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Let Us Remain True to Ourselves

Armando Borghi

January 1952

Editors Note: Armando Borghi, the write of this article, is one of the most outstanding figures in the older generation of Italian anarchists. During the years after the first world war he was a co-worker with Malatesta and was secretary of the then influential Italian Syndicalist Union. In exile, wrote one of the most compelling indictments of the Fascist regime in his book, Mussolini - Red and Black. The following article is translated from Umanita Nova of 6th January, 1952.

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When Anarchism came into being and assumed a form and shape of its own, which differentiated it, in depth, from its progenitors of kindred ideas - such as democracy, republicanism and socialism - all of these tainted with authority - what did it demand of that world in which we may say it had its birth?

Did it ask the reformist elements for permission to be born? Did it proffer friendship to the regimes of the so-called lesser evil?

If it did not, was that a mistake? If it had really done these things, would anarchism have had any *raison d'être*? Would it have had the power to burst forth into life?

Anarchism was born because the old democratic elements had rejected their own logical democratic conclusions. It was born because the old democratic ideas of Mazzini, of Herzen, of Garibaldi and Blanqui had become bankrupt and had been relegated to the dusty files of history. It was born because the State, in anyone's hands, could never turn into an instrument for liberation, for justice, for equality, for tolerance, for equilibrium in the international field. It was born, not because a social "class" was coming into being within the framework of the great industries but because there was a ferment of ideas, a clash of thoughts, of strivings, and yearnings for a solution in harmony with the premises and promises of liberty.

Was it a mistake, then, for anarchists to think of striking at the roots of the evil?

If it was, then let us have the courage to say so. Let us rack our brains to build an anarchism that would knock in vain at the closed doors of "practical" charity, an anarchism that would have nothing in common with old anarchist practice because it would follow the other parties. If it was a mistake to strike at the roots of evil, we should recognise the fact that those practical Socialists were right when they accused anarchists of "demanding too much", of wanting it "too soon", of knowing what they wanted.

The denial of the State was the cardinal idea of anarchism.

It meant the denial of the kinship of the State to liberty, to socialism.

Was it an "excess" to make this denial?

Was it an arbitrary *a priori*? Was it no more than a blueprint drawn up by an architect who had failed to acquaint himself with his terrain or his building materials?

What about the facts, the ugly facts? Did they give the lie to anarchism?

When a new day dawns to-morrow, we shall have the answer to the free men of the East and of the West, when they themselves have seen clearly through the masks of their "liberators". We will give our answer without uttering a single word; we will hold up our hands, clean of any complicity with the cannibals of militarism of every persuasion, and with the priests of every church that is giving them its blessing.

Let us remain true to ourselves.

Has the State disarmed?

Has a just social order been achieved?

Has war been abolished?

Leaving aside for the moment the States which are powerless for historical or geographical reasons, where is the State dreamed of by philanthropic politicians - the State which is harmless and peaceful, the State which protects the weak?

Is it, then, an absolute principle? Yes, if you wish. It is an absolute, not set aside by the relativity incidental to the attrition of life and of struggle - a relativity which ever remains faithful to its own principle. We cannot conceive of a dog's bones as being part of a human skeleton. I have made previous use of this metaphor. A dollar bill can be exchanged into the smaller coins that may be needed, but if you cut up the bill into a hundred pieces, so as to get the one hundred pennies, you will get neither the dollar nor a single cent out of it.

A form of "practical" anarchism has made its appearance nowadays, which demands - and not for wartime only - that we make use of the machinery of the State, or at least of the communal State (see Ernestan and Souchy).¹

And this at a time when, with the coming war, even the defeated States are staking their last card in the gambling den of nations for a chance to become a Great Power.

What appalling blindness to think that they can thus force history!

Let us grant that, in making the mistake of interventionism in 1914, the followers of Kropotkin coated their error with a veneer of anarchism, and that, unlike the Social Democrats, they did not become liveried lackeys of the State. This enabled them, once the war was over, to return to their own position. But, even so, to repeat the same mistake for the third time, after the bloody fraud of two years of "liberation", is, I think, fantastic.

¹ See Letters to the Editors, Freedom, on "The Lesser Evil" by W. Fritzenkotter, 1/3/52, G. Ernestan, 29/3/52. -Editors

An anarchist here or there may lose his head - not for personal advantage, I know, but out of a desire to do something. But the State will never act on sentimental motives. War is its trade. If it cannot make war properly, it will make peace properly, with a view to preparing for war. If the anarchists were strong, they would impose their will against war. At least, they might try to. Being weak as they are, they cannot even think of joining in an imaginary war of liberation.

The State does not betray itself. Nor does it make revolutions of "liberation", even when it claims it does. If the State should intervene, when a revolution, on its own wind, goes a little too far, it postpones, it corrects, it arrests the revolution. It will smother and strangle it, and will often go to war to accomplish this.

Let us remain true to ourselves.

Let us not deny the facts which, after all, prove us to be right. In the leading nation of the Atlantic Pact there is less hunger than elsewhere, even at the bottom of the scale. Let us say so. There is less reaction than elsewhere, even though there are elements that hanker for suppression. Let us say so. Why deny it?

There was a time when we recognised the difference between Crispi and Mussolini, between De Rivera and Franco, between Bismarck and Hitler; we may as well recognise the difference between Truman and Stalin.

What of it?

Just because the Bolsheviks have gone beserk with authoritarianism, does it mean that the bourgeois regimes have turned lily-white in the eyes of anarchists?

Never! They are just what they were when the newly-born anarchist movement started a "social" war against them.

Let us not deny these facts:

(1) It is more than true that Russia is the major slaughter-house of freedom.

(2) America is also rushing to the slaughter, under the pretext of a war for freedom because it is trembling for the safety of its vast store of wealth.

(3) Russia has created a State Capitalism, which, like the capitalism of the Vatican in the Middle Ages, is enjoyed by its own hierarchy only.

(4) America has created, alongside its concentration of capital, the precarious "capitalism of the workers" as co-partners in the profits of its victorious wars.

(5) Both powers are hungry for land, for markets, for expansion, for domination in Europe, in Asia, in Africa. Each of them has, in every corner of the globe, old links to replace with new golden chains in a conflict for domination. In this frenzy of grafting the usual imperialist lies upon fragments of the truth, under the sham banners of Christ or of socialism, the whole thing appears to be a two-faced Janus. To the anarchists it is just a two-headed monster.

Since the Marxist authoritarian aberration has produced the results which anarchists have predicted; since capitalism has not died - and could not die - as a victim of historical fatalism, swallowed up in the vortex of "the class" and the Marxist votes (even this had been predicted by anarchists) let us not commit the folly of shutting our eyes and abandoning our ideals in the holocaust of a war.

In the face of the countless human sacrifices demanded by this "lust for liberation", when East and West meet in this great encounter, even the folly of a so-called libertarian war would provoke in us the compassion which we may feel for a mother who sacrifices her children and herself for fear of a dreadful future.

But let us be careful. We know ourselves. We are made of the same stuff as everyone else in this world. With us, feeling is father and child of an idea. The day we fail, we shall die with our feelings and our ideas.