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Italian Anarchism

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1997

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and to the social movements it may become a new force for change, for social transformation towards a better life, and, step by step, towards libertarian-communism: this is revolutionary gradualism. Those who have already taken this path have the responsibility to reach out, to contact, to relate with all the others willing to leave the ivory tower in order to organise, to collaborate, to create a network linking the libertarian left and the possible alternative.

The present Italian anarchist movement is passing through a crisis which it will only be able to get over if it finds a new political project. This crisis comes not only from the choices made in the '50s (a slow and unrelenting self-exclusion from the Italian political and trade union life), but also from more recent causes: due to difficulties in reading the current situation and in not having a political project since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

Italian anarchists are often active in many struggles and support many different campaigns and initiatives, though this is mostly at a local level, which is preferred both out of choice and out of lack of wider political action. There are rare attempts to organise regional or national co-ordinations, but these almost immediately have to face a single fact: the existence of various tendencies inside anarchism. This diversity could be a richness if each tendency shared in making a common project, but it is a grave source of weakness if sectarianism and “crossed vetoes” prevail.

I will give a brief account of the different tendencies in the movement today.

NATIONAL FEDERATIONS

At present there are two national federations. The first and largest is the F.A.I.¹. It was founded in 1945, and has passed through different political periods: enthusiasm after the end of the WWII and after the great contribution that anarchists made to the Resistance; next the renunciation of the class-struggle for all of the '50s and the '60s; the disaffiliation of the individualist tendencies at the end of the '60s; the expulsion of the “Platformist” groups at the beginning of the '70s; the subsequent rediscovery of social struggles. The FAI issues the weekly paper *Umanita Nova*, which is the most widely circulated paper in the movement,

¹ F.A.I. is the Italian Anarchist Federation

dealing with news and topics written for anarchists but which often fails to reach the people. FAI is an organisation composed of various tendencies, which, while enriching the debate, may block the congress resolutions, as each branch has large autonomy. FAI branches are often very active at a local level, but nationally FAI doesn't seem to have any official or public political line. The last congress launched the idea of building an "anarchist strategy for social transformation", but it's not easy to strike a balance. The second and smaller federation is Fd.C.A.². This was founded in 1986 and is the latest organised expression of Italian anarchist-communism, after the O.R.A.³. Fd.C.A. has branches and comrades in some regions in the centre and north of Italy and issues the quarterly bulletin *Alternativa Libertaria*, that reflects the activity and the positions of the federation. It's an organisation based on theoretical and strategic unity for all the members and on tactical experimentation. Its members are active in the unions, in the social centres and in local single-issues movements. At present FdCA is trying to develop a "minimal program" for political and social intervention today. The 2 federations don't have stable relations at national level, but they sometimes collaborate at local level. Each federation has international contacts with similar organisations: FAI is inside I.A.F.⁴; and the FdCA has promising new relations with A.L.⁵, O.S.L.⁶, W.S.M., C.G.T.⁷.

² Fd.C.A. is Federation of the Anarchist-Communists

³ O.R.A. was the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists similar to French and English ORA

⁴ I.A.F. is the International Anarchist Federations

⁵ A.L. is Alternative Libertaire in France

⁶ O.S.L. is Libertarian Socialist Organisation in Switzerland

⁷ C.G.T. is the Union Confederacion General del Trabajo in Spain

ARCA is a negation of the original USI project. Roughly, but briefly, we can say that they put more emphasis on ideological aspects. The other USI bases itself on trying to be a mass-organisation with no ideological influences; it is active in bargaining in the workplace and has been recognised as a "representative union" in different sectors. It is part of ARCA, which is a confederation of 4 unions (UNICOBAS, USI, SdB, CNL), with 25,000 members and aims to get full union representation at national and local level. The two USIs have branches all over the country and issue two papers with the same name: *Lotta di Classe*¹⁹. A third USI is in Milan (very active in Health) and till now hasn't sided with either of the two former USIs. There is a similar situation in France with CNT-F.

Social Centres: In Italy, the self managed social centres (different from those created by local administrations and controlled by the parties) are an important part of the opposition movement. Where they are set up they often become a sort of land-mark in the towns: young and not-so-young people can meet there, organise concerts, debates, watch and produce videos, listen to and produce music, support social struggles and international campaigns (Chiapas, Cuba, ex-Yugoslavia). Anarchists tend to set up their own self managed social centres and they generally leave or ignore social centres build by other political groups. But sometimes you can find co-operation among different tendencies of the Italian revolutionary left. Anarchists should avoid the marginalisation of the social centres from the surrounding community: between ghetto and no-man's land we should always choose solidarity and co-operation. This is the way to beat Leninist tendencies inside the social centres.

CONCLUSIONS

If Italian anarchism succeeds in breaking the 'splendid isolation' where it currently lives and goes back to the people, to workers,

¹⁹ Lotta di classe means Class Struggle

Political Problems: Unions, social centres... Despite all this activity, the Italian anarchist movement is practically “clandestine”, far from the public political eye. This is often deliberate, but more often due to media indifference.... though what is also true is the movement is not able to reach the tens of thousands of people as in the ‘20s, or just after WW2. Maybe only co-ordination among the several groups and national campaigns can restore visibility and credibility to the movement. Maybe?

Union: The anarchist workers are split up between different unions. And this seems to be a good thing. We can find anarchists inside CGIL¹⁵ as part of the left opposition inside the greatest Italian union, organising rank-and-file activity in the workplace for full control over bargaining, delegates and struggles. There are anarchists inside CUB¹⁶, a new alternative union that gathers some thousands of workers from industry and the public sector. The anarchists have been put in the minority by a centralised management of the CUB. The CUB is based in Milan. There are anarchists inside UNICOBAS (a new alternative union which grew out of the ‘cobas’ struggles in the ‘80s: schools, airports public sector) that tries to be a mass-union giving importance to the workers’ interests along with struggles against social cuts, unemployment and traditional union power in national bargaining. Based in Rome. There are anarchists inside U.S.I.¹⁷, re-born at the end of the ‘70s from the ashes of the glorious pre-fascism USI. Unfortunately USI split into 2 parts before summer. The reason for this partition are very complex: a different point of view about which role the union has to play and a different attitude to the ARCA¹⁸. One USI bases itself on libertarian-socialism as conditions for building the revolutionary union and a revolutionary project, and believes that joining

¹⁵ CGIL means Italian General Confederation of Labour

¹⁶ CUB means Unitary Base Confederation

¹⁷ USI was/is the Italian Syndicalist Union

¹⁸ ARCA means Association of the Self managed Confederated Representations

NON-FEDERATED GROUPS

There are tens of non-federated groups and circles. They are very active at local level about local issues or about national echo campaigns. They often make anarchism known in little towns and this is very important work. Their political life is tied to the ups and downs in their members’ lives. Among these groups we have to mention Cane Nero⁸. Their positions are inspired by insurrectionalism (in the name of anarchy). Their “military” actions are decided in secrecy and often provoke police repression against all anarchists who more often than not know nothing about Cane Nero’s actions. These comrades are then asked by Cane Nero to support it. Yet when the dust eventually settles, the name of anarchy has been ruined and around anarchism there is only a desert!!

There are many magazines, papers and fanzines at local and national level. It would be impossible to mention all of them here. But I will mention A-Rivista Anarchia⁹, which is very widely circulated and concentrates on cultural, philosophical and historical topics. It has always been very distant from class-anarchism. It is issued in Milan. A-Rivista Anarchia is paying a lot of attention to questions such as municipalism, self-management, anarcho-capitalism, influencing the debate and the fashions within the movement. Very close to A-Rivista Anarchia is Volonta¹⁰, a magazine-publisher about the State, Education, Utopia. Comunismo Libertario¹¹ deals with social, political and union problems and is interesting for the class-anarchist tendencies: welfare, unions strategy, economy. It is issued in Livorno. Germinal is a paper from the north-east; it deals with ex-Yugoslavian problems, anti militarism, social centres.

⁸ Cane Nero means Black Dog

⁹ A-Rivista Anarchia is A-anarchist magazine

¹⁰ Volonta is Will

¹¹ Comunismo Libertario comes from FdCA experience. Now it’s an independent magazine .

It is issued in Trieste. Close to Germinal is Senzapatria¹². It is about antimilitarism. Collagamenti / Wobbly is a good magazine concerning theoretical reflections about current struggles caused by the present change in industry. It is issued in Turin. Ombre Rosse¹³ is something like a strategical reflection and analysis bulletin. It is issued by libertarian-communists in Genoa. Rivista Storica Dell'Anarchismo¹⁴ deals with historic questions and it's an attempt at collaboration among historians of different anarchist tendencies. It is issued in Carrara. Eleuthera is a good publisher and does interesting books about social and historical topics. Close to A-Rivista Anarchia. There are many other little publishers within the movement and on the edge, whose work is very useful.

MEETINGS, CAMPAIGNS

These are the only chances to collaborate.

Anti-Clerical meeting: held in Fano for 13 years, it has been a successful way to dust off the old anticlericalism against Church power, but with a modern approach. Not an anti-religious meeting, but anticlerical: i.e. how the Catholic Church, and all the fundamentalist churches, control our social and private lives (family planning, sexuality, education, abortion, Vatican Bank, religion-tax) and how to fight against it/them. This is an example where anarchists have been able to involve many non-anarchists in the issue.

Self management Fair: it's a touring meeting (this year's is the 3rd) presenting experiences and debate concerning self management. It tries to respond to the new needs emerging from the movement: how to begin and develop experiences based on self management – education, farming, libraries, bookshops, services,

¹² Senza Patria means Without Country

¹³ Ombre Rosse means Red Shadows

¹⁴ Historical magazine of Anarchism

self-productions (videos, CDs, infos- net.). Some people think that this is the way to smash capitalism, whereas others believe that it is just a way to “secede” from capitalism. Some think that these experiences belong only to those who are directly involved while others think that this may be the beginning of an alternative network for all the people and not only for anarchists or libertarians. Since welfare is under attack, the debate has been growing around the two positions. To briefly describe this debate: On the one hand the workers' movement tries to defend the dying welfare-state and links itself to the reformist parties and reformist unions that continually negotiate welfare cuts, thus reinforcing the state and the government. At the same time welfare can't be in the hands of private agencies so the anarchist minority must reject State-welfare and Market-welfare and help to build self managed welfare. On the other hand you can hear people say that to defend welfare does not mean to defend the state but the workers' immediate interests: health, education, social security aren't options, but rights to defend along with wages. Therefore a great mass movement is needed to fight against neo-liberalism and welfare cuts; at the same time anarchists and libertarians have the right to experiment with new social models, beginning from themselves but going towards all the people. The debate is open...

Spain: in 1996 the movement campaigned about Spain '36 with videos, conferences, debates. “Tierra y Liberated” helped a lot. But only the Trotskyist Socialismo Rivoluzionario was able to organise a six-day camping about the Spanish revolution!

Americans in north-east: a new campaign is beginning against the American troops in the north-east of Italy. Anarchists are in the front line.

Ship to Bosnia: this was a very important initiative involving part of the movement in material solidarity to multi-ethnic Tuzla. It was a mass campaign both inside and outside the movement. All the various tendencies lost their holy importance... and many workers subscribed.