

The Path of Anarchism

Gaston Leval

May 8, 1924

Our friend Content is engaged in the review of certain questions concerning anarchism. The rather languid state of our movement inspires in him a host of questions about the direction that it should take and he examines them honestly, anxious to render service to the spread and triumph of our ideas and, consequently, to the cause of all human beings.

This state of uncertainty in which he finds himself is undoubtedly shared by many comrades, and I am one of those. But, when it comes to what the interests of our movement demand, I have arrived at some conclusions that are quite distinct and, on certain points, opposed. So I will lay them out and I would be pleased if the confrontation of our theses could help some comrades form an idea of proper and determined action, for, whatever method one might be a partisan of, the important thing is to put that method into practice, with our most intense energy.

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Is there anything to retract, modify or withdraw from anarchism, as a philosophy and doctrine of human life or as a historical social movement? In my opinion, no. In the work of our great thinkers, there is only one error to reveal: a date. They had announced — though not all — revolution before the end of the last century, and that revolution has not come. But the fundamental truths in the name of which they demanded that revolution, and the revolutionary means that they advocated — I speak here particularly of Bakunin and Kropotkin, to whose influence we have been most subject in the Latin countries — remain correct. The latter have been verified by the experience of the Russian revolution, where the most firmly revolutionary, the most truly transformative, have been improvised by the masses who would already have assured their livelihood, without bosses and without the State, if those forces had not shattered their attempt. The former are confirmed every day by universal experience.

The means of revolutionary advocated by Bakunin and Kropotkin are the only means of liberation. And it is precisely these that Content seems to reject as factors diverting our movement, because they cannot be implemented at the appointed hour. He writes: "Because the predictions of a Kropotkin and other anarchist thinkers have not been realized and their deductions have proven erroneous, it is no longer enough for me to embrace this new fatalism, which consists of saying 'anarchy will reign tomorrow' in order for it to be so." But, first, no anarchist thinker has supported this theory that anarchy would be established overnight, on our sunny sphere. In the famous work of Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, we do not find a plan for a future society. Kropotkin was too intelligent for such impertinence. He limited himself to sounding the prob-

lems of the social revolution, which is not yet the perfect anarchy sung by the poet and desired by use, and demonstrating that it was possible to accomplish that revolution without resorting to the methods recommended by all the authoritarian or timid schools.

Malatesta has often insisted on this point that our dream will certainly not spring up, suddenly, from the magic of an upheaval, but that, on the contrary, we must pass through a long period of practical incubation, in the course of which we will prune away the errors and learn, in the light of the facts, to guarantee, without exploiters and without masters, the necessary and fundamental conquest of every revolution — the conquest of bread.

If the predictions have not been realized, it does not follow inevitably that the deductions were erroneous. If the birth of a child occurs later than expected, that does not mean that we must stop giving them the care we had prepared.

Either our ideal entails the transformation of society or it does not; that transformation must be violent or it must not; the new state of things must have an authoritarian or libertarian basis, and its construction demands an individual and preparation, subjective and objective, moral and technical, or it does not. In the first case, there is nothing to do but get to the heart of our task and set about creating all that we lack in order to take advantage of favorable circumstances; in the second, there is nothing to do but patiently roll that Ixion's wheel that is *educationism*.

It is wrong to note our lack of preparation as a factor of our general orientation in the revolutionary period, sufficient to conclude that anarchism is a state of mind or an ideal, which has no other impact then to inspire isolated operations, always counterbalanced by losses and adjustments. No, anarchism is not that. It is a conception of life, individual and social, but especially social, and a doctrine of transformation. Its means could be education or violent revolution — and they will be both — but its aim will always be human equality and fraternity, produced on a liberated earth.

Ends and means — that is, in my opinion, the great confusion into which Content has fallen. In Spain, we suffer precisely the same evil, but in an opposite sense. Here we are violent by temperament, through the decisive influence of the past and present, and we confuse violence, which must overturn the obstacles over which humanity must pass in its march toward anarchy, with anarchy itself. In France, many comrades confuse the means of individual education with the great social aspiration that is anarchy. And they bring anarchism back to this reduced idea, this partial method, confining it within narrow limits, where it withers and perishes as a militant social force.

The weakness of a thing does not destroy its truth. If anarchist is still not securely equipped for the work of practical achievements, there is nothing to do but undertake the task of undeniable necessity. The state of mind that consists of abandoning at will what we have not found already well established is condemned to sterility! We must create, create and create.

Creators! That is what anarchism lacks the most. None of our thinkers have wanted to make a holy book of their writings, and yet the majority of those who have read them have done so with the mentality of a believer. They have demanded solutions from them everywhere. Those among them who have found an answer to the questions that haunted them, have bent their servile thought beneath the ideas of the idol and set out in a procession of the faithful, singing praises to the glory of their prophet and their complete paradise. Those who have not found an answer have found the work insufficient, have rejected the postulates of the incomplete exposition, either in its theoretical bases or in its material consequences, or they have rejected both at once.

And this is the greatest evil from which anarchism suffers. The great fundamental truths regarding principles and tactics are contained, in embryonic form, in the works of our thinkers. But they have said nothing definitive regarding that last point. They were anarchists, and not makers of Christian or Marxist bibles. That is why they have shown us a path that they have opened themselves, but that we must extend and widen and complete with new paths.

On the foundation that they have created, we must create more. The elaboration of the scientific bases of anarchism will not stop with the works of our departed pioneers, nor will the critiques of the present society or the ideas for future accomplishments. We must add to what they have created, provide new thoughts, fill the gaps, perfect that which is imperfect, complete that which is incomplete, strengthen that which is weak and not despair at the spectacle of our imperfections and abandon that which is not as developed as we would like.

We must create, create, create; we must find solutions to the problems that emerge, face those problems bravely and resolve them. We must create in all domains: in doctrine and propaganda, in philosophy and organization, in economy and in the work of destructive preparation and reconstruction. We must continue the work that our fallen comrades have left unfinished, because anarchy, having no barrier, will always be an uninterrupted creation.

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Gaston Leval, “Le chemin de l’anarchisme,” *L’idée anarchiste* No. 4 (May 8, 1924): 1–2. [Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

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