Proletari 56
The usual suspects, the usual provocateurs
Thoughts on anarchism and communism
2002

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Translated from Italian to Greek by L., and from Greek to English by the Clydeside Anarchist Noise collective in 2024.

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Introduction to our translation:

I remember coming across this text some years back, translated into Greek for the magazine 'Βίδα', a collective with almost two decades of activity in the region. I hated it on my first read. I like it a lot more now; people change!

There is very little available information online on the Proletari 56 collective, which originally wrote this text; the fact that searches of the group mainly bring up references to the translation demonstrates, in my opinion, the relative influence of this text, and its central argument in regards to the relationship between anarchism, communism and its conception of proletarian autonomy, on the dynamic anti-authoritarian milieu in Greece.

The translation of this text does not imply that the translator - or, even worse, the Clydeside Anarchist Noise collective! - identifies fully with the positions and arguments laid out; CAN has never been accused of being communist (yet). In addition, a question this broad resulting in a text this short will neces-

sarily have some omissions; ones that stand out in particular to me are the rather narrow geographical and chronological focus on the European 20th century, as well as the lack of engagement with Platformism and Especifismo. This was also admittedly not the easiest text to translate (from a translation), so please forgive any unclarity. Nevertheless, I think this text still has much to offer for any unlucky reader of the Clydeside Anarchist Zine, for anybody who spends as much time as us pondering the storming of the heavens and the total destruction of state and capital!

Introduction to the Greek translation:

The following text circulated in 2002 in Italy by the anarchist-communist group Proletari 56. We chose to translate and publish it because we think it contains useful historical references which contribute to the disintegration of some common ideological myths. In times of generalised intellectual confusion, proletarian action will become dangerous again for the bosses of this world, surpassing the obstacles of ”ideological purity” (without falling into the trap of cross-class ”alliances”), recrystallising its means and ends: self-organised and direct action for the destruction of capital and authority.

Translation by L.

Many of us have been characterised anarchists by the communists and communists by the anarchists. What is highlighted here is the different histories linked to the anarchist and communist traditions. The question is whether there is a differentiation, besides that in particular historical periods, which would make these two experiences oppositional. In communist history, one can include initials, histories, revolutions, authors - which are in reality very different between one another. It is not possible to identify the contribution of Marx (Grundrisse, German Ideology, Capital, the texts on

the Commune)[1] with its social-democratic treatment. Social democracy itself (from the radical tendencies and Bolshevism to the reformism of the German SPD)[2] cannot be assimilated by the work and the importance of the international communist left[3].

It is equally difficult to put on the same level the anarchist proletarian militants such as Buenaventura Durruti, Sabate[4], Paul Avrich[5], with liberals such as N. Chomsky.

The answers given by anarchism - turned into an active proletarian tendency at the turn of the last century - were not the result of a bright invention by a handful of theorists. On the inside of society, there was a human mass which lived its existence in confrontation with State and Capital. Only in this way can we understand the relationship between proletarian migration in south America and the presence of mass anarchist organisations.

The entire experience of the German Revolution after World War I was based on a convergence of the communist and anarchist spaces and common political work which led to this connection on an organisational level[6]. During these years, there were experiences that attempted to surpass the barbed wire of ideology and to respond specifically, in military, finan-

[1] Often the anarchist movement criticises Marx by resorting to older theories (e.g. Proudhon or Stirner) which, besides being historically disarmed, are incapable of developing an 'advanced' critique of Marxist works.

[2] The 'apostate' Kautsky and his student, Lenin

[3] As the Communist Left we mean the minorities which were either expelled or left the 3rd International, which opposed parliamentarism, syndicalism and the concept of socialism in one country, and developed in Germany, the UK, Bulgaria, Russia and Italy.

[4] Francisco Sabate Llopart (1915-1960), libertarian anarchist, participated in the resistance against the fascist regime of Franco and was executed by the Guardia Civil.

[5] Paul Avrich (1931-2006), university professor and historian. Dedicated his life to rescuing the history of the anarchist movement of Russia and the USA.

[6] The workers' councils and the AAU-E.

cial and political terms, to the needs of proletarian autonomy. At the beginnings of the previous century, a famous poster by the IWW[1] - a historic syndicalist organisation with an intense presence in America, especially the US - demonstrates various politicians looking at the stars carrying various fat (socialist, republican, liberal, anarchist) books, and a worker with the IWW initials written over his workwear, shouting 'ORGANISE!' and pointing at a factory.

In Italy, the attempts to surpass the ideologism of a similar conflict were particularised by the radical formations borne of the autonomous behaviours of the '70s.

The rebirth itself of the 'proper' anarchist movement in Italy in the '70s needs to be sought in the development of the autonomous struggles of various parts of the working class: the cycle of struggles from '68 onwards - in the interior of a mature capitalist state of affairs - had brought with them new behaviours and needs. The organisation from below (collectives, assemblies, base unions), and the tendency towards the unification of all proletarian needs, not only those of an economic nature but also a transformation in quality of life, for an immediate practice of collective power.

These struggles were expressed through a direct attack against authoritarianism, against all forms of hierarchy and repression, with the tendency to surpass all those obstacles and differentiations - imposed by capital - extending discussions, critiques and challenges from the negation of wage labour to the entirety of everyday life, meant as the sum of the moments of life, of social relations and sites of production, from the

[1] The Industrial Workers of the World, during WWI, were the only syndicate - with thousands of members - that refused to capitulate to the United States government and guarantee class peace through a promise to not call for labour strikes during wartime. Many members and cadres of the IWW were convicted, due to this stance, with heavy sentences. At the same time, syndicalists from other unions were taking up - as a reward for the class truce they had guaranteed - government positions…

underline is that our basic aim cannot be to act upon people's consciousness in such a way as to change it. In propaganda there is an illusion, whether it is done in written form or in actions. We do not convince anybody. We can only express what moves forward. We cannot create a movement within society. We can only act within the interior of the movement we belong to.'[8]

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[8] J. Barrot: Sull'uso della violenza (On the use of violence), 1973

tween economic and political struggles, the military question, etc, have found in various historical periods the proletarian movement divided between those who came to rupture with the existing and those who could not dream of anything different. This division - reflected also in separations between different parties and unions, working-class behaviours and desires that were antithetical with one another and difficult to bridge - transformed each time the standards of proletarian action. We can summarise by quoting an orthodox Marxist such as P. Mattick, who wrote, evaluating the Paris Commune in his text 'Councils and the State': '*Although it was hopeless, the struggle contained a lesson, in the sense that it demonstrated the necessity of a proletarian dictatorship for the destruction of power and the bourgeois State. But this does not make the Commune into a model for the construction of a communist State, as Lenin demanded. In any case, the proletariat must construct a communist society, and not a State. Its real aim is not one or another State - federational or centralised, democratic or dictatorial - but the abolition of the State and the classless society*'. The class is organised not based on some prejudiced ideas but around particular interests it must defend. The forms of struggle have changed based on social relations, that is, on the power dynamic between capital and the proletariat. If this is ignored, then it will not surprise us to see authoritarian self-organised structures, as well as centralised organisations where there is a libertarian practice.

We keep, then, the insult-compliment of being anarchists and communists, with an interest in the ability to mature the radical critique of the existing, not defending the past, but transforming it: '*Our duty is political only until we realise it with the destruction of political authority. The basic duty of communists is not to keep others in check. They self-organise with others, while they throw themselves with all their powers into duties that emerge out of their own personal and social, immediate and theoretical needs. This has unfortunately been expressed in a particularly pretentious way. What I want to*

school, the family, and 'free' time to struggles against prisons, the institution of the army, psychiatry, etc.

On the inside of these struggles there was a real libertarian practice: "*an immediate, daily practice of communism*", for Comunismo Libertario, #3 1979.

Thus, on the level of ideas - as much on the communist as on the anarchist camp - there is no a priori purity. In particular historical conditions, there is a direct or indirect development and mutual interaction.

The only line of differentiation that we can use to determine political tendencies and their historic importance is that of their action in relation to proletarian autonomy, to the support they gave to the process of the liberation of the proletariat.

In this way, we can observe that the revolutionary tendency traversed movements which were 'ideally' very far from one another.

As a result, there were anarchists in Spain who - during the civil war - became ministers: '*In the preservation of the mechanisms of the State and the political obstruction of revolutionary realisations, as much on the front lines as behind them, there was the addition of the reinforcement of bourgeois politics on the part of the Holy Alliance between members of the UGT (socialist union), the stalinists and the leadership of the CNT-FAI (anarchist union and political organisation)*'.[7]

In Germany of the '20s, there were organisations that defined themselves as communist and fought for an anti-state workers' autonomy, desiring a rupture with the formation linked to social democracy. '*The revolution requires of the proletariat to take into its own hands the greatest matters of social reconstruction, the most difficult decisions, to enter totally the creative movement. This is impossible if, from the beginning, the vanguard and, moving on, the wider masses, do not take things into their hands, do not feel responsibility, do not sit to*

[7] Camillo Berneri: Tra la rivoluzione e la trincea

study, to make propaganda, to struggle, to try, to think, to dare and act until the end. But something like that is difficult and tiring. Until the working class stops believing in the possibility of an easier path, where others act in their stead and direct unrest from a pedestal, give the sign to act, take decisions, make legislation, until then the working class will exist and remain passive under the weight of the old understanding and the old weaknesses.' These are not the words of some old anarchist but H. Gorter, a theoretician of the KPD, one of the most significant German communist organisations of the beginnings of the '20s, which fervently promoted anti-parliamentarism and anti-syndicalism in favour of the power of workers' councils.

In the '70s, there were armed formations which declared themselves Marxist-Leninist, but in their action and critique, developed proletarian autonomy, participating directly in the class struggle and practicing the libertarian autonomy which was produced, at this point, only by intellectualist bureaucracies. In 1970, Ulrike Meinhof wrote: '*a group of comrades who have decided to take action, to leave the level of lethargy, verbal radicalism, strategic discussions, which become more and more non-substantial [...] During the development of the urban guerilla, it is necessary to liberate ourselves from petit bourgeois miasma, from the 'State' we have within us, from antagonism, and you must learn to do so at the same time as the actions of the urban guerilla, directed toward its target, which must be subsumed to the conditions of the struggle [...] Authoritarian structures of leadership lack material basis in the guerrilla, because the true, i.e. voluntary development of the productive energy of every individual contributes to the effectiveness of the revolutionary guerrilla*'

In recent years, various political milieus, including even that of avowed reactionaries, recall their 'ideals' and libertarian phraseology. In this drunkenness, what we see is not a return to autonomous behaviours and libertarian practices but a return to the bullshit of Politics, specialised with the pilgrimage towards Democracy and the reactionary concept of Peace. The usage of a libertarian phraseology is in fashion. But this is done in a way that is completely cut off from any class character, depriving these words from their true meaning. What can autonomy and revolution mean to those who think of the problem as conquering a weaker and weaker 'civil society'... In this case, Argentina[(2)] - with its 'improper' insurrection, with the proletariat taking up arms in the metropolitan field - seems to us far more interesting and fertile for the importation of ideas and motives. It pleases us that this phenomenon is not moving in tandem with some 'movement of movements'[(3)] and makes us hope for the expansion of revolutionary processes in movement.

The classic antithesis between Marxism and a skeletal anarchism is not particularly fertile, given that what has accumulated historical interest is not an ideological identity of some kind, but on the one hand the real movement of the proletariat and on the other the maturing of a radical critique of exploitation and authority. A critique that can employ - without obstacles of a religious nature - theoretical tools of different kinds, whose usefulness is examined on the basis of the development of forms of social self-organisation and their collective self-understanding.

Every ideology stabilises and cements the theoretical development of the proletarian movement, but is at the same time a historical product of it. The ambivalence of the proletariat - which, although it produces capital, negates it in the moment of struggle - is reflected in its relationship with revolutionary theory.

The matter of the State, of parliamentarism, of syndicalism, in proletarian power, the matter of the relationship be-

[(2)] A reference to the insurrection which began during late 2001.

[(3)] This is a (mainly European) journalistic neologism for the cross-class 'movement against globalisation'