

find each other.



Anarchists in the Face of the New Capitalist Order

Alfredo M. Bonanno

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Comrades, before starting this talk, a couple of words in order to get to know each other better. In conferences a barrier is nearly always created between whoever is talking and those who are listening. So, in order to overcome this obstacle we must try to come to some agreement because we are here to do something together, not simply to talk on the one hand and listen on the other. And this common interest needs to be clearer than ever given the questions about to be discussed this evening. Often the complexity of the analyses and the difficulty of the problems that are being tackled separate the person who is talking from those who are listening, pushing many comrades into a passive dimension. The same thing happens when we read a difficult book which only interests us up to a point, a book with a title such as Anarchism and Post-industrial Society, for example. I must confess that if I were to see such a book in a shop window, I'm not sure I'd buy it.

That is why we need to come to some agreement. I think that behind the facade of the problem under discussion, undoubtedly a complex one, the fact that we are anarchists and revolutionary comrades means we should be able to find some common ground. This should permit us to acquire certain analytical instruments with which to better understand reality, so be able to act upon it more effectively than before. As a revolutionary anarchist I refuse to inhabit two separate worlds: one of theory and another of practice. As an anarchist revolutionary, my theory is my practice, and my practice my theory.

Such an introduction might not go down well, and it will certainly not please those who support the old theories. But the world has changed. We are faced with a new human condition today, a new and painful reality. This can leave no room for intellectual closure or analytical aristocracies. Action is no longer something that is separate from theory, and this will continue to be the case. That is why it is important to talk about the transformation of capitalism yet again. Because the situation we see before us has already undergone rapid restructuring.

When we find ourselves in a situation like this, we tend to let ourselves be seduced by words. And we all know anarchists' vocation for words. Of course we are for action too. But tonight it is a question of words alone, so we run the risk of getting drunk on them. Revolution, insurrection, destruction, are all words. Sabotage — there, another word. Over the past few days spent here among you I have heard various questions asked. Sometimes they were asked in bad faith, as far as I could tell. But translation from one language to another comes into it, and I don't want to be malevolent. I just want to say that it is important not to deceive oneself that my analysis provides the solution to the social problem. I do not believe any of the comrades I have spoken to over the past few days have the solution either. Nor does the anarcho-syndicalist comrade with his analyses based on the centrality of the working class, or the other comrades who as far as I can understand do not seem to agree with him and are proposing an intervention of an insurrectionalist nature. No, none of these hypotheses can claim to possess the truth. If anarchism teaches anything it teaches us to be wary of anyone who claims to hold the truth. Anyone who does so, even if they call themselves an anarchist, is always a priest as far as I am concerned. Any discourse must simply aim to formulate a critique of the existent, and if we sometimes get carried away with words, it is the desire to act that gets the better of us. Let us stop here and start thinking again. The destruction of the existent that oppresses us will be a long road. Our analyses are no more than a small contribution so that we can continue our destructive revolutionary activity together in ways that make any small talk simply a waste of time.

So, what can we do? Anarchists have been asking themselves this for a long time: how can we come into contact with the masses? to use a term which often comes up in this kind of discussion, and which I have also heard on various occasions over the past few days. Now, this problem has been faced in two different ways. In the past, throughout the history of anarchism, it has been faced

by using the concept of propaganda, that is, by explaining who we are to the masses. This, as we can easily see, is the method used by political parties the world over. Such a method, the use of traditional anarchist propaganda, is in difficulty today in my opinion, just as the spreading of any other ideology is. It is not so much that people don't want to have anything to do with ideology any longer as that capitalist restructuring is making it pointless. And I must say here publicly that anarchists are having difficulty in understanding this new reality, and that it is the subject of an ongoing debate within the international anarchist movement. The end of ideology is leading to a situation where traditional anarchist propaganda is becoming pointless. As the effectiveness (or illusion, we do not know which) of propaganda disappears, the road of direct contact with people is opening up. This is a road of concrete struggles, struggles we have already mentioned, everyday questions, but of course one can't exceed one's limitations. Anarchists are a very small minority. It is not by making a lot of noise, or by using advertising techniques that they will be able to make themselves heard by the people. So it is not a question of choosing the most suitable means of communication — because this would take us back to the problem of propaganda, and therefore ideology, again — but rather of choosing the most suitable means of struggle. Many anarchists believe this to be direct attack, obviously within the limits of their possibilities, without imagining themselves to be anyone's fly coachman.

I ask you to reflect for a moment on the state of Capitalism at the beginning of the Eighties. Capitalism was in difficulty. It was facing increased labour expenditure, a restructuring of fixed plants at astronomically high costs, a rigid market, and the possibility of social struggles developing in response to this. And then, think about the conditions six or seven years later. How quickly Capitalism changed. It overcame all its difficulties in a way that could never have been predicted, achieving an unprecedented programme of economic and imperialist management of the world. Perhaps it

is also a choice of reason, a result of analytical reflection. What we know about global capitalist restructuring today tells us that there is no other way open to anarchists but that of immediate, destructive intervention. That is why we are insurrectionalists and are against all ideology and chatter. That is why we are against any ideology of anarchism, and all chatter about anarchism. The time for pub talk is over. The enemy is right outside this great hall, visible for all to see. It is simply a question of deciding to attack it. I am certain that insurrectionalist anarchist comrades will know how to choose the timing and the means for doing so, because with the destruction of this enemy, comrades, it is possible to realise anarchy.

During the first half of the Eighties, huge mass struggles took place against nuclear power plants in Italy. One of the most important of these was the struggle against the missile base in Comiso. In this context we realised 'base nuclei'. For three years we struggled alongside the local people. This was a mass struggle, which for various reasons did not succeed in preventing the construction of the base. But that is not the only kind of struggle we consider, it is just one of the possible ones we participate in as insurrectionalist anarchists, one of the many intermediary struggles possible.

In another direction, in the years that followed, over four hundred attacks took place against structures connected to the electric power supply in Italy. Sabotage against coal-fired electric power stations, the destruction of highvoltage pylons, some of them huge ones that supplied a whole region. Some of these struggles transformed themselves into mass struggles; there was mass intervention in some of the projects of sabotage, in others there was not. On a dark night in the countryside, anonymous comrades would blow up a pylon. These attacks were spread over the whole country, and in my opinion possessed two essential characteristics: they constituted an easily realisable attack against Capital, in that they did not use highly destructive technology and, secondly, they are easily copied. Anyone can take a walk in the night. And then, it is also healthy. So anarchists have not passively waited for the masses to awaken, they have considered doing something themselves. In addition to the four hundred attacks we know about, one could guess that at least another four hundred could have taken place as the State conceals these actions because it is afraid of them. It would be impossible to control a capillary-style spreading of sabotage all over the country. No army in the world is capable of controlling such activity. As far as I know, not one comrade has been arrested in connection with the known four hundred attacks.

I would like to wind up here because I think I have been talking long enough. Our insurrectionalist choice is anarchist. As well as being let us say a characterological choice, a choice of the heart, it

does not seem so at the moment, but this programme aimed at closing the circle of power is well underway. What has happened? How was a situation so wrought with difficulties able to pick up so quickly and radically?

We all know what happened, it is not the technical side of it that surprises us. Basically, a new technology has been inserted into the productive process. Labour costs have been reduced, productive programmes replaced, new forces used in production: we know all this. That is not the aspect of capitalist restructuring that surprises us. No, what astounds us is the latter's ingenious use of the working class. Because this has always formed the main difficulty for capitalism. Capitalist geniality has succeeded in attacking and dismantling the working class, spreading them all over the country, impoverishing, demoralising and nullifying them. Of course it was afraid to do this at first. Capital was always afraid to venture along that road, because reductions in the price of labour have always marked the outbreak of social struggles. But, as its academic representatives had been insisting for some time, the danger no longer exists, or at least it is disappearing. It is now even possible to lay people off, so long as you do it by changing production sectors, so long as others are being prepared to develop an open mentality and are beginning to discuss things. And all the social forces: parties, unions, social workers, the forces of repression, all levels of school, culture, the world of the spectacle, the media, have been rallied to tackle Capitalism's new task. This constitutes a worldwide crusade such as has never been seen before, aimed at modelling the new man, the new worker.

What is the main characteristic of this new man? He is not violent, because he is democratic. He discusses things with others, is open to other people's opinions, seeks to associate with others, joins unions, goes on strike (symbolic ones, of course). But what has happened to him? He has lost his identity. He does not know who he really is any longer. He has lost his identity as one of the exploited. Not because exploitation has disappeared, but because

he has been presented with a new image of things in which he is made to feel he is a participant. Moreover, he feels a sense of responsibility. And in the name of this social solidarity he is ready to make new sacrifices: adapt, change his job, lose his skills, disqualify himself as a man and a worker. And that is what Capitalism has systematically been asking of him over the past ten years, because with the new capitalist restructuring there is no need for qualifications, but simply for a mere aptitude for work, flexibility and speed. The eye must be faster than the mind, decisions limited and rapid: restricted choices, few buttons to be pressed, maximum speed in execution. Think of the importance that video games have in this project, to give but one example. So we see that worker centrality has disappeared miserably. Capital is capable of separating the *included* from the *excluded*, that is, of distinguishing those who are involved in power from those who will be *excluded* forever. By 'power' we mean not only State management, but also the possibility of gaining access to better living conditions.

But what supports this divide? What guarantees the separation? This lies in the different ways that needs are perceived. Because, if you think about it for a moment, under the old-style form of exploitation, exploited and exploiter both desired the same thing. Only the one *had*, and the other did not. If the construction of this divide were to be fully realised, there will be two different kinds of desire, a desire for completely different things. The *excluded* will only desire what they know, what is comprehensible to them and not what belongs to the *included* whose desires and needs they will no longer be able to comprehend because the cultural equipment necessary to do so will have been taken from them for ever.

This is what Capitalism is building: an automaton in flesh and bone, constructed in the laboratories of power. Today's world, based on information technology, knows perfectly well that it will never be able to take the machine to the level of man, because no machine will ever be able to do what a man can. So they are lowering man to the level of the machine. They are reducing his

attack before we do. Nor do I see any reason why we should only feel ourselves authorised to attack in their presence. The ideal, certainly, is mass struggle. But in the face of the project of capitalist restructuring anarchists should feel responsible and decide to attack personally, directly, not wait for signs of mass struggle. Because this might never happen. So this is where the destructive act takes place. It is at this point that the circle closes. What are we waiting for?

So, individual acts of destruction too. But here an important objection has been raised: what does one gain by smashing a computer? Does that perhaps solve the problem of technology? This question, an important one, was presented to us when we worked out the hypothesis of social sabotage. It was said: what result is obtained by destroying a pylon? First of all, the question of sabotage is not aimed so much at the terminal points of technology as at the communications network. So, we are back to the problem of knowledge of the way technology is distributed over the country, and, if you allow me to digress for a moment, I want to point to a serious problem that arises here. I allow myself to use the term 'serious problem' because a comparison has been made between what a clandestine armed organisation thinks they are doing by striking a specific person, and what, instead, an anarchist insurrectionalist structure thinks it is doing by striking a technological realisation, maintaining that, all said and done, there is not much difference. There is a difference, and it is a very important one. But it is not a question of the difference between people and things. It is an even more important difference, because the aims of the clandestine armed organisation contain the error of centrism. By striking the person, the organisation believes it is striking the centre of Capital. This kind of error is impossible in an anarchist insurrectionalist organisation, because when it strikes a technological realisation (or someone responsible for this realisation), it is fully aware that it is not striking any centre of Capitalism.

comrades here this evening have experienced such things, and have participated directly in specific struggles.

So, we need to invent new instruments. These instruments must be capable of affecting the reality of the struggles without the mediation of trade union or party leadership. They must propose clear, even though limited, objectives, ones that are specific, not universal, so in themselves are not revolutionary. We must point to specific objectives because people need to feed their children. We cannot expect everyone to sacrifice themselves in the name of universal anarchism. Limited objectives, then, where our presence as anarchists has the precise task of urging people to struggle directly in their own interests because it is only through direct, autonomous struggle that these objectives can be reached. And once the aim has been reached the nucleus withers and disappears. The comrades then start again, under different conditions.

What comrades are we talking about? What anarchists are we talking about? Many of us are anarchists, but how many of us are available for real, concrete activity? How many of us here today stop short at the threshold of the issue and say: we are present in the struggle, we suggest our project, then the workers, the exploited, do what they like. Our task is done. We have put our conscience at rest. Basically, what is the task of the anarchist if it is not propaganda? As anarchists, we have the solution to all social problems. So we present ourselves to the people who suffer the consequences of the problem, suggest our solution, and go home. No, this kind of anarchism is about to disappear out for good. The last remaining mummies belong to history. Comrades must take the responsibility for struggles upon themselves directly and personally because the objective against which the exploited need to struggle in certain situations, and against which they often do not, is a common one because we are exploited just as they are. We are not privileged. We do not live in two different worlds. There is no serious reason as to why they (the so-called masses) should

capacity to understand, gradually levelling his cultural heritage to the absolute minimum, and creating uniform desires in him.

So when did the technological process we are talking about begin? Did it begin with cybernetics as has been suggested? Anyone who has any experience of such things knows that if poor Norbert Wiener has any responsibility at all, it lies in the fact that he started to play around with electronic tortoises. In actual fact, modern technology was born a hundred years ago when an innocent English mathematician started toying with arithmetic and developed binary calculus. Now, following on from that it is possible to identify the various steps in modern technology. But there is one precise moment in which a qualitative leap takes place: when electronics came to be used as the basis upon which the new technology (and consequently the technology for perfecting electronics) was built. And it is impossible to predict how things will evolve, because no one can foresee what the consequences of this entry into a new technological phase will be. We must understand that it is not possible to think in terms of cause and effect. For example, it is naive to say that the great powers have the atomic potential to blow up the world, even though this is so. This idea, so terrifying and apocalyptic, belongs to the old concept of technology based on the hypothesis of cause and effect: the bombs explode, the world is destroyed. The problem we are talking about here opens up the prospect of a far more dangerous situation because it is no longer a matter of speculation but something that already exists and is developing further. And this development is not based on the principle of cause and effect but on the weaving of unpredictable relations. Just one simple technological discovery, such as a new substance for energy conservation for example, could lead to a series of destructive technological relations which no one in all conscience, no scientist, would be able to predict. It might cause a series of destructive relations which would not only affect the new technologies, but also the old ones, putting the whole world in chaos. This is what is dif-

ferent, and it has nothing to do with cybernetics, which is only the distant relative of the present nightmare.

In the light of all this we have been asking ourselves for a long time now: how can we attack the enemy if we do not know it in depth? But, if you think about it, the answer is not all that difficult. We very much enjoy attacking the police, for example, but no one becomes a policeman in order to do so. One informs oneself: how do the police operate? What kind of truncheons do they use? We put together the small amount of knowledge required for us to roughly understand how the police work. In other words, if we decide to attack the police, we simply limit ourselves to obtaining a certain amount of knowledge about them. In the same way, it is not necessary to become engineers in order to attack the new technology, we can simply acquire some basic knowledge, a few practical indications that make it possible for us to attack it. And from this consideration another, far more important one, emerges: that the new technology is not abstract, it is something concrete. For instance, the international communication system is a concrete fact. In order to build abstract images in our heads it needs to spread itself throughout the country. This is the way the new materials are being used, let us say in the construction of cables for data transmission. And it is here that it is important to know technology, not how it works in the productive aspect, but how it is spread throughout the country. That is to say, where the directing centres (which are multiple) are to be found and where the communication channels are. These, comrades, are not abstract ideas but physical things, objects that occupy space and guarantee control. It is quite simple to intervene with sabotage in this instance. What is difficult is finding out where the cables are.

We have seen the problem of finding the documentation and research required to attack: at some point this becomes indispensable. At some point, knowledge of technology becomes essential. In our opinion this will be the greatest problem that revolutionaries will have to face over the next few years.

Today as never before, striking at the root of inequality means attacking that which makes the unequal distribution of knowledge possible directly. And that is because, for the first time, reality itself is knowledge, for the first time Capitalism is knowledge. Whereas the centres where knowledge was elaborated, the universities, for example, were once cloistered places to be consulted at specific times of need, today they are at the centre of capitalist restructuring, the centre of repressive restructuring. So, a distribution of knowledge is possible. I insist on saying that this is an urgent problem, because it is possible to grasp any difference when one sees it. But when a net separation between two different kinds of knowledge which have no communication between them occurs — the knowledge of the included and that of the excluded — it will be too late. Think of the project of lowering the quality of schooling. Think how mass schooling, once an instrument for gaining knowledge, has been transformed over the past twenty years into an instrument of disqualification. The level of knowledge has been lowered, whereas a restricted minority of privileged continue to acquire other knowledge, in specialised masters degrees organised by Capital.

This, in my opinion, demonstrates the need and urgency for attack yet again. Attack, yes. But not blind attack. Not desperate, illogical attack. Projectual, revolutionary attack, with eyes wide open in order to understand and to act. For example, the situations where capital exists, and is being realised in time and space, are not all the same. There are some contexts in which insurrection is more advanced than others, yet there is still a great possibility for mass struggles to take place internationally. It is still possible to intervene in intermediate struggles, that is, in struggles that are circumscribed, even locally, with precise objectives that are born from some specific problem. These should not be considered to be of secondary importance. Such kinds of struggle also disturb Capitalism's universal project, and our intervention in them could be considered an element of resistance, putting a brake on the fragmentation of the class structure. I know that many

I know that there is an ongoing debate about this. However, this debate is based on a misunderstanding. That is, it is trying to treat two things that are radically different in the same way. The old revolutionary dream, let us say of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, was that of attacking and defeating power so that the working class could take over the instruments of production and use them in the future society in a way that was more just and free. Now it would be impossible to make a fairer and more free use of these new technologies, because they do not stand passively before us like the old technologies of yesterday, but are dynamic. They move, penetrate deep inside us, have already penetrated us. If we do not hurry to attack, we will no longer be able to understand what we need in order to do so, and rather than us taking the technologies over, it will be the technologies that take us over. It will not be a case of social revolution but of the technological revolution of capital. This is why a revolutionary use of these new technologies is impossible. The misconception is similar to the old one concerning the possible revolutionary use of war, which many well-known anarchists fell prey to when the first world war broke out. A revolutionary use of war is impossible, because war is always an instrument of death. A revolutionary use of the new technologies is impossible, because the new technologies will always be instruments of death. So all that is left to do is to destroy them — to attack, now, not in the future, not when the project has been completed, not when those who are deceiving themselves stop doing so, but sabotage now, attack now. This is the conclusion we have reached. It is at the moment of the destructive attack that one clarifies what we said to begin with. It is at this point that theory conjoins with practice, and the analysis of post-industrial capitalism becomes an instrument with which to attack capitalism. It becomes an instrument for insurrectionalist and revolutionary anarchism in order to direct one's attention to what — the men and the things — makes this project of restructuring of Capitalism possible, and whose responsibilities are clear.

I do not know if any use will be made of the computer in the society of the future, the self-managed society many comrades refer to, just as it is impossible to know whether any use will be made of a considerable number of the new technologies. In fact, it is impossible to know anything about what will happen in this hypothetical society of the future. The only thing I can know, up to a point, concerns the present, and the effects of the use of the new technologies. But we have already gone into this, so there is no point in repeating ourselves. The task of anarchists is to attack, but not on behalf of their own organisational interests or quantitative growth. Anarchists have no social or organisational identity to defend. Their structures are always of an informal character so their attack, when it takes place, is not to defend themselves (or worse still to propagandise themselves), but to destroy an enemy who is striking everyone. And it is in this decision to attack that theory and practice weld together.

An historically unprecedented kind of capitalism is appearing on the horizon. When we hear of neo-liberalism, this is in fact what is meant. When we hear talk of global dominion, this is the project that is being referred to, not the old concept of power, not the old imperialism. It was in the face of this project and its immense capacity to dominate that real socialism collapsed. No such thing would ever have happened in the context of the old capitalism. There is no longer any need for the world to be divided into two opposing blocs. The new capitalist imperialism is of an administrative kind. Its project is to manage the world for a small nucleus of *included*, at the cost of the great mass of *excluded*. And with these projects in mind, all possible means are already being used — the new ones we have mentioned, along with the old ones, as old as the world, such as war, repression, barbarity, according to the situation. In this way, in the former Yugoslavia for example, a ferocious war is being waged aimed at reducing a people's capacities as far as possible. Then there will be an intervention in this situation of absolute destruction in the form of a little humanitarian aid which will seem

like an enormous amount of help in such conditions of absolute and total misery.

Think of what the state of countries like the former Yugoslavia would be like without the war. A great powder-keg at the gates of western Europe, on our borders, alongside the European Community. A powder-keg ready to explode, social contradictions which no economic intervention would ever be able to raise to the level of western consumerism. The only solution was war, the oldest device in the world, and that has been applied. American and world imperialism are intervening in Somalia and Iraq, but there is little doubt that they will intervene in the former Yugoslavia because the probability of rebellion in this area must be reduced to zero. So, old means are being used along with new ones, according to the situation, according to the economic and social context involved.

And one of the oldest weapons in the great arsenal of horrors is racism. On the question of racism and all the misdeeds related to it (neo-nazism, fascism, etc.), let's look for a moment at the differentiated development of capitalist restructuring. In order to understand the problem it is necessary to see how capitalist restructuring cannot solve all its problems just by waving a magic wand. It is faced with many different situations all over the world, each with various levels of social tension. Now, these situations of social tension are making what is lurking in the depths of each one of us rise to the surface, things that we have always put aside, exorcised. Essential factors such as racism, nationalism, the fear of the different, the new, Aids, the homosexual, are all latent impulses in us. Our cultural superstructure, our revolutionary consciousness, when it puts on its Sunday clothes, obliterates them, hides them all. Then, when we take off our Sunday best, all these things start to reappear. The beast of racism is always present, and Capitalism is always ready to use it. In situations such as that which exists in Germany where social tensions have developed rapidly over the past few years, this phenomenon is in constant development. Capital controls racism and uses certain aspects of it, but it is also afraid of it in that the

overall management of world power is of a democratic, tolerant and possibilist nature. From the point of view of utilisation, anything (e.g., ideology, fear) can exist — it is all part of capital's project. We cannot say with certainty that post-industrial capitalism is against racism. We can see a few of its main characteristics, such as its democratic nature, then suddenly discover that in the context of one specific country the same technologically advanced capitalism is using methods that were used a hundred years ago: racism, persecution of Jews, nationalism, attacks on cemeteries, the most hateful and abominable things man can devise. Capital is manifold, its ideology always Machiavellian: it uses both the strength of the lion and the cunning of the fox.

But the main instrument of capitalism the world over are the new technologies. We must think about this a little, comrades, in order to dispel so much confusion. And in doing so we must also consider the possible use of such technology on our part, in changed social conditions, in a post-revolutionary situation. We have already seen how there has been a great qualitative leap from the old technologies to the new — by new technologies we mean those based on computers, lasers, the atom, subatomic particles, new materials, human, animal and vegetable genetic manipulation. These technologies are quite different from, and have little to do with, the old ones. The latter limited themselves to transforming material, to modifying reality. On the contrary, the new technologies have penetrated reality. They do not simply transform it, they create it, instigating not just molecular changes, possible molecular transformation, but above all creating a mental transformation. Think of the use that is normally made of television. This instrument of communication has got inside us, into our brains. It is modifying our very capacity to see, to understand reality. It is modifying relations in time and space. It is modifying the possibility to step out of ourselves and change reality. In fact, the vast majority of anarchists do not think it possible to make use of this assemblage of modern technologies.