the repression and have to reckon with it every day.

Power grasps the profound meaning of anarchist and revolutionary activity, not so much in the method used but in the consequences of the action. The risk of well-chosen and diffused information could be greater than an action of reprisal or sabotage which, at a given moment, might even turn out to be strange and incomprehensible.

It is the revolutionaries themselves who do not have clear ideas on this important question. They apply a schematic maxim that neatly separates the different methods of struggle. In particular, concerning armed struggle, they have very clear ideas that either a) unconditionally define it the only revolutionary method capable of defeating power; b) denigrate it, considering it a terroristic method worthy only of power and its servants, a method not to be followed, that is polluted by spies and informers, a method that leads the whole movement to ruin.

These two positions clash, with results that are at times comical, at times pathetic.

Let us say right away that we do not consider the method of armed struggle to be a privileged one, but simply one method among others that is capable of giving its contribution to the revolutionary project within a strategy aimed at applying diverse methods in various combinations.

But let us also say, with the same clarity, that just as it is necessary for the anarchist movement as a whole to give itself the best structures of information, theory, and concerning intermediate struggles, it is necessary to give itself a structure of armed struggle.

It derives from this that if the structures of information require printing presses, newspapers, publishing projects, etc; if the theoretical structures require books, editorial series, study and study centres; if intermediate struggles require intervention groups, an organised presence in factories, social centres, living areas, struggle committees in the schools, etc.; at the same time armed struggle requires its own means and organisation.

Objectively speaking, looking at this last form of organisation, one cannot see its real difference from similar organisations formed by the authoritarians. But the same thing could be said for a printing press or a struggle committee. When one goes past the door of a neighbourhood committee it is not very clear if one simply looks at the initials or the banner.

On this problem, mistakes committed in the past will not necessarily be avoided in the future, as the many hawks and sparrows that flutter perched in different points of the tree continue to repeat. At the same time, the more or less valid critiques of many vultures do not necessarily indicate the presence of a corpse. A critique is a critique. It is enough to take it into consideration without listening to the moral adornment that the good heart of the critic likes to administer here and there.

Certainly the specific organisation is an instrument that presents many dangers, but the same thing also goes for many others. Information that one doesn't know how to use can produce the opposite effect and do more harm than good. Theory that is incapable of going beyond the abstract moment of analysis wraps itself in traditional academic clothing that stifles it and makes it support and camouflage repression. Intermediate struggles that are not addressed towards a growth in revolutionary consciousness translate themselves into easy bites for democrats and transformists of every kind. Dynamite can explode in the hands of someone who doesn't know how to use it. Not reaching standards with certain techniques, agreeing to use certain instruments superficially without the necessary preparation, thinking that, as one is the bearer of revolutionary truth, one will be understood no matter what one does, leads to blind action, superficial amateurishness, painful disillusionment, discouragement, defeat.

We do not want to sing the praises of specialisation here, because the defect of a manic closure of technique is one of the worst aspects of specific organisations. One simply wants to say that everything needs to be done according to certain rules, to given techniques. To ignore them deliberately or due to superficiality is not a conscious negative response to the defects of specialisation, but just absolute stupidity.

An intelligent, sensitive comrade must possess sufficient qualities to enable him to put all the methods that the long painful history of the revolutionary movement puts at his disposition to good use. If he is a clever journalist, and he uses this ability in the elaboration of information, the editing of papers, radio, leaflets, etc., he must also do everything to interest himself in other methods, inserting himself as he thinks best in the ambit of the strategic project that he is engaged in. And he must do that at the risk of seeing the specialisation that he had acquired in the sector that he had mastered, decline. You fight specialisation by widening your field of revolutionary interests, not through an invitation to amateurism and approximation. Of course, that comrade will remain fundamentally a journalist, because such is his particular inclination, but his new interests will lead him to other sectors of methodological intervention where he will be able to give a contribution, perhaps less significantly than other comrades, but certainly no less important. More than that: it will precisely be this overcoming of sectoral activity to guarantee a collaboration between different methods, leading to a series of interactions that would have been quite impossible in a rigid, schlerotic optic.

So an organised project means the coexistence of multiple interests, a meeting of individual and collective affinities, materialisation of programmes and analyses, ideas and intuition, enthusiasm and knowledge. To see organisation as something hermetically closed, all the more so because it contains programmes and ideas concerning armed struggle, is a classic backward addiction to the traditional cliché of the armed party, a repetition of conspiratorial models that are quite out of date. But the opposite of all that does not mean confusion, lack of realism, spontaneism, and a refusal of any structure or self-discipline. The idea that many people have about anarchy is reproduced, seen as the absolute reign of boyish pranks. Joy is not synonymous with stupidity, just as creation does not necessarily mean the refusal of all the knowledge that has come before it. Self-discipline is the recognition of the immediate and impelling need to make an effort to get a result that one considers important. Nobody will guarantee us that result if it is not we ourselves, with our own will power, to bend the obstacles separating us from it. And these obstacles are not just walls to be knocked down or cops to prevent doing harm, they can also be linked to our own problems of a personal nature such as, precisely, the incapacity to put order in our programmes, our ideas, our gestures: a dispersive tendency towards the improvised, the immediately pleasurable, the superficial; our fear of commitment, of going into things more deeply, the difficulty of the task that awaits us. All that is part of the problem of the specific organisation, as it belongs to the life of the human being. We cannot delete it all of a sudden because we consider it easier to continue to prattle on about the beauty and spontaneity of anarchy.

According to how the relation with organisation is lived it can either be a bitter experience or a creative project. Organisation itself can give life to relationships of two different kinds with two different comrades, but these two relationships, if they really are such, will not leave the organisation where it was before. Reciprocally a mistaken approach of relationships gives negative results that affect the whole organisation and all its components. The same happens, in the positive sense, for relations that develop harmoniously, in mutual respect for commitments and individual autonomy.

A great critical effort has been made concerning the formal aspects of this kind of specific organisation. Most often, when it was a question of anarchist experiences, residual conspiratorial and Jacobin deformations similar to those of the authoritarians have been criticised in them: elements that are certainly far from anarchists' ideas and ways of acting. But how many of these

critiques stopped half way? How many have been able to grasp the real significance of the mistakes that have been made, even the most obvious of them?

At other times critical analysis has started off from documents considered (or passed off) as pilot, to then reach the organised structures. We consider it legitimate to ask ourselves if the depth of the gulf that passes between saying and doing can really assess the true dimension of the mistakes made.

In other cases we resorted to comparisons between different historical situations (Russia, Spain, Mexico, etc.) to develop critiques which, if objectively correct, turned out to be of little use in the face of the need to show the errors and deformations of the organisational structure.

Some open doors

Correct reasoning is nothing but a play on words, the extraordinary thing is that people believe they are speaking in function of things. More often it happens that only those who talk for the sake of talking state supreme and original truths. When instead one makes an effort to talk about something specific, language, bizarre, makes them say the most ridiculous and distorted things.

(Novalis)

Smashing through open doors makes a lot of noise but gives few useful results. For anyone who likes making a din the operation can also have some positive aspects.

Take the debate on 'clandestinity'. Someone who is in this situation will be likely to dream up more elaborate theoretical calculations than those that justify clandestinity in the face of the need for the armed clash (which are often inexistent). He finds it a little reductive to simply admit that clandestinity is a contingent fact linked to precise individual and group conditions, and not a fact that you can place a step higher in a hypothetical scale of revolutionary values. On the other hand, those who rightly criticise this choice on theoretical grounds are incapable of seeing it as an unavoidable consequence of certain objective situations. They prefer to carry on with their theoretical critique, refusing to accept the limits and teachings of certain real necessities. In this way a polemic develops between the deaf. Clandestinity is not an essential prerogative of armed struggle, on the contrary it constitutes one of the negative aspects that the conditions of the clash often push individual comrades into, but cannot be lived as a privileged condition. If anything, the privileged condition would be that of daily activity, of complete revolutionary engagement in a situation characterised by open social 'status'.

This does not mean that the armed organisation must be clandestine, as also—in the best hypothesis—to rigorous clandestinity corresponds an active daily life of all its participants. These are the open doors that do not need to be smashed through but, once there are people who insist on beating their heads on them, we might as well open them once and for all.

The same discourse full of misconceptions could be developed on active, therefore also armed, daily life against the class enemy. We can reject—and rightly so—the commonplaces of conspiratorial Jacobinism, but we cannot put our trust in the occasionalism of daily life, especially when this starts off full of good will and ends up in the privatist labyrinth, in the little concessions to an ideal of life which perhaps, had it been Epicurean all the way, at least the recognition of the primordality of the needs of the individual would be real. Also the hardly gratifying needs

of respectable society, which instead is nothing other than an upturned revisitation of the same scale of values. To reactionary respectability contrasts a progressist one. Change the colours, the language, the stereotypes; the logic of adjustment remains intact in its immobility. We can illude ourselves that we are changing the world by toting a machine gun and ending up inside a cell mulling over the mistakes made without getting to the bottom of it, and we can ... wielding the problems of our everyday life, end up up to our necks in shit in a series of problems of survival that we are also incapable of coping with. Sitting arguing about who is right, while the mistakes add up on both sides, does not lead to any positive conclusion.

Nobody, by definition, wants to make the revolution in the place of the exploited. That said there are more than a few who are tired of waiting for everybody to rise up so that they too can insurgé. More than a few believe that it is necessary to start somewhere and, even if we are few, that we can always do something to attack the enemy. This is not a losing logic. Even when one doesn't manage to gain something in the quantitative sense, even when one doesn't 'win' on a military level, that does not mean that one is a loser on the revolutionary level. Otherwise the critics and those who wait would reconfirm an equivalence between military efficacy and revolutionary results that they themselves (and rightly so) deny on principle. If anything, the reverse logic is the loser. The logic that teaches waiting, temporisation, compromise, camouflage. The political chair that preaches this is too compromised to supply reliable indications.

In the same way, no one imagines that the exploited will be swept into a conspiratorial dimension. Even attempts at armed struggle must look at themselves from this perspective and from all the efforts made by power to make it the only possible solution. The self-organisation of struggles is the bursting forth of active daily life, the creativity of subversive action, irrepeatable confrontation with whoever has no models to lean on or canons to respect. In the face of this spread in perspective the revolutionary action of a minority must deal with a waiting that threatens to become too long. It cannot drown in the long-term work of accumulation without risking rendering its own discourse incomprehensible, without risking letting itself join the metaphysical nonsense that so many owls of militant politics transmit in the darkest night. It must go against the current. Go back to the source of an antagonist movement that is threatening to recline on its ability. All that does not signify—even if it has mistakenly been said so—a leninist vision of the revolutionary struggle. Nor does that mean an awry educationism applied to the exploited as a whole through the method of armed struggle. More simply, it means building the specific anarchist organisation, among a thousand contradictions, to push the exploited to revolt. That comes about in many ways contemporaneously and therefore also through recourse to armed struggle. If there were a reason capable of demonstrating the non-practicability of this method in absolute, the same reason would seal the headstone on the revolutionary struggle as a whole for ever, in that it would be demonstrating, at the same time, the non-practicability of any other method.

Reducing armed struggle to a clash between rival gangs is a serious limitation, but that does not only apply to those who close themselves up in an acronym and from this cocoon claim to inculcate fear in the State. Those who criticise this partial vision do not make the effort to identify the reasons behind this error and happily put up their hands, concluding for a failure of the method as a whole. The first defend their own practice and are often even pathetic in their fantasizing about theoreticians who have nothing to do with revolutionary self-organisation; the second are in bad faith in that they have no intention of contributing to the correction of errors and so, with their critique, give life to a better use of the method: they simply want to silence

behaviour that they often recognise as dangerously engaging for their peace of mind or their theoretical uniformity. The practical errors of the others can disturb the peaceful waters of their own way of interpreting reality far more than their own critical analysis does.

The repartition between appearance and reality, spectacle and class struggle, real revolutionary action and fictitious armed counter-position, can lead to conclusions of great interest but can also abort in alternatives that are devoid of any sense. Nothing in this world is totally white or totally black. It is a question of tendency, orientation, action aimed at something. The static contemplation of truth is not at all something positive, it ends up destroying truth itself, transforming it into a symbol, an ideal model, a graveyard of action. It is not 'reality' that qualifies the substance of a movement, but the latter's disposition towards reality—as we have said elsewhere—when it addresses itself towards the reality of the struggle. But this moving is transformation in course, revolutionary action that modifies the movement as such and the reality that receives the action of the movement. To imagine one of these two things as immobile or performed, perfect in all its particulars, can be useful to analytical ends but this has nothing to do with the effective going of social phenomena. When one speaks of the appearance of armed struggle, of fictitious and spectacular clash, when—rightly—accuses the armed organisations of arrogating the right to represent the exploited in struggle and of acting in the name of something a thousand miles off, very true things are said. But even things that are true can be mistaken, in fact they are often partially untrue, and it is precisely this aspect of partial truth that makes it interesting and useful to us. Things that are absolutely true are banal tautologies, repetitions that add nothing to the means that one possesses to understand and transform reality. But something that is in part true cannot only be taken into consideration for the true part, it must be taken into account for that which it signifies as a whole: part true and part not true. So when one says that armed struggle is a fictitious counter-position against capital one cannot say that this affirmation is absolutely true. It is true in that the specific organisation marks the limits of the free development of the self-organisation of struggles; it is not true in that if there were to be a modest development of this self-organisation it would put itself in its place and without supplanting it, feed a small nucleus from which undreamed developments could result. This, obviously, only on condition that one does not fall into the equivocation of the armed party and the storming of the Winter palace. Beyond these limits and aberrations the specific armed organisation represents concretely that which the organisation of the struggles of the exploited will never become, and it is well that it be like that. Revolutionaries represent a small light that disappears under the vivid sun of the full blown struggles of the exploited. But in the lack of struggle, or when the sun is late in rising, the small light is always better than nothing at all.

As a consequence of the distinction between appearance and reality one has accused armed struggle of being an exclusively political, therefore fictitious method. Here too it seems to us that this accusation could be extended to any method, any kind of human action, when it turns out to be oriented exclusively in the formal sense. We insist on saying that one cannot accuse a given method of lack of reality, one can only develop criticism concerning its strategic applications. These, precisely, can be supplied with political accentuations such that they end up disqualifying their social and revolutionary significance. There can be no doubt, for example, that reforms constitute the strong element on which the social-democratic management of power bases itself. For the same reason there can be no doubt that intermediate struggles can open the way to political instrumentalisation, to a denial of the revolutionary outlet. Yet there are struggles that are realised and supported by many comrades and the only critiques of them are those that

concern themselves with reducing the danger of their instrumentalisation and do not simply define them political struggles and advise against their use by comrades. It seems to us that in the problems concerning armed struggle there are motivations that are not always clear, often of a personal kind, that prevent if not exactly a detached evaluation, at least a sufficiently clear one concerning the problem.

There has been an infantile element in some of the affirmations that have assigned revolutionary priority to organised violence, but it was a superficiality that needed to be gone into together without having recourse to reciprocal poisonous needling and lack of construct. On the one hand a gratuitous extension of the need for liberatory violence has developed where there is a centrality of the method of armed struggle. On the other, in the attempt to criticise the paradoxical aspects of this centrality, some have reached the point of throwing the whole legacy of the violent struggle of the revolutionary movement into the sea, ending their journey on the beaches of pacifism or the existential contradictions of a certain everyday life. If there is no doubt that only with recourse to revolutionary violence will it be possible to attack the class enemy and put it in difficulty to the point of defeating it in the course of the revolutionary event, in the same way there can be no doubt that this recourse to violence does not signify exclusion from the other methods, to prioritise one particular method. Also, because it is not true that violence is a prerogative of armed struggle. Information, theory, intermediate struggles can also have a violent formulation and propose themselves as a stimulus to the revolutionary awareness by the exploited.

The attempt to 'kill one to educate a thousand' has been defined unrealistic. This thesis seems a good one to us. But the content of the action that has the aim of eliminating a class enemy does not stop there. Even accelerating the process of eliminating some officials of the repressive structure does not move the function one millimetre. That does not deny, though, two things of great importance: first, it is always a question of one less class enemy; second, one is contributing to another, very different and far richer educative process, that aimed at the exploited who thus see that the progressive elimination of their class enemies is possible. The narrowness of the first of these two reasons has often underlined. It has been said that as soon as one enemy is dead another will take his place. It has been said that one shouldn't attack the person who carries out a function but put the function itself under attack. None of these reasons convince us. Perhaps they are valid reasons, but we continue to consider that the elimination of a class enemy is always preferable. Concerning the second reason it has been said that we should not concern ourselves with developing 'educative' messages aimed at the exploited. I do not agree on this point either. The whole of revolutionary action is an educative process of great complexity. The contradictions (formal) emerge from the fact that we are often forced to take it into consideration in its partial aspects, and it is on these unrelated aspects that incomprehension and pointless arguments develop.

No illusions

Whoever has a fine sense of his time, perceives in himself the delicate action of his internal nature, and moves his tongue and his hand accordingly.. people will laugh at him, like the Trojans with Cassandra.

(Novalis)

I don't have any illusions. Words are or are not comprehensible according to their actual situation. We only give them space and credibility if they fall into our patterns and certainties. Defence mechanisms become automatic and prevent the very reception of the message. If that was not so the illuminists would have definitively changed the world two hundred years ago.

It happens, for example, that if someone says that a specific organisation requires means so it should go about procuring them, the deaf that do not want to hear immediately translate this into their own language: occult financing, presence of foreign secret services, gang of street thieves and robbers, revelry and champagne. If one says that there is a need for a minimum of self-discipline and that one certainly cannot leave everything to improvisation, the same deaf one immediately translates: Jacobin asceticism, authoritarian rigidity, devaluation of human life, lack of ethical foundation, instrumentalisation of others, dehumanization. If one says that the physical elimination of the class enemy is also correct from the revolutionary point of view, the deaf one immediately translates: sanguinary madness, endorsing the behaviour of a military tribunal, practically applying the death penalty, absence of ethical principles, incomprehension of the official.

No illusion, therefore, that these words will alter the deafness of those who do not want to hear.

The revolution

Limits only exist in order to be overcome, and so on.

(Novalis)

Today hardly anybody speaks of revolution any more. Having made so many discriminations and covering one's back we have almost reached the absurd of denying the fact that we are revolutionaries. Anarchists are for the revolution, not just in words but also with deeds. We are not just waiting for a future event, which often inside us we consider far off and improbable, but are acting now to realise this event as soon as possible.

And in this perspective we are always prepared to start all over again.

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Alfredo M. Bonanno
Things well done and things done by half
1983

Anarchismo 41, 1983. <https://archive.elephanteditions.net/library/alfredo-m-bonanno-things-well-done-and-things-done-by-half>
Original title: *Delle cose ben fatte e delle cose fatte a meta,*

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