Errico Malatesta
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Let's skip the "philosophical" definitions, that is, the demanding, confused and… inconclusive ones. The ideal means: that which is desired. The real means: that which exists.

Unhappiness with what is, and the constant craving for something better, the aspiration to greater freedom, to more power and more beauty is a peculiarly human characteristic. The man who finds everything fine, who reckons that everything there is, is as it ought to be, and should not and cannot change, and who blithely accommodates himself, without a murmur, without any objection, without a gesture of rebelliousness, to the position and circumstances thrust upon him, would be less than human. He would be… a vegetable, if such a thing could be said without offending vegetables.

But on the other hand, man cannot be and cannot do everything that he wants, because he is curtailed and obliged, not only by brute natural environment, but also by the actions of every other man, by social solidarity which, like it or not, ties him to the fate of the entire human race.

Therefore, one must strive for what he wants, doing what he can.

Anybody who can accommodate himself to everything would be a poor thing, comparable, as I was saying, to a vegetable. On the other hand, someone who reckons he can do anything he wants without taking into consideration the wishes of others, the means required to achieve a purpose, the circumstances in which he finds himself, would be nothing but a cloud-chaser cast forever in the role of victim, without advancing the cause he so cherishes by as much as a single step.

So the problem facing us anarchists—since the aim of this publication is to have whatever impact it can on the anarchist movement—the problem facing us anarchists, who regard anarchy not so much as a beautiful dream to be chased by the light of the moon, but as an individual and social way of life to be brought about for the greatest good for all… the problem, as we say, is to so conduct our activities as to achieve the greatest useful effect in the various circumstances in which history places us.

One must not ignore reality; but if reality is noxious, one must fight it, resorting to every means made available to us by reality itself.

Come the outbreak of the world war, the harmful consequences of which are still evident, there was in certain quarters, which purported to be and may once upon a time had been subversive, much talk of "reality." All half-baked consciences, all of those who were casting around for some honorable pretext upon which to make amends for their youthful transgressions and secure themselves a livelihood, all the weary who lacked the honest courage to admit that that was what they were and then retreat from public life—and there were many such in the ranks of the socialists and several in the anarchist ranks—embraced and preached the war "because it was a fact," relying on backing from some selfless types who, in all good faith and misled by a wrong-headed view of history and a whole propaganda based on lies, believed that this really was a war of liberation and got involved in it and paid the price.

Today there is no shortage of those who back fascism "because it is a fact" and they cover up or think they can justify their defection and treachery by arguing of fascism, as they once did of the war, that its aims are revolutionary.

Yes, the world war and "the peace" that came out of it are facts, just like every previous war was a fact, and all the massacres and all the people-trading. The fascist cudgel is a fact, as was the German rod that "cannot tame Italy!"

Furthermore, all the oppression, all the poverty, all the hatreds and crimes that assail, divide and degrade men are facts too.

Are we therefore to accept everything, and defer to everything because this is the situation in which history has placed us?

The whole of human progress has been made up of battling against natural facts and social facts. And we who want to see maximum progress, the greatest possible happiness for every single human being, are besieged and buffeted on every side by hostile realities, and we have to combat these realities. But before we can combat them, we must know about them and take them into the reckoning.

If it is to emerge triumphant or merely to stride towards its triumph, anarchy has to be thought of, not merely as a luminous, attractive beacon of light, but also as something feasible, achievable not only with the passage of centuries but in relatively short space of time and with no need for miracles.

We anarchists have greatly minded the ideal; we have devised a critique of all the moral falsehoods and all the social institutions that corrupt and oppress humanity and we have outlined, with whatever poetry and eloquence each of us may have possessed, a yearned-for harmonious society rooted in kindness and love; but there is no denying that we have scarcely troubled ourselves about the ways and means of turning our ideals into reality.

Granted the need for a revolutionary—or, rather, insurrectionary—upheaval that should demolish any material obstacles, political authority or hogging of the means of production, things that

counter the spread and trialling of our ideals, we believed—or behaved as if we did—that everything would just fall into place, without any pre-conceived planning, in a natural, spontaneous way, and our response to prospective difficulties was abstract formulae and an optimism that runs counter to present facts and foreseeable ones. In short, we resolved the whole thing by theorizing that the people will want what we want, and that matters will work out precisely as we would wish.

Are all governments noxious? Well, "we shall do away with them all and stop new ones from being formed." How, though? With what resources? "The people or the proletariat will see to that." But what if they do not?

"Each person will do as he pleases." But what if all these individuals, who together make up the masses, were to want the opposite of what we want, were to kneel before a tyrant, or let themselves be used as instruments deployed against us?

What if the peasants were to refuse to keep the towns provisioned? "The peasants are no fools and will hasten to ship foodstuffs to the towns in return for industrial goods… or for promises of goods yet to be manufactured."

And what if folk refuse to work? "Work is a pleasure and no one will want to deny themselves that pleasure."

And if there are criminals who trespass against the lives and liberty of others? "There will be no more criminals."

And so on and so on, answering every query with blithe assertions and denials, ruling out all the bad things, and taking for granted all the good things.

There have even been a few, fired up with enthusiasm and maybe looking ahead centuries to the hoped-for outcomes of education and eugenics (the science and art of selective procreation) who have divined that, on the morrow of a successful insurrection, humanity will be made up entirely of kindly, intelligent, healthy, strong, and handsome folk!

The truth is that we have always been trapped in a vicious circle. While, on the one hand, we have been arguing that the masses cannot attain moral emancipation as long as the current conditions of political and economic subjection apply, on the other we have assumed that events would turn out as if those masses were already made up entirely, or for the most part, of conscious, forward-looking individuals jealous of their own freedom and respectful of the freedom of others. Even as we have been arguing that anarchy, of which freedom is the stock-in-trade, cannot be forcibly imposed, "by contradiction absolute forbid," it never occurred to us that we should prepare against the eventuality of other people's over-ruling us.

In short, we have lacked a practical program capable of being enacted the day after the victorious insurrection, one which, whilst not trespassing against anybody's freedom, might enable us to enact, or start to enact, the implementation of our ideas, and draw the masses to our side through example and through the tried and tested superiority of our methods.

Thus, that fraction of the people that aspires to emancipation and will forge a new history has not understood us and has largely embraced either the authoritarian, oppressive communism or hybrid syndicalism.

And we have found ourselves powerless just when circumstances seemed most to favor us.

It is high time that we sort out these shortcomings of ours so that we can be ready for future opportunities, which are assuredly on their way.

And we urge all our friends to partake in this task of drawing up a practical program for immediate implementation.