Revolution and Dictatorship
On one anarchist who has forgotten his principles

Luigi Fabbri
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In the latest edition of *Vie Ouvrière* to have arrived from Paris, we find a long letter from a Russian comrade, Victor Serge, known in France — where he lived before 1915 — under the pseudonym of Kibaltchitch. He writes from Moscow about the Russian Revolution, living as he is in the middle of it all.

In truth, he has no news to deliver.

His letter is, more than anything else, a polemic against the newspaper *Le Libertaire* which he takes to task for keeping faith with our beliefs, according to which, if we may quote Bakunin’s phrase, the authoritarian communists’ notion that a revolution can be decreed and organised “either by a dictatorship or by a Constituent Assembly, is quite mistaken”. Kibaltchitch thinks otherwise. He has changed his mind and is a supporter of the so-called proletarian revolution.

But as is the policy of every renegade who is, or appears to be, sincere, he deludes himself that he has evolved and reproaches the anarchists who have stayed faithful to their own principles with being traditionalists, of being stick-in-the-muds, whereas anarchism — so he says — is not traditionalist and not static but dynamic. Pre-
cisely! But he fails to appreciate that under the pretext of breaking free from a so-called anarchist tradition, he fails into the orbit of the old statist, authoritarian tradition of the bourgeois socialists, if not directly into the absolutist and militaristic tradition of the *ancien regimes*. He is the very archetype of the anarchist who has moulded anarchy like a beautiful dream of his imagination, because, deep down, he has little faith in it: and as soon as events crop up, in the face of which he is called upon to abide by his own ideas, even should it cause friction, conflict and sacrifices, he promptly scampers off in the opposite direction. And to any who might be surprised by this, he replies:

“One has to march in step with life, and face reality. One has to remain on the terrain of facts.” This is precisely the same language employed in 1914 by anarchy’s other renegades in their embrace of war-mongering policy, renegades who forgot their own principles and whose assertions were so brilliantly exposed as false by our Malatesta.

Kibaltchitch is a State anarchist (the contradiction between those two words is indicative of his wrongheaded stance) just as Grave and Malato were in 1914: just as the Vanderveldes, Guesdes and Bissolatis were State socialists, except that they were less at odds with their own teachings, just as the interventionists of 1914–1915 used to call us traditionalists and worshippers of words, and argued, as Kibaltchitch does, that one had to revise one’s own ideas in the light of the reality of the facts, etc., But just as they were unable to offer anything in place of anarchist ideas other than the empty, deceitful verbiage suitable for bourgeois democrats, so Kibaltchitch too can offer no more details as to how and in what particulars anarchist ideas stand in need of amendment and he simply retreats behind the “phenomenon occurring” in Russia in order to mouth the authoritarian marxist formula about the State being an instrument of revolution.

He, like some other anarchists we know, has failed to understand that the most important part of the anarchist programme consists,
not of some far-off dream, which we would also like to have come true, of a society without masters and no government, but, above all else, of the libertarian notion of revolution, of revolution against the State and not with the State, the notion that freedom is also a means as well as an end, a more appropriate weapon against the old world than the State authority preferred by Kibaltchitch and less of a two-edged sword, a weapon less treacherous than that authority.

Therein lies the whole essence of the anarchist teaching: not sprung all at one stroke, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, from the mind of one isolated thinker, however gifted: but deduced from the experience of previous revolutions, from contact with which and in the heat of which, after 1794, 1848 and 1871, people like Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Arnould, Pisacane and Lefrançais, etc... have drawn the appropriate lessons which the First International largely adopted as its own and which are known today by the generic description of anarchism.

If one denies this revolutionary function of anarchism, one is an anarchist no more. If the whole of anarchism consisted of a distant vision of a Society without government, or of the individual’s assertion of self, or of the intellectual and spiritual conundrum of abstract individual perception of lived reality, there would be neither need nor room for an anarchist political or social movement. Were anarchism only an personal ethic for self-improvement, adaptable in material existence to the most widely divergent actions, to movements that would fly in the face of that existence, we might be called “anarchists” whilst belonging to other parties, and the description “anarchist” might be applied to all who, even though intellectually and spiritually liberated, are and remain our enemies in terms of practicalities.

But that is not how we understand it, nor do those who have detected in anarchism, not some means of retreating into an ivory tower, but a revolutionary proletarian movement, an active involvement in the emancipation of the workers, with equality and freedom alike as its criteria and its object! Kibaltchitch, who
does not accept that object, automatically places himself outside the anarchist family. In order to stay within it, when he reaches conclusions of his own, he implicitly admits that he is neither an anarchist nor an anarchist-communist: he confines himself to the assertion — I am a communist. That comes within an ace of flying false colours, for it is far from certain that, as he contends, communism is of itself anti-State and libertarian in its immediate aims, as soon as they can look upon the State not as some impediment and deviation, but as a weapon against the old world. He deceives himself and deceives us when he seeks to reconcile dictatorial communism with anarchy, since Lenin himself cautioned (in The Reconstructive Task of the Soviets) that “anarchism and anarchist syndicalism are irreconcilable with proletarian dictatorship, with socialism, with communism”. Socialism and communism in the sense in which Lenin understands them, which is to say, Bolshevism.

Whilst we wait to hear from Kibaltchitch just what this non-traditional anarchism is, we note that his own is more properly described as a non-anarchism. Indeed, he speaks in the most pessimistic manner possible about the Russian anarchist movement which so flourished in 1905, 1906 and 1917–18. “After having done the revolution immeasurable service and afforded it a legion of heroes — he says this Russian anarchist movement has been rent by utter ideological, moral and practical confusion.”

That would be depressing news indeed, if we did not know already that all who quit one party for another discover that everything is going from bad to worse in the one they have just left. All renegades see things through the same spectacles! Our reply is that a movement that has been strong enough to do the revolution immeasurable service and provided a legion of heroes cannot be destroyed so easily.

It may perhaps have happened in Russia as it has in other revolutions that the burning idealism and revolutionary vigour of the combatants may have paved the way for the ruling party, which
and the bourgeoisie hereabouts, we stand unreservedly alongside revolutionary Russia. But that does not imply that we should give ground on the question of dictatorship, on the problem of revolutionary leadership, for the revolution may begin even outside of Russia. Let us defend the Russian revolution against bourgeois vilification: let us cry out to the peoples to rally to its defence against the attacks from capitalist countries, but let us not close our eyes to its errors and let us not be in a hurry to repeat them. Let us not be so seduced by success that we utterly forget our principles.

By remaining above all else anarchists, we will have done our first duty by the Revolution!

“CATILINA” (aka Luigi Fabbri)
rograd is better than before is a comfort to us too. But Kibaltchitch
does not talk to us about what most interests anarchists, precisely
because they are anarchists: that is, freedom. And should the re-
ports reaching us from various quarters, and which we have spelled
out above, are correct, that would confirm our profound belief that
communism without anarchy, communism in its statist form, is the
negation of freedom. When Kibaltchitch says that “communism
itself in its governmental form guarantees the individual greater
well-being, more happiness and more freedom than any other cur-
rent form of social organisation” he is saying something that, to
say the least, still awaits practical substantiation.

As he himself admits, in Russia today, there is none of that. We
are well aware that a large part of the reasons why the revolution
cannot bring the Russian people greater well-being, comfort and
freedom can be put down to the infamous blockade by the capital-
ist countries, to the war waged against the Soviet Republic by the
Entente powers, and to the countless, unspeakable acts of infamy
perpetrated against it by the international bourgeoisie. We know
all that, but we are convinced that for some of its afflictions, espe-
cially its internal afflictions, the Russian revolution is indebted to
its dictatorial character, to its government and those who govern.
“This is no time to call it to account for its sins”, says Kibaltchitch.
Perhaps. But nor should a veil be drawn over mistakes or others be
encouraged to repeat them.

What, in essence, would Kibaltchitch like? That even the French
anarchists abjure their principles so as to join the communist fac-
tion of the Socialist Party, “in order to reduce the dangers of State
socialism and combat the influence of power”. Very well, charge!
We know from all too great experience that all who have defected
from anarchism to authoritarian socialism have ended in the worst
reformist-legalitarian and authoritarian hyperbole. The best means
of bringing an effective anarchist influence to bear is to stay an an-
archist in one’s ends as well as in one’s means.

But Kibaltchitch says that dictatorship is a means, a weapon, just
as much as a revolver. “All violence is dictatorial!” Thus does our
Russian ex-comrade indulge in a rather fraudulent play on words.
By insulting it, he confuses the violence of the rebel with the vio-
ence of the gendarme: the violence of a risen people against that of
the oppressor government, the violence of the breaker of shackles,
breaking free and freeing others with the violence of the State, not
that of the revolution: and although it may claim and hold itself
to be revolutionary, dictatorship holds the revolution in check and
drives it off course. Rejecting, resisting and lining up with the op-
position to that certainly does not amount to “withdrawing from
the fray”, as Kibaltchitch argues, but instead amounts to prosecut-
ing a different action which is simultaneously more revolutionary
and more libertarian.

Kibaltchitch says that, at a time when entire generations are be-
ing sacrificed “he has no desire to engage in futile discussion of
personal preferences”, but the anarchist conception of revolution
is not a matter of the preferences of Peter or Paul, nor is it parti-
san apriorism. It is for the good of the revolution that anarchists
are against dictatorship: so that the revolution is not aborted, does
not place limits upon its aims, does not mould an organism which
would inevitably pave the way for a new form of statist rule, a new
ruling class. We fervently hope that that does not happen in Rus-
sia. Whilst there is every reason to fear so, and whilst the struggle
is even today taking such a heavy toil, and our best comrades are
thrown into prison by the bourgeoisie’s “Royal Guards”, we have
no wish to be reduced tomorrow to the sole satisfaction of being
tossed into prison by the “Red Guards” of the proletarian dictator-
ship! And what matters, Kibaltchitch continues, is that we should
be “unreservedly in favour of Red Russia if it is to survive!” Cer-
tainly! Whether we would say as much if we were in Russia, we
cannot tell, but we would certainly make a distinction between the
Russia of the People and that of the Government, the official Russia.
As we are living in a context of bourgeois rule, opposed to the State