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Chapter from “Dittatura e Rivoluzione”
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The intolerance of many socialists, even revolutionary ones, in the face of anarchism largely depends on their absolute ignorance of the ideas, aims, and methods of anarchists.

It is astounding to note how some of the most intelligent people, of a vast political and economic culture, among the socialists, when it comes to anarchy, can say nothing but the usual senseless clichés spread by the worst bourgeois press: the most outlandish and defamatory statements, the most foolish interpretations. All the socialist knowledge of anarchism seems condensed in that old pamphlet, in which Plekanov, in 1893, vented his anti-anarchist bile, without any respect for truth and without any intellectual honesty;[1] or in the well-known book

[1] The present volume was already more than half printed when a new book, ‘State and Revolution’, was published by Lenin for the types of Avanti! (Milan, 1920). In it, Lenin recognizes the superficiality of Plekanov, who dealt with the subject by completely avoiding what were the most current and politically essential differences between socialism and anarchy, and by

by Lombroso on anarchists, which takes as true documents the reports of the police and of the directors of prisons, and – who knows why – catalogues among the anarchists people who for nine-tenths never dreamed of being one!

Countless socialist refutations of anarchism have appeared in newspapers, books, and journals; but, with praiseworthy exceptions, they almost always refuted ideas that were not at all anarchist, but attributed to anarchists out of either ignorance or polemic artifice. Especially on the concept of revolution, pretended anarchist theories have been put into circulation that were so extravagant as to lead one to doubt the good faith of those enunciating them. How much ink was scattered to demonstrate to the "deluded anarchists" that the revolution is not made with stones, with old rifles or some revolvers, that barricades no longer correspond to the needs of today's struggle! That isolated and sudden movements are not enough! That individual attacks alone do not make the revolution! That the riot is one thing and revolution is another!... And so on, with unique discoveries of a similar kind — ignoring, or pretending to ignore, that anarchists have the most exact concept of revolution, and at the same time most practical, according to the etymological, traditional, and historical meaning of the word.

Revolution, in political and social language — and also in popular language — is a general movement through which a people or a class, breaking out of legality and overthrowing the existing institutions, breaking the lion pact [patto leonino][2] imposed by the rulers on the ruled classes, with a more or less long series of insurrections, revolts, riots, attacks, and strug-

accompanying the historical sections with philistine and vulgar considerations, tending to demonstrate that an anarchist can hardly be distinguished from a bandit. (Lenin, State and Revolution, p. 118).

[2] Translators note: This phrase, now used in Italian law, stems from a fable by Phaedrus, 'The cow, the goat, the sheep, and the lion', which is itself derived from Aesop. The fable concerns the injustice of any arrangement which solely benefits one party at the expense of another.

gles of all kinds, definitively overthrows the political and social regime to which, until then, they were subjected, and establishes a new order.

The overthrow of a regime usually takes place in a relatively short time: a few days for the revolution of July 1830, which in France replaced one dynasty for another; a little more than one year for the Italian revolution of 1848; six or seven years for the French revolution of 1789; a dozen years for the English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. The revolution, that is, the de facto demolition of a pre-existing political and social regime, is essentially the conclusion of an earlier evolution, which translates into material reality, violently breaking the social forms and the political shell no longer able to contain it. It ends with the return to a normal state, when the struggle has ceased, whether the victory allows the revolution to establish a new regime, or whether its partial or total defeat restores part or all of the old one, giving rise to the counter-revolution.

The main feature, by which it can be said that the revolution has begun, is the exit from legality, the breaking of state equilibrium and discipline, the unpunished and victorious action of the square against the law. Before a specific and decisive fact of this kind, there is still no revolution. There can be a revolutionary state of mind, a revolutionary preparation, a condition of things more or less favourable to revolution; there may be more or less fortunate episodes of revolt, insurrectional attempts, violent or non-violent strikes, even bloody demonstrations, attacks, etc. But as long as the force remains with the old law and the old power, we have not yet entered the revolution.

The struggle against the state, armed defender of the regime, is therefore the sine qua non condition of the revolution, which tends to limit the power of the state as much as possible and to develop the spirit of freedom, to push the people, the subjects of the day before, the exploited and the oppressed, to the maximum possible limit, to the use of all individual and collective freedoms. In the exercise of freedom, unconstrained by laws

and governments, lies the health of every revolution, the guarantee that it will not be limited or arrested in its progress, its best safeguard against internal and external attempts to throttle it.

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Some tell us: "We understand that, as anarchists, being opposed to any idea of government, you oppose dictatorship, which is its most authoritarian expression; but it is not a question of proposing it as an aim, but rather as a means, albeit unpleasant, but necessary, just as violence is a necessary but unpleasant means during the provisional revolutionary period, necessary to overcome bourgeois resistance and counterattacks".

Violence is one thing, government authority is another, whether dictatorial or not. If it is true, in fact, that all governmental authorities rely on the use of violence, it would be inaccurate and erroneous to say that all "violence" is an act of authority, so that if the former is necessary, the latter also becomes so. Violence is a means, which takes on the character of the end for which it is used, of the way it is used, of the people who use it. It is an act of authority when it is used to force others to act in the way of those in charge, when it is an emanation from government or bosses, and serves to keep peoples and classes enslaved, to prevent the individual freedom of subjects, to obtain obedience by force. Instead, it is libertarian violence, that is to say an act of freedom and liberation, when it is used against those who command by those who no longer want to obey; when it is aimed at preventing, diminishing, or destroying any kind of slavery, individual or collective, economic or political; and it is used directly by the oppressed — individuals, peoples, or classes — against the government and the ruling class. Such violence is the revolution in progress; but it ceases to be libertarian, and

we, or those in favor of the revolutionary dictatorship, exclude that one of the causes of the terrible conditions in which the Russian revolution struggles is precisely its excessively authoritarian and dictatorial approach? Certainly not.

We, with the greatest sense of objectivity that was possible for us, given our passion as partisan men, examined in a previous chapter the conditions created in Russia by the dictatorship in relation to the interests of freedom. And from this point of view the conclusions that can be drawn are certainly not encouraging! But our aim is not to set ourselves up as judges and neither to make historical criticism as an end in itself, but rather to examine ideas and facts, taking into account what could be the revolution in our countries. We can also allow that in Russia things could not have gone differently than they did, and that it could not have been done differently from what has been done. But it is certain that in Western countries one could not act in the same way as in Russia.

Our considerations are above all intended to have a value here, where we live, as a norm and guide of a possible revolution more or less near; so we have the duty not to blindly imitate what is said, or what we imagine, to have been done in Russia or elsewhere, but rather to positively prepare the ground for our revolution, seeing what is and is not suitable for its triumph, given our conditions, the means we can dispose of, and the ends we set ourselves with the revolution — here, in our environment, with our sentiments, and our ideas.

Those who quote Lenin so often must remember in this regard the honest advice he gave to the revolutionaries of Hungary, when the unfortunate revolution ended so badly there, to be careful not to ape what had been done in Russia, because errors had been committed there which had to be avoided; and because what could be useful, necessary or inevitable in Russia, could on the contrary be avoidable and harmful elsewhere. Lenin's advice is good for revolutionaries of all countries — including the revolutionaries of Italy.

therefore revolutionary, as soon as, having overcome the old power, it wants to become a power itself, and crystallizes in any form of government.

This is the most dangerous moment of any revolution: that is, when the victorious libertarian and revolutionary violence can be transformed into authoritarian and counter-revolutionary violence, moderating and limiting the popular insurrectionary victory. It is the moment in which the revolution can devour itself, if it is taken over by the Jacobin and statist tendencies, which right now are manifesting themselves through Marxist socialism in favor of the establishment of a dictatorial government. The specific task of anarchists, deriving from their own theoretical and practical conceptions, is precisely to react against such authoritarian and liberticidal tendencies; with propaganda today and with action tomorrow.

Those who make a distinction between theoretical anarchy and practical anarchy, in order to argue that practical anarchy should not be anarchistic but dictatorial, have not well understood the essence of anarchism, in which it is not possible to divide theory from practice, since, for anarchists, theory arises from practice and is in turn a guide for conduct, a real pedagogy of action.

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Many believe that anarchy consists only in the revolutionary and at the same time ideal affirmation of a society without government, to be established in the future, but without connection with current reality, so that today we can or should act in contradiction with the proposed goal, without scruples and without limits. Thus, while awaiting anarchy, yesterday they advised us to provisionally vote in the elections, as today they propose us to accept provisionally the so-called proletarian or revolutionary dictatorship.

But not at all! If we were anarchists only in ends and not in means, our party would be useless; because, in Bovio's words,

the notion that 'Thought is anarchist and history is marching towards anarchy' can also be said and approved of by those who are active in other progressive parties (and in fact many of them subscribe to it). What distinguishes us, not only in theory but also in practice, from other parties is not only that we have an anarchist purpose but also an anarchist movement, an anarchist methodology; inasmuch as we think that the path to take, both during the preparatory period of propaganda and in the revolutionary one, is the path of freedom.

The function of anarchism is not so much to prophesy a future of freedom, but to prepare it. If all anarchism consisted in was the distant vision of a society without a state, or in the affirmation of individual rights, or in a purely spiritual question, abstracted from lived reality and concerning only individual consciences, there would be no need for an anarchist political and social movement. If anarchism were simply an individual ethic, to be cultivated within oneself, and at the same time adapted in material life to acts and movements in contradiction with it, we could call ourselves anarchists and belong to the most diverse parties; and so many could be called anarchists who, although they are spiritually and intellectually emancipated, are and remain, on practical grounds, our enemies.

But anarchism is something else. It is not a means of closing oneself in the ivory tower, but rather a manifestation of the people, proletarian and revolutionary, an active participation in the movement for human emancipation, with principles and goals that are egalitarian and libertarian at the same time. The most important part of its program does not consist solely in the dream, which we want to come true, of a society without bosses and without governments, but above all in the libertarian conception of revolution, of revolution against the state and not through the state, of the idea that freedom is not only the vital heat that will warm the new world of tomorrow, but also and above all, today, a weapon of combat against the old world. In this sense, anarchy is a real theory of revolution.

have dangerous hesitations and scruples, which the masses do not have. Direct popular action — which we could call libertarian terrorism — is therefore always more radical, not to mention that, locally, it is possible to know much better who and where to strike, than from the distant central power, which would be forced to rely on courts, always far less just and at the same time more ferocious than popular summary justice. — Courts which, even when they perform acts of true justice, do not strike by sentiment but by mandate, therefore become disliked by the people for their coldness, and are led to surround their acts of cruelty, even when necessary, with a useless theatricality and a hypocritical display of a non-existent and impossible legislative equality.

In all revolutions, as soon as popular justice becomes legal, organized from above, it gradually turns into injustice. Perhaps it becomes crueller, but it is also led to strike the revolutionaries themselves, to often spare enemies, to become an instrument of the central power in an increasingly repressive and counter-revolutionary sense. Therefore, as an instrument of destructive violence, not only can one do without governmental power in the revolution, but violence itself is more effective and radical the less it is concentrated in a determined authority.

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To those who counter our arguments with what is happening in Russia, we reply that the experiment is still in progress there, and that it is too early to rely on it as proof of truth. The decrees issued by the Soviet government are widely cited, but to understand if they are good one should know if, how, and to what extent they have been applied, their results, etc. To conclude that good was done there, it would be necessary for the experiment to be finished, either with victory or with defeat, in order to know and understand whether the dictatorship helped or hindered one or the other more. As things stand today, can

tried to shake its yoke, and with such a ferocity that no other revolutions have ever achieved.

As anarchists, however, we direct all our reservations, not against the use of terror in general, but against codified, legalized terrorism, made an instrument of government — even if it is a government that claims and believes itself to be revolutionary. Authoritarian terrorism, in reality, by the fact of being such, ceases to be revolutionary, becomes a perennial threat to the revolution, and also a reason for weakness. Violence finds its justification only in struggle and in the need to free oneself from violent oppression; but legalization of violence, violent government, is itself already an arrogance, a new oppression.

Therefore, it becomes a cause of weakness for revolutionary terrorism to be exercised, not freely by the people and only against their enemies, not through the independent initiative of revolutionary groups, but by the government; with the natural consequence that it persecutes, together with the real enemies of the revolution, even sincere revolutionaries, more advanced than the government, but discordant with it. Furthermore, terrorism, as an act of governmental authority, is more susceptible to gathering those popular antipathies and aversions which are always determined in opposition to any government, of whatever kind it may be; and only because it is a government. The government, due to the responsibilities that it bears and all the influences it suffers from abroad and from within, and even when it resorts to radical measures, is inevitably led to concerns and acts, whether violent or submissive, by the principles suggested, by the need to defend its power and personal security, in the present or future, or even the simple good name of its members, rather than the interests of the people and the revolution.

In order to get rid of the bourgeoisie in every place, to proceed with those summary measures which may be necessary in a revolution, there is no need for orders from above. Indeed, those in power, out of a natural sense of responsibility, can

Both our propaganda today and the revolution tomorrow will need the maximum possible freedom to develop. This does not alter the fact that we must, and can, continue the same, even if freedom is partly, little or much, taken away from us; but our interest is to have it and to want it as much as possible. Otherwise, we would not be anarchists. In other words, we think that the more we act like libertarians the more we will contribute not only to getting closer to anarchy, but to consolidating the revolution; while we will move away from anarchy and weaken the revolution whenever we resort to authoritarian systems. Defending freedom for ourselves and for all, fighting for ever more extensive and complete freedom; this is our function, today, tomorrow, always — in theory and in practice.

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Freedom even for our enemies? one wonders. The question is either naïve or disingenuous. With the enemy we are in a struggle, and in the fray the enemy is not recognized any freedom, not even that of living. If our enemies were only… theoretical ones, if we were faced with them disarmed, unable to attack our freedom, stripped of all privileges and therefore on equal terms, it would be admissible. But to worry about the freedom of our enemies when we have a few poor newspapers and a few weeklies, and they have hundreds of large newspapers; when they are armed and we are unarmed, while they are in power and we are subjects, they rich and we poor, come on! It would be ridiculous… It would be the same as granting a murderer the freedom to kill us! We deny this freedom to them, and we will always deny it, even in the revolutionary period, so long as they keep their condition as executioners and we have not conquered our entire freedom, not only in law but in fact.

But we will not be able to conquer this freedom except by using it as a means, where it depends on us to do so; that is

to say by giving an increasingly free and libertarian direction to our movement, to the proletarian and popular movement; by developing the spirit of freedom, autonomy, and free initiative among the masses; by educating them to an ever greater intolerance of any authoritarian and political power, encouraging the spirit of independence of judgment and action towards leaders of all kinds; by accustoming the people to the contempt of every restraint and discipline imposed by others and from above, which is not the restraint of their conscience or a discipline freely chosen and accepted, followed only as long as it is considered good and useful for the revolutionary and libertarian purpose set ourselves.

Of course, a mass educated in this school, a movement having this direction (that is, the anarchist movement), will find in revolution the occasion and the means to develop itself up to limits not even imaginable today; it will be the natural and voluntary obstacle to the formation and affirmation of any more or less dictatorial government. Between this movement towards ever greater freedom and the centralizing and dictatorial tendency there can only be conflict, more or less strong and violent, with greater or lesser truces, depending on the circumstances; but never concordance.

And this is not because of an exclusively doctrinal and abstract whim, but because as deniers of power — this is, we repeat, the most important aspect of anarchist theory, which wants to be the most practical of theories — we think that revolution without freedom would bring us back to a new tyranny; because the government, by the mere fact of being such, tends to halt and limit the revolution; and because it is in the interest of the revolution and its progressive development to fight and hinder any centralization of powers, to prevent, if possible, the formation of any government, or at least to prevent it from strengthening, becoming stable, and consolidating. That is to say that the interest of the revolution is contrary to the tendency that every dictatorship has within itself, however prole-

far more terrible massacres would punish weakness with the white terror of counter-revolution!

Moreover, we must not over-value the rhetoric with which the bourgeois press is pompous, in order to scorn and slander revolutionary terrorism.

For the past four years everyone has been talking about the horrors, the massacres, the infamies, the revolutionary disorders in Petrograd and Moscow. But if one had the patience to go to libraries to retrieve the diaries of Rome, Turin, Vienna, Koblenz, Berlin, London, and Madrid from about 1789 to 1815, one would read identical words of horror about the massacres, the infamies, and the disorders of the French Revolution, which today everyone calls the Great Revolution. Those who recall the times of the Paris Commune of 1871, also remember with what disgusting language they spoke of the "massacres" by the Communard oilmen: there were not enough words to insult them as the worst murderers. Nevertheless, how many apologists of the Paris Commune are there today among the revilers of the Moscow Commune!

The sincere Italian patriots must remember the infamies reported in moderate and Bonapartist Parisian newspapers — in agreement with the Viennese clerical newspapers — against the Roman Republic in 1849, and how then the pious souls were scandalized and horrified by the massacres attributed to the Carbonari and the Mazzinians. One day the real truth will also be known about the Russian revolution, and perhaps many of its slanderers today will change their minds. Then, probably, the only ones who will persist in criticism will be… the anarchists!

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The bourgeoisie has no right to be scandalized by the terrorism of the Russian revolution. In its revolutions, the bourgeoisie has done the same, and has used terror to its own advantage against the people, every time that the latter has seriously

We do not deny at all the necessity of the use of terror, especially when external enemies come to the aid of internal ones with armed force. Revolutionary terrorism is an inevitable consequence, when the territory on which the revolution has not yet sufficiently strengthened is invaded by reactionary armies. Every snare of the counter-revolution, from within, is too fatal in such circumstances to not be exterminated by fire and sword. The legend of Brutus, who sent his sons to the gallows as internal accomplices to the Tarquins, expelled from Rome and threatening Roman freedom at the head of a foreign army, is the symbol of this tragic necessity for terror. Thus, in France the need was felt in 1792 to exterminate the nobles, priests, and reactionaries accumulated in the prisons, as Brunswick approached menacingly towards Paris, led by emigrants.

Terror becomes inevitable when the revolution is surrounded on all sides. Without the external threat, internal counterrevolutionary threats are not so scary; the sight of their material impotence is enough to keep them inactive. Leaving them undisturbed may still be a mistake, and perhaps a danger for the future, but it does not constitute an immediate danger. Therefore, one can more easily be drawn towards one's enemies by a feeling of generosity and pity. But when these enemies have armed forces beyond the borders ready to intervene to their aid, when they find allies in the external enemies, then they become a danger, which becomes ever stronger the more the other danger advances from the outside. Their suppression then becomes a matter of life or death.

The more inexorable the revolution is in such situations, the better it manages to avoid greater grief in the future. Excessive tolerance today may require a doubly severe penalty tomorrow.[4] And if it had as its consequence the defeat of revolution,

[4] In this sense Giovanni Bovio said that the Revolution "mercifully commits cruel actions, and avoids feminine piety; excuses a massacre and condemns the Soderinis." (G. BOVIO, Doctrine of the parties in Europe, Naples, 1886 — p. 137).

tarian or revolutionary it claims to be, to become strong, stable, and solid.

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But no! others reply; it would be a question of a provisional dictatorship, lasting only as long as the work of ousting the bourgeoisie, in order to fight, defeat, and expropriate them.

When one says "dictatorship" it is always implied that it will be provisional, even in the bourgeois and historical meaning of the word. All dictatorships, in the old days, were provisional in the intentions of their promoters and, nominally, also in fact. The intentions in this case count for little, since it is a question of forming a complex organism, which would follow its nature and its laws, and would nullify any contrary or limiting aprioristic intention. What we need to see is: first, whether the consequences of the dictatorial regime are more detrimental than beneficial to the revolution; second, if the destructive and reconstructive purposes for which the dictatorship is intended cannot also, and more successfully, be achieved without it, through the broad paths of freedom.

We believe that this is possible; and that the revolution is stronger, more incoercible, more difficult to defeat, when there is no centre at which to strike it: when it is everywhere, on all points of the territory; and wherever the people proceed freely to realize the two main ends of the revolution: the removal of authority and the expropriation of bosses.

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When we reproach the dictatorial conception of revolution with the grave mistake of imposing the will of a small minority on the great majority of the population, we are told that revolutions are made by minorities. Even in anarchist literature this expression is very often repeated, and it, in fact, speaks of

a great historical truth. But we must understand it in its true revolutionary meaning and not give it, like the Bolsheviks, a sense that it had never had before. That revolutions are made by minorities is, indeed, true… up to a certain point. Minorities, in reality, start the revolution, take the initiative of action, break through the first door, and knock down the first obstacles, inasmuch as they attempt that which the inert or misoneistic majorities fear, in their love of quiet living and fear of risk.

But if, once the first ties are broken, the popular majorities do not follow the audacious minorities, the actions of the latter are either followed by the reaction of the old regime as it takes its revenge, or results in the substitution of one form of domination and privilege for another. That is, it is necessary that the rebellious minority have the majority more or less consenting, interpret their needs and latent feelings; and, having overcome the first obstacle, realize popular aspirations, leave the masses the freedom to organize in their own way; become, in a certain sense, the majority.

If this is not the case, we do not say that the minority does not have the same right to revolt. According to the anarchist concept of freedom, all the oppressed have the right to rebel against oppression, the individual as well as the collectivity, minorities as well as majorities. But it is one thing to rebel against oppression and quite another to become an oppressor in turn, as we have said many times. Even when the majorities tolerate oppression or are complicit in it, the minority that feels oppressed has the right to rebel, to want its freedom for itself. But majorities would have the same and greater right against any minority that demanded, whatever the pretext, to subjugate them.

Moreover, in actual fact, oppressors are always a minority, both when they oppress openly in their own name and when they exercise oppression in the name of hypothetical collectivities or majorities. The revolt is therefore, at the beginning, of a conscious minority, rising in the midst of an oppressed ma-

jority, against another tyrannical minority; but this revolt becomes a revolution, it can have a renewing and liberating effect, only if its example manages to shake the majority, to drag it, to set it in motion, to gain its favour and support. Abandoned or opposed by popular majorities, the revolt, if defeated, would go down in history as a heroic and unfortunate movement, a fruitful forerunner of the times, a bloody but necessary stage of an inevitable victory in the future. Otherwise, if victorious, the rebellious minority that has become the owner of power in spite of the majorities, a new yoke on the neck of its subjects, would end up killing the very revolution it had aroused. In a certain sense it could be said that, if a rebellious minority were not able with its momentum to drag the majority of the oppressed with it, it would be more useful to the revolution if defeated and sacrificed. Since, if it were to become the oppressor with victory, it would end by extinguishing in the masses all faith in revolution, perhaps making them hate a revolution from which they saw nothing but a new tyranny — of which they would feel the weight and damage, whatever the pretext or name with which it was covered.

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Especially after the Russian revolution, the idea of the dictatorial power of revolution is defended as a necessary means of fighting against internal enemies, against the attempts of the former rulers eager to regain economic and political power. That is, the government would serve to organize, in the first moments of greatest danger, anti-bourgeois terrorism in defence of the revolution.[3]

[3] We speak of "terrorism" not only in the particular meaning of the government's terrorist policy, but in the general sense of the use of violence up to the most deadly limits, which can be done either by a government through its gendarmes, or directly by the people in the course of a riot and during the revolution.