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The Anarchist Revolution: Polemical Articles 1924–1931, edited and introduced by Vernon Richards. Published by Freedom Press London 1995.

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In the first issue of *Pensiero e Vobnta* Saverio Merlino[1] wrote: 'The anarchists have been tormented and rendered powerless by the conflict, which has never ceased to rage among them, between individualists and communists. They are poles apart and agree on only one thing — their abhorrence of parliamentarism.'

I think Merlino exaggerates when he ascribes the impotence of the anarchists to the conflict between communists and individualists. When circumstances have favoured action and, in general, when there have been the will and the ability to do something practical, any dispute has been forgotten and communists and individualists (I speak, of course, of true anarchists who are loyal to the

[1] Saverio Merlino (1858–1930) was a contemporary of Malatesta's and they remained friends until Merlino's death in 1930 in spite of the fact that he had stopped calling himself an anarchist many years before and became a kind of social democrat who, according to Malatesta in his obituary of his friend, 'in his intentions and in his hopes, sought to bring together all the advanced parties and groups' — including the anarchists — though he declared himself in favour of parliamentary elections and, according to Malatesta, 'joined the Neapolitan section of the Socialist Party' — Editor.

principle, Neither Slaves Nor Masters) have always found themselves on the same side.

The impotence of the anarchists depends on a number of other reasons, in particular the lack of a practical programme that could be implemented in the short term, as well, of course, as from the general conditions in which they have been obliged to act. In other words, the fact that they looked to an ideal and therefore, rather than putting their ideas into practice, they felt obliged to hasten the hour of the revolution.

And Merlino exaggerates when he says that the ideas of the communists and the individualists (I am still, of course, speaking of sincere, thinking anarchists) are diametrically opposed to each other. They may seem to be to those who take certain literary and 'philosophical' digressions seriously, but in reality it is usually a question of verbal misunderstanding.

Anarchist individualism has had the misfortune to be frequently professed by those who lacked any sense of anarchism: bourgeois literati who tried to attract attention to themselves by the use of paradox in order to re-enter and succeed in the mainstream literary field; semi-cultured and semi-literate youngsters who wished to *distinguish themselves*; idiots whose brains were addled by the reading of obscure books; and worst of all, the more sophisticated criminals, superior criminals who sought to justify their crimes with a theory. And in Italy these generally ended up as fascists. Bourgeoisie, government and parties opposed to anarchism have profited from these deviations to pour scorn on anarchism and they have, unfortunately, succeeded to wrongfoot us where the mass of the people is concerned. Misunderstandings and issues about individuals have clouded discussion and often embittered even the anarchists themselves. But none of this detracts from the fact that essentially, in, that is, their moral motivations and ultimate goals, individualist and communist anarchism is one and the same thing — or almost.

On the other hand, is it possible to set up the communist system, immediately, as the general basis of social life? Would people moulded by a history of struggle between peoples, classes and individuals, in which every person has had to think for themselves in order to survive and not be trampled underfoot, want such a thing? And could it not, in the present climate of public morality, lead to the exploitation of the good or the weak by the bad and the unscrupulous? And even supposing that people did want it, how to make it work on a large scale, as things are now, whether throughout the world or in a single country, and without bringing about a monstruous process of centralisation and relying on a faceless bureaucracy, by definition incompetent and oppressive?

From all that has been said, and from much more that could be said, I conclude — and the true anarchists have always drawn similar conclusions — that desires and aspirations should not be mistaken for unshakeable dogmas, beyond which there is no salvation.

Communism is our ideal.

We are communists because communism seems to us to be the best way in which people can live together, in which people can best demonstrate their love for one another and at the same time render more productive human attempts to conquer natural resources. For this reason we must preach it; and as soon as circumstances allow we must apply it through example and experiment, in all hose places and in all those branches of activity where it is possible so to do. For the rest we must trust in freedom, which ever remains our aim and the means of all human progress.

I warmly recommend the book by Armand.[2] It is a conscientious book, written by one of the most respected of individualist anarchists and it has been generally well received by the individualists. But, reading this book, one wonders why on earth Armand insists on referring to 'anarchist individualism' as a distinct body of doctrine when in general he is setting out principles common to all anarchists of whatever tendency. In reality Armand, who likes to call himself 'amoral,' has produced a kind of manual of anarchist morality — not 'individualist anarchist' but anarchist in general. Indeed, beyond anarchist, a widely human morality because based on the human sentiments that render anarchy desirable and possible.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that there exists among the anarchists a self-styled individualist minority which is a permanent cause of unpleasantness and weakness.

And, now that the anarchists are in a ferment over preparations for the future, it is worthwhile to re-examine the question calmly and without preconceptions.

I shall do so briefly from my point of view as a communist or *associationist;* others will do so, should they wish, from the individualist point of view.

(I use the word 'associationist' as an alternative to the word 'communist,' not because I like pointless new jargon, but because I foresee the possibility that the communist anarchists will gradually abandon the term 'communist'; it is growing in ambivalence and falling into disrepute as a result of Russian 'communist' despotism. If the term is eventually abandoned this will be a repetition of what happened with the word 'socialist.' We who, in Italy at least, were the first champions of socialism and maintained and still maintain that we are the true socialists in the broad and human sense of

[2] E. Armand (1872–1962*), Ainsi Chantaitun En Dehors*He was for many years editor of the individualist journal 1'En *Dehors* — Editor.

the word, ended by abandoning the term to avoid confusion with the many and various authoritarian and bourgeois deviations of socialism. Thus too we may have to abandon the term 'communist' for fear that our ideal of free human solidarity will be confused with the avaricious despotism which has for some while triumphed in Russia and which one party, inspired by the Russian example, seeks to impose worldwide. Then perhaps we would need another adjective to distinguish us from the rest — and this could well be *associationist* or *societist* or such like, although it seems to me that simply to use the term 'anarchist' would suffice.)

First of all let us avoid one common mistake which underlines the whole misunderstanding.

The individualists presume, or speak as if they presume, that the anarchist communists wish to impose communism, and that this would actually place them beyond the anarchist pale.

The communists presume, or speak as if they presume, that the anarchist individualists reject any idea of association, looking instead to the struggle of individual against individual, the dominion of the strongest (and there are those who, in the name of individualism, have supported such ideas and worse, but these people cannot be called anarchists) — and this would place them not only beyond the anarchist pale but beyond human society too.

In reality the communists are communists because in freely accepted communism they see the fruits of solidarity and a better guarantee of individual liberty. And the individualists, the truly anarchist ones, are anti-communist because they fear that communism would subject individuals to the tyranny, nominally, of the collectivity and, in practice, to the party or cast, and that this, on the pretext of having to administrate, would manage to invest itself with the power to dispose of things, and consequently of the people who need those things. They want every individual or group to

be able to freely carry out their own activities and freely reap the fruits of their equality with other individuals and groups, conserving relations of justice and equity between one another.

If this is so, clearly no fundamental difference exists.

Only that, according to the communists, justice and equity are, for natural reasons, impossible to achieve in an individualist system and that freedom would thus also be unachievable. It would also be impossible to achieve equality from the beginning — a state of affairs, that is, in which every person would be born into conditions that were equally ripe for development and into equal material means, enabling them to achieve some kind of upward mobility, and to rejoice in a reasonably long and happy life, according to their own natural abilities and their own actions.

If the same climate were to prevail over the whole earth; if the soil were everywhere equally fertile; if raw materials were everywhere equally distributed and available to those who needed them; if civilisation were general and had everywhere reached the same level of development; if the work of past generations had raised all countries to the same standards; if population were equally distributed over the habitable surface of the earth — then one can imagine that everyone (whether group or individual) would have land and the means and raw materials to work and produce on an independent basis, without exploiting or being exploited. But natural and historical conditions being what they are, how to bring about equity and justice between those who live on arid land and those who happen to find themselves on fertile, well-situated land? Or between the inhabitants of a village lost between the mountains or in the midst of the marshes and the inhabitants of a city which hundreds of generations have enriched with the legacy of human intelligence and labour?
