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Revolutionaries Terror

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There is a general problem of revolutionary tactics that must be discussed constantly, because the fate of the coming revolution may depend on its solution.

I do not wish to speak of how to combat and overthrow the tyranny that today oppresses some peoples with particular severity. Our role is to work for the clarification of ideas and moral preparation for the near or distant future, because we cannot do anything else. And if we thought that the time had come for effective action, we would speak even less about it.

I shall therefore only deal — purely hypothetically — with the period after the victorious insurrection and with the violent measures that some would like to use to "help justice to triumph" and others consider necessary to protect the revolution from the attacks of its enemies.

Let us leave aside the all too relative concept of "justice": it has always served as a pretext for all forms of oppression and injustice, and often means nothing other than revenge. Hatred and revenge are uncontrollable feelings which are naturally aroused and fed by oppression; but even if they are a useful force in shaking off the yoke, they are a negative force when it comes to replacing oppression not with a new oppres-

sion but with freedom and brotherhood among men. And so we must strive to awaken those higher feelings which draw their strength from the passionate love of the good, while at the same time being careful not to suppress the impetuosity which, although it consists of good and bad elements, is necessary for victory. If it is necessary to rein in the masses in the form of a new tyranny in order to be able to control them better, let us rather allow them to follow their passionate feelings, but let us never forget that we anarchists cannot be avengers or judges. We want to be liberators and as such our action must consist of education and exemplary deeds.

So let us deal here with the most important question: the defense of the revolution.

There are still people who are fascinated by the idea of terror, who believe that the guillotine, firing squads, massacres, deportations, galleys (gallows and galleys, as one of the most famous communists recently told me) are powerful, indispensable weapons of revolution, and who believe that many revolutions have been defeated and have not achieved the expected result because the revolutionaries, in their goodness and weakness, have not sufficiently persecuted, repressed and massacred their opponents.

This is a misconception widespread in certain revolutionary circles, which has its origins in the rhetoric and historical falsifications of the apologists of the French Revolution and has recently been reinforced by Bolshevik propaganda. But the exact opposite is true: terror has always been a tool of tyranny. In France, it served the sinister rule of Robespierre. It paved the way for Napoleon and the reaction that followed. In Russia he persecuted and killed anarchists and socialists, massacred rebellious workers and peasants, and ultimately curbed the impetus of a revolution that could have meant a new era for humanity.

Anyone who believes in the revolutionary, liberating power of repression and cruelty has the same backward mentality as

the lawyers who believe that crime can be prevented and the world can be morally improved through harsh punishments.

Like war, terror revives atavistic, animalistic feelings, not yet completely covered by the veneer of civilization, and carries the worst elements of the population to the highest places on its wave. And instead of serving to defend the revolution, it discredits it, makes it hateful in the eyes of the masses, and inevitably leads to what we would today call "normalization," that is, the legalization and perpetuation of tyranny. Whether one side or the other wins, a strong government will be formed in each case, which will ensure peace for some at the expense of freedom and rule for others without too many dangers.

I know very well that those anarchists who are in favor of terror (however few in number) are opposed to any organized terror carried out on the orders of a government and by paid agents: they want the masses themselves to attack their enemies directly. But this would only make the situation worse. Terror may please fanatics, but it is above all suitable for the truly evil, who are hungry for money and blood. One should not idealize the masses and imagine them to be made up of only good people who can commit acts of violence but are always guided by good intentions. Policemen and fascists are servants of the bourgeoisie, but they come from the masses!

In Italy, fascism absorbed many criminals and thus, to a certain extent, preemptively purified the environment in which the revolution will take place. But one should not think that all Duminis and Cesarino Rossis are fascists. Among them there are those who, for some reason, did not want to or could not become fascists, but are ready to do in the name of the "revolution" what the fascists do in the name of the "fatherland". And just as the thieves of all regimes have always been ready to put themselves at the service of the new regimes and become their most zealous tools, so the fascists of today will be ready to declare themselves anarchists or communists or whatever, just to be able to continue to play the role of rulers and

satisfy their evil instincts. If they cannot do this in their own country, because they are known and exposed, they will look elsewhere for opportunities to show themselves more violent, more "energetic" than the others, and to treat all those who see the revolution as a great work of goodness and love as moderates, cowards and counter-revolutionaries.

The revolution must of course defend itself and develop with implacable logic, but it must not and cannot be defended by means that are contrary to its aims.

The main means of defending the revolution is still to deprive the bourgeoisie of the economic means of power, to arm everyone (until everyone can be persuaded to throw away their weapons, just as they throw away useless and dangerous objects), and to involve the entire mass of the population in the victory.

If, in order to win, we must erect gallows in public places, I would rather perish.