

You Always Act for Yourself

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"... since expropriation is a way of getting away from slavery **individually**, the risks have to be borne **individually**, as well, and comrades who practice expropriation **for themselves** lose every right - if such a right even exists for anarchists, and I don't believe it - to claim the solidarity of the movement when they fall into misfortune." - Brand (Enrico Arrigoni)

I took this quotation of Enrico Arrigoni (aka Frank Brand) from an article he wrote called "The Right¹ to Idleness and Individual Reappropriation" that appeared in his publication *Eresia di oggi e di domani* (*Heresies of Today and Tomorrow* - published in the mid to late 1920s). In the article, he didn't only attack the doctrine of the "dignity of labor" then popular in radical circles, but also any moralistic conception of solidarity.

While defending individual expropriation, Arrigoni also pointed out that those who choose this path can't expect automatic solidarity, because *they are acting for themselves*, and so they, and they alone, have to bear the risks of their action, and be prepared to face the consequences for themselves.

I want to expand on this. You see, I always act *for myself*, regardless of what sort of action I take, and regardless of the situation in which I take it. And from what I observe, no one acts differently than this. Some just feel the need for altruistic or collectivist glosses to cover their egoistic intentions. And, sadly, some of them even start to believe these glosses are more real than their desires and aspirations. And yet, the element of self-interest is always there, even if the altruistic, moralistic delusion undermines the possibility of self-enjoyment.

If I always act for myself, then, in a certain sense I also always *act alone*. Even when I take an action with others. What I do in such a situation is what I am willing and able to do, and so is unique to me. I do it with my own intentions and for my own reasons. If I do an action with others it is because I have found a situation in which my intentions, desires, and reasons can interweave with theirs in a way that enhances my self-creative energy, my ability to fight authority, and my self-enjoyment. So my reasons remain *solely* mine, and in this sense, I am still acting alone.

I consider this important in understanding the nature of an *association of willful self-creators*. Here, you recognize that you are in it for yourself; I recognize that I am in it for myself. And this

¹ The Italian word "*diritto*" seems to have a broader meaning than the English word "right". In this case, Arrigoni uses it as a way to say that there is no genuine anti-authoritarian basis for condemning those who choose to escape the slavery of a job under a boss through theft.

undisguised awareness is the basis for our mutual trust. It also means that I can expect *nothing* of you except what it gives you enjoyment to offer me. And I can only know that insofar as I have experience of you. You and I need to develop a sort of kinship, a deep shared experience of each other through which you and I come to understand something of the desires, the aspirations, the ideas, the reasons, the capacities each has, and how these things can interweave to our mutual benefit. But even with such deep experiential knowledge of each other, it isn't wise for me to *expect* anything of you, or for you to *expect* anything of me. Each of us is a self-creator, and so changing constantly in terms of what gives us enjoyment.²

Since, in every situation, I am acting *for myself*, not for the group, the cause, the ideal, etc., I'd be a fool to *expect* solidarity. I, and I alone, am responsible for what I do, and I have to be prepared to accept the consequences, whether to my benefit or to my harm. Nor do I owe solidarity to anyone.

In many anarchist circles, this is a major heresy. But solidarity *owed* is an ideal above you and me, and like all ideals, never exists in actuality. It makes for a lot of babble and mistaking verbal "support" for solidarity. When I recognize that I always act alone, for myself, when I don't expect solidarity, it is no longer an ideal. It is a relationship between individuals. A relationship based on mutual benefit. It comes to me as a gift, and to those whose actions spark my generosity, I may offer it as a gift. But to those who demand it, I offer nothing.

² I have not brought up large-scale street actions and riots here, because at this point in my life, I don't find myself in such situations, but since these are situations in which an individual acts "with" large numbers of strangers, even more than the activities I mention above, you are acting *alone*, and so for yourself, and need to be fully prepared to face the risks involved.

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