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Armed struggle and the revolutionary movement

Jean Weir

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A transcription from 325 #10 of a speech by Jean Weir. It overviews in more straightforward language the argument against traditional armed struggle put forward by Italian insurrectionary anarchists inspired by the practice of groups like Azione Rivoluzionaria. It reiterates the argument against building just towards one grand revolutionary break and for pushing for the exploited to organize towards multiple insurrectionary ruptures. It is provided for informational purposes.

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Athens, Greece: A transcription of a brief presentation by Jean Weir of Elephant Editions during an international conference called by the members of the armed group Revolutionary Struggle. The event took place on the 7–8 June 2012 and concerned the armed movements in Europe and their history, plus the prospect of global social revolution as an answer to the systemic crisis. Speakers also included Brigitte Asdonk (Red Army Faction), Bertrand Sassoie (Communist Combatant Cells), Jose Rodriguez, Andreas Vogel (June 2nd Movement), Christos Tsigaridas (Revolutionary Popular Struggle) and Commission for an International Red Help. Nikos Maziotis and Pola Roupa of Revolutionary Struggle also made presentations at the conference. These comrades have since gone into clandestinity, from where we hope the authorities never touch them again.

Athens, Greece. A hot university, barricaded in, riot cops positioned outside. A transcript not to be lost in translation or memory...

[Chairs clatter, screech on the floor. People cough. The flick of lighters. Quiet chatter in the crowd is a deafening roar... Attention focuses and wanders off in the heat...The microphone is being set-up...]

.. **chaos...**

I think I distinguished myself on the poster here as not having an organisation or an acronym after my name, (but a great word, “England”!), so that requires an explanation. I don’t belong to any organisation or acronym, and of course, that was always a conscious choice in my life and the years I’ve lived through, these choices were, as the comrades here already explained, were there for everybody to make, if they so desired.

As is the case today; we are here now tonight because the comrades of **Revolutionary Struggle** made an invitation to the movement of this kind.

Given the state of the reality that we are living in today, the only choice we have is to attack and destroy this world, as it exists in the form it exists at the moment, so the question is, how do we go about this and what forms do we use? The comrades of Revolutionary Struggle made their choice, they didn’t ask the consensus of the comrades in an assembly – they’re individuals, they made their decisions as free individuals, stood by them and acted coherently and are taking the consequences.

They have emerged from the belly of the beast to come back into the movement to embrace the comrades with their proposals, and this, I think, is what defines this moment, which is this two days *[of the conference]*.

So this encounter also has the characteristic of the struggle, it is a moment of struggle, not just a moment for reminiscing or talking about the past, therefore it is a moment of solidarity, because there is no difference between solidarity and struggle, for us solidarity is a continuation of the struggle everywhere.

For anarchists, we don't have a linear view of the past, and then, *into the future*. We don't have a history with a capital 'H', but a patrimony, a heritage — which is still alive today.

Some of the comrades of the past, and even a century before, are still alive in the struggle, and there are many aspects of the anarchist movement which could be summed up as the armed, violent, section of attack against the system, and much of this movement has disappeared, because it hasn't been recorded, it does not have its reference points, it doesn't have historians.

I would like to just say, that I would like to consider myself an element of a tension towards the attempt to move towards the attack and destruction of the existent, this is something which can't be described or quantified. It is a qualitative tendency which exists in the movement, which is giving itself moments of experimentation, and also evaluation of methods, which is a question which is posed to us tonight, that of the armed struggle.

One more thing I'd like to say on the subject of England, there are some comrades who are also here with us in spirit from England, they send their love and their solidarity to the comrades who are promoting this event, as well as to all the comrades in the prisons and those fighting in the streets. Greece is a great inspiration and continues to be a great inspiration in this context. And some of the comrades in England are working assiduously to make known many aspects of the struggle here, including the documents and reporting of the trial of the comrades of Revolutionary Struggle.

Armed struggle is a method, it is not the whole of the struggle, it's a selection of a choice of field. It is done in a certain way, with certain objectives, but we, as anarchists, we also have other methods, which we apply at the same time or at different times. So, we are having to continually work out which strategy to use against the enemy at a given moment.

We don't make a political analysis, we want the destruction of politics, but we make a social analysis at the level of the exploited, with whom we will have to carry out this destruction.

So, with that rather garbled introduction, (because I belong to the barbarians, the stammerers, I do not have a political way of reasoning,) nevertheless, the comrades who made the proposition have put us in a situation where we have to make an effort also, to look at certain things more closely which seemed already given, to look at them again in the problematic. One of the problematics for anarchists has occasionally been — Is it possible for anarchists to act within a closed group, clandestine or otherwise, in the dimension of armed struggle? Or does the group end up by definition closing itself and separating itself from our other comrades in struggle, i.e. the exploited, the excluded.

We have our thoughts, we have our ideas on this question, we have our experiments, we have our methodology, but everything is in the dimension of a great flux of reality that we live in, nothing is fixed and nothing is certain forever. We play the game, the way we decide, we take responsibility for our actions, and when needed we pay the price, we make our own rules, but we're free to break them whenever we like, because we haven't sworn any allegiance to anyone.

- I know, everyone is tired, I don't know if we are still barricaded in by the riot cops, and this meeting is like one taking place in a bunker; which is a reality check for anyone, but there is never any doubt about being in a war here in Greece. -

Very briefly, they've been mentioned before, but the various experiments and experiences of armed struggle (in the sense of the closed group – because this can take place in other circumstances):

There was the **1st of May Group**, which was active at the end of the 60s, that carried out various attacks in different cities in Europe, against Franco-ism and also against the murder of [Giuseppe] Pinelli¹. Sometimes doing co-ordinated bombings in different cities on the same day. One aspect which underlined,

¹ Giuseppe Pinelli; an anarchist who was killed by police in Milan, Italy, 1969.

To close, when we are looking for our accomplices in the struggle, we need to look beyond the movement, to the exploited in society, this 'thing' called "society". Not to draw them into the movement but to push them to attack. *- I'm sorry if I have strayed from the topic of the historical reality of the armed struggle, but I find it difficult to look at reality in a purely historical dimension and I realise that the intervention in terms of the language and translation has been very incomplete.* - This is because there isn't an answer, there are questions and propositions that we need to look at and experiment with.

Our point of reference must always be the destruction of this world which is based on work and exploitation. To enter the adventure of freedom, where the means of survival belong to everyone. To each according to their needs, from each according to their abilities, desires and without coercion – or moral pressure which also must disappear from this world!

Let's work with whichever method we desire to destroy the existent!

Let's destroy the spectacle of representation and I'll be the first to break the microphone!

and for them, seemed to verify the fact that they were anarchists, was the fact that they attacked property not individuals. "We attack property, not people" was one of their slogans. Now, of course, we know very well that anarchists do not attack "people", anarchists attack class enemies. These are not people.

Another group, the Angry Brigade, which was active in England, they carried out various attacks over a number of years, the specific interest that they generated was because they didn't write long communiques, just very short and to incite the people to attack themselves. I don't have their exact words here, but one of their communiques was "*what do you want, sit here gazing into nothing in a drug-store drinking tasteless coffee, or blow it up?*" Some of their first communiques were just three words, or a few syllables. It would be fascinating to talk about the group but I don't think we have time and I don't think it is particularly relevant to the points we want to make, but I do think that one of the great developments they made to the anarchist approach to armed attack was the very fact of short communiques.

Now I come to Italy, at the end of the 70s, to briefly look at an armed struggle group named **Azione Rivoluzionaria**, which named itself specifically anarchist.

Now there is a strange feeling for going into talking about an armed group, as an outsider, not as a member of the group, because we know normally those who do that are the other side – the enemy, the cops and so on. One of the main aspects of the armed closed organisation is the fact that their actions belong to them.

So, in the latter part of the 70s, some members of the anarcho-libertarian area – firstly, we have to say that '77 is a context – known in Italy as the "*Anni di piombo*" – the "Years of Lead", because there was thousands of people in the streets, demonstrating, and there was a diffused armed guerilla in the whole of Italy in those years – there were many armed groups, of the closed Marxist-Leninist kind, and there was a critique of these

groups, and this critique was active, in the form of small nuclei of attack. These groups either did not claim their attacks at all or invented a name for each series of actions or specific attack. **Azione Rivoluzionaria** formed in a moment of very widely diffused liberatory violence. Young people had lost all their taboos about violence and in '77 when the communist-syndicalists went to speak to the students in the occupied university of Rome, they were chased out of the university, and this time was a moment of liberation for many, many, young people. When later, a young member of **Lotta Continua**, Francesca Russo, was killed, there was a massive rebellion in the streets and the rebels were smashing the gunshop windows, arming themselves and shooting the cops. The whole of these years, I don't know if they have been recorded in Greece or not, but they are worthy of examination, because these moments were happening in a time of capitalist restructuring, which has now taken place. All the heavy industry of FIAT and the other productive centres were closing down, thousands of men were redundant, thousands of young people realised they had no future in the terms of the capitalist society.

For the closed clandestine organisations, the moment had come; for the **Red Brigades**, for example, the question became: "Either enlist, or desist", meaning "Join the organisation – or stay at home and watch us". This led to a massive situation of enrolment in the organisation, which contributed afterwards to a collapse not only of the organisation but the whole concept of revolution and attack. It has already been mentioned that there were 4000 comrades in the prison, and the State found the way to get a profession of desistance: "*pentiti*" – repentance and denunciation of the struggle.

To get back to **AR**, it was a very interesting attempt to do something different, to quote them:

"The movement does not put off the class struggle but takes it on in first person. What we want is to carry out a destructive critique of the State with the use of revolutionary violence. Armed struggle, propaganda by the deed – We want to hasten the time and widen

the internal front of the clash in order to reach a destabilization of the State. Armed struggle is the only force credible of making any project today. Create, organise, 10, 100, 1000 armed nuclei. ... Ours is a revolutionary organisation in which we meet at an informal level, on the basis of various different ideas and experiences of differing comrades."

... The existence of this group within the movement at the time, stimulated a part of the anarchist movement with a critique of the armed struggle method. This critique was put into practice a decade later in the 80s, in the form of affinity groups; in this case against the nuclear industry in Italy. Many of the actions consisted of sawing down pylons, but these actions were not explained in communiques, rather the anarchists were present in their critique of the big demonstrations and campaigns, in their own meetings and interventions. The essence of this methodology is that there is not one apocalyptic moment when revolution will occur as a result of a crisis of Capital. "Crisis" is one of the mechanisms of Capital which undergoes recurrent crisis.

These crises lead to increasing discomfort which lead to rebellion and organisation. They also lead to a proliferation of reformist groups that aim to alleviate the distress of the exploited. So, if we say, rather than aiming towards one moment of revolution, we are aiming at moments of insurrection, which are partial moments, without being complete, this is more to the point.

This was also attempted in the moments in the 80s during the struggle against American cruise missile bases in Sicily, Italy. This became also an intermediate struggle, again we don't have time now to explain fully, but this is a moment of time when anarchists in Italy attempted in those years to activate an insurrectional struggle. This time, the intention was to create organisms created by anarchists, but adopted by people who were not anarchist, because the essence of insurrectionary struggle is taking back our lives and our actions without delegating the struggle to anyone. Not to an armed group nor a trade union.