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Letter of América Scarfó to Émile Armand

América Scarfó, Émile Armand

1928

Buenos Aires, 3 December 1928. To comrade E.
Armand.

Dear Comrade,

The purpose of this letter is, first of all, to ask your advice. We have to act, in all moments of our lives, in accord with our own manner of seeing and thinking, in such a way that the reproaches and criticisms of other people find our individuality protected by the healthiest concepts of responsibility and liberty, which form a solid wall weakening their attacks. For this reason we should act consistently with our ideas.

My case, comrade, is of the amorous order. I am a young student who believes in the new life. I believe that, thanks to our free actions, individual or collective, we can arrive at a future of love, fraternity and equality. I desire for all just what I desire for myself: the freedom to act, to love, to think. That is, I desire anarchy for all humanity. I believe that in order to achieve this we should make a social revolution. But I am also of the opinion that in order to

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Translation of an important document in the history of
Argentinian anarchism and of anarchist thinking on amatory
ethics. “I desire for all just what I desire for myself: the freedom to
act, to love, to think. That is, I desire anarchy for all humanity.”

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arrive at this revolution it is necessary to free ourselves from all kinds of prejudices, conventionalisms, false moralities and absurd codes. And, while we wait for this great revolution to break out, we have to carry out this work in all the actions of our existence. And indeed in order to make this revolution come about, we can't just content ourselves with waiting but need to take action in our daily lives. Wherever possible, we should act from the point of view of an anarchist, that is, of a human being.

In love, for example, we will not wait for the revolution, we will unite ourselves freely, paying no regard to the prejudices, barriers and innumerable lies that oppose us as obstacles. I have come to know a man, a comrade of ideas. According to the laws of the bourgeoisie he is married. He united himself with a woman as a consequence of a childish circumstance, without love. At that time he didn't know our ideas. However, he lived with this woman for a number of years, and they had children. He didn't experience the satisfaction that he should have felt with a loved one. Life became tedious, the only thing that united these two beings were the children. Still an adolescent, this man came to know our ideas, and a new consciousness was born in him. He turned into a brave militant. He devoted himself to propaganda with ardor and intelligence. All the love that he hadn't directed to a person he offered instead to an ideal. In the home, meanwhile, life continued with its monotony relieved only by the happiness of their small children. It happened that circumstances brought us together, at first as companions of ideas. We talked, we sympathised with each other, and we learned to know each other. Thus our love was born. We believed, in the beginning, that it would be impossible. He, who had loved only in dreams, and I, making my entrance into life. Each one of us continued living between doubt and love. Destiny — or, better, love — did the rest. We opened our hearts and our love and our happiness began to intone its song, even in the middle of the struggle, the ideal, which in fact gave us an even greater impulse. And our eyes, our lips, our hearts expressed themselves in the magic conjuring

very well that she should not exercise on him, or accept from him, domination of any kind.”

of a first kiss. We idealised love, but we were carrying it into reality. Free love, that knows no barriers, nor obstacles. The creative force that transports two beings through a flowery field, carpeted with roses — and sometimes thorns — but where we find always happiness.

Is it not the case that the whole universe is converted into an Eden when two beings love each other?

His wife also — despite her relative knowledge — sympathises with our ideas. When it came to it she gave proofs of her contempt for the hired killers of the bourgeois order as the police began to pursue my friend. That was how the wife of my comrade and I have become friends. She is fully aware of what the man who lived at her side represents to me. The feeling of fraternal affection that existed between them permitted him to confide in her. And he gave her freedom to act as she desired, in the manner of any conscientious anarchist. Until this moment, to tell the truth, we have lived really like in a novel. Our love became every day more intense. We cannot live altogether in common, given the political situation of my friend, and the fact that I have still not finished my studies. We meet, when we can, in different places. Isn't that perhaps the best way to sublimate love, distancing it from the preoccupations of domestic life? Although I am sure that when it is true love, the most beautiful thing is to live together.

This is what I wanted to explain. Some people here have turned into judges. And these are not to be found so much amongst common people but in fact amongst comrades of ideas who see themselves as free of prejudices but who, at bottom, are intolerant. One of these says that our love is a madness; another indicates that the wife of my friend is playing the role of “martyr”, despite the fact that she is aware of everything that concerns us, is the ruler of her own person, and enjoys her freedom. A third raises the ridiculous economic obstacle. I am independent, just as is my friend. In all probability I will create a personal economic situation for myself that will free me from all worries in this sense.

Also, the question of the children. What do the children have to do with the feelings of our hearts? Why can't a man who has children love? It is as if to say that the father of a family cannot work for the idea, do propaganda, etc What makes them believe that those little beings will be forgotten because their father loves me? If the father were to forget his children he would deserve my contempt and there would exist no more love between us.

Here, in Buenos Aires, certain comrades have a truly meager idea of free love. They imagine that it consists only in cohabiting without being legally married and, meanwhile, in their own homes they carry on practicing all the stupidities and prejudices of ignorant people. This type of union that ignores the civil registrar and the priest also exists in bourgeois society. Is that free love?

Finally, they criticise our difference in age. Just because I am 16 and my friend is 26. Some accuse me of running a commercial operation; others qualify me as unwitting. Ah these pontiffs of anarchism! Making the question of age interfere with love! As if it the fact a brain reasons is not enough for a person to be responsible for their actions! On the other hand, it is my own problem, and if the difference in age means nothing to me, why should it matter to anyone else? That which I cherish and love is youth of the spirit, which is eternal.

There are also those who treat us as degenerates or sick people and other labels of this kind. To all these I say: why? Because we live life in its true sense, because we recognise a free cult of love? Because, just like the birds that bring joy to walkways and gardens, we love without paying any attention to codes or false morals? Because we are faithful to our ideas? I disdain all those who cannot understand what it is to know how to love.

True love is pure. It is the sun whose rays stretch to those who cannot climb to the heights. Life is something we have to live freely. We accord to beauty, to the pleasures of the spirit, to love, the cult that they deserve.

This is all comrade. I would like to have your opinion on my case. I know very well what I am doing and I don't need to be approved or applauded. Just that, having read many of your articles and agreeing with various points of view, it would make me content to know your opinion.

* * *

America Scarfo was 16 years old when she wrote this letter; the love she is referring to is none other than that of Severino di Giovanni. On the relationship between the two see Osvaldo Bayer's *Severino di Giovanni. El idealista de la violencia*, Planeta, Buenos Aires, 1999. Bayer says that before the letter "a squall had blown through Severino and América's relationship. The criticisms of comrades, the near irresolvable impediments to continuing the relationship, and her own family situation, caused a crisis in America, who rowed with Severino and told him that she was finishing the relationship. As in many a lovers' quarrel, a later meeting erased all these problems and sealed the union with still greater strength. América's letter to L'en dehors came from this reunion. It was in a sense an act to officialise the feelings that until then they had kept intimate between themselves."

The letter was published in *L'en dehors* on 20 January 1929 under the title "An Experience", together with the reply from E. Armand:

"Comrade: My opinion matters little in this matter you send me about what you are doing. Are you or are you not intimately in accord with your personal conception of the anarchist life? If you are, then ignore the comments and insults of others and carry on following your own path. No one has the right to judge your way of conducting yourself, even if it were the case that your friend's wife be hostile to these relations. Every woman united to an anarchist (or vice versa), knows