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Anarchy and “Scientific” Communism

Luigi Fabbri

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1922

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ment that, in the eyes of superficial folk, represents them abroad. A friend of mine, returning from Russia in 1920 burning with enthusiasm, when I warned him that the soviets there were a humiliating sort of subordination and that government agents even manipulated their elections “fascistically,” replied some-what rashly: “But if the majority of the proletarians were really able to elect the soviets of their choice, the Bolshevik government would not remain in government another week!”

If that is so, then when we criticise—not persons, not individuals, whom we have often defended against slanderers in the kept press of capitalism—when we, prompted by our constant concern not to fall into the mistaken, exaggerated form of criticism, attack the ruling party in Russia and those of its supporters anxious to follow in its footsteps in Italy—because we see that its methods are harmful to the revolution and bring about a real counter-revolution—how can anyone say that “we are taking up a stand against the Russian Revolution”?

The proletariat, which knows and heeds us, knows that this is an evil, ridiculous assertion, as evil and ridiculous as the way the hacks of the bourgeoisie try to pass off as insults and charges against the whole Italian people the justly harsh criticisms—which we support—that foreign revolutionaries level at the government and the ruling class of Italy.

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the Revolution comes not in the form of government ordinances, laws and military feats, but in the form of the profound change wrought in the moral and material life of the population.

That change is irrefutable. Tsarism in Russia has died, and with it a whole endless series of monstrosities. The old noble and bourgeois ruling class is destroyed and along with it many things, from the roots up, especially a lot of prejudices, the removal of which was once thought impossible. Should Russia, as appears to be the case, be unfortunate enough to see a new ruling class formed there, then the demolition of the old annihilated one leads to the expectation that the rule of the new power will in its turn be overthrown without difficulty. The original libertarian idea behind the "Soviets" did not win the souls of Russians over in vain, even if the bolsheviks have maimed it and turned it into a cog in the bureaucracy of the dictatorship; inside that idea lies the seed of the new revolution which will be the only one that acts out real communism, communism with freedom.

No government can lay claim of the moral renewal of Russia in the wake of revolution, nor can it destroy it; and that renewal is the merit of the popular revolution alone, not of a political party. And of course, in spite of everything (a comrade wrote to me who had just returned from Russia, after some criticisms of the bolshevik maladministration), "the impression that the life of the Russian people makes all in all is so grand that everything here in capitalist Europe seems a wretched, stupid 'petit bourgeois' imitation. No vulgarity there; one never hears those vulgar songs sung by drunks; there the off-putting atmosphere of Sundays and those places where people amuse themselves in western countries does not exist. Amid sacrifice and unspeakable suffering, the people really do live a better, more intense moral life."

In real terms the Russian Revolution lives on in the Russian people. That is the revolution we love, that we celebrate with enthusiasm and with a heart filled with hope. But, as we never tire of repeating, the revolution and the Russian people are not the govern-

tion to the war and after that with weapons in hand in March; then later against bourgeois democracy and social reformism in July and October; fighting at last on all fronts, giving up their lives in the fight against Yudenich, Denikin and Wrangel, against the Germans in Riga, the English in Archangel, the French in Odessa and the Japanese in Siberia. Many of them (and this is not the place to see if or to what extent they were mistaken in so doing) have collaborated with the Bolsheviks in internal civil or military organisation, wherever they could, with least conflict with their own conscience, to the advantage of the revolution. And if today Russian anarchists are among the opposition inside Russia and fight against bolshevik policy and the bolshevik government, all they are doing is pressing on—a heroic few—with the struggle for revolution begun in March 1917.

Not only is today's government not the Russian Revolution, but it has become its very negation. On the other hand, that was inevitable by virtue of the fact that it is a government. Not only does fighting the Russian government, at the level of polemic, with revolutionary arguments—that have nothing in common with the arguments of the revolution's enemies—not only does this not make one a foe of the revolution, but it defends it, clarifies it and frees it of the stains which the bulk of the public sees in it—stains that are not of it, but come from the government party, the new ruling caste that is growing, parasite-like on its trunk, to the detriment of the great bulk of the proletariat.

This in no way prevents us from understanding the grandiosity of the Russian Revolution, and appreciating the renewal it has meant for a good half of Europe. The only thing we oppose is the claim of a single party to monopolise the credit and the benefits of such an enormous event, which they certainly did have a hand in, but in a proportion one might reasonably expect from their numbers and organisation. The Russian Revolution was not the work of a party—it was the work of a whole people: and the people is the real leading actor of the real Russian Revolution. The grandeur of

I. The bourgeois phraseology of “scientific” communism

A short while ago, through the publishing firm of the Communist Party of Italy, a little twelve-page pamphlet was issued by that “superlative theoretician” (as he was introduced to the public in the socialist and communist press) Nikolai Bukharin. It bore the pompous title *Anarchy and Scientific Communism*. Let us just have a look and see how much “science” there is in it.

Bukharin does not set out any true notion of anarchism, any of the points in the anarchist-communist programme as they truthfully are; nor does he take the trouble to inform himself on anarchist thinking by drawing upon the primary sources of the anarchists' historical and theoretical literature. All he does is parrot well worn clichés, talking without being careful to keep faith with what he has heard said, and allowing his imagination to run riot in relation to those facets of anarchism that he knows least about. It is impossible to find such a failure to comprehend the theory and tactics of anarchy since the superficial and untrustworthy hackwork of the bourgeoisie thirty or forty years ago.

When all is said and done, it is a rather banal and unimportant piece of writing. But it has been distributed in Italy through the good offices of a party most of whose members are proletarians, and it is presented to workers as a refutation of anarchism. The Italian publishers depict Bukharin's booklet as a work of “admirable clarity that gives a definitive account of the INCONSISTENCY AND ABSURDITY OF ANARCHIST DOCTRINE.” So it is Worth the trouble of showing how nothing can be more absurd, in-

consistent or ridiculous than the “science” of know-nothing with which he tries to discredit the notion of anarchy.

On the other hand, Bukharin’s pamphlet has furnished us with yet another opportunity to make propaganda for our views among the workers, who are our special target, our supreme occupation; we are certainly not trying to win over the author personally, or the publishers of his pamphlet, as this would be wasting our time.¹

If we are to spell out the emptiness and ignorance which prevails among those who style themselves “scientific”—it’s always the most ignorant who feel the need to show off their academic credentials, bona fide or otherwise—then the phraseology they dress up in should be sufficient.

Their terminology is like the pomp with which overbearing people surround themselves and the poses they strike, moving among folk in an arrogant fashion, saying: “Stand aside and let us through; woe betide anyone who fails to take his hat off to our excellence.” And, in their boundless arrogance, they look down on all mere mortals as they speak, unaware that what they say to those they address is not only inane but also genuinely insulting—such as might be expected of some uneducated bumpkin.

Listen, for instance, to the pompous terms in which Bukharin addresses the anarchists, throwing in their faces the fact that he is condescending to debate theories of which he is ignorant.

“We have purposely avoided arguing against anarchists as if they were delinquents, criminals, bandits, and so on.”

That is the line of jesuits who teach one how to insult while pretending that it is not the intention... But saying that, he only concludes further on that the anarchist groups spawn “those who expropriate for the sake of their own pockets,” thieves if one likes, and that *“anarchists attract delinquents.”*

¹ It is believed that Bukharin here refers to more than just Russian anarchism and Russian anarchists. In his pamphlet he makes no distinction and speaks in a global sense. On the other hand, Russian anarchists have the same ideas and programmes as anarchists in other countries.

selves with whichever party it was that won the most fame. Then no one, or practically no one, spoke of the Russian anarchists. We knew—and later news proved we were right—that they must be in the forefront of the battle, unknown but nonetheless important factors in the revolution. And for us that was enough.

We have no partisan interests, nor have we any need to exploit our fallen to secure privileges for the future; and for that reason our silence on the work of our comrades did not dampen our joy. And, between the months of March and November, before they seized power (and even for a few months after they had, until bitter experience confirmed what our doctrine had given us an inkling of in advance) the bolsheviks seemed to be the most energetic foes of the old oppressors, of the war policy, of all truck with the bourgeoisie; and fought against democratic radicalism with its roots in capitalism and, along with it, against the social patriots, reformists, right socialist revolutionaries and mensheviks; and later, when after a little hesitation they co-operated to scatter to the winds the equivocation of the constituent Assembly, the anarchists, without any senseless rivalry, stood at their side.

They stood at their side ideally, spiritually, outside Russia and, more practically, in the sphere of propaganda and political activity against the slander and calumnies of the bourgeoisie. And, even more practically, they stood there still (and that even after they had begun to oppose at the polemical level), against the bourgeois governments when, so far as was possible, an effort was made to use direct action to prevent the infamous blockade of Russia and to stop the supply of war materials to her enemies. Every time the interests of the revolution and the Russian people seemed to be at stake, the anarchists held their ground, even when they knew that they could indirectly be giving help to their opponents.

The same thing, on a much larger scale, with a greater expenditure of energies and more sacrifices in ruthless armed struggle, happened inside Russia where our comrades have been fighting for the revolution against tsarism since before 1917, with dogged opposi-

war, it has surpassed that world war in magnitude and importance. Had it managed, if it manages or should it manage in the future—as, in spite of everything, we still hope—to break the bonds of wage slavery that bind the working class, or should the advances made by earlier revolutions be expanded to include economic and social equality, freedom for all in fact as well as in theory, that is to say with the material possibility of enjoying it, then the Russian Revolution will surpass in historical importance even the French Revolution of 1789–93.

If the world war failed to extinguish all hope of resurrection by the oppressed people of the world, if despite it men are not to be set back centuries to the animal existence of their ancestors, but only a little way, it is beyond dispute that we owe it to the Russian Revolution. It is the Russian Revolution that has raised the moral and ideal values of humanity and which has impelled our aspirations and the collective spirit of all peoples forwards towards a higher humanity.

In that sad dawn of 1917, while the whole world seemed to be rushing headlong into horror, death, falsehood, hatred and blackest obscurity, the Russian Revolution suddenly flooded those of us who were suffering from that endless tragedy with the searching light of truth and brotherhood, and the warmth of life and love began to flow again along withered veins to the parched hearts of the workers' international. For as long as that memory persists, all the peoples of the earth will be obliged to the Russian people for an effort that, not only in Russia and Europe but in the most distant corners of the globe inhabited by men, succeeded in lifting the hopes of the oppressed.

We absolutely do not conceal the cost of the Russian people's feat in terms of fatigue, heroism, sacrifice and martyrdom.

We anarchists have not followed the progress of the revolution with mental reservations or in a spirit of sectarianism. We never talked this way, in public or in private: up till now, but no more. So long as the revolution was moving forward we did not concern our-

What impudence! In their hatred for rebel spirits, for all who have too much love of liberty to bow to their whims and kowtow before their impositions, whether in the labour movement today or in the revolution tomorrow, they do not shrink from taking the mud-slinging, libellous activities of officialdom and of the bourgeois press as their model in attacking the anarchists. One would think one was reading police libels! And can all this rubbish, these worst clichés of crude slander, be summed up under the heading “science”?

How can one conduct a debate like that? The anarchist organisation lays no claim to being composed of superior beings; naturally enough, its people have the foibles that all mortals share and consequently, like any party the anarchist organisation too has its shortcomings, its deadweight; and there will always be individuals who seek to cloak their own morbid, anti-social tendencies with its colours. But no more so than is the case with other parties. Just the opposite! In fact, the worst forms of delinquency, the spawn of selfishness and ambition, the spirit of interest and greed shun anarchism, for the simple reason that in it there is little or nothing to gain and everything to lose.

Take it from us, you “scientific,” communists, that we could easily reply in kind to this sort of attack, were it not that we believe we would be demeaning ourselves and that there would be no point in so doing! It is not among the anarchists that one could most easily find “*those who*” —as Bukharin puts it—“*exploit the revolution for their own private gain,*” in Russia or outside it...

As depicted by Bukharin, anarchy would be “a product of the disintegration of capitalist society,” some sort of contagion, spreading chiefly among the dregs of society, among atomised individuals outside any class who live only for themselves, who do no work, organically unable to create a new world or new values: proletarians, petite bourgeois, decadent intellectuals, impoverished peasants, and so on.

What Bukharin takes for “anarchy” would not be an ideology of the proletariat, but rather a product of the ideological dissolution of the working class, the ideology of a horde of beggars. Elsewhere he calls it the “Socialism of the Mob,” of an idle, vagrant proletariat.² In another section of his antianarchist pamphlet, Bukharin dubs it the “ragged mob.”

Believe me, readers, it is not a matter of exaggeration. All I have repeated up to now are word for word quotations, only shortened and condensed for considerations of space: enough, of course, to give an idea of what Bukharin sees as nothing less than the social basis of anarchy.

However little they know about anarchism, workers reading us—even those least in sympathy with us—know enough to reach their own conclusions as to these extravagant simplifications. Russia is not the only place where there are anarchists, so the Italian workers need not mistake will o’ the wisps for lanterns or believe fairy tales about ogres and witches. Italy’s proletarians, among whom the anarchists are everywhere rather numerous, are in a position to answer for us that there is no truth in all Bukharin’s fantasies.

Anarchism, while it does not claim to be the “doctrine of the proletariat”—it claims, rather, to be a human teaching—is *de facto* a teaching whose followers are almost exclusively proletarians: bourgeois, petit bourgeois, so-called intellectuals or professional people, etc., are very few and far between and wield no predominant influence. There are infinitely more of these wielding a predominant influence, in all those other parties which no doubt call themselves proletarian parties, not excluding the “communist” party. And, as a general rule, anarchist proletarians are not, in fact, an especially superior or inferior sector; they work as other workers do, belong to all trades, can be found in small as well as big industry, in fac-

² See *The ABC of Communism* by Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, Editorial Avanti!, Milan, p. 85.

temporary difficulties can be surmounted, well-being will come about. It ceases to be revolution if, in practical terms, it does not mean an increase in freedom to think and act—in whatever ways do not restrict the freedom of others—for ah those who were oppressed under the old regime.

Such are the views and feelings that act as our guides in our propaganda and polemics. In no way are propaganda and polemic prompted by a spirit of sectarianism, much less by a spirit of competition or by personal interest; and we do not in the least engage in them as an exercise in criticism and doctrinairism. Rather we are aware of fulfilling a double obligation, of immediate political relevance.

On the one hand, the study of the Russian Revolution, the shedding of light on the errors made by those in government, and the criticism of the bolshevik system that won the day are, as far as we are concerned, a duty imposed by political solidarity with our Russian comrades who, because they share our thinking and hold our point of view—which, we believe, are the thoughts and viewpoint most compatible with the interests of the revolution of the proletariat—are deprived of all liberty, persecuted, imprisoned, exiled, and, some of them, put to death by that government. On the other hand, we have a duty to show up the bolshevik error, so that if a similar crisis arose in the western countries the proletariat would take care not to set out along a road, to take a direction, that we now know from first-hand experience means the wrecking of the revolution.

If that is what we think, if we are deeply convinced that that is the case—and our opponents cannot doubt it, for there are no other interests or strong feelings that could turn our mind away from such an undertaking—then it is our duty, as anarchists and revolutionaries, to break our silence. But does all that mean that we are against the Russian Revolution?

The Russian Revolution is the most earth-shaking event of our day. Brought on and made easier by an enormous cause, the world

V. The Russian Revolution and the Anarchists

When they run out of arguments against our unshakable reasoning, the parting shot authoritarian communists loose at us is to portray us as “enemies of the Russian Revolution.”

From our position of fighting against the dictatorial conception of revolution—a position we share with our Russian comrades—to back up our arguments we cite the baneful results of the dictatorial direction of revolutionary Russia, and hold up to the light the grave errors of the government there; in this sense alone are we fighting against the Russian Revolution.

This is more than a question of unfair accusations: it is at once a lie and a slander. If the cause of the Revolution is the cause of freedom and justice, in a practical and not in any abstract sense, that is to say, if it is the cause of the proletariat and its emancipation from all political and economic servitude, all state or private exploitation and oppression; if the Revolution is the cause of social equality, then it is with justice that we can insist that the only ones still faithful today to the Russian Revolution, the revolution made by the working people of Russia, are the anarchists.

We appreciate that, for some considerable period, in time of revolution, all that anyone—and especially revolutionaries—has a right to expect is thorns and very few roses. Let us have no illusions about that. But revolution ceases to be revolution when it is not and does not signify an improvement, however slight, for the broad masses, and fails to assure to the proletarians a greater well-being or at least, if they cannot clearly see that, once certain

tories, among the artisans, in the fields; they belong to the same labour organisations as others do, and so forth.

Naturally, there are anarchists among the lowest orders of the proletariat, too—among those whom Bukharin condescendingly labels the ragged mob—but that is by no means an exclusively anarchist phenomenon. If that were the case,

if in fact all beggars, all those in rags, all the horde that suffers most under capitalist oppression, were to come into our ranks, we would not be displeased in the slightest; we should welcome them with open arms, with no unjust disdain or misplaced prejudice. But—to give the lie to Bukharin’s fantastic catalogue—it is a fact that anarchy does have its followers among these orders, in the same proportions as among the others, as do all the other parties, the communist party included.

And what does that leave of Bukharin’s phoney scientific terminology in his attack on anarchism?

Nothing, except the so-to-speak unconscious revealing of a frame of mind that ought to put the proletariat on its guard, and alert it seriously to the risks it will be running should it have the misfortune to entrust its future to these doctrinaire champions of a dictatorial communism.

Just who is it who speaks so scornfully of the “ragged mob,” the “horde of beggars,” “dregs,” and so on? None other than those petite bourgeois, whether old or new, coming from both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, who rule the roost these days in organisations, parties and the labour press, leaders of all sorts who represent the ruling class of the future, yet another minority group who, under some guise or other, will exploit and oppress the broad masses, and who surround themselves with the more fortunate orders of the citizen proletariat—the ones in large industry—to the exclusion and detriment of all others.

Bukharin imprudently admits as much in his little pamphlet when he makes the Revolution and communism a sort of monopoly wielded exclusively by that sector of the proletariat

welded together by the apparatus of largescale production. "All the other strata of the poor classes," he goes on to say, "can only become agents of revolution whenever they protect the rear of the proletariat." Now, these "poor classes" outside big industry, are they not proletariat? If they are then Bakunin's prophecy that the tiny minority of industrial workers can become an exploiter and ruler over the broad masses of the poor would be proven right. Even if this is not spelled out explicitly, it can be sensed from the language that these future rulers—in Russia today they are already in a position of control—use as regards the hapless poor classes, to whom they award the passive mission of placing themselves at the rear of the minority who want to get into power. I repeat, this scornful, supercilious language reveals a frame of mind: a frame of mind typical of bosses, rulers, in dealings with their serfs and subjects. It is the same language that among us is used by careerists from the bourgeoisie and, above ah, the petite bourgeoisie against the proletariat as a whole—terms like "beggar, ragamuffin, dregs, no creative ability, don't work," and so on.

Let Italian workers read Bukharin's booklet: to prove the worth of our arguments, we have no need to weave a conspiracy of silence about what our opponents write and say, nor do we need to downgrade or misrepresent their thinking. On the contrary, we have every interest in proletarians being able to compare and contrast our thinking with opposing ideas. But if they do read Bukharin's few pages of writing, we can't say what the reaction will be when they find the outrageous bourgeois terminology currently used to lash all workers and revolutionaries in Italy—including the communists, no less!—directed against anarchists.

With all this it is none other than Bukharin who has the nerve to say that the ANARCHISTS ARE AT ONE WITH THE BOURGEOISIE AND COLLABORATIONIST PARTIES AGAINST THE POWER OF THE PROLETARIAT.

Naturally enough, Bukharin takes care to back up this claim—defamation pure and simple—with arguments and facts! The facts,

reconcile them, and so demanding of the sacrifice of all human freedom and dignity, that one can surmise that it is impossible when today the spirit of revolt, autonomy and initiative is so widespread among the masses, hungering not only for bread but also for freedom.

Almost all anarchist literature has, since the end of the First International, belonged to the communist school of socialism. Up until the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917 the two chief schools into which socialism was divided were, on the one hand, legalistic, statist collectivism, and, on the other, anarchist, revolutionary communism. What number of polemics, between 1880 and 1918, have we not engaged in with the Marxist socialists, today's neo-communists, in support of the communist ideal as against their German-barrack-room collectivism!

And so, their ideal view of the reorganisation to come has remained the same, and its authoritarian overtones have even become more pronounced. The only difference between the collectivism that we criticised in the past and the dictatorial communism of today is a tactical one and a slight theoretical difference, and not the question of the immediate goal to be reached. True, this links up with the state communism of the pre-1880 German socialists—the *Volksstaat* or people's State—against which Bakunin directed such vitriolic criticism; and likewise the government socialism of Louis Blanc, so brilliantly demolished by Proudhon. But the connection with the revolutionary statist approach is only on the secondary level of politics, and not on the level of its particular economic viewpoint—that is, the organisation of production and the distribution of the products—of which Marx and Blanc had a rather broader, more general view than their latest heirs.

In contrast, the dichotomy is not between anarchy and a more or less "scientific" communism, but rather between authoritarian or state communism, rushing headlong towards a despotic dictatorship, and anarchist or anti-state communism with its libertarian vision of revolution.

If one has to talk about contradiction in terms, it must be not between the term communism and the term anarchy, which are so compatible that the one is not possible in the absence of the other, but rather between communism and state. Where there is state or government, no communism is possible. At least, it is so difficult to

the whole fifty-year history of anarchism, the heroism of so many Russian anarchists killed since 1917 at the front, weapon in hand, in the defence of their country's revolution, all this goes to prove completely the opposite.

Anarchists fight all power, all dictatorship, even should it wear the proletarian colours. But they have no need to join up with the bourgeois or go in for collaboration to do so, in Russia or anywhere else. Anarchists can take pride in the fact that theirs is everywhere the only organisation that—at the cost of almost always being alone in doing so—has always since it first emerged, been implacably and intransigently opposed to any form of state collaboration or class collaboration, never wavering from their position of enmity for the bourgeoisie.

But we have not taken up our pen merely to debate and refute vacuous, libellous and outrageous turns of phrase. There is also, in Bukharin's booklet, an attempt to discuss some ideas of anarchism, or ideas with which it is credited; and it is to this (however pathetic) aspect that we shall devote the bulk of this short piece of polemic and propaganda of ours—having less to do with Bukharin and more with the arguments alluded to here and there, keeping the discussion as impersonal as possible, and taking no further notice of the irritating, antirevolutionary terms in which our opponent couches the few arguments he is able to muster.

II. The State and the Centralisation of Production

For some time now, communist writers—and Bukharin especially among them—have been wont to accuse anarchists of a certain error, which anarchists on the other hand have always denied, and which, until recent times, could be laid exclusively at the door of the social democrats of the Second International, to wit that of reducing the whole point of issue between marxism and anarchism into the question of the final objective of the abolition or non-abolition of the state in the socialist society of the future.

At one time, democratic socialists who then, as the communists of today do, styled themselves “scientific,” affirmed the need for the state in the socialist regime and in so doing claimed to be marxists. Until very recently, anarchist writers were more or less the only ones who exposed this as a misrepresentation of marxism. Now, on the other hand, an effort is under way to make them jointly responsible for that misrepresentation.

At the international socialist and workers’ congress in London in 1896—where much thought was given to excluding anarchists (who, at that time, were alone in claiming the title of communists) from international congresses on the grounds that they did not accept the conquest of power as means or as end—it was none other than Errico Malatesta who mentioned that originally anarchists and socialists had shared a common goal in the abolition of the state, and that on that particular issue marxists had parted company with the theories of Marx himself.

talk of violence or state terrorism which has to be imposed by the socialist regime; others want the word “communism” to signify the complex of theories that are known as marxism (class struggle, historical materialism, seizure of power, dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.); still others quite purely and simply a method of philosophical reasoning, like the dialectical approach. So some—harnessing together words that have no logical connection between them—call it *critical communism* while others opt for *scientific communism*.

As we see it, they are all mistaken; for the ideas and tactics mentioned above can be shared and used by communists too, and be more or less made compatible with communism, but they are not in themselves communism—nor are they enough to set it apart, whereas they could very well be made compatible with other, quite different systems, even those contrary to communism. If we want to amuse ourselves with word games, we could say that there is quite a lot to the doctrines of authoritarian communists, but what is most strikingly absent is nothing other than communism.

Let it be clearly understood that in no way do we dispute the right of authoritarian communists to adopt whatever title they see fit, whatever they like, and adopt a name that was our exclusive property for almost half a century and that we have no intention of giving up. It would be ridiculous to contest that right. But whenever the neo-communists come to discuss anarchy and hold discussions with anarchists there is a moral obligation on them not to pretend they know nothing of the past, and they have the basic duty not to appropriate that name to such a degree as to monopolise it, to such a degree that an incompatibility is created between the term communism and the term anarchy that is artificial and false.

Whenever they do these things they reveal themselves to be devoid of all sense of political honesty.

Everyone knows how our ideal, expressed in the word anarchy, taken in the programmatic sense of a socialism organised in a libertarian way, has always been known as anarchist communism.

without any of them being able to appropriate social capital to themselves for their exclusive advantage to the exclusion or detriment of others. It is an ideal of the economic reorganisation of society, common to a number of schools of socialism (anarchy included); and the marxists were by no means the first to formulate that ideal.

Marx and Engels did write a programme for the German Communist Party in 1847, it is true, setting out its theoretical and tactical guidelines; but the Communist Party already existed before that. They drew their notion of communism from others and were by no means its creators.

In that superb hothouse of ideas, the First International, the concept of communism was increasingly clarified; and it took on its special importance in confrontation with collectivism, which around 1880 was, by common agreement, incorporated into the political and social vocabulary of anarchists and socialists alike: ranging from Karl Marx to Carlo Cafiero and Benoit Malon to Gnocchi Viani. From that time forward, the word communism has always been taken to mean a system for the production and distribution of wealth in a socialist society, the practical guidelines for which were set down in the formula: from each ACCORDING TO HIS RESOURCES AND ABILITY – TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS NEEDS.² The communism of anarchists, built on the political terrain of the negation of the state, was and is understood to have this meaning, to signify precisely a practical system of socialist living after the revolution, in keeping with both the derivation of the word and the historical tradition.

In contrast, what the neo-communists understand by “communism” is merely or mostly a set of methods of struggle and the theoretical criteria they stand by in discussion and propaganda. Some

² In contrast, the collectivists’ formula was “to each the fruits of his labour” or even “to each according to his work.” Needless to say, these formulae must be taken in their approximate meaning, as a general guideline, and absolutely not as dogma, as however they were employed at one time.

Time without number, in the writings of anarchists, the well known anarchistic construction Karl Marx placed upon socialism in 1872, in the midst of one of his most violent polemics with Bakunin has been quoted:

What all socialists understand by anarchy is this: once the aim of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, has been attained; the power of the state, which serves to keep the great majority of producers under the yoke of a numerically small exploiting minority, disappears, and the functions of government are transformed into simple administrative functions.¹

We do not find this marxist notion of what anarchy is acceptable, for we do not believe that the state will naturally or inevitably die away automatically as a result of the abolition of classes. The state is more than an outcome of class divisions; it is, at one and the same time, the creator of privilege, thereby bringing about new class divisions. Marx was in error in thinking that once classes had been abolished the state would die a natural death, as if through lack of nourishment. The state will not die away unless it is deliberately destroyed, just as capitalism will not cease to exist unless it is put to death through expropriation. Should a state be left standing, it will create a new ruling class about itself, that is, if it chooses not to make its peace with the old one. In short, class divisions will persist and classes will never be finally abolished as long as the state remains.

But here it is not a question of seeing how much there may be in what Marx thought concerning the end of the state. It is a fact that

¹ See Marx: “The Alliance of Socialist Democracy and the International Working Men’s Association” in Works of Marx, Engels and Lasalle edited by Avanti!, Milan, vol. 2. (English translation from Marx-EngelsLenin, Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, p. 110. (Note by English editor.)

marxism agrees with anarchism in foreseeing that communism is equivalent to the death of the state: only, according to marxism, the state must die a natural death, whereas anarchism holds that it can only die a violent one.

And, let us say it again, the anarchists have pointed this out—in their polemics with the social democrats—times without number from 1880 up to the present day.

Authoritarian communists, while rightly critical of the social democratic idea (which they doubtless also credit, mistakenly as it happens, to anarchists) that the basic difference between socialism and anarchism is in the final goal of eliminating the state, make in their turn a mistake that is similar and perhaps more grave.

They, and on their behalf Bukharin, maintain that the “real difference” between anarchists and state communists is this: that whereas the communist’s “ideal solution ...is centralised production methodically organised in large units, THE ANARCHISTS’ IDEAL CONSISTS OF ESTABLISHING TINY COMMUNES WHICH, BY THEIR VERY STRUCTURE, ARE DISQUALIFIED FROM MANAGING ANY LARGE ENTERPRISES, BUT... LINK UP THROUGH A NETWORK OF FREE CONTRACTS.”²

It would be interesting to learn in what anarchist book, pamphlet or programme such an “ideal” is set out, or even such a hard and fast rule!

One would need to know, for instance, what structural inadequacies debar a small community from managing a large unit, and how free contracts or free exchanges and so on are necessary obstacles to that. Thus, state communists imagine that “anarchists are for small scale decentralised production.” Why small scale?

The belief is probably that decentralisation of functions always and everywhere means falling production and that large scale pro-

² These and other statements, printed in quotation marks or in heavy type, are literal quotes from Bukharin’s pamphlet. On the other hand, the same things are reproduced in the above-mentioned ABC of Communism and elsewhere in The Programme of the Communists published by Avanti! in 1920.

the word’s meaning, the different usage of the word over the span of forty years in popular and proletarian parlance, and the changes in the stances of the parties after 1880— thereby creating a real anachronism.

But that’s the authoritarian communists and not us; there would not even have been any need for us to debate the matter had they taken the bother, when they changed what they called themselves, to set out clearly what change in ideas was reflected in this change in name. Sure, the socialists-now-become-communists have modified their platform as compared with the one laid down for Italy at the Genoa Congress of the Workers’ Party in 1892, and through the Socialist International at its London Congress in 1896. But the change in programme revolves wholly and exclusively about methods of struggle (espousal of violence, dismissal of parliamentarianism, dictatorship instead of democracy, and so on); and it does not refer to the ideal of social reconstruction, the only thing to which the terms communism and collectivism can refer.

When it comes to their programme for social reconstruction, to the economic order of the future society, the socialists-communists have changed not at all; they just have not bothered. As a matter of fact, the term communism covers their old authoritarian, collectivist programme which still lingers on—having in the background, the far distant background, a vision of the disappearance of the state that is put before the masses on solemn occasions to distract their attention from a new domination, one that the communist dictators would like to yoke them to in the not so distant future.

All this is a source of misapprehension and confusion among the workers, who are told one thing in words that leads them to believe quite another.

From ancient times, the term communism has meant, not a method of struggle, much less a special method of reasoning, but a system for the complete radical reorganisation of society on the basis of common ownership of wealth, common enjoyment of the fruits of the common labour by the members of human society,

We have indicated elsewhere¹ how in 1877 the *Arbeiter Zeitung* of Berne published the statutes of a “German speaking Anarchist Communist Party”; and how in 1880 the Congress of the Internationalist Federation of the Jura at Chaux-de-Fonds gave its approval to a memorandum from Carlo Cafiero on “Anarchy and Communism,” in the same sense as before. In Italy at the time anarchists were more commonly known as socialists; but when they wanted to be specific they called themselves, as they have done ever since, even to this day, anarchist COMMUNISTS.

Later Pietro Gori used to say that socialism (communism) would constitute the economic basis of a society transformed by a revolution such as we envisaged, while anarchy would be its political culmination.

As specifications of the anarchist programme, these ideas have, as the saying used to go, acquired rights of citizenship in political language from the time when the First International was in its death throes in Italy (1880–2). As a definition or formulation of anarchism, the term anarchist communism was incorporated into their political vocabulary even by other socialist writers who, when it came to their own programme for the organisation of society from the economic point of view, did not talk about communism, but rather about collectivism, and in effect, styled themselves collectivists.

That was the position up to 1918; that is to say until the Russian bolsheviks, to set themselves apart from the patriotic or reformist social democrats, made up their minds to change their name, resurrecting that of “communist,” which fitted the historical tradition of Marx and Engels’ famous *Manifesto of 1847*, and which up to 1880 was employed by German socialists in a purely authoritarian, social democratic sense. Little by little, nearly all the socialists owning allegiance to Moscow’s Third International have ended up styling themselves COMMUNISTS, disregarding the perversion of

¹ See Luigi Fabbri: Dictatorship and Revolution (in Italian) p. 140.

duction, the existence of vast associations of producers, is impossible unless it is centrally managed from a single, central office, in accordance with a single plan of management. Now that is infantile!

Marxist communists, especially Russian ones, are beguiled by the distant mirage of big industry in the West or in America and mistake for a system of production what is only a typically capitalist means of speculation, a means of exercising oppression all the more securely; and they do not appreciate that that sort of centralisation, far from fulfilling the real needs of production, is, on the contrary, precisely what restricts it, obstructs it and applies a brake to it in the interest of capital.

Whenever dictatorial communists talk about “necessity of production” they make no distinction between those necessities upon which hinge the procurement of a greater quantity and higher quality of products—this being all that matters from the social and communist point of view—and the necessities inherent in the bourgeois regime, the capitalists’ necessity to make more profit even should it mean producing less to do so. If capitalism tends to centralise its operations, it does so not for the sake of production, but only for the sake of making and accumulating more money—something which not uncommonly leads capitalists to leave huge tracts of land untilled, or to restrict certain types of production; and even to destroy finished products! All these considerations aside, this is not the real point at issue between authoritarian communists and anarchist communists.

When it comes to the material and technical method of production, anarchists have no preconceived solutions or absolute prescriptions, and bow to what experience and conditions in a free society recommend and prescribe. What matters is that, whatever the type of production adopted, it should be adopted by the free choice of the producers themselves, and cannot possibly be imposed, any more than any form is possible of exploitation of another’s labour. Given basic premises like those, the question of how production

is to be organised takes a back seat. Anarchists do not a priori exclude any practical solution and likewise concede that there may be a number of different solutions at the same time, after having tried out the ones the workers might come up with once they know the adequate basis for increasingly bigger and better production.

Anarchists are strenuously opposed to the authoritarian, centralist spirit of government parties and all statist political thinking, which is centralist by its very nature. So they picture future social life on the basis of federalism, from the individual to the municipality, to the commune, to the region, to the nation, to the international, on the basis of solidarity and free agreement. And it is natural that this ideal should be reflected also in the organisation of production, giving preference as far as possible, to a decentralised sort of organisation; but this does not take the form of an absolute rule to be applied everywhere in every instance. A libertarian order would in itself, on the other hand, rule out the possibility of imposing such a unilateral solution.

To be sure, anarchists do reject the marxists' utopian idea of production organised in a centralised way (according to preconceived, unilateral criteria regulated by an all-seeing central office whose judgment is infallible. But the fact that they do not accept this absurd marxist solution does not mean they go to the opposite extreme, to the unilateral preconception of "small communes which engage only in small scale production" attributed to them by the pens of "scientific" communism. Quite the opposite: from 1890 onwards Kropotkin took as his point of departure "...the present condition of industries, where everything is interwoven and mutually dependent, where each aspect of production makes use of all the others"; and pointed to some of the broadest national and international organisations of production, distribution, public services and culture, as instances (duly modified) of possible anarchist communist organisations.

IV. Anarchy and Communism

There is a bad habit that we must react against. It is the habit that authoritarian communists have had for some time now, that of setting communism against anarchy, as if the two notions were necessarily contradictory; the habit of using these two words communism and anarchy as if they were mutually incompatible and had opposite meanings.

In Italy, where for something over forty years these words have been used together to form a single term in which one word complements the other, to form the most accurate description of the anarchist programme, this effort to disregard such an important historical tradition and, what is more, turn the meanings of the words upside down, is absurd and can only serve to create confusion in the realm of ideas and endless misunderstandings in the realm of propaganda.

There is no harm in recalling that it was, oddly enough, at a congress of the Italian Sections of the first workers' International, meeting clandestinely near Florence in 1876, that, on a motion put forward by Errico Malatesta, it was affirmed that communism was the economic arrangement that could best make a society without government a possibility; and that anarchy (that is, the absence of all government), being the free and voluntary organisation of social relationships, was the best way to implement communism. One is effectively the guarantee for the other and vice versa. Hence the concrete formulation of anarchist communism as an ideal and as a movement of struggle.

One moves towards the abolition of capitalism by expropriating the capitalists for the benefit of all, not by creating an even worse capitalism in state capitalism.

Progress towards the abolition of the state is made by fighting it as long as it survives, undermining it more and more, stripping it so far as is possible of authority and prestige, weakening it and removing from it as many social functions as the working people have equipped themselves to perform on their own through their revolutionary or class organisation—and not, as authoritarian communists claim, by building on the ruins of the bourgeois state another even stronger state with more functions and added power.

By taking this last course, it is the authoritarian communists, no less; who place obstacles before organisation and mass activity and set out along the road diametrically opposed to that which will lead to communism and abolition of the state. It is they who are the ridiculous ones, as ridiculous as anyone who, wishing to travel east, sets out in the direction of the setting sun.

The authoritarians of communism, sectarians and dogmatists that they are, cannot appreciate that others are not like them; hence they charge us with their own shortcomings.

Our belief, in general terms, even when it comes to economic affairs—even though our hostility is focused mainly against its political manifestations—is that centralisation is the least useful way of running things, the least suited to the practical requirements of social living. But that does not by any means prevent us from conceding that there may be certain branches of production, certain public services, some offices of administration or exchange, and so on, where centralisation of functions is also needed. In which case no one will say a word against it. What matters for anarchists is that there should be no centralisation of power; it is worth pointing out here that there will be no imposition on everyone by force, on the pretext that it answers a practical need, of any method that has the support of only the few. A danger that will be eliminated if all government authority, and every police body, which might impose itself by force and through its monopoly of armed violence, is abolished from the outset.

To the neo-marxist error of compulsory and absolute centralisation, we do not oppose decentralisation in all things by force, for that would be to go to the opposite extreme. We prefer decentralised management; but ultimately, in practical and technical problems, we defer to free experience, in the light of which, according to the case and circumstances involved, a decision will be taken in the common interest for the expansion of production in such a way that neither under one system nor under the other can there ever arise the domination or exploitation of man by man.

There is no need to confuse the political centralisation of state power in the hands of the few with the centralisation of production. So much so that today production is not centralised in the government but is, rather, independent of it and is decentralised among the various property owners, industrialists, firms, limited companies, international companies, and so forth.

According to anarchists, the essence of the state is not (as the authoritarian communists imagine) the mechanical centralisation of production—which is a different issue, that we spoke of earlier — but, rather, centralisation of power “or to put it another way the coercive authority” of which the state enjoys the monopoly, in that organisation of violence known as “government”; in the hierarchical despotism, juridical, police, and military despotism that imposes its laws on everyone, defends the privileges of the propertied class and creates others of its own. But it goes without saying that should economic centralisation of production be added to centralisation in the more or less dictatorial government of all military and police powers—that is to say were the state to be simultaneously gendarme and boss and were the workplace likewise a barrack—then state oppression would become unbearable—and anarchists would find their reasons for hostility toward it multiplied.

Lamentably, this is the obvious end of the road on which authoritarian communists have set out. Even they would not deny that.

As a matter of fact, what do the communists want to carry into effect? What have they begun to construct in Russia? The most centralised, oppressive and violent dictatorship, statist and military. And what’s more, they simultaneously entrust or intend to entrust the management of social resources and production to this dictatorial state: which blows up state authority out of all proportion, transforming it moreover “to the utter detriment of production,” and which results in the establishment of a new privileged class or caste in place of the old one. Above all else “to the detriment of production”: that is worth emphasising; and the Russian example has shown that we were not mistaken— for if Russia finds herself in the throes of famine today it is indeed due to the infamous blockade of Western capitalism and the exceptional drought; but the “disorganising” impact of dictatorial bureaucratic, political and military centralisation have contributed mightily towards it.

Authoritarian communists claim that they too wish the abolition of the state: we have known that claim since the days of Marx and

All this goes under the name of “giving the proletarian organisations a broader power base”; and, as a result, the Russian anarchists no less, who quite logically and correctly have always opposed this real strangulation of the original soviet movement that arose freely out of the revolution (that is, they defend the soviets against dictators just as they have defended them against bourgeois aggression) the Russian anarchists turn—thanks to the miracle of marxist dialectic—into enemies of the soviets. Given their mentality, Marxists cannot understand that their so-called “soviet power” is the obliteration of the proletarian, people’s soviets and that, this being the case, opponents of so-called “soviet power” can be—provided, of course that this opposition comes from within the revolutionary, proletarian camp—the best friends of the proletarian soviets.

So anarchists do not in fact have this preconceived, principled aversion to “the methodical, organised form of mass action”—usually attributed to them in clichéd argument on account of our opponents’ sectarian approach—but rather oppose only the particularly authoritarian and despotic approach of the state communists, countering with the libertarian approach which is more apt to interest and mobilise the broad masses in that it leaves them scope for initiative and action and interests them in a struggle that is from the very outset a coordinated one, presenting them with expropriation as their chief and immediate objective.

It may be that this libertarian sense of direction will, likewise, not culminate in the abolition of the state—not because that is impossible but because there is not a sufficient number who want it, what with the still too numerous herd of humanity who feel in need of the shepherd and his stick—but in such a case it would be rendering the revolution a great service to succeed in holding on to as much freedom as possible, helping to determine that the eventual government is as weak, as decentralised, as undespotic as possible under the circumstances; that is to say, wringing the utmost utility from the revolution for the sake of the proletariat as well as the maximum well-being and freedom.

those who nonsensically describe anarchists as being opposed to mass organisations and accuse them of steering clear of participation in organised mass activity “on principle.” The truth of the matter is quite different. Anarchists see no incompatibility between the broad, collective action of the great masses and the more restricted activity of their free groups: far from it, they even strive to link the latter with the former so as to give it as far as possible the proper revolutionary sense of direction. And if anarchists do often discuss and criticise those proletarian organisations led by their opponents, they are not thereby fighting against organisation as such, but only against its taking a reformist, legalistic, authoritarian and collaborationist direction—this being something, by the way, which the authoritarian communists likewise engage in everywhere where they themselves are not the leaders of the proletarian organisation.

Some dictatorial communist writers—taking up the old social democrats’ fable that the anarchists want only to destroy and not to rebuild, and that they are thus opponents of mass organisation—reach the conclusion that by taking an interest in the soviets in Russia, anarchists are being inconsistent with their ideas and that it is merely a tactic to exploit the soviets and disorganise them.

If this is not slander pure and simple, it is beyond doubt proof of the inability of these mad dogs of authoritarianism—to understand anything apart from omnipotence for the state. According to the authoritarians of communism, the soviet regime consists not of free, self-governing soviets directly managing production and public services and so on but only of the government, the self-styled soviet government, that has in reality overridden the soviets, has abolished their every freedom to act and all spontaneity in their creation, and has reduced them to passive, mechanical underlings, obedient to the dictatorial central government. A government that whenever any soviet shows signs of independence, dissolves it without further ado and sets about conjuring up another artificial one that is more to its taste.

Engels. But the belief or the intention is not enough: it is necessary to act consistently from the very outset. In contrast, the dictatorial communists, because of the way they run their movement and the direction they would like to impose on the revolution, set out along exactly the opposite road to the one that leads to the abolition of the state and to communism.

They are heading straight for the “strong and sovereign state” of social democratic memory, towards a more arbitrary class rule, under which the proletariat of tomorrow will find itself constrained to make a fresh revolution. Let those communists who seriously want communism reflect on this fatal mistake that is undermining the very foundations of the whole edifice of the authoritarian communist parties, instead of wasting time fantasising on the imaginary errors of anarchists—those who have every right to reply to the criticisms of these state-worshippers of communism: “*physician, heal thyself!*”

III. The “Provisional” Dictatorship and the State

The truly essential point at issue, separating authoritarian from libertarian communists, is just what form the revolution should take. Some say statist; anarchistic say others.

It is fairly certain that between the capitalist regime and the socialist there will be an intervening period of struggle, during which proletariat revolutionary workers will have to work to uproot the remnants of bourgeois society, and it is fairly certain that they will have to play a leading role in this struggle, relying on the strength of their organisation. On the other hand, revolutionaries and the proletariat in general will need organisation to meet not just the demands of the struggle but also the demands of production and social life, which they cannot postpone.

But if the object of this struggle and this organisation is to free the proletariat from exploitation and state rule, then the role of guide, tutor or director cannot be entrusted to a new state, which would have an interest in pointing the revolution in a completely opposite direction.

The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists—in view of their being hostile to any form of government, even a transitional one—as the foes of all organisation and all coordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only

areas of the countryside—anarchist communists have no intention of adopting that sort of an approach as their own. In such cases, all revolutionaries would have an interest in averting too many clashes with certain strata of the population who could later be won over more easily by propaganda and the living proof of the superiority of libertarian communist organisation. What matters, above all else, is that the day after the revolution no one should have the power or the economic wherewithal to exploit the labour of another.

But we anarchists are of the opinion that we must begin now to prepare the masses—in spiritual terms through propaganda, and in material terms by means of anarchist proletarian organisation—to get on with discharging all functions of the struggle and with social, collective living, during and after the revolution; and one of the first among those functions will be expropriation.

In order to steer expropriation away from the initiatives of individuals or private groups there is in fact no need for a gendarmerie, and there is in fact no need to jump out of the frying pan into the fire of state control: there is no need FOR GOVERNMENT.

Already, from locality to locality everywhere, and closely inter-linked, the proletariat has a number of its own, free institutions, independent of the state; alliances and unions, labour rooms and co-operatives, federations, confederations, and so forth. During the revolution other collective bodies more attuned to the needs of the moment will be set up; still others of bourgeois origin, but radically altered, can be put to use, but we need not concern ourselves with them for the present except to say they are things like consortiums, independent bodies and so on. Russia herself in the earlier moments of her revolution—whenever the people still had freedom of initiative—has furnished us with the example of the creation of these new socialist and libertarian institutions in the form of her soviets and factory committees.

Anarchists have always regarded all such forms of free organisation of the proletariat and of the revolution as acceptable, despite

Capitalism would not cease to be, merely by changing from private to “state capitalism.” In such a case the state would have achieved not expropriation but appropriation. A multitude of bosses would give way to a single boss, the government, which would be a more powerful boss because in addition to having unlimited wealth it would have on its side the armed force with which to bend the proletariat to its will. And the proletariat, in the factories and fields, would still be wage slaves, that is, exploited and oppressed. And conversely, the state, which is no abstraction, but rather an organism created by men, would be the organised ensemble of all the rulers and bosses of tomorrow—who would have no problem in finding some sanction for their rule in a new legality based more or less on elections or a parliament.

“But,” they insist, “expropriation has to be carried out according to a given method, organised for the benefit of all; there is a need to know all about the available means of production, houses and land, and so on. Expropriation cannot be carried through by individuals or private groups that would turn it to their own selfish advantage, becoming new privileged property owners. And so there is a need for a proletarian power to cope with it.” That would all be fine, except for the sting in the tail! These people are really odd, wanting (in theory) to achieve the abolition of the state while in practice they cannot conceive of the most elementary social function without statist overtones!

Even anarchists do not think of expropriation in terms of some sort of “help yourself” operation, left to personal judgment, in the absence of any order.³ Even were it possible to predict as inevitable that expropriations, once disorder sets in, would take on an individualistic complexion—say, in the furthest flung places or certain

³ Bukharin is likewise critical of the antedeluvian idea of repartition of wealth, even should it be into equal shares. He is quite right, of course; but to include that in a general critique of anarchism is a real anachronism. One can find all that Bukharin says in this connection in any of the propaganda booklets or papers the anarchists have been publishing for the last forty years.

really effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.

Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority that make up the government; and, this notwithstanding, if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle.

The outcome would be that a new government—battening on the revolution and acting throughout the more or less extended period of its “provisional” powers—would lay down the bureaucratic, military and economic foundations of a new and lasting state organisation, around which a compact network of interests and privileges would, naturally, be woven. Thus in a short space of time what one would have would not be the state abolished, but a state stronger and more energetic than its predecessor and which would come to exercise those functions proper to it—the ones Marx recognised as being such—“keeping the great majority of producers under the yoke of a numerically small exploiting minority.”

This is the lesson that the history of all revolutions teaches us, from the most ancient down to the most recent; and it is confirmed—before our very eyes, one might say—by the day-to-day developments of the Russian revolution.

We need delay no longer on this issue of the “provisional” nature of dictatorial government. The harshest and most violent guise of authoritarianism would probably be temporary; but it is precisely during this violent stage of absorption and coercion that the foundations will be laid for the lasting government or state of tomorrow.

On the other hand, even the communists themselves are mightily distrustful of the “temporariness” of dictatorship. Some time ago Radek and Bordiga were telling us how it would last a generation (which is quite a long time). Now Bukharin, in his pamphlet, warns us that the dictatorship will have to last until such time as the workers have attained complete victory and such a victory will be possible “only when the proletariat has freed the whole world of the capitalist rabble and completely suffocated the bourgeoisie.”¹

If this were true, it would mean robbing the Russian people first, and every other people after them, of all hope of liberation, and put off the day of liberation to the Greek kalends, for it is well understood that however extensive and radical a revolution may be, before it manages to be victorious completely and worldwide not one but many generations must elapse.

Fortunately, such anti-revolutionary pessimism is quite erroneous. It is, what is more, an error in the pure reformist tradition, by which an attempt was made in Italy in 1919–20 to impede any revolutionary enterprise “doomed to failure unless the revolution were carried out in every other country as well.” In reality, revolution is also possible in relatively restricted areas. Limitation in space implies a limitation in intensity, but the working class will still have won a measure of emancipation and liberty worthy of the efforts made, unless it makes the mistake of emasculating itself—by which we mean relying upon the good offices of a government, instead of relying solely on itself, on its own resources, its own autonomous organisation.

“the proletariat is always proletariat even after its victory, after it succeeds to the position of ruling class...”²

¹ In Bukharin and Preobrazhensky’s ABC of Communism they go even further: “Two or three generations of persons will have to grow up under the new conditions before the need will pass for laws and punishments and for the use of repression by the workers’ state.”

² We repeat that communist objections to anarchism, which we reprint in quotations or in heavier type, are genuinely from N. Bukharin.

The proletariat is always proletariat? Oh! Then what becomes of the revolution? This is precisely the essence of the bolshevik error, of the new revolutionary jacobinism: in conceiving of the revolution, from the outset, as a merely political act, the mere stripping of the bourgeois of their governmental powers to replace them with the leaders of the communist party, while “*the proletariat remains proletariat*,” that is to say, deprived of everything and having to go on selling its labour for an hourly or daily wage if it is to make a living! If that happens, it is the expected failure of the revolution!

Sure, class differences do not vanish at the stroke of a pen whether that pen belongs to the theoreticians or to the pen-pushers who set out laws and decrees. Only action, that is to say direct (not through government) expropriation by the proletarians, directed against the privileged class, can wipe out class differences. And that is an immediate possibility, from the very outset, once the old power has been toppled; and it is a possibility for as long as no new power is set up. If, before proceeding with expropriation, the proletariat waits until a new government emerges and becomes strong, it risks never attaining success and remaining the proletariat for ever, that is to say, exploited and oppressed for ever. And the longer it waits before getting on with expropriation, the harder that expropriation will be; and if it then relies on a government to be the expropriator of the bourgeoisie, it will end up betrayed and beaten! The new government will be able to expropriate the old ruling class in whole or in part, but only so as to establish a new ruling class that will hold the greater part of the proletariat in subjection.

That will come to pass if those who make up the government and the bureaucratic, military and police minority that upholds it end up becoming the real owners of wealth when the property of everyone is made over exclusively to the state. In the first place, the failure of the revolution will be self evident. In the second, in spite of the illusions that many people create, the conditions of the proletariat will always be those of a subject class.