

Anarchist Communists

A Question of Class

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

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0. Preface to the English edition

The Federation of Anarchist Communists (FdCA) was founded in 1985 on the principle of the theoretical and strategic unity of its members, a principle which it still holds to and will continue to do so. This principle means that the FdCA is based on its positions which are shared by the entire federated membership.

These positions are set out in a number of original Theoretical Documents which represent the unity of the Federation and its policies. They also represent the unity of its militants, federated into a single political organization and individually and collectively responsible for the political life and the political decisions of the FdCA.

Our Theoretical Documents are divided into Theory, Basic Strategy, Political Strategy and General Tactics.

The documents which go to make up our Theory represent the unique, united and characteristic identity of the Federation. They set out the Federation's revolutionary role and its political function as historical memory and active minority, a role which has been indicated by the experience of the revolutionary proletariat throughout the history of the class struggle.

Our Theory currently consists of two documents: "*Teoria dei Comunisti Anarchici*" and "*Comunisti Anarchici: Una questione di classe*." This booklet is a translation of the latter of these documents which was first published in 2003.

Basic Strategy consists of those documents which set out the long-term strategic role of our class enemies the role of the mass organization and the political organization and the tasks of these organizations during the transition to communism. Political Strategy consists of documents which set out in the short term the social, political and economic context of the class struggle and the strategic role of the mass organizations and the political organization, while our General Tactics are concerned with the immediate role of these organizations within the current context of the class struggle.

This system of Theoretical Documents was conceived so that the FdCA would always be in a position to understand the nature of its role and its actions and so that it can engage in a continuing process of strategic reflection and analysis, learning always from the class struggle, promoting internal debate and thereby avoiding ideological rigidity.

On our website at www.fdca.it you can find most of our Theoretical Documents in Italian and several documents of Basic Strategy and General Tactics also available in English.

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1. Theoreticians

Anarchist Communism is not the pure fruit of some intellectual adventure. It is not the result, happy as it may be, of certain individuals who, sheltered from history, have meditated on humanity's destiny. It is not the (generous) answer of a few utopians to the ills of contemporary society and to its patent injustices. It is not the search for an ideal of perfection which can satisfy the need for harmony of minds requiring abstract ponderings. Anarchist Communism was born both from and within the struggles of the proletariat and has therefore little to do with the innate aspirations of man towards less iniquitous forms of social organization. Hence, we will not be searching for its roots in the philosophical systems of more or less ancient times (even though they may have provided food for thought, as is also the case with certain other forms of political thought born around the same time, such as Marxism or liberal ideology). We will concentrate only on the stratification of ideas laid down in one component of the workers' and proletarian movement beginning with the First International (1864) and continuing until today.

All this, however, does not mean that there have never been individuals whose reflections have made a fundamental contribution to the development of the ideological corpus which bears the name of Anarchist Communism and we will be dedicating brief sections to them, with three premises. The first is that none of them was simply a thinker who observed the evolution of events in the class struggle from without or who held a directing role, giving him the sole task of furnishing policies and analyses. All were politically active full-time in the daily goings-on of the movement and for this reason their contribution is often fragmentary, consisting of one-off articles or pamphlets hurriedly written in the heat of the moment, with the train of thought in progress and often not brought to a conclusion. Their thinking, therefore, although it may not always be systematically presented in broad works resulting from years of planning, is nonetheless coherent in its own way, with a thread which needs to be established with patience and care, though this is often the cause of the diverse interpretations which can be made.

The second premise is that those who we remember here are not the only thinkers which Anarchist Communism can boast. Others have contributed greatly to the development of our ideas and analyses. We simply wish to underline the fact that these three names each represented a significant turning point in the evolution of Anarchist Communist theory.

Finally, the third premise is that we ask the reader not to be shocked by the absence from this brief collection of certain classic names which appear in every history of anarchism (William Godwin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Pëtr Alekseevich Kropotkin, etc.) or comrades who have been so valuable to the Anarchist Communist movement in particular (Émile Pouget, Errico Malatesta, Nestor Ivanovich Makhno, etc.). The former are not included as they represent trains of thought which are often distant from Anarchist Communism. The latter are omitted because, although their system of thought may have been rigorous, they did not represent milestones to the extent that we wish to emphasise here. We will leave to another moment a systematic study of the evolution of Anarchist Communist theory, one where every influence can be examined and evaluated more fully.

1.1. Bakunin (or Origins)

In the history of anarchist ideas, Mikhail Aleksandrovič Bakunin (1814–1876) represents a fundamental stage and is without doubt the basis for every form of class-struggle anarchism. His adventure-filled life, together with a distinct lack of any systematic approach, means that what was said above regarding the necessity for tiresome reconstruction of trains of thought is completely true where he is concerned, coherent and organic though his thought may be. Clues spread here and there throughout pamphlets, articles, letters, notes and so on are normally what constitute his analysis of the moment and are therefore destined to be used for the most disparate purposes, given the fact that they have never been arranged into one collection which could serve to clarify them one and for all. Even so, careful reading of his work should not lead to excessive misunderstandings (unless that is what one wants). As we have said, though, that job will be for another time. Here, what we are trying to do is simply trace the basic elements of his thoughts as part of the process of the development of Anarchist Communist theory.

His work, in fact, already included some of the distinctive elements of this theory, such as what the new society should be like, the role of the vanguard, organizational dualism and the need for a revolutionary strategy which grows from consciousness of the economic and class relations of the current situation at any time. Each of these topics will be dealt with later. At this point, we are simply emphasising Bakunin's contribution to their definition.

It is thanks to him that Anarchism was able to move on from the proto-Anarchist wastelands of Godwin and Proudhon, free itself from the myth of the individual and his freedom guaranteed by possession, and become genuinely collectivist and, later still, communist. The future society which he imagined was federalist, based on the free union of local communes and productive communes and which was anti-hierarchical but which was no longer (as under Proudhon) centred on the nucleus of the artisan family, proud of its skills and the owners of the necessary means of production. Instead, these means were to become considered to be under collective management through the workings of producers' and consumers' associations.

The role of the vanguard in the revolutionary process was a constant source of worry for Bakunin. **"If the popular risings in Lyons, Marseilles and other cities in France were failures, it is because of a lack of organization [...]"** For him, the organization must be composed of individuals who were conscious of their aims, who were in agreement and who were therefore much more united. His taste for conspiracy, which was part of his impulsively romantic nature, combined with the need for clandestinity (something which was clearly essential given the times in which he lived) led him towards an almost too rigid conception of organization, one which was unacceptable not only to most Anarchists, but even to the most hard-bitten Marxists one could hope to meet. If any convincing is needed, just read a few pages of the pamphlet *"To the Officers of the Russian Army."* But even though these extreme positions (conceived as they were under the influence of Sergei Gennadievich Nechaev) may seem almost folkloristic, the fact remains that Bakunin did conceive of the organization of conscious class-struggle militants (Anarchist Communists) as a structure which took its decisions in a democratic way but which was disciplined, where the roles that each played corresponded to the assumption of responsibilities without which the group could not function or be effective. All this was possible without getting lost in sophistry over the need for every individual to have freedom of action, something which has gravely retarded the development of the Anarchist movement. There were two good reasons for all this. The first is that membership of the organization is voluntary, which in itself

requires clarity regarding the rules which the organization uses in order to develop its revolutionary action and, of course, acceptance of these rules. The second reason is that the political organization is not, for Bakunin at least, the forerunner of the future society which must instead permeate through the lives of the masses, and cannot therefore mirror it in any way, but must simply respond to its tasks in the most efficient way possibly.

Which leads us to the third basic characteristic of Bakuninist thought — the strict separation between the political organization and that of the proletariat. The former, conscious of its aims, organized and disciplined, is at the heart of the revolution, directing its evolution, promoting and supporting it. The latter, gathering all the exploited masses to it, is the one which actually makes the revolution and builds the society of free equals by following an arduous path through the inevitable initial chaos. In making this distinction, there is no hint of leaderist Blanquism (or, as we would call it today, Leninism), as the organization of the revolutionary vanguard has no role to play unless it is within the larger workers' organization. It does not take their place when decisions are to be made, it simply limits itself to trying to guide, to steer the masses along their revolutionary path.

In order to do this, the political structure of the revolutionary vanguard must not only enunciate principles, as sterile as they are correct. It must set forth concrete proposals relevant to the time and place where it acts. This means analysing the historical context wherever it operates as Bakunin himself did admirably when he analysed the situation in Italy and suggested what he thought would be useful in his letter to the Italian internationalists addressed to Celso Ceretti. All this without underestimating some aspects which, although they may seem peripheral, are in fact fundamental if the organization is to be properly effective, such as financing and making available resources which will allow it to exist.

These four principles, proposed clearly for the first time by Bakunin, will always be part of the evolution of Anarchist Communist theory and represent its permanent framework.

1.2. Fabbri (or Maturity)

Luigi Fabbri (1877–1935) had a much less adventurous life than Bakunin, but spent his militant life in both the specific Anarchist movement and in the organizations of the workers' movement. His name, even among Anarchist old-timers, is often shadowed by that of his contemporary, Errico Malatesta.

However, without wishing to take away from the importance the latter played as the spark — theoretical, too — of the movement (think, for example, of the clarity with which he approached the debate on the role of the unions with Pierre Monatte at the 1907 Amsterdam Congress), Fabbri's position was more coherent, not as heavily veined with generic and tendentially inter-class humanism, and more thorough with regard to the role of the political organization. Fabbri can be said to have brought those ideas which Bakunin had elaborated during his work in the First International to their logical conclusion, providing Anarchist Communist theory with a complete and self-consistent, almost definitive framework.

The role of the mass organization (or labour union) was always clearly defined for Fabbri as the sole, irreplaceable agent of revolution, but it is also necessarily the only possible place where the proletariat can spend its revolutionary apprenticeship. For this reason it cannot distance itself too much from the levels of consciousness expressed by the real masses, or it risks turning into

the virtual image which the vanguard makes of the revolutionary movement, in other words the fruit of a desire and not of the reality of class war.

“Those among the workers who have determined convictions [...] within the class organizations must realize that there are those in there with them who do not share their ideas and that therefore, out of respect for the opinions and freedoms of others, they are obliged to maintain the pact for which the organizations were created, working around common goals without wanting to lead them towards special goals (even apparently good ones) which do not correspond to the desires of others.” From this the workers’ organization is doomed to split (for example the split that led to the creation of the *Unione Sindacale Italiana*, even if this was the work of the “reformists’ evil plans”). Side by side with the mass organization, he foresaw the presence of a cohesive, structured political organization and, in fact, after World War I was one of the promoters of the *Unione dei Comunisti Anarchici d’Italia* (UCAd’I – Union of Anarchist Communists of Italy), before Malatesta’s drive for unanimity led to the formation of the *Unione Anarchici Italiani* (UAI – Union of Italian Anarchists).

In 1926, when the international Anarchist movement was jolted by the organizational proposals which had been set forth by a group of Russian refugees in Paris (Makhno, Ida Mett, Piotr Arshinov, etc.), the “Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists – Project,” and many prestigious militants cried scandal because of what they considered to be its overly leaderist tones, Fabbri took a most responsible position and recognized that it placed “in the arena of discussion a number of problems regarding the Anarchist movement, the place of Anarchists in the revolution, the organization of Anarchism in the struggles, and so on, which need to be solved if Anarchist doctrine is to continue to respond to the growing needs of the struggle and of social life in the present-day world.”

Lastly, we should remember that it was his lucid analyses which allowed him to be the first to clearly foresee developments in the Russian Revolution (which had just taken place) and the counter-revolutionary nature of the coming Fascist regime.

1.3. Berneri (or Innovation)

Camillo Berneri (1897–1937) is representative of the latest generation of the theoreticians of militant Anarchism, anarchism at the height of its development. The losses incurred from the Spanish War through the loss of a good many active members of the movement, from the Fascist regimes through the dispersion of a century of accumulated experience and from World War II through the emergence of the bipolar world order and the disappearance of every alternative to Capitalism except Stalinist Communism, have had the effect of not allowing a new Anarchist Communist theory to develop. Few original thinkers have emerged (perhaps the only ones were Daniel Guérin and Murray Bookchin, though the latter starts from positions which have nothing to do with class-struggle Anarchism). The re-elaboration of theory suffered an enormously grave interruption, to the point where even the memory of basic points of that theory which is Anarchist and Communist at the same time was lost and required a long and laborious recovery. The ability to analyse the present situation, too, came to a long halt and only recently have we found Noam Chomsky to be an extremely lucid representative, the likes of which had not been seen for over half a century. It has only been for about the last thirty years that the real lineaments of the various products of the Anarchist movement and its role as an integral part of the

proletariat, an idea of class struggle and not just the product of the vague utopian wanderings of a few philosophers lost in their sophistry, has emerged from the mists of disinformation which had shrouded its distinguishing features, disfiguring it.

In his thinking, Berneri demonstrated intolerance for dogmas at an early stage, above all where they came from a collection of assertions which were superficially accepted and were not sufficiently examined for their truth. His was, then, a strongly innovative contribution which was not tied to any preconceived systems which would anyway end up creating barriers for the development of the idea. Unfortunately, his premature death in revolutionary Barcelona at the hands of hired Stalinist thugs put an end to his theoretical development (and, as we have seen, to that of the entire movement). It is therefore easier to understand the potential in his original elaborations (original, though within the definition of class-struggle Anarchism) than to point to a complete corpus of doctrine. The most interesting elements are to be found in his analysis of post-revolutionary society, of its possible methods, of the contradictions which it will encounter and resolve. Berneri's theoretical exploration heralded positive developments which were necessary even at the time in which he lived in order to clear the mists which had already enveloped the presumed orthodoxy of the day, whose sterile ideas were useless for day-to-day action.

Lastly, he was also the bearer of what could be called *possibilism*, or a willingness to confront and to consider the conquests of the day, something which distinguishes him from that mass of automatons, his contemporaries (still appreciated today by their many imitators). This even taking into account the total intransigence of his basic principles which frequently led him into conflict with the Stalinists to such extent that they felt forced to eliminate him physically — any adversary who interfered in their matters was dangerous for them.

2. Events

As we have done with the Anarchist Communist thinkers, so will we do with the history of the class-struggle Anarchist movement. We will limit ourselves simply to summarizations of some important events, above all in relation to their relevance for the development of our theoretical guidelines. For the founders of the theory we have just indicated a few representatives without denying the importance of other contributions, consistent as they may be. We have only dealt with those that seemed to us to be the most relevant to the development of a theory which became more and more self-consistent, and have left it to other specific works to engage in a methodical treatment of the theoretical systems of the individuals examined and also those others who, over the space of a century and a half, have contributed, often in an extremely important way.

History, too, is replete with significant episodes which absolutely must not be forgotten. Even the few events which we will take into consideration deserve much better, much deeper treatment. What we intend to do here is only to highlight the most significant stages of the historical evolution.

But first, a premise: all the historically relevant events in the Anarchist movement in general are the fruit of its class component and not of those who presume to distribute certificates of orthodoxy and hand out excommunications to anyone who does not remain within the boundaries of supposedly sacred principles (which, as we have seen, do not even have a historical basis in the birth of Anarchism). From the often decisive presence in key moments of the struggle by the exploited for their emancipation to the creation of their instruments of resistance, from the struggle for freedom from various oppressors to the most advanced experiments in the building of a society which is not based on the exploitation of one man by another, Anarchist Communists have left traces of their presence and their activity while others thrashed out the purity of their ideas and their rigorous adherence to what they considered to be unalterable precepts, thereby saving their souls without providing any real contribution to the emancipation of the proletariat.

From a different point of view, it was exactly this constant presence in the struggles of the exploited which gave rise to the collection of experiences, later reflection on these experiences and on their concrete results, and consequently the origin of the theory itself, making Anarchist Communists the acting vanguard and historical memory of the proletariat.

2.1. The Paris Commune (1871; an improvisation)

At the time when the Parisian proletariat gave birth to the Commune, there was no political organization which had elaborated a plan of action. It was the difficult situation of the period following the war with Prussia, the existing social conditions which contrasted with the hope aroused by the birth of the First International, and the tradition of vanguard that the French workers' movement had enjoyed for decades which created the mix that sparked the first authentically self-managed proletarian experiment on a vast scale.

When Adolphe Thiers moved all the structures of the French State to Paris from Versailles, a vacuum was created which the Commune filled, without almost any plan. Even the Blanquists, the strongest and least heterogeneous group within the Commune, did not have clear ideas on what to do, apart from creating the most centralized revolutionary government possible. They had no social plan. The others (Jacobins, Proudhonians, Internationalists, etc.) were few and divided amongst themselves and were swamped by the elected representatives of the people who had no political direction. The Jacobins had their heads in the past and had nothing to say about the future. The Proudhonians were practically inexistent, as their traditional representatives were against the Commune. The Internationalists were split between a few Marxists, some Syndicalists and a section of militants or Anarchists (Louise Michel, Louis-Jean Pindy) or people very close to Bakuninist ideas (Eugène Varlin), but none of these had a stable relationship with libertarian organizations. Bakunin's comrades in France had mostly departed following the ruinous failure of an attempted Commune in Lyons the previous year.

This was how the Paris Commune proceeded for a few months before being drowned in blood (there may have been 30,000 dead and 45,000 taken prisoner). It took no precise direction and did not therefore foreshadow any complete social model. The surprising thing, and its greatest legacy to the workers' movement, is that despite the quarrels inside the Commune, the dangers from outside, the state of war in which it found itself operating and despite the lack of a politically mature element, the daily life of the Commune was organized, services worked well or badly as may be, production continued. Even a fairly respectable military defence organization was set up.

This period is not only essential in order to understand the development of the international workers' movement and the emblematic role that the Commune of 1871 has always played in it, but it is fundamental in the development of Anarchist Communist theory. Karl Marx was, to say the least, surprised by the events in Paris and was rapidly forced to revise some of his conceptions of the workers' state, which he did by publishing "The Civil War in France." For Bakunin, everything that happened was natural and formed part of his theory — even, to a certain extent, the errors of the Commune and its defeat. It was not, in fact, surprising that the proletariat was able to organize itself spontaneously and efficiently. Speaking with the benefit of hindsight (in the light of experiences of later revolutions), neither was it surprising that the path of post-revolutionary society followed the correct way towards ever more self-managing structures, searching for federative alliances with similar groups. This is the natural way of things whenever the revolution is not led astray by perverting theories. In fact, the absence of already-existing organizations with a definite programme serves to prove this elementary fact, in the case of the Commune.

On the other hand, it was the very absence of a conscious vanguard (which, according to Anarchist Communist theory, must orient the revolution, not direct it, and must protect it from deviations, not impose its own beliefs) which constituted the weakness of the Commune and stopped it from acting resolutely thereby isolating it from the rest of France. By then, France was resigned to defeat and was firmly under the control of reaction. Revolution either expands and contaminates or it perishes!

2.2. Ukraine (1917–1921; an idea)

The revolution in Ukraine has remained an unknown episode to this day thanks to the thick veil of disinformation which Soviet propaganda draped over it and thanks also to the complicity of official Western historiography. The real facts of the matter have so far escaped serious historical analysis. The vastness of the event (around two million people were involved) and its duration (its fortunes waxed and waned over a period of about four years) make it, however, a key episode in the history of Anarchist Communism. Any reflection on its development and final results can only provide an enormous font of practical and theoretical stimuli for Anarchist Communist theory. The reader is, as usual, advised to study the texts specifically regarding this event in order to find detailed accounts of the events and information on how they fitted into the immense and complicated panorama of the 1917 Russian Revolution. We will limit ourselves here to reflecting on its theoretical influences.

The first point of reflection is in fact its size and duration. What happened was not due solely to the “immense libertarian soul” of the Ukrainian people, for their atavistic intolerance of any sort of dominator (something already noted by Bakunin), or for their peasant traditions and their strong ties to the earth, the font of all life. All this obviously had an influence but they are conditions which have historically existed in other times and places without producing the same results. Instead, there was a detonator, a catalyst of confused aspirations, something which channelled the people’s unheeded needs. That something was an organization of comrades who had already been militants for a long time, who were well versed in the practice of struggle and in theory and who had a firm point of reference in the personality of Nestor Ivanovich Makhno (1888–1934).

The Makhnovist experience provides us with two distinctive points for consideration. The first is the particular role which the revolutionary vanguard played. Secondly, there are the ideas that resulted from contemplation of its defeat.

We have said that Anarchist Communism does not see the role of the vanguard in the revolutionary process as one of direction or management, but as one of orienting the process from within, guarding against any deviations it might fall victim to either through any lack of clarity on the part of the masses involved or, and above all, those caused by erroneous recipes introduced from without which might poison the whole process. In the case of the Ukrainian revolution, the Anarchist Communist vanguard placed great emphasis on this second aspect, even to the point of taking on that most thankless of tasks of all time — the creation of an army of defence. This choice, which was nonetheless unavoidable, was responsible for the more expert comrades (such as Makhno) being seen more as an ideal point of reference rather than as a real part of the social evolution which was taking place. On the one hand, this confirmed that idea that the spontaneous development of the masses, not deviated by ideologies which propose models claiming to be solutions to every problem and for this reason referring to themselves as scientific, naturally tends towards collectivism and self-management. On the other hand, however, it is exactly by acting as a physical barrier to any external influences that the idea takes root that the enemies of the revolution are to be found on the outside, both counter-revolutionaries and those who set themselves up as the proletariat’s only revolutionary party, giving in this case a visible, palpable form to the role of safeguarding the integrity of the revolutionary process which was played by the Anarchist Communist vanguard.

Unfortunately, the external difficulties (civil war — the main theatre of which was in Ukraine itself, the sacrifice of the region by the Bolshevik government as part of the peace of Brest-Litovsk and the consequent arrival of German troops, the hostility of the Bolsheviks towards an experiment which challenged their theories on the workers' state and the guiding party) placed the possibility of revolution in doubt along with any territorial or chronological continuity and threatened the chances of success. The treaties between the Makhnovist army and Lev Davidovich Trotsky's Red Army, which were made in order to defeat the various White generals who threatened the area (Anton Ivanovich Denikin, Pëtr Nikolaevich Vrangeli, etc.), were not an act of faith in the central government of Moscow but were rather an attempt to confront one enemy at a time, starting with the most threatening and imminent. The confrontation with the Bolsheviks was put off until later as they were further away, they had not yet established themselves socially, there were difficult contradictions with the peasant masses all over Russia, they had internal divisions in the party and a section of their militant base (the sailors and factory workers) were potentially closer to anarchist positions. On the other hand, Lenin had managed to carry through the October Revolution with more-than-dubious means: the slogan "All power to the soviets!", which had upset the Bolsheviks' own ideas in April 1917, came from the Anarcho-Syndicalists and was responsible for a large section of the workers' movement deciding to lend their support to the party. This was, however, a very damaging conflict for the movement, and reflection on the reasons for defeat was the subject of careful reconsideration which later led the Paris-based Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad to propose the "Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists — Project," which we have already mentioned.

The analysis was simple and profound. The Bolsheviks had won because they had a compact organization which had a sense of direction and branched into every area which the revolution had reached. The Anarchists were divided into little groups which were often in disagreement with each other and did not have a common plan. They could not possibly have the same political weight. The *Makhnovshchina* remained isolated (as happened during the Paris Commune) and Lenin's party had no difficulty in methodically tightening the noose around their necks. The question of Anarchist Communist organization had by now become unavoidable.

2.3. Spain (1936–1939; a project)

The Spanish Revolution was hurried on by the announcement of General Francisco Franco, forcing the workers' organizations (and in particular the CNT) to accelerate their programmes. But despite this, the Anarchist Communists (CNT-FAI) were not caught unawares. A few months previously during its congress in Zaragoza, the CNT had approved a programme for **Libertarian Communism**, which set out the path towards the achievement of a society of free equals. So, in those areas where its influence on the proletariat was greatest, they immediately began a series of collectivizations of land, industry and services which produced a rough sketch of a self-managed society with some noticeable results. It should be noted that the CNT was strongest in those areas, such as Catalonia, where economic development was most advanced, a fact which provides a strong argument against the fantastic theory of Marxists (which, besides, has no basis in theoretical analysis or historical research) that states that Anarchism can only establish itself in places which remain in a primitive state of development (peasants and small producers) and which would be eclipsed by progress.

By reason of its size and duration, the Spanish experience is comparable to that of Ukraine, but enjoyed without doubt much greater chronological and geographic continuity. So much so that today it represents the most valuable example of the realization of Anarchist Communism. This is not surprising in the light of what has been said above about the existence in the ranks of militants of a precise and detailed project and in the light of the long revolutionary preparation which the Spanish proletariat had accumulated at the time and, lastly, in light of the fact that the CNT represented not only the most radical, conscious wing of the proletariat, but was also the one which was best rooted among the masses.

So why the defeat? Let us leave aside for now any judgement on the entry into government by the better-known Anarchist militants, first in Catalonia, then in the central government. It may have been an error, but it certainly did not have a determining influence on events. First of all, because when these choices were made, the fate of the Republic was already on the cards and, secondly, though they may not have been able to guarantee success for the revolution, threatened by a section of the republican coalition itself (notably the Stalinists, who were at the time guarantors of the interests of the Spanish bourgeoisie and the Soviet state), they certainly did not in any way damage the social experiments under way, above all in Catalonia.

Without doubt the choice of the enemy to strike early played a considerable role, so much so that Zaragoza (where Anarchist Communists had their most consistent presence) was lost straight away. Divisions within the republican ranks also played their part, in particular the clever, but perverting, way in which the *Partido Comunista Español* was able to impose its “two halves” policy (first, victory in the civil war and only then the social revolution) even using force, turning its arms on the peasants’ collectivity instead of on the external enemy.

All this cannot, however, explain completely what happened. The Anarchist Communists were prepared for events. They had a precise, detailed programme. They enjoyed wide influence among the proletariat. They had excellent, able militants. Even though they committed errors or seemed uncertain at times, this did not suffice to damage their initial advantage or the outcome of the revolution. Once again it was the factor of isolation (on an international scale this time) which was fundamental. The democracies around Spain, whether out of fear of the rising Nazi and Fascist aggression (which, it was hoped, could be placated through a policy of appeasement — for example Neville Chamberlain in 1938 in Britain) or out of fear of a possible spread of revolutionary conquests to their countries (for example in Léon Blum’s France), limited themselves to verbal support and left the field open for military intervention in support of the Francoist rebels on the part of Italy and Germany. The USSR could not stand by and watch the birth of a new revolutionary pole for the international proletariat to gather round and was already on the way to making a treaty with the Nazis (the Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty), which was signed at the same time as the fall of Madrid. Hence its formal support, without substance. Like many others, Anarchist Communists hurried to lend assistance to the Republic by joining the international brigades, but their help was in terms of manpower. They were unable to share their experiences, something which could have allowed the Spanish to use this experience to further their own struggle, mainly as a result once again of a lack of a general organization which alone could have protected the social revolution from choking to death.

It should also be added that the experience of the international brigades, with the armed clashes between the Anarchist Communists and Stalinists within the Republican forces, led to distorted conclusions in the libertarian movement. As a result, many militants, and with them the young people who were later attracted to Anarchism, developed a ferocious opposition (not

backed up by careful analysis) to the communism which had been achieved in the Soviet Union and, as an extension of this, to Communism in the widest sense. Thus began a long slide which led to some preferring, of all things, Liberal Democracy and often deep-rooted, violent anti-Communism.

3. Why Communist: what we have in common with the left

Throughout its history, there has been a fringe within the Anarchist movement which, as a result of a philosophical defence of the individual (seen as some self-sufficient monad), has resulted in a completely reactionary contempt of the masses. But a very large majority of the Anarchist movement (almost the entire movement) has always been a part of “the left” and has defended the weakest, the exploited, fighting doggedly for their liberation.

Some Anarchists, while declaring themselves to be part of the left and believing that their theory can liberate the whole of humanity (both servants and masters), have come to believe that good ideas live by themselves — all it needs is for them to be understood. So, their main task has ended up as pure, idealistic propaganda and a consequent refusal of class struggle.

They have, on the one hand, refused organization on the basis that it is an essentially authoritarian principle and, on the other hand driven by a blind hatred (and not by a precise analysis) of Marxism, they believe that society divided into classes is not a reality but some philosophical invention of Trier’s. The result of all this is inaction and sterility.

Among the class-struggle currents of the Anarchist movement there are three which use the term communist in their theoretical definitions (Libertarian Communism, Anarcho-Communism and Anarchist Communism) whereas others make reference to syndicalism (Revolutionary Syndicalism, various forms of Anarcho-Syndicalism). We will deal with these distinctions later on.

It should be noted at this stage that the term Communism refers openly to the acceptance of class principles which distinguish all revolutionary leftists, irrespective of their school of thought.

In fact it was Anarchists who first adopted the term on a wide scale. Its early adoption represented early maturity on the part of the Anarchist movement, which passed from the Collectivist phase to which Bakunin was still linked (“*from each according to their ability, to each in relation to their work*”), to the truly egalitarian phase (“*from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs*”).

Until such times as Anarchists adopted the communist adjective, around the end of the 19th century, it had been relegated to certain unimportant utopian sects such as the Icarians who were influenced by Étienne Cabet.

Initially, it was the Marxists who had assumed the name. Marx and Engels chose it, in fact, for their small group of German immigrants in Britain, the Communist League, and used it in their 1848 work, the “Communist Manifesto.” Successively, however, they fell back on the term **Social Democracy** in all countries, partly as a result of their alliance with the Lassallians which led to the birth of the German Social Democratic Party, and partly because the Communist programme was judged to be too advanced for political movements which still had to act within bourgeois societies which had not yet developed fully. Orthodox Marxism, in fact, believed that before there could be a social revolution, the bourgeoisie had to develop all its progressive potential and the proletariat had to cooperate in this, because only when this task of the proprietary classes had

been exhausted and when bourgeois society had turned on itself, could the contradictions within it explode, giving rise to the new era of proletarian domination.

It was only after the Russian Revolution of October 1917 that Marxist parties all over the world returned to the use of the adjective communist. By that stage, though, Anarchist Communists had already been using the term for around half a century as a synonym of class-struggle Anarchism.

3.1. Method (historical materialism)

Any activity which is designed to transform the existing situation and change the structure of society cannot but come from an analysis of the situation it finds itself in. The absence of such an analysis inevitably leads to an inability to understand and establish what objectives to aim for in order to obtain the desired transformation, what the social structure's weak points are, what its contradictions are. It is impossible, in other words, to prepare a revolutionary project (which in order to be just that, apart from being clear in its aims, must inevitably mark out a direction which can guide its action).

The absence of a project conceals to a greater or lesser extent the conviction (at times implicit and not understood) that the contradictions in the present social structure can contain within them the inevitable end of the capitalist system. In other words, a mechanical, spontaneist conception which for that very reason believes in the self-destruction of the system, which involuntarily activates, but above all without the possibility of dispensation, its own process of extinction (for example by allowing the proletariat's rage to grow, organize and explode). The long, messianic and useless wait for the cathartic moment of revolution which has been with us for well over a century now, has definitively proved this approach. If only the Luxemburgists knew!

What we need to do, then, is begin this analysis, but first of all we must define a methodology which we can use to interpret the situation. In defining a method of analysis, the first thing to be said is that it does not, and must not, have any pretence of being absolutely *objective*. Methods designed for different aims are inevitably different. One thing, however, is important: the method, which we will analyse and define, without doubt provides the only key to reading both the past and the present. In other words, it is the only one which can make sense of the varied panorama of scattered facts which present themselves. On the other hand, this does not mean that we will abandon it if certain facts cannot be explained by it; first of all, because there is as yet no other method which is as successful as far as the interpretation of history is concerned; secondly, because history is not a linear process without contradictory aspects, which can therefore require a comprehensive outline in which every aspect can be contained (our method takes account of and has as its proposition, this contradictory fact, and seeks only to re-construct the lines which undergo historical development); lastly, because historical materialism, the method we are talking about, is simply too appropriate for our ends and it has provided too many positive results in the history of the proletariat.

Its most precise definition is provided by Marx and Engels:

"The first historical action is therefore the creation of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself, and this is precisely a historical action, a fundamental condition of any history, which still today, as millennia ago, must be accomplished every day and every hour simply to keep man alive [...]. In every conception of history

therefore, the first point is that this fundamental fact be observed in all its facets and that its place be recognized.”

Historical materialism is therefore a methodology for the analysis of historical facts which can establish the primary cause for these in the evolution of the productive structure of society, in the development of relationships and forces of production; every event that history presents us with is therefore not the result of ideas and the clash between different conceptions of life, but the result of the economic interests at stake — direct and indirect manifestations of the relationships which establish themselves with human society in the production of those goods which are necessary for the satisfaction of our historically and socially determined material needs. History is not the history of ideas. Ideas are backdrops created by real movements that can themselves, however, influence the movements. History is the history of the antagonisms created by the production relationships. It is the history of the struggle between the classes.

3.2. Classes (the protagonists)

The “*class-struggle left*,” “*class-struggle unions*” or “*class interests*” are common expressions in political phrasebooks. But what are classes for Anarchist Communists, or indeed for the entire radical left, Marxist and otherwise? They are the social groups that can be identified on the basis of their position in the cycle of production and the distribution of goods. For Marxists (for a majority of them, at least), the definition is quite rigid. There are basically two classes. First, those who control the means of production (capital, structures, production machinery, etc.) and who, on the basis of this ownership, obtain a privileged share of the goods which are produced without themselves working on the transformation of raw materials into finished goods. Then there are those (the proletariat) who own only their ability to work (their labour force) which they sell to the former group (the bosses) in exchange for a wage which allows them and their families to survive and reproduce (the very word “proletariat” comes from the Latin *prōlēs*, meaning “offspring”). Others, such as the middle class are destined to disappear into the proletariat, while the poor who are unable even to make their way into the labour markets survive as an underclass (the “lumpenproletariat”) and do not merit a class identity, serving only to keep wage levels down thanks to competition with the employed, something which serves the interests of the bosses alone.

For Anarchist Communists from Bakunin onwards, the position requires further explanation. The position within the productive cycle does identify fundamental opposing interests — on the one hand the proletariat which produces goods for consumption through its labour and which loses the benefit of this as a result of the ownership system of capitalist society and, on the other hand, the bosses who take the profit thanks to their ownership of the means of production. But around this irreparable contradiction are a series of secondary actors who are no less important. There are the peasants, who possess their own means of production but who are robbed of the greater part of the wealth they produce by the mechanism of distribution which they do not control. Then there are the middle classes whose function is essential to capitalist reproduction and who are repaid with ephemeral, derisory privileges and who are consequently often confused as to where their real interests lie. Finally there are the unemployed, whose desperate thirst for a wage puts them in fictional competition with their natural allies.

It is important, therefore, to establish the basic dichotomy and build a strategy which can bring together the interests (which are only separate in appearance) of all those who to a greater or lesser extent are exploited by the present social system based on capitalist private property. This basic dichotomy cannot be denied or avoided. For this reason, there is no place from a class-struggle point of view for all those groups (even though they may be tactically useful in the building of revolutionary confrontation) which bring together people on the basis of subjective perceptions or of different interests to those involved in the production cycle, such as consumers, the poor, the inhabitants of a neighbourhood, students, etc.

3.3. Class struggle (antagonism)

As we have said, the materialist conception of history implies the conception that society is divided into classes and that the interests of these classes are fatally opposed and irreconcilable. This too is an idea which is shared by the whole class-struggle left and is not an invention of Marxism (as certain non-class struggle Anarchists think). It is a reality known even before the theoretical works of Marx and Engels, though this pair did provide a coherent, convincing description of it. As in the case of historical materialism, though, also in this case the paths of Marxism (or better still, the different varieties of Marxism) and Anarchist Communism quickly diverged on three fundamental points: the causes of the class struggle, the development of the class struggle, and the relationship between the condition of the proletariat class and the consciousness that it develops of this condition.

For Anarchist Communism, the class struggle is developed within the full flowering of capitalist society primarily as a result of the material conditions that the proletariat has to live in. But as these conditions are not new, nor are they as bad as in past days, other joint causes are needed: a fundamental role is surely played by the fact that the capitalist organization of labour concentrates large masses of workers into the same physical space, both for production and in daily life, easing the way for political aggregations. Our agreement with the Marxists is thus far complete. Marxists, however, tend to overvalue this important aspect, to the point of considering it the only possible aspect and consider it completely as an internal movement of the productive forces, who in their development create the conditions for the birth of workers' antagonism and therefore threaten from within, for that same reason, the very life of capitalist class society. They therefore limit the class struggle to the version of factory struggles, particularly in industry, which best represents the advanced stage of technical and productive development. Anarchist Communists, on the other hand, though recognizing the decisive importance of the two factors mentioned before, believe that others have their role to play: the growth in education (not so much regarding schooling, but in the circulation of ideas), which is dragged along by labour once liberated from feudalism; an idea of social justice which emerges from the mists of impatience which have always been produced in every society which is marked by deep inequality; finally, utopia — the embodiment of a less unfair world. The Marxists would say these are superstructural factors (or idealistic, or worse still, petit-bourgeois), but nonetheless of great importance and, most importantly, they do not relegate the class struggle to that between workers and individual bosses, but include the whole struggle between the exploited and their exploiters, embracing also the demands of the peasants.

This is the source of the second point of dissent. For Marxists, wherever capitalism develops is where the moment of Communist revolution draws near, whereas the old-fashioned production methods (crafts, peasant agriculture, etc.) are inexorably eliminated, thereby facilitating progress. However, revolutions have always occurred in places where capitalism was not yet fully developed and while the new working class (still in a minority) may have provided grist for the political vanguard's mill, nothing could have happened without the involvement of the endless masses of peasants.

The third point of divergence is the bitterest: the relationship between the condition of the class and the consciousness of its real interests, as interests opposed to those of the proprietary class. Once again for Marxists this is a problem which does not exist. Either because, for some of them, the two (class and class consciousness) are destined to merge, deterministically and spontaneously, coinciding, driven by the evolution of productive forces, overlapped by the development of the economic structure. For others, since it is not necessary for the entire proletarian mass (nor even the worker minority within it) to be class conscious, it is sufficient that there be a compact vanguard nucleus, in other words the party. In its Leninist version, the party is actually outside the workers' movement, as the workers are incapable of raising themselves to the revolutionary doctrine as they are weighed down by their own inevitable economism, that is to say their immediate, daily needs which are different to and irreconcilable with their historical needs — something they are incapable of understanding. For Anarchist Communists, on the other hand, the relationship between the class and its consciousness can be affected by the more advanced, politicized elements who act within the proletariat (being a part of it) in order to stimulate consciousness of its historical interests through the day-to-day struggles which seek to provide answers to the needs of the immediate present. This is because the greater the unity and consciousness in the proletariat, the better the chances of a revolution being able to assume an Anarchist Communist character quickly, enabling the class to build the new society without delegating the task to anyone.

3.4. A Society of Free Equals (communism)

"We do not, after all, differ with the Anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the aim." These words were written by Vladimir Il'ich Ulyanov, Lenin, in September-October 1917 and the date is no accident. This is to show that as far as the type of society which it is intended to realize, there is no apparent contradiction between the various currents of the revolutionary left. Following a long phase of uncertainty during the mid-19th century between Socialism ("*to each according to their merits*") and Collectivism ("*to each according to their labour*"), Communism ("*from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs*") became the common arena for all those class elements which have developed throughout the history of the workers' movement. There also exists a common view of the communist society which would develop (without, however, going into excessively detailed plans, given the acceptance of the fact of the enormous self-organizational abilities of the masses once they are free of the bourgeois yoke!): a federative basis, with freely-accepted rules for social life being developed from below — in other words the model sketched out by the Paris Commune. There can be no communism (*equality*) without liberty (*self-determination*); there can be no liberty without communism.

Though there may be agreement between all the various revolutionary currents which have appeared in the workers' movement over the years on the social framework which will be realized with communism (we could just as easily say "with anarchism," since no-one denies that it is impossible to separate economic equality from the liberty of the individual), opinions do diverge, and noticeably so, on two fundamental issues: what sort of action is required now, in the bourgeois State, and the timescale and methods of the passage from the initial revolutionary phase to the construction stage of the society that we all aspire to.

4. Why Anarchist: what divides us from the left

Let us not be fooled by the heading. It has already been explained that Anarchist Communists were born from and have always remained within the struggles of the exploited and have therefore constantly been a part of the class-struggle left. However, in everyday language the expression “*left*” has come to include only the Marxist element, be they Revisionists, Third-Internationalists, heretics or the so-called “New Left,” with the Anarchists being pushed aside. We therefore use the term as it is currently used, for reasons of simplicity, but this in no way implies any distancing of ourselves from strictly class-struggle positions.

In reviewing the common points between the various theories which populate the struggles for the emancipation of the proletariat, we have already noted in what way they differ with regard to the various interpretations and how their implications are not accepted unanimously. They are, however, less important than those differences indicated at the end of the last section and concern two fundamental and truly divisive issues: the development of the proletarian movement and the building of the post-revolutionary society.

4.1. Struggles in the Bourgeois State

The deterministic view of history (more evident in his followers, but nonetheless present in Marx) can also influence the various ways of conceiving the means to develop the proletariat’s radical nature within the present capitalist society, the instruments required to strengthen the proletariat’s opposition to exploitation and the level of struggle which the proletariat itself is capable of developing. In the words of Marx and Engels in the 1848 Communist Manifesto: “the proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class.” This brief passage contains in a nutshell the whole history of the evolution of Marxism from its origins as a tiny sect of German emigrants in Great Britain to the dominant party of the proletariat throughout the 20th century. It is also, according to Anarchists, the cause of the miserable collapse of real socialism. The above extract was also to become (and not by chance) one of Lenin’s favourites, one upon which he would build his theory of the revolutionary party. Let us look at this in detail.

The first element to consider is the question of “*political supremacy*.” The conquest of this supremacy has logical and practical consequences which Anarchist Communists have always rejected (as also have, if the truth be told, certain Marxist currents like the Luxemburgists, Bordighists, Council Communists, etc.). The need to conquer political power, in fact, implies political representation, a party which works within the institutions. Anarchist Communists do not reject the party as organization (obviously as long as it meets certain criteria, something we will return to later). We reject it inasmuch as it **represents** the exploited masses, and even more so where

this occurs within the political arena. If the masses are to bring about their own emancipation, then only they can represent themselves. For Marxists, however, the political vanguard plays an entirely different role (this, too, we will return to later), but above all it must devote itself to entering the apparatus of the bourgeois State, taking over its mechanisms, developing its own strength, electorally speaking, and so on. The process was once known in Italy as “becoming State.” The revolutionary current of Marxism was to reject this strategy which underwent a tragic development and met an even more tragic end in the Second International (1881–1914), but nevertheless the same path would be followed again and again, as for example with the parties of the Third International (1921–1989).

In effect, the compromise with the bourgeois State and the re-absorption by the State of Marxism’s operations (to the extent of it totally capitulating) has been a constant factor in the history of Marxism. When the German Social Democratic Party was founded in Gotha in 1875, Marx sharply criticized the programme of the new political grouping, as the fusion between his followers and those of Ferdinand Lasalle had, in his opinion, watered down his theories. The party continued on its path despite this excommunication. However, though trusting in the support of Engels (who would himself disown it after the turning point of the 1891 Congress in Erfurt) and its own ideas, developed for the most part by Karl Kautsky, it would form the basic political line of the Second International. The door was open, and the first to rush through was Eduard Bernstein, who started to deny the need for revolutionary struggle (a denial implicit in the phrase “wrest by degree” in the passage by Marx and Engels quoted at the start of this section). He was followed by Alexandre Millerand in France, who left the party in order to enter a bourgeois Government as minister. Finally, there came the whole German Social Democratic movement, which in 1914 (earlier indicated erroneously but intentionally, as the date of the end of the Second International) voted for the war credits which allowed Germany to launch World War I.

Lenin grafted a Blanquist element onto the Marxist tree, giving it once again an aggressively revolutionary character. However, though this would work in the power-grabbing phase of November 1917, it would nonetheless later allow the re-emergence of the tendency to compromise with the bourgeois State, a factor which has been shared by every Communist party in the world right up to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Anarchist Communists, instead, are not interested in the bourgeois State apparatus, except to analyze it in order to reveal its true method of functioning. We therefore believe that it is not useful to work within this apparatus, either as an organization or as proletariat. Nothing is to be gained by it except more chains.

4.2. Political Struggles and Social Struggles

Anarchist Communists believe that the revolution must be a social revolution, that it must overturn the property relationships of bourgeois society. Responsibility for the abolition of private property and its replacement with collective ownership must be fully taken on by the proletariat, which must itself begin to manage production, distribution and services. Communist society can only be self-managing and federative or, as is often said, decision-making power must be exercised from below. With this in mind, the day-to-day struggles which we are involved in within the present capitalist society serve a variety of purposes. First of all, they help build the proletariat’s fighting power, its mass organization whose forms presage the future instruments

of management. Secondly, even the conquest of “*crumbs, which though tiny are always good to eat, (...) will increase the workers’ well-being and therefore improve conditions, even intellectual conditions*” (Fabbri). Lastly, anything that the struggle snatches from the bosses, which limits their freedom to do as they would wish, is a conquest which must be won and defended. In this sense, Anarchists are “*reformers*” (to use Malatesta’s word) but not reformists, as they do not believe that a free and equal society can be built *little by little, step by step*. What can be built by degrees and will help the chances of a successful revolutionary rupture, is the will to fight and the class consciousness of the exploited. Anarchism is “*gradualist*” (another of Malatesta’s expressions) in other words, not because it envisages a gradual passage from Capitalism to Communism, but inasmuch as it believes in the gradual construction of revolutionary proletarian organization which is conscious of the fact that the satisfaction of its historical needs rests entirely and solely in the hands of the proletariat itself.

In all of the above there is no room for political struggle, for taking control of the State apparatus with the aim of using it as a vehicle for social change, for two good reasons. The first is that the State is a superstructure of bourgeois society and, as such, is unsuitable for a communist transformation (if anything, its survival reproduces bourgeois society, as we will see further on). Secondly, the political road envisages delegation, without any possibility of control, to the (often self-proclaimed) vanguard which then loses itself in the meanderings and traps of the capitalist social apparatus and deprives the proletariat of its role as protagonist of its own emancipation, which rightly belongs to it. It could also be added that the political struggle diverts the hopes of emancipation towards inappropriate paths, deceiving the masses into imagining that emancipation can be brought about by the powers-that-be rather than won through social struggle.

This point sharply divides Anarchist Communist theory from Marxist theory (in almost all its forms). Marx and Engels’ political revolution, and before them that of the Jacobins, Gracchus Babeuf and Louis-Auguste Blanqui, envisages a political struggle, the consequences of which we have seen in all the political revolutions which have taken place to date, where the dominant class has simply reappeared. Social revolution, the only revolution which can truly emancipate the exploited, requires social struggle.

4.3. The Role of the Vanguard

As we have said, the need for political struggle, with all its complexities, its strategic subtleties and its dark side, leads to the creation of a political party, or vanguard, which detaches itself from the masses in order to protect the masses’ interests, the only possible relationship being that of delegate. The party, guardian of orthodoxy and the only strategy for the salvation of the exploited, is the course of the correct line to follow and becomes separate from the class it seeks to represent. In fact, in its Leninist variety it **must** be formed by elements which do not come from the proletariat. This is because the workers (not to mention the peasants), being squeezed under the weight of their daily needs (economicism), are incapable of understanding the difference between their immediate needs and their historical needs, the satisfaction of which will lead to their emancipation.

For Anarchist Communists, the party (a word which Malatesta himself used), or the political organization of the Anarchist Communists, plays a role only within the proletarian movement. In other words, from within the daily struggles, it seeks to develop the class consciousness within

the proletariat, to promote (as part of the proletariat's clash with the bourgeoisie) a revolutionary strategy which can allow consciousness of the historical needs to develop among the exploited, starting with their daily needs. In this case, the party does not make the revolution for the proletariat, it does not direct it in the proletariat's interest, it does not govern it for the good of the proletariat. It simply exists within the process of growth and emancipation of the proletariat, seeking to convince the rest of the proletariat that the ideas it promotes are a suitable way of reaching the goal. In order to do this, the party must develop analyses, proposals, reflections and must function as an enzyme for revolutionary development, as the historical memory of past victories and defeats and the fulcrum for a critical and useful re-examination of these.

4.4. The State

Let us return to the extract from Marx and Engels which we quoted at the start of Chapter 4.1. Marx and Engels speak of concentrating all the means of production in the hands of the State. As we have already seen, that "by degree" was the justification used by German Social Democrats for the conquest of political power and the gradual transformation of capitalist society into a communist one (*this* is utopia, at least in its commonly-used sense of the unreachable goal, something which history has more than amply demonstrated). But what happens once the State has been taken over, on the crest of a revolutionary wave, no longer on the forced march through the institutions which eventually peters out to the point of exhausting the innovative energies of the self-proclaimed vanguard? What happens once the party of professional militants has for the moment achieved power without ever having come to any political compromises with the ruling class? Can the recipe still work? Even in this case, the history of all the revolutions of the 20th century and of their collapse leaves no room for doubt — the revolution is not betrayed (as claimed by Lev Davidovich Bronstein, a.k.a. Trotsky). It regularly fails to reach its intended goals and throws up another class society based on exploitation. But why?

Marx and Engels' phrase ends with a qualification of the State as "the proletariat organized as the ruling class." Here is the root of the causes of the failed revolutions which have been run by Marxists and it is on this point that Anarchist criticism has concentrated, beginning with Bakunin. He had foreseen these failures well before they ever happened. The question we should ask ourselves is a simple one: does the proletariat need the State to organize itself as the dominant class? The answer of Anarchist Communists is: no, for some very basic reasons.

4.4.1. The Problem of the Dominant Class

In 1868, when the Bakuninist International Alliance of Socialist Democracy applied to join the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), Marx, apart from asking that it join as a local section and not as a structured international, requested a change in its statute: with heavy irony he pointed out that the phrase "equalization of the classes" was ambiguous and that it would have to be corrected to read "abolition of the classes." Bakunin agreed that the phrase was improper and agreed with the proposed change which better explained the goal of the revolution. But the error committed by Marx and Engels in 1848 was much greater and would be the cause of many negative consequences among his followers and on the revolutionary processes that they would be involved in.

What, in fact, can be meant by the proletariat constituting itself “as the dominant class”? First of all, if the proletariat has taken power, then the revolution or the change of hands with the bourgeoisie will already have taken place and as the aim of the revolution is, according to everyone, the abolition of classes (something which Marx himself reminded Bakunin of in 1868), the struggle of the proletariat becomes its own dissolution as a class together with all other classes, the bourgeoisie heading the list. In second place, class distinction is not a matter of ethics, somatics or ethnicity, but is based on the different positions which the individual members of a society have with regard to property relationships. At the moment in which individual property is abolished, to be substituted by the collective ownership of production, distribution and consumption, there is an effective end to all class-based social organization. The image is, therefore, of a real non-sense: is it possible that myriads of Marxist commentators have not realized it? Of course they have! But as it was convenient for controlling the process of revolution for their own ends, it was accepted without too much argument and justified by what seemed to be two strong points: the temporary survival of the enemies of the revolution and the need to begin the construction of communist society, something which no-one imagines can be done in a day.

4.4.2. The Defence of the Revolution

One fact which history has always amply demonstrated with the utmost clarity is that the society born from the revolutionary process will initially find itself clashing with those who up to then had enjoyed privileges and who will find no shortage of help from their counterparts in other countries as yet unaffected by such radical events. It is often the case that revolutions collapse for the very reason of outside interference. It will therefore be necessary for a while, often quite a long time, to defend the gains which the initial impetus brings.

For Marxists, this need is met by the State and by a disciplined army, run along lines developed throughout the long history of warfare. Despite all the pre-revolutionary chatter about the people’s army, about the democratization of the armed forces, the election by the troops of their officers whose appointment can be revoked at any time, wherever bourgeois parties or Marx’s followers have taken power, armies have always formed again under the same conditions as before with the higher ranks coming from the military academies, with their rigid hierarchies, with the usual discipline imposed from the top down, with the same professional nature resisting popular input. It should be remembered that when the sailors in Kronštadt, the *crème de la crème* of revolutionary combatants in 1917, rebelled against the heavy discipline which it was sought to impose on them, the Bolshevik powers attacked them with the cadets, student officers from the military academy who were certainly no part of the proletariat. It can be added, too, that this was an entirely internal party matter seeing as how the Anarchists organized inside the fortress were a small minority.

Anarchist Communists, on the other hand, hold that the need to defend the gains of the revolution must be met in another way. The fighting forces must apply principles which go against the old hierarchical methods. Anyone who accepts the responsibility of command must enjoy the respect and trust of those who will carry out the commands at the risk of their lives. In other words, the appointment of commanders must be by election and must be revocable and only major decisions should be discussed and agreed upon by all. Moreover, the war should be carried out as a partisan war, with small, mobile units which are hard to localize and which enjoy the support of the local population. And these are not wild fantasies. We have seen how Makhno or-

ganized his revolutionary army in this way and was able to defeat Wrangel and Denikin, whose armies were financed by the Western capitalist powers and against whom even Trotsky's famed Red Army was forced to retreat. The very conception of war and how it should be waged was at the heart of the clash between the Marxist Communists and the Anarchist Communists in Spain in 1936–39: centralized command and discipline on the one hand (no matter that this weakened the strength of the international brigades which had come from all over the world to help the revolution), while on the other hand, participation and support from the local population (who were persuaded by the obvious advantages that a successful social revolution would bring them), a system which was able (in the symbolic figure of Buenaventura Durruti) even to withstand the strength of the Francoist troops at the gates of Madrid, to the point that the Generalissimo was forced to put off taking control of the capital until the end of the war.

The dispute is not only technical or tactical but goes much deeper, as it not only allows the old stalwarts of bourgeois command to recycle themselves as “experts” in the new social order, but also because behind these ideas (originally Lenin's) there lies the old statist mode of thinking — the same which led the Bolshevik leadership (though, it must be said, with the objections of Trotsky and Aleksandra Mikhailovna Kollontai) to sign the unilateral peace with the dying Germanic empire (at Brest-Litovsk in 1918). The declared reasons were the weakness and demoralization of the Russian troops with respect to the mighty German army, rendering any headway on the front improbable. In effect, this move did allow some respite for Germany (albeit short-lived), which was at that stage near capitulating. Ukraine was ceded (and had to liberate itself from the occupying forces and the nationalist bourgeoisie) and the Spartacist revolutionary vanguard of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht was abandoned to its own fate — the firing squad.

As far as the Anarchists were concerned (not to mention Trotsky and Kollontai), the war could and should have continued in the form of popular guerrilla warfare, something which would also have permitted the extension of the revolution westwards.

4.4.3. The Management of the Economy

Opinion is totally divided, too, on the organization of production. As we saw in the quotation from Marx and Engels, Marxists believe that economic power must be concentrated in the hands of the proletarian State. This is not only because, in their way of thinking, the State is the proletariat (or, the only general organization capable of discerning the collective good) but also because the decentralization of the system of production impedes that harmony of intent which alone can encourage growth in the volume of goods and allow supply to meet demand. This is how the Factory Committees in Soviet Russia were stripped of all power (1918), even though they had been the backbone of the expropriations of the capitalists and had guaranteed production in the first few turbulent months. In fact, only a third of their members were permitted to continue being elected from below, while the other two thirds were nominated from above. Power passed to the Central Soviet and the “All-Russian Soviet of Workers' Control,” as the workers had (because of direct management) begun to “*act as if they owned the factories*” (Anna Mikhailovna Pankratova) -something which was an obstacle to the collective good. It is almost like listening to the tirades of a feudal lord in ancient China against the “egoism” of the peasants.

If the Petrograd workers who were the recognized vanguard of the Bolshevik revolution had become short-sighted due to small-scale possession and the greed dictated by their own interests,

then what hope was there for solidarity from the peasant masses who had always been linked to the land and to the ownership of what their labour was able to wring from the earth?

This is where the Russian Revolution embarked on the slippery slope of the war economy, with raids on the countryside and forced collectivizations, with government functionaries deciding what was to be produced, five-year plans and decisions entrusted to economic experts (who were, naturally, recycled from the old social order). Former owners were even appointed as directors of the factories!

For Anarchist Communists, the disastrous effects of this policy which history has laid plain for all to see were clearly foreseeable. We will soon come back to the effects which all this produced (and which could not have failed to produce) with regard to the reconstruction of a system of exploitation of the working classes. Above all, the masses' sense of detachment as a result of the above policies needs to be emphasized. The management from below of the production process is seen as being inevitably incoherent, chaotic and inefficient. The workers cannot organize themselves, and therefore someone must do it — in their interests (interests which this someone is evidently in a better position to understand). All this when history has furnished splendid examples of the ability of workers to manage themselves and of the natural solidarity between the exploited classes (witness Spain and also Ukraine, where a trainload of grain confiscated from the counter-revolutionary Whites was sent to Petrograd which was known to be starving). Not to mention the fact that, in the aftermath of the Paris Commune in 1871, even Marx had admitted the proletariat's ability to build its own social organization!

The first disastrous effect is the proletariat's distancing itself from the revolution, when it does not provide them with convincing answers. It happened in Russia from the start with the peasants, who were constantly preyed upon and failed to be convinced that they should co-operate with the city workers, and it happened later with the workers themselves who more often than not saw the same bourgeois elements they had expropriated returning to power. It happened in Spain in 1936, when the Marxists refused to link the masses to the civil war by starting the social revolution, and in fact impeded collectivization through force in order not to frighten off that section of the bourgeoisie that was in favour of the Republic: the two-stage policy (victory in the civil war first, revolution later) was responsible for the previously un-politicized masses not understanding the point of the struggle against Francoism, thus de-vitalizing the strength of opposition to the rampant obscurantism.

4.4.4. The Death of the State

If what is outlined above are the purposes for which Marxists claim that the State apparatus should survive after the revolution (defence of the gains obtained against external enemies and the organization of production and distribution), it immediately follows that these tasks are limited in time. Anarchist Communists, as we have said, do not share this way of resolving the two problems and have put forward concrete counter-proposals. There remains, however, the contradiction noted early on by Bakunin: "in this way, therefore, in order to liberate the popular masses, it is necessary to begin by enslaving them." The fact remains that the State, also for Marxists, should have a limited lifespan and *extinguish itself* once its duties have been carried out. The history of victorious revolutions of the 20th Century have made perfectly clear how rapidly the State stands aside to make way for that self-managing society that everyone says they want!

One look at events, in fact, is enough to do justice to the Marxian theory of the extinction of the State. In the USSR, the State became an omnivorous monster which devoured all personal freedom. Its exponential growth knew no bounds — the effect it had even within the private lives of individuals expanded beyond all measure. And when the moment came when its enormity led to a resounding implosion (1989–1992), it spat from within it an army of hungry locusts (the new bourgeoisie, mafia organizations, corrupt officials, unscrupulous *nouveaux riches*, etc.) that had lain hidden within it over the decades.

It was easy to foresee what regularly took place everywhere those theories which rely on taking possession of the State as a method of defending and organizing the revolution were put into practice. It was, in fact, foreseen by Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Fabbri and many other libertarian thinkers. Invented by the bourgeoisie during its rise to power in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries as a weapon to protect the domination of its class, the apparatus of state is suited to this very task and nothing else. It is for this most simple of reasons that this superstructure, should it survive when the underlying structure for the organization of production is eliminated, tends to reproduce the exploitation it was based on. The old class domination which was destroyed is then reproduced in a modified form and regenerates a new exploiter class. Right up to his death, Trotsky laboured under the false illusion that the USSR was a “degenerated workers’ state” — in other words, given that as the basis of ownership within society had changed (from bourgeois individual property to collective property under the control of the State), the revolution was irreversible, as Trotsky, good Marxist that he was, could never believe that an organizational superstructure could modify the structure of the production relationships. Instead, a new class (in the real sense) gave rise to a form of privileged appropriation of goods and so a new form of exploitation came into being wherever Marxist parties came into power and took control of the State apparatus. It is for this reason that the State never withered away having exhausted its usefulness as Marxism predicted it would, but instead the worst predictions about “barrack-house communism” (Bakunin) advanced by Anarchist Communists were to come true.

4.4.5. Dictatorship and Bureaucracy

But where does this new class come from? Who is it composed of? How exactly does it appropriate and exploit? The answer is easy. It was equally easy one and a half centuries ago. When the Marxists began to talk about the “dictatorship of the proletariat” (exercised through the State), in order to respond to the two previously-seen needs of the immediate post-revolutionary period, the device was immediately criticized and it was clear from the start that it would become a dictatorship *over* the proletariat. Bakunin was already saying: “*any difference between revolutionary dictatorship and statist centralization is only apparent. The two are substantially nothing but the same form of government by a minority over the majority in the name of the supposed stupidity of the latter and the supposed intelligence of the former.*”

The minority which would exercise this power (and which did, in fact, exercise it in democratic centralist regimes) was inevitably of bourgeois origin, since it was mostly the bourgeoisie who had the time and means to acquire a sufficient cultural level which would allow them to dominate the workers’ parties, those parties which were supposed to represent the interests of the proletariat in the parliamentary circuses or in the abstruse doctrinaire dialectics of clandestine circles. In fact, as far as Lenin was concerned, it was for this very reason of being outside the class which guaranteed their revolutionary steadfastness, given that they were unconcerned

with the needs of the moment, those needs which afflict the proletarian masses who, weighed down by poverty, would be more inclined to come to a compromise. This is how a group of bourgeois intellectuals, who were struggling to find a place which could satisfy their ambitions within the capitalist social order, began to impose themselves on the proletariat's struggles from the mid-1800s. As their way of conceiving the future society allowed them to conquer a certain prestige which they would otherwise be unable to enjoy, they borrowed from similar theories of others who had already been in the vanguard of the bourgeois revolutions of the previous century (Jacobins, Blanquists, etc.), with the same love for political struggle, for the winning of Statist power, for the use of the State in order to establish a vicious post-revolutionary dictatorship which they claimed would defeat the enemies of the revolution but which instead served only to keep them in power permanently.

Within the societies created by the revolutions managed by the Marxist parties, a new dominant class immediately formed which was made up of revolutionary intellectuals who had previously constituted the party (or better still, its group of leaders) and of the contributions by intellectuals, technicians and experts who had been active within the old order and who learnt to stay afloat thanks to the need the former had for them and their expertise. This new class was given the name "**bureaucracy**." Trotsky never recognized it as the dominant class, preferring to think of it as a rampant excrescence which, though sucking the life from the revolution, never changed its basic nature. In reality, the completely centralized control over distribution allowed the bureaucrats to acquire a privileged share of goods in accordance with their (at times inexistent and often harmful) role in the productive process. This, under the guise of the socialization of all the means of production, constituted a real form of exploitation and reproduced class society. When this society collapsed, the most dynamic members of the privileged classes rapidly converted to the new role of bourgeoisie to all effects.

Certain heretical Trotskyists (such as Bruno Rizzi) understood their master's mistakes and modified the theory by introducing a new class, the "**techno-bureaucracy**," which was designed to take account of the situation in Soviet Russia, but which contained two limitations. The new class had a double face, as it was positioned between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and shared aspects of both. In second place, the nature of the new class was seen as the most advanced and appropriate for the running of planned economies which were at that time gaining popularity even within capitalist societies. Forty years later, these aspects fascinated anti-organizationalist and non-class struggle anarchists in Italy. They saw undeniable advantages in it, from their point of view, and they made it the basis of a new theory made up of classes which rise and fall where the techno-bureaucracy plays a primary role against a proletariat which has most to fear from the arrogant new enemy and against the declining bourgeoisie which is to all extents innocuous. It was their hope that all this would smash the rigid class-struggle dualism which was considered Marxist and water down the class struggle, shifting attention onto the cultural front. This also had the effect of marking out the USSR as the real enemy and reducing the importance of the capitalist enemy in Western countries, considered by this stage a system in decline and rapidly moving towards the eastern European system. The fall of the Soviet empire, the end of planned economies, the re-emergence of the power of money and of the controllers of international finance, the spread of Western (in particular US) imperialism, the re-appearance of an aggressive bourgeoisie in capitalist countries, the increasing intensification of the traditional class war — all these have put paid to these so-called new theories which heralded a new age of messianic Anarchism.

5. Why Anarchist Communist: what distinguishes us from anarchists

Throughout its evolution, anarchism has taken on many forms, an enormous quantity of different roles. Anarchist Communism is clearly distinct from these various incarnations, and this chapter will set out its distinguishing features and point out the differences from the other schools of thought. Of these, we will not be considering two — the Educationalists and the pure Individualists, as neither can be considered revolutionary currents.

The former, as Malatesta noted, hold that education can suffice to change man's nature, even before changing the material conditions of existence. Obviously, by arguing against this, we are not saying that the educational problem is not essential; we simply believe that a good programme of education is not enough to arrive at communism, simply by dint of the fact that everyone becomes convinced that it is the only rational system of social organization.

The evolution of Individualism merits brief treatment as it is most instructive. Its prime theoretician, Johann Kaspar Schmidt (better known as Max Stirner), was a mild-mannered teacher in a secondary school for girls and his explosiveness existed only in the radicalness of his writings. He was harshly criticized by Marx and Engels in the *Saint Max* chapter of their book "The German Ideology," together with the rest of the Hegelian left. The basic idea, later developed philosophically by Friedrich Nietzsche and which became the standard of Individualist Anarchists, was that the measure of freedom was equal to the amount of the individual's independence, which showed a total lack of regard for the fact that Man is a social animal. All Man's achievements (including those which made it possible for abstract thought, and therefore Stirner's fantasies, to develop) were obtained only thanks to human society. They are the fruit of billions upon billions of anonymous contributions to the creation of the well-being and evolution of the species. Humankind today lives in such a thick web of relations between all its past and present members, that the total freedom of one isolated being as a single individual is a philosophical category which is totally removed from reality. Starting with this improbable supposition, the individualists began to cut themselves off from all social groupings and to despise the masses (whom they thought slavishly obeyed power) and ended up considering Anarchism as a fight against authority and the State and not as a struggle for a egalitarian society. Social equality disappeared from their theories in favour of a furious search for the liberty of the individual which often broke out into a struggle of each against the other, something which had previously been theorized by that founder of Social Liberalism, Thomas Hobbes, and is so dear to the aggressive capitalists of the period in which we now live. It is not by chance that theoreticians of extreme liberalism and competition as the only font of social progress, such as the early 20th century Austrians Friedrich August von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, are classified as Anarchists. Neither is it by chance that in the United States there has developed a current of so-called Anarcho-Capitalists (Friedmann) whose only enemy is State centralization which is perhaps guilty in their eyes of limiting the possibilities for enterprise by the most unscrupulous individuals (thereby damaging the vast

majority of their equals), who see the solution to every social problem in entrusting to the private sector (lured by profit) every economic initiative, every form of collective service, every aspect of human existence. Individualists, or rather a majority of them, end up fighting not against the exploitation by one over another, but against any obstacle placed in the path of this exploitation. Others, albeit few, have remained actively militant among the proletariat and despite their lack of structure have contributed and continue to contribute much.

5.1. Organization

Let us move on to those Anarchists who, at least in word, remain true to the struggle for the emancipation of the exploited. The first big distinction is between those who do not believe it is necessary for there to be organization of the class struggle and those like the Anarchist Communists who believe that it is indispensable. There are, in fact, spontaneist fringes in the Anarchist movement who do not believe that any form of planning is required, given that an anarchist society will inevitably come into existence as a necessary result of the evolution of human society. Giovanni Bovio, a Socialist parliamentarian and freemason with strong anarchist leanings, once said: “*Thought is anarchist and history is marching towards anarchy*,” echoing that faith in the inevitability of the development of history towards anarchy. This optimism originates in the vision of the anarchist Prince Pëtr Kropotkin, the founder of Anarcho-Communism, on the basis of his own scientific knowledge. Kropotkin was a geographer of some standing, bettered only in professionalism among Anarchists by Elisée Reclus. On the basis of his own scientific knowledge and the study of social insect communities and, wholly imbued with positivism and the consequent sure belief that science could solve every problem, Kropotkin came to the idea that libertarian communism was a necessary and inevitable result for the organization of the collective life of humanity.

Thus, Anarchism was no longer the goal of the conscious efforts on the part of men and women to organize themselves for their collective happiness, but only the final and teleologically predetermined stage in historical development (as we shall see, somewhat like the dialectic materialism of Stalinist orthodoxy which stemmed from the same positivist vein). The result of all this, and his followers acted accordingly, was that all forms of organization are not only unnecessary (given that the course of events cannot be seriously influenced) but actually dangerous, as they represent an obstruction for the free flow of the process’ spontaneity and impede the appearance of the final stage in the development of humanity.

On the other hand, Anarchist Communists (and others, besides) believe that the various stages of history are not written in stone and that the collective intervention of humans can influence events. This influence may be minor at first, but with the passage of time it can be directed at ever-greater goals. And collective means organized. As a result of their deterministic vision, Anarcho-Communists place no importance in the class struggle. Furthermore, they consider even the existence of classes to be an unproven fact, if not some Marxist invention. It is the man or woman, as a single individual, who must tend towards becoming a member of the anarchist society. For Anarchist Communists, society is dramatically divided into classes (something which the recent wave of rampant liberalism has made abundantly clear by widening the gaps between the haves and the have-nots, between rich countries and poor — in other words, between the exploiters and the exploited), and only the emancipation of the weakest by means of a resolute

class war will lead to a society of free equals, the product of a conscious programmed project which can fulfil the proletariat's aspirations. The class struggle exists and it is the only hope to obtain a more just society. But if it is to be successful, it must be organized.

5.2. Organizational Dualism

The feature which best distinguishes Anarchist Communists from all other schools of thought within Anarchism is what we call “**organizational dualism**.” This means that apart from the general organization of the entire proletariat (as outlined in Chapter 1.2, dedicated to Fabbri), there is also the political organization of Anarchist Communists, or, to use the usual terms adopted in the movement's debates, beside the Mass Organization there must also be the Specific Organization. As already indicated, the other trends in Anarchism reject either or both of these.

It is clear that Individualists recognize no role for the movement of the exploited who are seen as a humble flock of individuals unworthy of any personal realization as they have no ambitions. But the Individualists lie completely outside class-struggle Anarchism. The Kropotkinist Anarcho-Communists (not for nothing known as anti-organizationalists) believe that any work among the masses apart from pure and simple propaganda of the “right” ideas, is useless. This is the origin of their lack of interest in the daily struggles of the working class which are seen as pointless and counterproductive. Pointless in that every gain made under the present social system is held to be short-lived and counterproductive as the syndicalist approach only encourages the habit of gradual conquests with a consequent loss of sight of the revolutionary goal. We have already seen how Bakunin threw himself into the struggle which began with the First International and how both Fabbri and Malatesta considered that any gains towards the well-being of the masses in the present were nothing to be looked down on. Anarchist Communists believe that it is essential to be involved on a day-to-day basis in the workers' organizations (to which, as workers, we belong). We believe that the existence of these organizations is necessary as a barrier to the powerful whims of the exploiter class. For Anarcho-Communists, instead, their abandoning of all attention to the proletariat's immediate demands results in the specific organization being relegated to a role of propaganda of the ideal, the recruiting of new members, in other words something like the function of a religious sect.

Basing themselves on similar premises to those of the Kropotkinists, Insurrectionalist Anarchists also deny the value of work within the labour movement. After all, Kropotkin was present at the International Congress in London in 1881 which approved the strategy of propaganda by the deed. Disappointed by the late arrival of the revolution, unable to enjoy a useful relationship with the masses thanks to the spread of special anti-anarchist legislation all over Europe, the anarchists chose to act according to their times in order to extricate themselves from the corner they found themselves in. The hope was that the spread of violent acts directed at the pompous bourgeoisie of the period would provide an example which would rapidly be imitated thereby transforming the insurrectionary spark into an immense revolutionary blaze. This was the period of the bloody acts of the likes of François-Claudius Köhlingstein (better known as Ravachol), Bonnot, Émile Henry and many others. France, in fact, though at the centre of the insurrectionalist wave was also the place where class-struggle Anarchist militants (Émile Pouget, Fernand Pelloutier, Pierre Monatte, and others) found a way out through the formation of the “*Bourses*

du Travail” and the syndicates and thereby brought Anarchism back to its natural element, the proletariat, which led to a new and profound method of struggle and organization. Despite this, there are still today those who as a result of a childish theoretical simplification, hold that gains made by the unions are ephemeral and who continue to preach the idea of propaganda by the deed. They are mistaken twice over. Firstly, when they think that syllogisms can cancel history – in other words they believe, with purely abstract reasoning, that as long as capitalism exists there can be no improvement in the living conditions of the masses even where there have been labour struggles. Secondly, they are under the illusion that some external example can be more attractive and convincing than long, tiring educational activity within the day-to-day struggles.

Then there are those Anarchists who deny the need for a Specific Organization. Anarcho-Syndicalists of various types and Revolutionary Syndicalists lay their trust in the spontaneous evolution of the proletarian masses and that accordingly if the labour unions are left alone, sooner or later they will arrive at the decisive clash with the boss class. Malatesta already opposed this idea, held by Monatte, in 1907 at the International Congress of Amsterdam. He clarified how the proletariat’s associations for resistance would inevitably slide into reformism, thus blurring sight of the goals. This was the economicism which Lenin pointed out, though he wanted to fight it by instilling class consciousness into the masses from without, but which Anarchist Communists fight by acting as a critical conscience from within. The historically proven decline of all unions which were born revolutionary (starting with Monatte’s own CGT), has led some Anarcho-Syndicalists to seek the answer not in political organization, but in the creation of unions which are based on a pre-determined revolutionary idea. In other words, to create unions which are exclusively composed of conscious, revolutionary elements. The result is a strange mix of mass organization and political organization which is basically an organization of anarchists who set themselves up to do union work. In this way the obstacle has not been removed, but avoided, as the link which connects the masses to the revolutionary strategy is missing, unless of course it happens to be the resurrection of the idea of an external example which contaminates the masses by some process of osmosis.

For Anarchist Communists these theoretical problems are resolved with organizational dualism, assigning precise tasks and separate functions to the two organizations.

5.2.1. The Mass Organization is not a carbon copy of the political organization

For Anarchist Communists, the mass Organization (labour union) does not need to mimic their particular expectations of combativeness or opposition to capital to the point that if the union were not to meet their standards, they would not participate in the unions’ struggles. They do not expect the union to be born revolutionary nor to continually carry on a fierce level of combat against the bosses. Unions are born out of a need for the proletariat to defend itself. They aim to wring as much as possible out of the bosses in order to win greater wealth for the exploited classes they represent. They try to satisfy the needs of the workers who are being continually squeezed by their adversary, the bosses. As long as the union exists, it will produce within it a managing class which more often than not acts in its own interests rather than in the interests of those it claims to represent. This is all an inevitable, naturally-occurring state of affairs and something which has yet to be avoided throughout the course of history.

From the capitalists’ point of view, the unions’ economic fight is not only an attempt to demand improvements in the (always unequal) division of the goods provided by the system of

production, it is a permanent need to re-organize according to the fluctuations in the workers' demands. The unions therefore, linked with the phases of the class war, genetically take on the double role of answering the proletariat's interests and being one of the sources of the development of capitalism. And that is without taking into consideration the bad faith of its managing class who view their role as answering their own needs for a better life, or worse still as a trampline for their careers in the bourgeois State's administrative ranks.

One fundamental requisite for an egalitarian revolution is that it be the work of those who wish to find within the new society the benefits of the happy life they are denied under the present social system. "*The emancipation of the workers will be at the hands of the workers themselves*" is not simply a slogan for Anarchist Communists, as it is for Marxists — it is a profound conviction. It is the proletariat, acting on its own initiative, which will liberate not only itself but all others too, heralding the end of class society. It follows therefore that the most united and conscious proletariat possible should face the bosses in the final clash if it is to avoid falling prey to an intellectual class which might "offer" to manage society on its behalf and supposedly for its benefit. But if it is to avoid every form of substitution, be it imposed or produced in all apparent naturalness, and if it is to prevent the handing over of power in any way which might end up being permanent and damaging to the final goal of establishing a free and equal society, the proletariat itself must be able to take on immediately the management of the various phases of the revolution and the subsequent reconstruction. This is why workers' unity is indispensable. And it can only be reached through collective struggle and not through the marvellous example of exemplary struggles which the masses should watch, admire and imitate. The nub of the problem is the link between the economic condition of the class and consciousness of the historical ends which the class must necessarily pursue for its own emancipation. Or, in other words, how does the link between class and class consciousness come about?

We have already seen how the Leninists consider class consciousness to be external to the proletariat and must be brought to the proletariat, even through authoritarian means. In direct opposition to this, Revolutionary Syndicalists hold that class consciousness is born spontaneously and gradually among the masses, the more they engage in the clash with capitalism. This is a vision which is clearly descended from economic determinism and the inevitable explosion of the internal contradictions in the capitalist system, while the Leninist vision is a product of bourgeois Jacobinism. Marxism has not remained immune from either. For many Anarchists who side with the struggle of the exploited, there is no automatic link between the class and class consciousness, while there is also a rejection of the Leninist methods. As we have already seen, Anarcho-Syndicalists (though admittedly not all of them) avoid the problem rather than face it, with their theory of example designed to infect the proletariat, who otherwise tend to bow down to the reformists. Their vision is for well-organized revolutionary unions to engage in radical, victorious struggles which serve as a magnet for the great mass of the exploited. Therefore, they hold that the union organization should, from day one, take an ideal form — even if this damages class unity. Theoretically, class consciousness comes before the condition of the class and the union becomes a carbon copy of the political organization.

Anarchist Communists consider this to be wrong (indeed Fabbri drew attention to this). Though we are fully aware that there will always be differing levels of consciousness among the workers and are convinced of the fact that unity does not mean homogeneity, we believe that the class comes before the consciousness, that unity comes before radicalness and that therefore the relationship between the class and class consciousness needs to be resolved in another way.

5.2.2. The Political Organization is not only for propaganda

If the running of the phase of revolutionary struggle and the society which follows must be firmly in the hands of the workers, as we have said already, then class unity is a necessary prerequisite as is the proletariat's consciousness of its historic needs, which are much greater than its immediate economic needs. How to grasp the horns of this dilemma is something which has been hotly debated for a long time and various solutions have been proposed, as we have seen. For class-struggle Anarchists, the solution has been clear since the days of Bakunin and requires two things: direct action and political organization.

The practice of direct action, in other words the first-hand running of the struggles, is a training ground for the acquisition of consciousness by the proletariat, which independently evaluates its victories and the methods adopted to win them on the one hand, and on the other, the bitterness of the conflict and the strength of the opponents. The progression from self-management of the day-to-day struggles to self-management of the revolutionary conflict is thereby more natural, without doubt. We must, however, be careful not to confuse direct action with just any action carried out by those concerned. Direct action is not just a group of people (however big or small, well-organized or conscious) self-managing their own struggles. This is something that every political grouping does in the course of its activities, but it does not add even one ounce of consciousness to the masses. Direct action can only be carried out by economically or territorially (and not politically) homogeneous groups in order to achieve even a modest objective, because it is only in this way that individuals with varying degrees of social consciousness can engage with each other against an external obstacle. They thereby acquire an awareness both of the momentary limitation of that struggle's aims, together with the skills (including technical skills, too) which will be needed to widen the scope of objectives they can aim for and ensure the long-lasting nature of their gains.

And it is precisely within the process of direct action that the irreplaceable role of the "party" (to use Malatesta's expression) of Anarchist Communists can be seen. Pushing forward the terms of the clash; enabling others to become conscious of how fruitful the gains made in economic struggle can be and how quickly and easily what has been won can be taken back by the enemy; placing the immediate aim within an ever-greater context of aspirations. These are the specific tasks of Anarchist Communist militants in the class struggle. In other words, the conscious members of the mass organization must work towards spreading the practice of direct action and use the struggles of today to enable a consciousness of the objectives of tomorrow to develop. Anarchist Communist militants find strength for their activities in the co-ordination of their efforts which takes place through their work in their political organizations. The political organization is therefore the much sought-after link between the class and class consciousness. Its activities as a part of general class organization are the enzyme which sparks off fermentation of the economic condition of the class in the full awareness of the proletariat's historical ends. But in order for that to happen there must be workers' unity, independent of their level of class consciousness and direct action. The mass organization, therefore, does not subject prospective members to entrance exams but simply groups together all the exploited unconditionally, in the way envisaged by Bakunin's project for the **International Working Men's Association**. The conflict with capital and the constant actions of the political organization (in Bakunin's plan, the **Alliance for Socialist Democracy**) within it, will ensure the struggles will gradually become more radical until such times as the decisive clash arrives.

The goal of the Anarchist Communist political organization is thus to remain a part of the class struggle in order to radicalize it and promote consciousness of its final objectives. The organization cannot limit itself to making propaganda (abstract propaganda, out of sight of the proletariat) but must descend to the level of consciousness expressed by the proletariat in any given moment and constantly seek to raise it. To do this it must produce analyses, strategies and credible proposals. Its members must gain the trust of the workers and distinguish themselves by the clarity of their ideas and their ability to promote convincing struggles which should, if conditions so permit, be victorious. However, they must not become a new leader class, separate from their comrades in struggle, but simply a point of reference which can point the way at any time and not lose their sense of direction during the ups and downs.

As it is obvious that not all proletarians will have reached the same level of consciousness when the revolution breaks out (what is required is unity, not an identical state of consciousness), it follows that “leading groups” will naturally evolve, if the reader will forgive the expression. But this does not mean that a Leninist-style dictatorship necessarily follows, if three fundamental points are adhered to. First of all if the gap between the “vanguard” (Bakunin’s “*active minority*”) and the masses, in terms of consciousness, is not too great. In this way it will be possible to maintain the maximum level of grassroots control over the former’s actions by the great mass of the proletariat. Obviously, what is referred to here is the level of consciousness regarding ideas for struggle and not strategic awareness that members of the specific organization need to possess. Secondly, the “vanguard” needs to remain physically alongside its comrades in the struggle. It must not expect or demand a directing role for itself even if this were to be justifiable by the need to guarantee a successful outcome of the revolution. Finally, all power will have to be invested in the workplaces and in the proletariat’s associations and, from there, proceed upwards from below, without ever being delegated to higher organs, allowing them *carte blanche*, not even with the excuse of greater scientific or technical competence. The organization of Anarchist Communists will have to be vigilant in order to ensure that none of these three potential deviations occurs.

5.3. On the State and Collectivity

Having lived in a period when the bourgeois State ferociously fulfilled its role of protecting the interests of the ruling class, Anarchists have developed a deep and justified hatred for this institution. Furthermore, their direst predictions regarding the oppressive nature of the State as an institution were borne out by the revolutions controlled by Marxists and in particular by the history of the Soviet Union. The point that Anarchist Communists challenge other Anarchist tendencies on is not the need to abolish the State right from the first moment of the revolution, but the fact that the great majority of Anarchists from other tendencies have acquired such an aversion to the State that they become blind to other facts.

Many Anarchists have developed a strange inversion of priorities. The State, which is a tool of the bourgeoisie that the bourgeoisie uses in order to exploit and appropriate the lion’s share of available wealth, has become the prime enemy, even greater than the bourgeoisie which uses that tool. But partly as a result of the effects of the proletariat’s struggle, the State has taken on other roles apart from that of policeman and these roles, known by the general term “welfare state,” have some very complex facets. On the one hand they have allowed the bosses to offload onto taxpayers (and thus mostly the workers themselves) part of the costs deriving from the greater

security and well-being of those less well-off; a burden created through pressure from the workers has been offloaded onto the collectivity, which otherwise would form part of the cost of labour. On the other hand, though, these functions have enabled a minimum redistribution of wealth in favour of the workers; as the result of decades of struggles they have allowed the conflict to be regulated for the protection of the weakest, they have produced social institutions, such as education, healthcare and social insurance, with a high element of solidarity.

It is not a surprise, therefore, if capitalism (which has now reached another phase of its historical development, where fierce international competition demands that costs be slashed) tends towards reducing social provisions (which are partly financed by business) and to reduce the tasks of the State to that of being an armed guardian of Capital's interests. And it is the inverted point of view of many Anarchists which prevents them from analyzing the phenomenon, from seeing that our principal enemy is the same as ever, and from realizing that what the "light State" would like to get rid of is the very thing that the proletariat have an interest in maintaining. The reduction in the State's functions involves a lowering of the fiscal burden on the rich but not on the poor, the maintenance of the State's role as policeman and the destruction of all social insurance, guarantees and protection.

The dropping of areas such as the above by the State and their replacement by equivalents on the market (and therefore their transformation into a source of profit) involves an increase in cost for services which workers will only rarely be able to afford, and will result in a noticeable reduction in their living standards. By not defending these tasks of the State, we also risk losing sight of another important aspect: the role of collectivity. Anarchist Communist society will not be able to do without a system of "taxation," in the sense that a part of the wealth will be set aside in order to sustain those who cannot contribute to the production which is essential for their needs — children, the old, the ill, etc. State management of areas such as education, healthcare and social insurance is much closer to the collective management of these services in a future society than would be the case under private management, subject to the laws of profit. The transport workers in revolutionary Spain in 1936, who were organized in a union, lost little time in organizing the service. Would the same happen today with the same rapidity and naturalness in the case of the workers on the privatized railways in Britain? Consider also the case of pensions, where under the current system there is an automatic link (and corresponding sense of solidarity) between workers of different generations.

Anarchist Communists therefore believe that the struggle against the survival of the State at the time of the revolution does not preclude recognition of the various functions of today's bourgeois State: those that serve to guarantee the continuing class domination (which, not surprisingly, capitalists seek to preserve and strengthen) and those born from compromises in the clash between the classes and which provide a modicum of well-being for the oppressed classes (again, not surprisingly, the very functions which capitalists seek to eliminate today). If the bourgeoisie is seeking to reform the State, it is doing so out of its own interests, interests which do not coincide with those of the workers.

5.4. The Methods

It is commonly said within the Anarchist movement that there is a close link between the means of the struggle and its ends. If by this is meant that certain methods must be excluded

because they are inappropriate for the ends, then we have no objection. We have already seen, for example, that any suggestion of using the State in the march towards communism is out of the question, if we are to promote its extinction. There are means which are theoretically and practically incompatible with the ends of the struggle.

This does not automatically signify that there is a strict relationship between the means and the ends, something which many Anarchists claim, particularly the pacifist elements and the anti-organizationalists, with some grotesque consequences. To make an example, if this were indeed the case, Anarchists would have to behave in the here and now by acting out the rules of solidarity and social living that they are trying to create for the future society. This would mean living in some sort of collective such as a commune, but would have two unfortunate consequences — one practical and one theoretical. On a practical level, communes have always failed miserably (for example the famous 19th-century Cecilia commune in Brazil), as the members carry with them certain weaknesses and defects, inherited from the present bourgeois social organization where they were born, grew up and schooled, which have a negative effect on the life of the community and eventually ruin it. Neither can the commune remain isolated from the rest of the world: it is often therefore contaminated by its relationships (often of a commercial nature) with surrounding societies. Thus it follows that communist society must cover a vast area and increasingly include the rest of humanity and that a period of transition would be required in order to eliminate individuals from those vices which are part and parcel of their character. The theoretical consequence is that the new society would be born out of the example offered by small groups, like small spots of communism which spread throughout the social fabric, thus kissing goodbye to the revolution and welcoming a vision of the future make-up of society which can be realized by degrees in a new form of reformism.

We would have to be non-violent because (according to the axiom of ends and means) a society of peace and solidarity could not come from a violent act such as a revolution. Anarchist Communists do not love violence, but we know that the bosses will not voluntarily give up their privileges as a result of simply reasoning with them that communism is the most rational social structure possible.

It follows that, for Anarchist Communists, the means must not contradict the pre-established ends, but once the obviously incompatible means have been discarded there remain a wide range of methods of struggle which should be considered only on the basis of their effectiveness. Above all, we believe that certain means, far from advancing the struggle towards its goal, serve to distance it and make it impractical. This is the case with criticism of the political organization and its internal structure by some confusionists of anarchism, who see the internal discipline of militants with regard to the decisions taken collectively as a violation of the individual's freedom and in effect a negation of anarchist ends. This belief impedes any serious work within the masses and therefore delays the social revolution.

5.5. The Evidence

If the political organization of Anarchist Communists is not to limit itself to simple propaganda of sacred principles, its work in the struggles of the exploited must be incisive, effective and recognizable. For this reason the political and strategic line which the organization follows must be seen outside the organization as being united, capable of representing a solid reference

point for the proletariat in its process of acquiring consciousness. The functional principle which allows this is known as “**collective responsibility**” and was outlined by the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad in France (*Delo Truda*), in the “Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists — Project.” The definition of this function sparked off a great scandal within the Anarchist movement, to the extent that the word “Platformist” is still used as an insult against Anarchist Communists. However, it is based on a misunderstanding which we will now seek to clear up.

The confusionists of Anarchism mistakenly identified the collective responsibility of the Anarchist Communist political organization with the democratic centralism of Leninism. But it is a facetious comparison. In democratic centralism, a group of leaders take decisions which the members are then obliged to apply. As membership of the party is voluntary, at least in those places where it is not in power, this is perfectly legitimate as those who agree to join the organization agree with its way of functioning. All this, however, has absolutely nothing to do with collective responsibility, which instead provides for the maximum democracy in decision-making (at the Congress, where each member counts as much as any other). But once decisions have been accepted by the majority, the entire organization is bound by them. The minority can always decide not to apply the decision, but they cannot block the work of the organization or damage the external image of the organization by working against the decision. At the following Congress it will be able to make its case once more and try to convince a majority of members, either should the previous line have clearly failed or else through greater success in setting out their case.

The Anarchist Communist organization has four basic principles on which it bases its work: **theoretical unity**, **strategic unity**, **tactical homogeneity** and **collective responsibility**. Theoretical unity means that all members must share the general principles which inspire the organization — in other words, the principles outlined in this work. If this were not the case they would be working for different causes and should therefore belong to different organizations. Strategic unity means that all members must share the common path which the organization establishes to the social revolution — in other words, those guidelines which all agree on regarding the organization’s actions from now until (it is hoped) a not-too-distant future. Without a common strategy, the actions of members or groups of members would follow different paths and the organization per se would be unable to play any meaningful role in the struggles of the masses. Tactical homogeneity means that the daily, local activities of the various members and groups must tend to agree with the general strategic line, though there can be some diversification according to the varying local situations. If the tactics of the various components of the organization did not run along similar lines, the organization’s actions would be confused and incoherent.

The Anarchist movement has known two types of organization: organizations of synthesis and organizations of tendency. Synthesist organizations accept members who declare themselves to be Anarchists, without any further specification. It is possible, therefore, for members to be Educationalists, Communists, Syndicalists, Insurrectionalists and even Individualists. The range is not always quite so wide and the level of theoretical unity required can vary from one organization to another. For example, in 1965 the class-struggle wing of the *Federazione Anarchica Italiana* succeeded in having Malatesta’s 1920 programme adopted by the organization, thereby provoking a split with the anti-organizationalist and individualist elements. Whatever the level of theoretical unity may be (and it is never complete), the absence of any strategic unity means that any decisions taken need be observed only by those who agree with them, leaving the others

to do as they please. This means that the decisions are of little value, that Congresses can make no effective resolutions, that internal debate is unproductive (as everyone maintains their own positions) and that the organization goes through the motions of its internal rites without presenting a common face outside the organization. The absence of any formal structure not only does not guarantee greater internal democracy but can permit the creation of informal groups of hidden leaders. These groups come together on the basis of affinity, they can co-opt new adherents and they can generate an uncontrolled and uncontrollable leadership, hard to identify but nonetheless effective.

Organizations of tendency gather their members on the basis of a shared theory (there are also organizations of anti-organizationalists!). This was the case in 1919 with Fabbri's *Unione Comunista Anarchica d'Italia* (Anarchist Communist Union of Italy) before Malatesta, with his Programme, transformed it into the synthesist *Unione Anarchica Italiana* (Italian Anarchist Union) out of a desire for unanimity and maybe in the hope of dragging towards class-struggle positions those who did not want to know anything about the class struggle. Obviously, Anarchist Communists organizations are organizations of tendency. The strong tendency towards homogeneity which is accepted by members when they join places a great limit on the apparently coercive nature of the principle of collective responsibility. Indeed, when a known member of any party takes a certain position, it inevitably reflects (even if they do not intend it to) on their organization in the eyes of the public. For this reason it can be even more dangerous for members to speak "different tongues," just because they do not wish to accept a single method of communication, than it is when the communicative vocabulary to be adopted is previously agreed on.

5.6. The Programme

The basic element which distinguishes Anarchist Communists from all other Anarchist currents may be organizational dualism, but what marks them out in particular from the rest of the Anarchist movement (even with regard to the Libertarian Communists — see Appendix 2) is the existence of a **programme**. This is the collection of the short-term and mid-term objectives which the political organization establishes for itself. It is approved by Congress and reviewed at each successive Congress. What has been achieved and what has not been achieved is studied and explained. Objectives can be considered no longer important and can be removed, and in general the strategy is adapted to the times. The programme as such is a set of strategic and tactical elements which guides the political organization's actions in the mid-term. The fusion of strategic elements and tactical elements enables the programme to change with the changing economic and social situation. The function which the Anarchist Communist political organization assigns the various parts of the programme are one of its characteristics, seeing that objectives which may be purely tactical for some may be strategic for others, and vice versa. For this very reason the programme is a platform for collaboration with other political organizations, where each one retains the right to establish strategically common objectives which are then pursued in collaboration with other organizations.

The existence of a programme (often called a **minimum programme**) may initially seem to be an unimportant detail. On the contrary, its consequences are of the utmost importance, as its existence provokes a certain mentality and disposition for political work. This is something which

characterizes to a great extent the Anarchist Communist political organization and determines some very important aspects.

5.6.1. Phase Analysis

These traits are all contained in the short definition of programme which we have just given. They do, however, merit a little detailed examination. As we have said, the programme is the workplan which the political organization provides for itself at every Congress, and is therefore valid for several years. As it contains tactical and strategic elements, it needs to place the organization's political action within a dimension which is adequate in order to progress towards the ends. In order to do this, the programme (which is established in a particular historical context) must set out the correct steps for the times concerned. It therefore requires knowledge of the current situation and this implies that accurate political and economic analysis of the current phase be made beforehand.

For decades, Anarchists had abandoned the field of economic analysis, judging it to be unnecessary to know the class enemy's strategy in order to spread Anarchist ideas. The result is action without time or place, a vision of the world in which everything is grey and where the cutting edge of militants has become progressively blunter and the survivors sit around nostalgically agreeing that they are right.

The rediscovery of Anarchist Communism sparked off a rediscovery of the joys of study, knowledge and analysis. In consequence, certain dogmas previously considered untouchable were put to the test, something Berneri had already done. Above all, it made it possible once more for there to be dialogue with those common women and men who slave away to earn a few crumbs of wealth without having to wait for a messianic salvation in some distant future. In other words, Anarchism came back to live in the open, among the masses and within the labour struggles.

5.6.2. Gradualism

As we have seen, a sect-like spirit dominated the Anarchist movement in Italy after World War II. This derived from the opinion that only the realization of a free and egalitarian society after the social revolution could improve the condition of a humanity which was bowed by exploitation: any other progress, any other conquest, any improvement was considered impossible under the current capitalist system or even as a trap to ensnare the masses and stop them reaching their final goal. Any compromise with the needs for today was seen as giving in and would result in putting off further the glorious future which was the sole objective worth fighting for.

The re-discovery of Anarchist Communism once again brought to the fore the **gradualism** which Malatesta spoke of and the programme is a visible manifestation of this. Intermediate objectives are not reformist sops which are designed to build the future society piecemeal (something which Anarchist Communists would never dream of). They are merely vital responses to the daily needs of the exploited which, far from dulling their ambitions for a just, egalitarian society, give them a taste for struggle and for conquest. The more they eat, the hungrier they get. Anyone who has to resolve the immediate problem of their primary needs will only with difficulty be able to conceive a long struggle for their historical needs and only with enormous

difficulty will be able to acquire the necessary consciousness to transform themselves into the agents of their own emancipation.

Ultimately, if we do not propose solutions to the problems of the day, it will be practically impossible to provide credible proposals for the realization of a paradise which is lost in the mists of a distant future. The struggle to satisfy the immediate needs, to snatch even a minimum of wealth from our class adversary, to limit his unbounded power and total control over the workforce, was called “revolutionary gymnastics” by Malatesta and Fabbri. For this reason, their Anarchism, like ours, was not reformist but *reforming*, because it kept its eye firmly fixed on the revolutionary objective, without nonetheless renouncing the gains made in the here and now. Obviously these gains are fleeting and the to’s and fro’s of the class struggle can all too easily render them useless (something we have in fact been witnessing in recent decades), but they need to be obtained nevertheless, for two reasons. Firstly, the acquired consciousness that they are not permanent will sooner or later make it clear to the proletariat that only the final victory can guarantee peace and well-being for ever and for everyone. Secondly, a look back at the last two hundred years of history will make it quite clear that generally there has been some real progress in the living standards of workers in those countries where there has been an active labour movement.

5.6.3. Alliances

We have spoken about the sect-like spirit which dominated the Italian Anarchist movement for decades. It really could not have been otherwise. As the only possible objective to aim for is the social revolution (about which Anarchists have their own very precise ideas), then no alliance with other revolutionary forces is possible, in fact it could even represent a betrayal of the ideal. But Anarchist Communists have their programme with its partial and immediate goals, and as far as this is concerned it is possible to find companions, in other words to form alliances in order to obtain success for that particular piece of the programme. Thanks to the programme, this possibility is an important element in the history of the Anarchist movement which, thanks also to the influence of Malatesta in 1921, proposed an alliance with other leftists (known as the *Fronte Unico Rivoluzionario*, or Revolutionary Single Front) to respond to the growing Fascist reaction.

Anarchist Communists are so sure of their historical ends, of their strategy for obtaining them and of the steps they must take today, that they do not fear any impure contact contaminating them. On the contrary, they believe that they can contaminate others. In particular, they feel that they can spread their ideas and proposals among the great mass of the proletariat which is still fooled by the promise that the system is reformable or by the hope that an authoritative, illuminated leader will guide them towards a society without classes.

6. Appendices

6.1. Appendix 1: Historical materialism and dialectic materialism

Historical materialism is the heritage of the whole proletariat since its inception as a class conscious of the exploitation to which it is subjected, though it must be recognized that Marx was the most accurate promoter and organizer of historical materialism. Marx was influenced by Proudhon, who was the first to note the **economic contradictions** within society; however, (according to Marx) Proudhon imagined that these contradictions could be resolved through the use of a **science** which only partially took account of the real situation of productive relationships without taking account of autonomy which is essential in real materialism.

Unfortunately, the main theoreticians of orthodox Marxism, from the time of the Second and Third Internationals up to the present day, have always substituted historical materialism with the **dialectic materialism** that was set out by Friedrich Engels in his works “Anti-Dühring” and “The Dialectics of Nature.” Dialectic materialism turns Hegelian dialectics on its head, *placing it with its feet on the ground*: while Hegel concentrated on the evolution of the idea, dialectic materialism instead considers the evolution of matter. Matter evolves by means of its own immutable (a-historical) laws; in society and in the economy this can be seen in the continual dialectics between the development of the productive forces and the production relationships. The latter initially adapt themselves to the level of development of the productive forces, but at a certain point they become an obstacle for the productive forces, to the point that they become a rigid casing which must eventually be broken.

Thus, dialectic materialism is no longer a method for discovering the real situation, but becomes an interpretation of the reality; not only does it imagine that it provides a general vision of human history, it also predicts with certainty the final crisis of capitalism and the inevitable advent of communism.

But communism is then no longer a way to change the production relationships once the proletariat, as a class, has re-appropriated the product of its labour; communism is instead reduced to being only one way to manage the productive forces in a particular advanced stage of evolution. In this way man loses his function as the one responsible for transforming the situation and becomes only the product of extraneous forces and immutable laws which lie out of his control.

Therefore, Englesian and Leninist Marxism theorize a metaphysical and idealistic materialism of a sort that anarchism has always rejected. It must be said again that dialectic materialism is not a method for discovering the real situation but an interpretation of the historical process and a precise vision of the facts which entails pre-determining the future as the inevitable development of past and present events. Anarchism (apart from Kropotkinist positions) has always rejected this conception of history which is the child of positivism and this idea of man as a product of superior laws; for Anarchism, history is the product of extremely complex and variable factors and man is one of these factors at play.

Dialectic materialism is also the child of the great development in the natural sciences of the mid-19th century, to the point that it believes it can transfer the methods of natural science to social science. Thus, the birth of **scientific socialism**, which studies the laws of the evolution of history as if they were **objective**, like the physical laws of nature. This need to transform social processes into objective laws has consequences on economic theory. In “Capital,” in fact, Marx enunciates an economic theory that reduces class struggle to a sort of corrective factor; in the interpretation of history, the class struggle is a part of the dynamic processes of matter, but matter has abstract and immutable laws. As man can only know nature in an approximate way because it is outside and independent of him, he consequently cannot intervene in its development, either alone or collectively; man is therefore only a pure product of nature. This rigidly deterministic model (reductionism) of the 19th century disappeared from the natural sciences during the course of the 20th century, but it has remained within Marxism! In the second half of the 20th century we even saw the end of that mechanic model that was the predictability of movement which came into existence with Galileo and Newton, as we now know that the tiniest uncertainty in the starting conditions makes the trajectory unpredictable, even by a very few particles!

Dialectic materialism therefore induces a scheme of interpretation of history based on successive stages (revolutions), as one can read in the “History of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of the USSR” in the edition authorized by the Party’s Central Committee.

It seems incredible that for so long “scientific socialism” was content with such a simplistic and unreliable vision of history. And yet, until not much more than ten years ago, historical materialism, deterministic materialism and dialectic materialism were still being mixed up and still are by most Marxist and other analysts. For Anarchist Communists it is therefore doubly important that we distinguish between them. It is important so that we can re-discover the method of analysis that has guided the principal and best steps of the anarchist movement since the time of Bakunin. Secondly, it is important so that we can once again place the maximum importance on the class nature of our struggle which has so often been forgotten as a result of doctrinaire beliefs that reduce man to being a puppet, incapable of acting and building a society for the benefit of man.

In fact, within the Anarchist movement, the terror of these pre-conceived analyses of Marxism has led to a point-blank refusal of it, even with regard to the parts of it that inspired the birth of the workers’ movement and on which even the militants of the First International were agreed. But that is not all. It also led to certain principles being rejected by some, merely because Marxism talked about them, thereby forgetting that they were also basic principles of Anarchism. They had existed even before Marx formulated them and by abandoning them, the spirit that had inspired the movement since its beginnings was lost.

6.2. Appendix 2: Anarchist communism and libertarian communism

6.2.1. Historical Materialism as an instrument of analysis

Any activity designed to transform the present society with the aim of organizing social life so that everyone, as individuals and as a collective, can live free from need presupposes that there is a method of analysis of the current situation.

For us, that method is historical materialism.

Historical materialism as a way to analyse historical facts, according to Marx, Engels and also Bakunin, is the common heritage of the exploited all over the world. Chapter 3.1 contained an effective summary, made on the basis of experience gained by the exploited in their struggles mainly since the Industrial Revolution. It is from that period that the proletariat as a class was created thanks to formation of large urban concentrations, the expulsion of poor peasants from the countryside and the destruction of crafts due to the changing production processes. However, it is on the analysis of the classes that we find among the exploited the first division between the two principal tendencies: the Anarchist tendency and the Marxist tendency.

The former took account of the continual change in social relationships and realized that the mass of the urban proletariat and the poor peasants (expropriated by the development of capitalism) would be willing to effect a radical and egalitarian transformation of society in order to find an answer to their material needs.

The latter saw the proletariat in the factories as the sole enemy of Capital and the development of productive forces as a progressive proletarianization of the exploited; it followed that once Capital were to reach its maximum stage of development there would be a corresponding stage of development of the proletariat.

This profound antagonistic contradiction would necessarily resolve itself in the revolution, a moment of synthesis of the process of historical development.

Finally, we must consider the problem of the relationship between structure and superstructure as it divides the Marxist interpretation of the situation from the historical materialist interpretation of Anarchist Communists. Marx only vaguely defines this relationship, prompting a wide range of interpretations from his followers, who for the most part consider that the relationship is one of absolute dependence of superstructure on structure.

The most obvious consequence of such a differentiation can be seen in the conception of the State.

The State is considered by Marxists as a superstructure generated by the structure of the capitalist economic system. As such the State must be conquered and transformed, placing it at the service of the working class as a tool for the construction of Socialism. This State, controlled by the party, must be used against any attempted resurgence of the bourgeoisie and to create the conditions necessary for the successful development of Socialism and then Communism. As the State gradually transforms its economic structure, the conditions will be created for its disappearance. It is this conception of the historical process that gives rise to the Marxist separation of economic struggle and political struggle.

Anarchist Communists reject the clear separation between structure and superstructure and consider the State as a superstructure in continual transformation due to the evolving nature of capitalism itself. We also consider the superstructure as a producer itself of relevant effects on the structure. It follows that we believe that the use of the State is incompatible with the end of destroying it. As firm supporters of historical materialism, we believe that the way Marxism overcomes the means-ends contradiction is merely a dialectic trick. Throughout our history, Anarchist Communists have held that the instrument of the transition to Socialism is the very act of revolution, the people in arms and the widespread practice of self-organization.

For Anarchist Communists, this means that there is no separation between economic struggle and political struggle and that we should constantly strive to unite the two and thus recompose the contradiction on the terrain of the defence of the material and historic needs of the exploited.

6.2.2. Organizational Dualism

The relationship between the masses and their most conscious elements (the vanguard) is one of the fundamental problems regarding the formulation of a revolutionary strategy. The absence of a solution to this problem, or incorrect solutions to it, lie behind every historical failure of each revolutionary project or else are the basis of the failures in those countries where revolutions enjoyed some initial success. No school of Marxism has yet clarified that relationship in its essence, while on the part of Anarchists, the rejection *a priori* of the concept of a vanguard (a word which evokes an unwarranted idea of authority) has long impeded any detailed explanation. The only clear thinking on the matter remains, even after over a century, Bakunin.

A correct theory on historically and socially determined material needs shows us that the satisfaction of them is in contradiction with the capitalist system and that therefore seeking their satisfaction is the basis for the definition of a revolutionary strategy and the organization of the proletariat in the workplace (the mass organization). The capitalist system has perfected a series of instruments with which it can recover what it loses to workers' demands, so it is perfectly utopistic to claim that the material needs and their satisfaction can automatically provoke the end of capitalism, ruined by its internal contradictions. The struggle for material needs must also be the seed for class consciousness and the basis on which a detailed strategy for attacking the capitalist system can be grounded. It must also be a revolutionary strategy, which can be a point of reference for the political growth of the proletariat in the struggle and ensure an increase in those struggles as part of a strategic process which will direct them towards the goal of the revolution. An organization is therefore required for the development of strategy and this organization (the specific organization) of revolutionary proletarians must be based on a common theory. This is organizational dualism.

6.2.2.1 The Mass Organization

By mass organization we mean the organization which the masses build for the defence of their interests. We can better explain by trying to define the mass organization *par excellence*: the labour union. It is formed in the workplace due to the precise material needs of the working masses who make up its membership and who control it directly. Its distinguishing features are:

- heterogeneity, due to the fact that its goal, independently of the political ideas of its members, is not to unite people who are already members of this party or that, but to unite all workers who share the interests to be defended;
- direct action, by which we mean the first-hand running of the struggles and agreement on demands, as a constant practice, in other words within the labour union which guarantees control by the workers. The labour union, as a mass organization, is therefore a tool in the hands of the working classes for the improvement of their economic conditions and for their emancipation, through anti-capitalist struggle.

In all this, it must be remembered that the emancipation of the workers is the fruit of constant struggle and not so much of propaganda or ideological convictions. It must also be remembered that direct action, an essential practice in the struggle for our needs, is a guarantee that the union does not become the plaything of this or that party, and that decision-making never becomes independent of the assembly of workers. From this it derives that:

“the workers’ organization must have a final goal and an immediate goal. The final goal must be the expropriation of capital by the associated workers, in other words restitution to the producers, and for them to their associations, of all that the labour of the working classes has produced, of everything that would have no value without the labour of the workers. The immediate goal is to develop increasingly the spirit of solidarity between the oppressed and resistance against the oppressors, to keep the proletariat in practice with the continual gymnastics of workers’ struggle in all its various forms, to conquer from capitalism today all that it is possible to grab in terms of well-being and freedom, however little it may be.” (Fabbri)

6.2.2.2 The Specific Organization

The specific organization, instead, is made up of the members of the mass organization who share the same theory, the same strategy and similar ideas on tactics. The task of this organization is, on the one hand, to be the depository for the class memory and, on the other hand, to elaborate a common strategy which can ensure the linking of all the struggles by the class and which can stimulate and guide. Having said this, we can easily establish the errors which led both to the Leninist conception of the party (a political organization which lies above the masses) and to the idea that the specific organization is merely a connector between the various struggles and is without a strategy or a revolutionary plan of its own. In the former case, the party-guide is formed of elements which are not necessarily part of the mass organization and so are external to it. It establishes a political line which is then transmitted to the organizations, like a drive belt. In the second case, it is the fear of a degeneration into authoritarianism which causes the essential role of elaborating a revolutionary strategy to be lost from sight. The specific organization’s members must bring this strategy with them into the heart of the organizations of the working class if the specific organization’s actions are to be effective.

The need for the existence of the specific organization, its tasks and its roles, has already been clearly set out by Bakunin:

“[...] to organize the masses, to firmly establish the beneficial action of the International Workingmen’s Association on them, is would be sufficient for even one out of every ten workers in the same occupation to be a member of the appropriate section. This is clear. In moments of great economic crisis, when the instinct of the masses, inflamed to boiling point, opens up to every joyful inspiration, when these hordes of men, enslaved, bowed, crushed but never broken, finally revolt against their yoke, but feel disoriented and impotent as they are completely disorganized, ten or twenty or thirty men in close agreement and well connected to each other, who know where they are going and what they want, will easily be able to bring along one, two or three hundred or more. We saw it recently during the Paris Commune. The real organization which had only begun during the siege was not enough to create a formidable capacity for resistance.”

Furthermore,

“[...] one could object that this manner of organizing the influence of the International over the popular masses seems to wish to establish on the ruins of the old authorities and existing governments a new system of authority and a new government. But this would

be a grave error. The government of the international, if indeed there is a government, or rather its organized action on the masses, will always be different from every government and from the action of every State because of this essential property. It is nothing more than the organization of action (not official and non invested with any authority or any political force, but absolutely natural) of a more or less numerous group of individuals guided by the same principle and working towards the same goal, first on the action of the masses and only later, through the more or less modified opinion by the international's propaganda, on their wishes and on their actions."

Here then are the characteristics of the specific organization:

- An organization which is an internal part of the mass organization and not external to it means that members of the specific organization must be class-struggle militants.
- It does not substitute the masses in revolutionary action, but rather stimulates their political growth, their desire for self-management and self-organization, leading to a revolutionary project.
- It is an inspiring, energetic force within the mass organization to which it brings its strategy.
- For the very reason that members of the specific organization are also members of the mass organization, as members of the mass organization they bring to it their points of view in order that the action of the masses can be strategically coordinated, with the aim of reaching the revolutionary objective in the most efficient way possible.

6.2.2.3 Relationship between Vanguard and Mass

What relationship should develop between the specific organization and the mass organization, between the vanguard and the mass, between the anarchist party and the labour union? It is not sufficient to impose the formula of the dialectic relationship, since that could serve to hide a division between the economic and the political, between class consciousness and the class. Let us straight away state that as the members of the specific organization are at the same time members of the mass organization, non-separation is guaranteed. It cannot be imagined in Second-Internationalist terms because it is obvious that the economic struggle is also political, something that strikes at the heart of capitalist exploitation, and its conquests need to be defended by including them as part of a strategy for action (which is not necessarily the strategy of the specific organization, but is more likely to be so the more the level of class consciousness has grown in the masses and the better and more expert is the work of the members of the specific organization within the mass organization). It is also a guarantee that conquest of the State is not proposed as a way to spark off the transition to socialism, thereby privileging political and party struggle over economic demands. The mass organization therefore loses its function as a drive belt of the specific organization and instead becomes the site of debate on the strategy defined by the specific organization against the strategies proposed by other parties, but above all confronting that strategy with the demands of action, the level of growth of the masses and of their real needs.

The role of the specific organization is not recognized in any official way within the mass organization. It is not, and must not be, a recognized, institutionalized leadership which, as such, could impose solutions and pretend (in the manner of the Leninists) to represent the real interests of the proletariat. It is only a point of debate and elaboration of politically homogeneous comrades who prepare and finalize their work and their proposals on the basis of their analysis and their ideology, without expecting it to be accepted on the basis of delegation, but only by virtue of it being freely accepted through debate within the mass organization. Any acceptance of Anarchist Communist ideas is only further proof of their correctness. Any refusal to accept them indicates an error of analysis on the part of the Anarchist Communists and requires them to revise the strategy or the tactic.

One last point remains to be clarified. The mass organization is not built by the specific organization in its likeness, a toy for it to influence or a place reserved for revolutionary proletarians. In other words, it is not the **revolutionary** mass organization. Such an organization would be a half-way house between party and mass. Firstly, it would only represent a closing in on itself by the specific organization, which would thus be idealistic, waiting for the proletariat to accept its ideology simply because it is the best and the most revolutionary — a form of politically impotent doctrinaire simplification. Secondly, it would be a talking-shop for the vanguard, reducing and sterilizing its internal debate and hiding within it a vision of the masses needing to be civilized, masses who are incapable of revolutionary action, a pure and simple army to be manoeuvred by the winner of the dialectic clash between the **politicized** elements. Debate must take place on the widest possible level, not at the highest possible level; only at this level can there be proper evaluation of the lines adopted by the various specific organizations.

6.2.3. Anarchist Communism and Libertarian Communism today

The experience of Spain also left its mark on the Italian Anarchist movement even with the strict limits on its activity imposed as a result of Fascist repression.

The heritage of the short-lived but fruitful **Unione Comunista Anarchica Italiana** (later known as the *Unione Anarchica Italiana*) was embraced in 1943 by groups which came together as the **Federazione Comunista Anarchica Italiana** (Italian Anarchist Communist Federation).

Together with this historic part of the Italian Anarchist movement which benefited from the various experiences of Italian Anarchist Communists, in the period following World War II there were also two other tendencies (although all would later merge to form an organization of synthesis, the **Federazione Anarchica Italiana**):

1. the *Federazione Comunista Libertaria Alta Italia* (Upper Italy Libertarian Communist Federation), whose members were Anarchist Communists but included also a sizeable fringe of more generally libertarian elements who had moved closer to the Anarchist movement thanks to the Resistance, making the FCLAI an organization which was not homogeneously Anarchist Communist in its strategy and theory;
2. a small individualist (or similar) area which was controlled by people such as Cesare Zaccaria and others, which was to end up disorienting a great many Anarchist Communist militants with their positions, resulting in a predominantly nihilistic form of politics. From the Carrara Congress on, they were to take over the leading positions in the organization

and ended up totally destroying any class positions within the movement, with some comrades even being driven towards the reformist parties.

This defeat which the Anarchist Communist movement suffered during the post-war period and whose effects continued right up to the early Seventies, was responded to by a sector of militants who in their youth had been involved in the Resistance, who believed in the watchwords launched after the war. After analysing the causes of the nihilist positions which had come to the fore, they came to understand that apart from the link with the class on the basis of defence of the material and historical needs of the class, the movement had failed to reconstruct those theoretical principles and a tradition of elaboration which could bind the movement to Anarchist tradition (from the First International through Anarcho-Syndicalism to the struggle during the Spanish Revolution).

The experience of the *Gruppi Anarchici di Azione Proletaria* (Proletarian Action Anarchist Groups -GAAP) was very important for the Anarchist and proletarian movement and produced theoretical and other material which was worthy of attention. On an international level, the GAAP linked up with the *Organisation Pensée et Bataille* (OPB) which was developing along similar lines in France. The two organizations also founded a short-lived Libertarian Communist International.

The fundamental error of these comrades was that they did not understand the need for ideological, methodological and practical links with the historical heritage of Anarchist Communism. Believing themselves to be something new, something different, was responsible for their failure to accept the benefits of a history rich in experience and analysis, which could have ensured a link with the masses as an essential historical component of the workers' and peasants' movements. By allowing others a monopoly of and domination over this area and by allowing the revisionists of Anarchism free rein, they committed their greatest historical and political mistake. The progressive loss of political identity was simply a direct consequence of this choice. Their eventual enfeeblement as revolutionary militants was a consequence of having lost sight of every link with Anarchism and with the Anarchist Communist heritage of culture and struggle. Inevitably, their progressive isolation produced sterility within the organization which, surrounded on either side by revisionist Anarchism and an equally revisionist Marxism, produced that Libertarian Communism (a synthesis of Anarchism and Marxism) that we know today.

The reply of the GAAP to this situation in 1956 was to join together with other Marxist groups to form *Azione Comunista* (Communist Action), a political area that was to survive as the only left-ist faction of the *Partito Comunista Italiana* (Italian Communist Party – PCI) until 1961 when the first Marxist-Leninist groups appeared in Italy. From that year on, the extra-parliamentary area left of the PCI became stronger and stronger. A group of intellectuals and syndicalists founded a new journal, *Quaderni Rossi*. Under the firm leadership of Raniero Panieri, it would re-discover the experiences of class spontaneity. The *Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria* (Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity), born from a left-wing split in the *Partito Socialista Italiana* (Italian Socialist Party), occupied itself mainly with collecting and guiding this experience, giving certain intellectuals and syndicalists the opportunity to publish *Classe Operaia* (1964–66). This marks a period of unity between some Marxists who by now were aware of the shortcomings of traditional Marxism in dealing with the problems posed by the class struggle and comrades who had previously been part of the Syndicalist or Anarchist Communist movement.

In 1968, the events of May in France began to produce their effects in Italy, which until then had had a separate development. The political actors mentioned above began to make their mark as basically they were the only ones in any way ready for the clash. In Pisa, *Potere Operaio* was born and, following a split within its ranks, *Potere Operaio*, *Lotta Continua* and the *Centro Carlo Marx*. In these organizations (except for the *Centro Carlo Marx* which merged with the PCI in 1975 becoming its far right wing), there was a most deleterious mixture of Leninism and spontaneism.

The crisis in these organizations and in others which had formed to the left of the PCI together with the inability of the Anarchist movement in general to rediscover its genuine origins in Anarchist Communism with regard to theory and political practice, gave rise to a mass of political activists who understood the spontaneous behaviour of the masses to be the key to revolution. The new “autonomous” movement attracted ex-members of the old *Potere Operaio*, refugees from a number of neo-Leninist political organizations and a good number of Anarchist groups (the Kronstadt Group from Naples, the FCL in Rome, etc.) who had attempted to re-discover Anarchist Communism by examining the ideas of the Organization Platform but who quickly abandoned (like the GAAP) the terrain of Anarchism and ended up becoming part of the hybrid world of Libertarian Communism.

At this stage, the term “Libertarian Communism” was no longer synonymous with “Anarchist Communism” (as it had been until the 1940s) and had taken on a new meaning. By now it indicated a theory in which analysis of the role of the specific organization, the mass organization and the relationship between the two, no longer coincided with Anarchist Communist theory and practice. Elements of Marxist analysis were introduced, such as the inevitability of the fall of capitalism once it reached its highest stage of development, the automatic nature of the struggles with regard to the economic phase, and a view of the current crisis as being Capital’s final crisis.

Having said all that, it is clear that we need to avoid the mistakes which have been made up to now. Leaving aside how the various organizations are named, we need to examine their content continuously. We need to maintain our links with the heritage of Anarchist Communist analysis. Together, we must define the various stages in the organizational process which can allow Anarchist Communists to ensure that every territorial group can make an impact on the struggles by means of a strategy which is firmly based on a common theory.

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