Giuseppe Rinaldi
The Decline of the Revolutionary Spirit and the Need for Resistance
23 September 1897

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Dear Comrades

In reporting the talk against *domicilio coatto* that I delivered in Jesi, the correspondent for *L'Avanti!* newspaper, states: "… (the speaker) *added that a heavy blame* (for the supine docility with which the people have put up with vexations from the government and from the capitalists) *should be laid on the anarchist party and republican party*, which, having been preaching revolution so long, realized that making it was an impossibility since the people, lacking all consciousness, would not follow them."

This is what I actually did say: but the italics, of course, have been added by the correspondent himself, and what italics they are in a democratic socialist newspaper, helping to highlight (and with some bragging perhaps) that I, whilst critical of my own party and the republican party, omitted the democratic socialists from that criticism.

Which calls for something of an explanation.

In Jesi, I spoke of the disillusionments that followed upon the hopes raised by the Italian nationalist revolution, and I stated how, on the one hand, the proletariat's economic conditions were growing more and more dismal, and, on the other, how what morsel of freedom that revolution had won was being lost, to the extent of returning to a state the same as or worse than that in which we found ourselves under the toppled governments.

And I sought to explain this fact in the light of two rationales:

For a start, there is the tendency on the part of social institutions to evolve in a given direction and bring forth their natural consequences: the tendency of political authority always to widen its sphere of activity and grow ever more oppressive; and private ownership's tendency to capture all the means of production, stepping up the exploitation of the workers more and more and turning all new advances in science and social progress to the detriment of the proletariat.

Secondly, there is the absence of popular resistance. And, looking past other more general factors that fell outside of the scope of that talk, I pinned the blame for that missing resistance on republicans and anarchists.

Both groups, cognisant of the fundamental unfairness of certain institutions and of the damaging consequences they inevitably entailed, had only troubled themselves with the utter and sudden destruction of those same institutions, sneering at anything that might soften those damaging consequences and yearning instead for them to arrive in their starkest possible form, in the hope that that might bring about and expedite the collapse of the institutions.

Republicans, naturally averse to the monarchy, traced all woes to the form of constitution and either did not think possible or, for tactical reasons, affected to sneer at any improvements or any reform that was not predicated upon the abolition of the monarchy.

For anything good, anarchists, being inimical to all governments and therefore to the monarchy, and being adversaries of private ownership, looked, on grounds similar to those of the republicans, to the radical overhaul of social organization, sneering at any improvements the current regime might be susceptible to and even looking forward to increased oppression and impoverishment in the hope of hastening conflict.

Thus the entire activity of both parties boiled down to preaching revolution. As to making it possible and laying preparations for it, the best they could come up with was recruiting their necessarily sparse supporters into their respective organizations and stockpiling weapons which, due to a lack of funds and the vigilance of the government, were always few in number and poor in quality, and generally they finished up being seized or rusting and becoming unusable. To which the Mazzinians first and the anarchists later added the distraction of the occasional more or less harmless bomb.

Meanwhile, as a result of waiting idly for the revolution to arrive, their affiliates ended up dropping off entirely to sleep; and the bulk of the people, or at any rate that portion of them with some glimmer of awareness and who could have done something, being told time and time again that there was nothing to be achieved without the revolution, let the government and the bosses blithely carry on oppressing and exploiting… and waited for the revolution to come. The revolutionary spirit aroused in Europe by the great French revolution and kept alive in Italy more than anywhere else throughout the first half of the century, gradually petered out since the revolution could no longer be made using the old methods due to changes in conditions and changes in goals, and in the end the government could do as it pleased without having to fret about any serious resistance. And it was very frequently the case that workers, once they had managed to organize themselves unaided and extract a few improvements, drifted further away than ever from the revolutionaries, whose forecasts and aims

contradicted the progress achieved. And rather than these having, as they should have and could have, helped bring the utter emancipation of the people that much closer, they provided additional arguments for conservatism.

I countered these mistakes and the methodology of the classic revolutionaries to which we ourselves had long subscribed, with my own belief, which has come to be shared by almost all our comrades: that bourgeois institutions, cornered by resistance and popular menace, still have a lot of concessions to make before they reach the point where they must succumb to a more or less violent demise; that it is in the interests of revolutionaries to squeeze every possible concession out of the government and bosses, both in order to ease the current suffering of the people and to hasten the final show-down; and that the better the people's material and moral conditions are and the more it has become aware of its own strength and inured to and skilled in struggle, through resistance and relentless struggles for improved conditions, the better equipped the people is for revolution. I therefore closed by urging resistance to the law on *domicilio coatto*, which is to be the first, and we hope successful, sample of what the people can do, starting right now, even peacefully and within the law, to counter government bullies, if it will but show its determination.

In all of this, I made no allusion to the democratic socialist party, for the straightforward reason that it did not exist during the period of Italian history to which I was referring. It was spawned in Italy precisely as a result of the mistakes we made and the decline in the people's revolutionary spirit; and it will collapse or be reduced to a party of mere politicos the day that we, learning from the experience of our past failures, can spread our activities in the bosom of the masses and when the dormant revolutionary spirit within the Italian people springs back to life.

Besides, the democratic socialists would be wrong to try to make capital out of these "confessions of an anarchist", since

our mistakes, shared by all the older schools of revolutionaries, are in large measure something we owe to marxist theory, of which all us anarchists were once upon a time more consistent or even more orthodox advocates than those who professed to be Marxists and, perhaps, than Marx himself, and we have been discarding those mistakes as we have been shrugging off marxism's mistakes.

But more of that some other time.

Your comrade Giuseppe Rinaldi